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maskil Le'David

Recalling the Merit of our Avot During the Days of Awe

“And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul” (Devarim 30:2).

During the Days of Awe, a Jew arrives at a recognition of the truth and a clarity of Hashem's Omnipresence. This compels him to repent and return to Hashem his G-d. We have a tradition that during the Days of Awe, from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, the Heavenly presence hovers over Bnei Yisrael and has the power of influencing us and rousing us to repent, as the Rambam tells us (*Hilchot Teshuva* 3:4), “Wake up you slumbering ones from your sleep and sleeping ones awoken from your deep sleep.” Moreover, that Heavenly spirit that is present during the days of Awe does not only arouse repentance, but actually assists us in purifying and cleansing ourselves from our sins.

This can be compared to someone whose body has become filthy with mud. In order to cleanse himself he must take water and soap and wash himself well. The dirtier he is, the more effort he must invest in scrubbing himself. So too, a Jew who has blemished his body through sins and iniquities has dirtied his body, spirit, and soul. How can he stand before the Creator in this way? Even if he repents sincerely, some impression from the sins will still remain. But when Hashem recognizes his desire to come closer to Him and repent sincerely, He digs a tunnel for him under the Throne of Glory and a great light emerges from this opening. Now his prayer can go straight to Hashem and be accepted by Him, without the Angels of Destruction intercepting the prayer and preventing it from being heard and accepted by Hashem.

On contemplation we see this is an enormous kindness that Hashem performs for His creations. Even though they have sinned and committed crimes against Him, He does not shut His door in their face. On the contrary, He actually helps them cleanse and purify themselves from their sins by annulling the power of the Angels of Destruction so that they won't provoke prosecution! When a person's prayer is accepted by the Creator, he

becomes cleansed from his sin and is now comparable to a new-born baby who has never sinned.

During the Days of Awe Hashem facilitates repentance through being close to us, which makes it is easier for us to be inspired by the atmosphere of Holiness. This influence rouses us to seek Hashem's presence. In addition, the period of the *chagim* is affected by the merit of the Avot who stand by the side of those who repent. In particular, we mention the merit of *akeidat Yitzchak* (the binding of Yitzchak on the Altar), which teaches us true love of Hashem as demonstrated by both Avraham Avinu and his son Yitzchak. Those holy Avot were so close to Hashem Yitbarach with nothing materialistic standing between them, to the extent that they were prepared to give up their lives for the sake of sanctifying His Name.

Referring to Avraham and Yitzchak as they were on their way to the *akeidah*, it is written (*Bereishit* 22:8), “And the two of them went together.” The commentaries explain that this expression teaches us that Yitzchak Avinu possessed the attribute of self-sacrifice to the same degree as his father Avraham Avinu, for he too was prepared to give up his life for the sake of fulfilling Hashem's will. So too this expression is a demonstration of the great love that existed between Avraham and Yitzchak, the same love that united them in their love for Hashem Yitbarach, to the extent that they achieved the level where Hashem, the Torah, and the holy Avot are considered as one.

The great love that existed between Avraham and Yitzchak is portrayed by the greatness of the sacrifice they were prepared to carry out for their Creator. Although they were so very deeply attached to one another, they were prepared to take leave of each other as Hashem wished. This shows us that their love for Hashem stood at the forefront of their mind and this is what guided them in all their conduct.

Avraham Avinu hurried to fulfill the Will of his Creator, as it says (*Bereishit* 22:3), “So Avraham woke up early in the morning and he saddled his donkey” – he did not wait for his servants to saddle his donkey for him but arose early in the morning and saddled the donkey himself, hastening to fulfill the mitzvah; this command from Hashem was so precious to him. This is the greatness of the Avot. The basis of their mutual love was fear of G-d and fulfilling His Will.

During the Days of Awe a Jew is obligated to rectify his deeds. To accomplish this he must utilize the influence of holiness that results from Hashem's close presence. Both matters between him and Hashem, as well matters between man and his fellow, need to be rectified. We must be aware that the *yetzer hara* is very strong and tries with all its might to prevent a person from rectifying matters between man and his fellow.

