

Good Yom Tov, everyone. I want to wish you and your families a year of *bracha, hatzlacha*, good health, spiritual growth, and prosperity. A year overflowing with abundant joy and happiness.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors,

- Anonymous
- Bruce and Julie Fried, in memory of Rabbi Jerry Pruzansky and in commemoration of his 50th *yahrzeit*, which is on 2nd day Rosh Hashana. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.

May the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha, hatzlacha*, good health, and a *shana tova umesuka!*

Rosh Hashana is also known as *Yom Hadin*; the Day of Judgment. It is the day described in the *Mishna* when *כל באי עולם עוברין לפניך כבני מרון*, *all living creatures pass in front of you, Hashem, for judgment individually, "like bnei maron."* While this sounds scary, our *tefillos* assure us *את' אלקינו באהבה את' ה' ותתן לנו ה' אלקינו באהבה את' ה'* that the judgment is carried out with love and tenderness.

But how is this judgment carried out with affection? What does that mean? I think the answer is found in the unusual wording *Chazal* used. The *mishna* could have simply said that each one of us passes before God individually, one by one for judgment, but instead it provides a metaphor, "*like bnei maron.*" The **Gemara in Rosh Hashana 18a** offers three definitions of *bnei maron* and these definitions provide three different perspectives on how we should view this Day of Judgment. Three different definitions – three different vivid images of judgment for us to internalize on Rosh Hashana.

First, the Gemara states that, in Bavel, they interpret *bnei maron* to mean "like sheep." This is the imagery of judgment used in *Unesane Tokef*, *כבקרת רועה עדרו מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו*, On Rosh Hashana, Hashem is *like a shepherd who counts and scrutinizes his flock under his staff.*

The first image is of a single sheep, one member of a large flock, indistinguishable from the next. Although the sheep is alone, there is no regard for individuality in this image. From this perspective, on Rosh Hashana, we come before God as passive, humble servants, together with the rest of His flock, who are also His humble servants. It is a reminder that an individual is intrinsically connected to others, past, present, and future. There is a great world within which we function. Our actions are influenced by those who came before and by those around us, and we impact not just our world, but future generations, as well. We dare not forget this important fact regarding our place.

Rav Kook, in his *Orot Hateshuva* (Chapter 6) writes:

אורות התשובה פ"ו: ממעמקים באה התשובה, מעומק גדול זה שאין הנפש היחידית האישית לגביה חטיבה בפני עצמה, אלא המשך מהגדולה ההויית הכללית. הרצון של התשובה נוגע ברצון העולמי, במקורו העליון, וכיון שהזרם הכביר של שטף החיים הרצוניים פונה להיטיב, מיד נחלים רבים שוטפים בכל מלא היש לגלות את הטוב, ולהיטיב לכל. "גדולה תשובה שמביאה רפואה לעולם, ויחיד שעשה תשובה מוחלין לו ולעולם כולו." בצנור הגדול, שלשד החיים העצמיים שוטף שם, מתגלה האחדות של כל היש במקורו, וברוח החיים המרחף של התשובה מתחדש הכל לטובה עליונה, מאירה ומצוחצחת.

Teshuva comes from the depths—from a great depth in regard to which the individual human spirit is not a self contained entity but a continuum of the great universal being. An individual's energy for teshuvah touches upon the universal drive at its spiritual source. And since the mighty current of the flow of that life-energy turns to do good, immediately many streams flow within the entire fullness of being in order to reveal the good and to do good to all. Great is teshuvah, which brings healing to the world. And when an individual does teshuvah, he and the entire world are forgiven" (Yoma). In the great conduit through which the abundance of the essential life flows, the unity of all being at its source is revealed. And in the

hovering life-spirit of teshuvah, everything is refreshed for the sake of a goodness that is spiritual, shining and bright.

The **Ramchal** also reminds us in *Mesilas Yesharim* (Chapter 1) that a person affects the world through his actions. He is one of the pack--both affected by, and affecting, those around him.

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק אואם תעמיק עוד בענין תראה כי העולם נברא לשימוש האדם. אמנם הנה הוא עומד בשיקול גדול. כי אם האדם נמשך אחר העולם ומתרחק מבוראו, הנה הוא מתקלקל, ומקלקל העולם עמו. ואם הוא שולט בעצמו ונדבק בבוראו ומשתמש מן העולם רק להיות לו לסיוע לעבודת בוראו, הוא מתעלה והעולם עצמו מתעלה עמו.

And if you delve deeper into the matter, you will see that the world was created for man's use. Although here he stands in great consideration. For if man is drawn after the world and distances himself from his Creator, here he breaks down, and the world spoils with him. And if he controls himself and clings to his Creator and uses the world only to assist him in the work of his Creator, he transcends and the world itself transcends with him.

What an empowering view of our impact. But that is only one facet of our existence, one understanding of *bnei maron*.

The second approach is from Reish Lakish. According to him, *bnei maron* means *k'ma'alos Beis Maron* like the ascent of *Beis Maron*, a narrow passage up a mountain, with a precipitous drop on each side of the pathway, necessitating walking up extremely carefully and alone. Reish Lakish adds the element of individuality to the judgment. We are not simply walking by like sheep, with our heads down, as part of a group. The *Beis Maron* was a narrow, winding road that was carved into the mountain, allowing for only one person at a time to ascend, traveling single file. If you took one step to the left or to the right, you would fall into the abyss. Be very careful, step by step, because there is no one else to count on. To quote the poet **William Ernest Henley**: “*I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*”

Rosh Hashana is the day when each of us must ask ourselves whether we are living up to our unique potential and fulfilling our individual mission in life.

On the day man was created, after Adam HaRishon lost his way and sinned, Hakadosh Baruch Hu asked him “**ayeka?**” “Where are you?” Hashem was not asking his location for GoogleMaps. Rather, He was asking “where are you spiritually?” Are you accomplishing what you are meant to accomplish in your life? He was addressing Adam, the individual...

On the anniversary of that fateful day, we are asked the same probing question...*ayeka*—where are you?

And when we blow the shofar each year, we are reminded that Hashem personally blew life into the first human and each of us, as well. And every morning when Hashem returns our *neshama* and we wake up, it reaffirms His confidence and faith in us. אתה נפחת בי Hashem, You personally placed the *neshama* into us...with Your own breath, *kaveyachol*...

And every morning we thank Hashem for restoring that same *neshama*...

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים שהחזרת בי נשמתי בחמלה,

When we thank Hashem for giving us back our lives, we end with the words ... great is Your *emunah*...

What does אמונתך mean? **Your faith?** In this context, it is usually translated as Hashem’s faithfulness.

In *Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind* (p. 151), **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik** offers another explanation: “הצור תמים פעלו...קל אמונה a God of faith...How can we apply this appellation of *kel emunah* to the Almighty God? Human beings trust in God. But how can we apply the expression “God of faith” to the Almighty

God Himself? The Ribbono shel Olam is designated “God of Faith” because He Himself has confidence in Man. And if He trusts in Man, then Man, too, must trust in Man.

Our very lives are a testament to the faith Hashem has in each of us. We thank Hashem for believing in us. *Atta nefachta bi*—every day of our lives... You return our neshama because You believe in us, and You expect something from us...and You guide us along the way...with Your closeness... Hashem steadies us and keeps us from falling off the precipitous drops on the sides of the mountain of life...

Rav Soloveitchik (On Repentance, p. 303) movingly described his feelings when he engages Hashem in dialogue through Talmud Torah: *“Believe me when I tell you that I myself could never have endured the past years had I not felt the close proximity of God. I am not a Kabbalist nor a mystic, so when I speak of the nearness of God, it is something I feel when opening the pages of the Talmud in order to study. When I am thus immersed in study, I feel as if the Almighty is there standing behind me, putting His hand on my shoulder, looking with me at the text lying on the table and asking me about it. This is not something I imagine. For me this is a true-to-life experience.”*

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks states, in *Letters to the Next Generation* (Chapter 8, p. 29): *Faith is the knowledge that we are here for a reason, and that in our journey through life God is with us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, believing in us more than we believe in ourselves. This is not wishful thinking. It is a fact. But it is not a simple fact. Just as we have to train ourselves to listen to great music or appreciate great art, so we have to train ourselves to sense the presence of God in our lives. That training comes in two forms. One is Torah, the other is mitzvot. Through Torah we learn what God asks of us. Through mitzvot, we practice doing God’s will. That is how we open ourselves to God. Faith allows us to take risks and face the future without fear.*