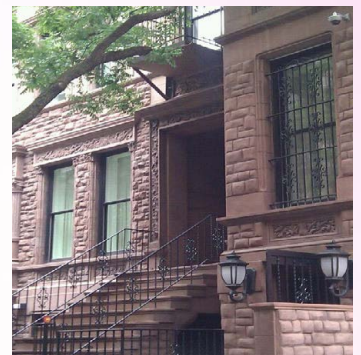
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27 Elul 5785

20 September 2025

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Nitzavim



Hilula

27 Elul

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Lebovitz

28 Elul

Rabbi Sa'adya, father-in-law of Rabbi Chaim Vital

29 Elul

Rabbi Shlomo Amralyo, author of *Responsa Kerem Shlomo*

1 Tishrei

Sara Imeinu

2 Tishrei

Rabbi Shmaryahu Greineman, nephew and *talmid* of the Chazon Ish

3 Tishrei

Rabbi Elchanan Moshe Kunshtadt, son of Rabbi Baruch Kunshtadt

4 Tishrei

Rabbi Avraham Danzig, the Chayei Adam





FROM THE TREASURY

Based on the teachings of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

Fear of the Day of Judgement

I learned in the name of Maran Harav Shach *zt"l*, that the reason we fear the Day of Judgement is due to the fact that we stand before Hashem on that day, not solely due to the judgement itself. However this leads us to the following question: if we are afraid of standing before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, why do we not feel this fear the entire year? Maybe we are not fulfilling the requirement of “Know before Whom you stand” (*Berachot* 28b)?

The verse “You are standing today” (*Devarim* 29:9) refers to Rosh Hashanah. However, Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabba* 29:1) that Creation began on the twenty-fifth of Elul. If that is so, why do we say on Rosh Hashanah, “Today is the birthday of the world?” Hashem actually began creating the world five days earlier, on the twenty fifth of Elul.

The answer is that the main goal of creation was for man; were it not for man, Hashem would not have created the world. We are considered “the whole world”, therefore we must constantly feel that the world was created for our sake. By saying “Today is the birthday of the world” we refer to the creation of mankind which took place on Rosh Hashanah and for whose purpose the world was created.

The Parshiot of Nitzavim and Vayeilech follow one another, yet seemingly contradict each other with their very names. “Nitzavim” implies standing still without moving, while “Vayeilech” means walking and movement. However, the essence of these Parshiot is no contradiction. On the contrary, they complement each other. After Bnei Yisrael stand in judgement before Hashem, Hashem then leads each person on his way according to his deeds. If a person is particular to follow the path of Torah and mitzvot, then Hashem leads him on the path of goodness and blessing. But if, G-d forbid, a person sins against Hashem, Hashem deems it necessary to lead him in the path of troubles and curses.

We began by stating that fear of the Day of Judgement is not only due to the actual judgement, but stems from the fact that we are standing before Hashem. This fear must accompany us not only on the Day of Judgement, but also throughout the year. The way to feel this fear is by living in accordance with the verse, “I have set Hashem before me always” (*Tehillim* 16:8).



WORDS OF THE SAGES

Round Challot for Rosh Hashanah

Readers who shopped for Shabbat this week certainly noticed the challot were braided differently. From Erev Rosh Hashanah every bakery bakes round challot for the duration of the month of Tishrei.

Here we will detail what lies behind this tradition, which may contain some new insights for every reader.

First of all, it is interesting to note that the classic shape of the challah has its source in the holy *sefarim*. As we know, throughout the year and for the *chagim* we have the custom of braiding long challot. The Shelah Hakadosh explains the reason for this: During the year challot are baked in the shape of the letter ‘vav’ so that when cutting the challah one completes the Name of Hashem (ו-ו-ו-ו). The piece of challah that one breaks off has the shape of the letter ‘yud’, the five fingers of each hand which are holding the challah represent the two ‘heh’ letters; the letter ‘heh’ has the numerical value of five. With the challah itself being a ‘vav’, the name is complete.

Some Sephardic communities practice the custom of baking round challot throughout the year, as a reminder of the *manna* which was round.

The *sefer Ta'amei Minhagim* (*Likutim* 183) explains the reason for the custom of baking round challot from Rosh Hashanah through Hoshana Rabba. He quotes the *Responsa* of the Mahari Asad (*Ohrach Chaim* 157), who clarifies the reason for baking round matzot for Pesach. During the time that Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, the Egyptian law was to form bread in a square or triangular shape, according to the number of gods they believed in. In order to distance themselves from the abominations of Egypt, Bnei Yisrael did the opposite and baked round bread which symbolizes Oneness. This is why particularly on Rosh Hashanah which is the primary time when we proclaim Hashem as King and affirm His Oneness, Ashkenazim have the custom of baking round challot, and continue to do so until Hoshana Rabba.

The Chatam Sofer *zy"ta*, writes that round challot are a good omen: a round shape is continuous, it has no end, which symbolizes longevity. Some *tzaddikim* are of the opinion that round challot symbolize a crown, which alludes to “And they will present You with a crown of Kingship,” as we say in the Rosh Hashanah prayers.

In addition, there are other customs regarding the shape of the challot baked in honor of Rosh Hashanah. Some have the custom to bake the challah in the shape of birds, as brought in the *sefer Torat Emet*. He explains this to be an omen that Hashem should guard us and protect us, as it says (*Yeshaya* 31:5), “Like flying birds, so will Hashem, Master of Legions, protect.” Skver chassidim adorn their round challot with a knot braided in the shape of a bird.

Some have a custom to bake challot in the shape of a ladder, referring to our judgment: “...who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted.” The Midrash Tanchuma writes that Hashem has ladders in Heaven; He elevates some people and lowers others (*Matamim* pg. 33). Others explain this custom to be an omen for our prayers to ascend to our Father in Heaven. Still others practice the custom of baking two challot, one in the shape of a bird and the other in the shape of a ladder (*Minhagei Beit Elik*).



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik
Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

The Moving Mezuzah

On a visit to the USA, someone approached me and related a strange phenomenon. No matter how strongly this Jew nailed the mezuzah to the entrance of his house, it would fall down again. He repeatedly re-affixed it to the doorpost, yet he kept finding it on the floor.

I offered to come and try to put it up myself. And so I did, making sure that it was firmly attached. After that I began to deliver a talk in his home. Suddenly, a slight noise was heard from the direction of the front door. Sure enough, there was the newly nailed-in mezuzah, resting on the floor.

I picked up the mezuzah and discovered that a piece of the wooden doorpost was stuck to it. This just proved how well the mezuzah had been affixed. The matter was extremely puzzling. How and why did it keep falling? I didn't have an answer, but nevertheless I put up the mezuzah once again, attaching it tightly to the doorpost. Then I continued my speech which had been interrupted.

Only a few minutes passed before we once again heard the light thud of the mezuzah falling.

I understood that there was a Heavenly hand knocking down the mezuzah. I turned to the master of the household and declared, "You are housing a murderer!"

The man turned pale and was filled with shame. He confessed that I was speaking the truth. He admitted that when he was a young man in his parents' home, a burglar had crept into the house. Out of fear, he killed the burglar. He had kept the matter hidden for years, not even sharing it with his wife.

I instructed the man on the exact way to rectify this act and atone for his terrible deed. I added that he should fast for the duration of one week, eating only minimally in the evenings.

After one week, he called to thank me for paving his path to teshuvah. Baruch Hashem, the mezuzah now remained affixed steadily, not moving an inch.

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Regarding matters between man and Hashem, the *yetzer hara* can ignore and remain silent, however when it comes to matters between man and his fellow, the *yetzer hara* is aroused and makes a person stumble time and again; it knows that Hashem forgoes His own honor but does not forgo the honor of His creations. As a result, these sins are the first to accuse us.

The way of the *yetzer hara* is to obscure our vision and even blind us. It causes us to think we did not hurt or offend our friend at all. The *yetzer hara* distorts reality and presents it in a different light, which results in us not feeling the need to repent; we persist with those wrongdoings. Even if we do repent about matters between us and Hashem, our repentance is incomplete until we rectify those matters between us and our fellow.

The Ba'al Hatanya explains at length

in his holy *sefarim* that Hashem descends to be with His people during the Days of Mercy and Forgiveness. The concept can be compared to a king whose permanent residence is in his palace in the city. Anyone who wishes to see the king may go to the area that overlooks the king's garden; from there he can catch a glimpse of his honorable countenance. But there are special days in the year when the king leaves his palace and goes out to the fields so that even those who live far from the city have the opportunity to see him.

So too, Hashem is close to His children throughout the year and anyone who wishes to repent can do so. However, during the Days of Awe Hashem draws even closer to His children so that also those who are in the fields, meaning those who are far from Him during the year, will be able to return to Him during this time.



PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

The Number Demonstrates its Veracity

"You are standing today" (*Devarim* 29:9).

Rashi (*Devarim* 29:12) quotes the *Midrash Aggadah*: "Why is the Parsha of Nitzavim adjacent to the Admonition? When Bnei Yisrael heard one hundred curses minus two, besides the forty-nine curses that were said in Parshat Vayikra, their faces turned colors in fright and they said, 'who can stand up to these?'"

The *sefer Divrei Shmuel* explains that the number "one hundred-minus-two, and forty-nine [curses]" is an important aspect of the admonition. If one warns someone that he will be struck without enumerating the number of blows, or one uses a round number, for example "fifty" or "one-hundred", one automatically assumes that the number is an exaggeration and not exact. One therefore liberally subtracts from the true number. But if one makes a point of using a number that is not round, it is clear that the number is accurate and constant.

Therefore, since Bnei Yisrael were told "one-hundred-minus-two" and "forty-nine" curses, demonstrating the exactness of the number, so certainly their faces turned colors in fright.

Is the Main Thing Where One's Heart Lies?

"He will bless himself in his heart, saying, 'Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit'" (*Devarim* 29:18).

These words, warns the Ktav Sofer, contain a lesson for those who act appropriately with their fellow men yet are sinful to Heaven. When they are reproved for their sins between man and G-d, they retort that having a good heart and showing compassion to others is good enough.

This is the implication of "he will bless himself in his heart." This person commends himself for his good heartedness saying, "Although I walk as my heart sees fit and perform all kinds of bad deeds, nevertheless 'Peace will be with me' – I will be okay. But in fact "Hashem will not be willing to forgive him" (*Devarim* 29:19) and will punish him for his sins. He will receive reward for his good deeds, but a mitzvah does not counteract an *aveira*.

TIMELY TOPIC



The Easy Way to Lighten the Decree

One of the most precious gifts given to us by our Creator are the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, known as the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* – the Ten Days of Repentance. During this time we have the ability to reverse our sentence and change our situation from one extreme to the other. Sometimes one is given a harsh sentence, yet his Heavenly advocates plead for his life in the Heavenly Court and try and lighten the decree.

Is there really an easy way to lighten the verdict? Surprisingly, the answer is positive. Yes, we can change the decree from bad to good! Chazal have long ago revealed good advice that holds the power to transform worlds and change the way things are decreed. According to Chazal, it is clear that the sweetest and least harmful form of suffering is – insults! And if a person would realize what the insult saves him, he would dance for joy.

The mekubal Rabbi Moshe Cordovero *zy”a*, writes about this in his *sefer Tomer Devorah*: “What are the best torments in the world, which will not disturb my *avodat Hashem*? There is nothing more beloved than those who disgrace, insult and blaspheme a person, for they do not deprive him of his strength or cause him to suffer sickness, nor do they deprive him of his food and clothing, or end his or his children’s life with death. If so, he should desire [these kinds of torment] and say; ‘I would rather suffer scorn and embarrassment by others.’ And when he is insulted he should rejoice.”

A most unpleasant situation which evokes strong feelings of outrage is when someone is wrongly suspected.

An honest individual understands he has committed no wrongdoing, and the concocted scheme against him frustrates and irritates him, robbing him of all peace of mind. If this person can prove his innocence – he should do so. Although it may be unprovable, as believing Jews we understand that people observe with their eyes while Hashem is aware of the actual reality. Practically speaking, those suspected in vain are afforded a golden opportunity to be saved from all

kinds of harsh and negative decrees, G-d forbid, and even to be blessed with a Heavenly gift. And who knows if this opportunity will return?

The Chafetz Chaim *zt”l*, used to travel around from town to town selling his *sefarim* for a small amount of money, less than their true worth, to benefit the public. He was willing to sell them on credit, allowing people to begin their study of the *sefarim*. He would record the debts in a special notebook and the next time he visited that town he would collect the debts.

In the town of Drohitchin lived a Jew named Rabbi Mordechai Leib Hakohen. He bought *sefarim* from the Chafetz Chaim and paid immediately in cash. Yet the next time the Chafetz Chaim came to that town his messengers came to Rabbi Mordechai and informed him he had a registered debt from buying *sefarim*. Rabbi Mordechai claimed this was impossible; he had never owed anyone even a single kopeck! But they showed him the debt recorded in the notebook, black on white – Mordechai Hakohen from the town of Drohitchin owed Maran the Chafetz Chaim such and such kopecks for the *sefarim* he bought on a certain date.

Although Rabbi Mordechai was sure he was right, he paid the “debt.” A short while later the mistake was revealed: there were two Jews in Drohitchin named Mordechai Hakohen! However, the second Mordechai was not called Leib, and it was this fellow who owed money for the *sefarim*!

The Chafetz Chaim hastened personally to Rabbi Mordechai Leib Hakohen, requesting his forgiveness. It turned out that this Rabbi Mordechai had sterling *middot* and never held any grudge at all. The Chafetz Chaim greatly admired his noble behavior, blessing him, “May you live long and good years!”

Indeed, Rabbi Mordechai Leib Hakohen merited immigrating to Eretz Yisrael and lived to the ripe old age of ninety-six.

Rabbi Mordechai Leib would recount this wondrous story to his offspring. He would explain that when someone suspects a friend and it turns out to be a false suspicion, it is an auspicious time for the innocent suspect to pray, and it is worthwhile utilizing the opportunity to bless the “suspect.”



GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Extensions of Rechilut

If Levi tells Reuven something negative about Shimon, and Reuven repeats this to Shimon (thereby transgressing the prohibition of *rechilut*), Shimon is forbidden to confront Levi saying, “Why did you speak about me?” for Shimon is thereby slandering Reuven. Even if Shimon does not mention that it was Reuven who divulged this information to him, if Levi will understand this by himself, Shimon is forbidden to mention the matter to Levi.



“Contemplate and see that Hashem is good”

Exciting update: With *siyata diShmaya*, the *shiurim* of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, the Admor Rabbi David Chananya Pinto *shlit"א*, are now available in Hebrew, English, French and Spanish

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