On this day, as we file before God, one by one, based on how we performed in the past year and on our aspirations, goals, passion and drive for the next year, we are given our new marching orders. We are given the tools, and suitable conditions, to make that happen. In the words of **Rav Chaim Friedlander** in his *Sifsei Chaim*:

שפתי חיים ח"א עמ' קי"ז: כל הנבראים מקבלים ביום זה תפקידים חדשים מתוך הסיבוב החדש, והם זקוקים לכלים חדשים המותאמים למילוי תפקידים אלה. ואולם הבדל יש בין הבריאה הראשונה של ששת ימי בראשית לבריאה החדשה בכל שנה ושנה: הבריאה בראשיתה נבראה בחסד-בלי שיקדמו אליה זכויות מעשי בני אדם, אולם מכאן ולהבא דן הקב"ה בכל ראש השנה על מסירת התפקידים החדשים ועל העזרה שצריך לתת למילוי תפקידים אלה-לפי מילוי התפקידים של כל אחד ואחד בסיבוב הקודם. לכן ביום זה הקב"ה דן את כל העולם כולו, "ומחדש כל המציאות בבחינת הסיבוב החדש" אחד הם, סיבוב החדש הוא אשר מחייב את הדין.

All creatures receive new roles from the “new rotation” on this day, and they need new tools adapted to fulfill these roles. However, there is a difference between the first creation of the six days of Genesis and the new creation each and every year: creation in its beginning was created by grace – without being preceded by the rights of human actions, but from then on G-d discusses every Rosh Hashanah the handing over of the new roles and the help that must be given to fulfill these roles – according to the fulfillment of the roles of each and every one in the previous round. Therefore, “on this day the Almighty judges the whole world, and renews all reality in the examination of the new reality.

Finally, Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel explained *bnei maron* as *chayalos shel beis David* – King David’s soldiers, each with a unique task and mission, fighting in his army.

What is the image of soldiers meant to convey? Soldiers are in a chain of command and **must obey their orders**. In the middle of the battle, they must work with their unit, to survive, to live another day. They cannot question their orders...their lives and the lives of many others depend on that principle.

This is a reminder that the stakes of life are real, that we are living in a battleground. To achieve eternal reward, we are continually battling the evil *yetzer hara*, which is relentlessly trying to defeat us, to destroy us. As the **Ramchal** teaches in *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chapter 1)

מסילת ישרים פ"א: ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה, כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם, העוני מצד אחד והעושר מצד אחד כענין שאמר שלמה (משלי ל): פן אשבע וכחשתי ואמרתי מי ה', ופן אורש וגנבתי וכו'. השלום מצד אחד והיסורין מצד אחד, עד שנמצאת המלחמה אליו פנים ואחור.

Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield. For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials for a man. Poverty from one side versus wealth from the other. This is as Shlomo said: "Lest I be satiated, and deny You, and say, Who is G-d? or lest I be poor, and steal..." (Prov.30:9). Tranquility on one hand versus suffering on the other, until the battle is waged against him from the front and from the rear.

ואם יהיה לבן חיל וינצח המלחמה מכל הצדדין, הוא יהיה האדם השלם אשר יזכה לידבק בבוראו ויצא מן הפרוזדור הזה ויכנס בטרקלין לאור באור החיים.

If he will be a man of valor, emerging from the battle victorious on all fronts - he will be the "Adam HaShalem" (whole man) who will merit to cling to his Creator and will emerge from this corridor to enter into the palace to enlighten in the Light of (eternal) Life.

וכפי השיעור אשר כבש את יצרו ותאוותיו ונתרחק מן המרחקים אותו מהטוב ונשתדל לדבק בו, כן ישיגהו וישמח בו.
According to the extent that he conquered his inclination and lusts, and distanced from the factors which distance him from the good, and exerted himself to cling to G-d, to that extent will he attain it and rejoice in it.

And we have been given instructions that we **must** follow. As *Ramchal* writes, Hashem has expectations.

At the same time, a person must clarify his own **obligation** in this world...

As we enter into the courtroom on this Day of Judgment, we are confident because we are soldiers fighting to spread God's message throughout the world, and we know if we follow His commands we will be victorious. Our strategy is Hashem's Torah and our ammunition is His *mitzvos*. As **Ramchal** writes
ההאמצעים המגיעים את האדם לתכלית הזה, הם המצוות אשר צונו עליהן האל יתברך שמו. ומקום עשיית המצוות הוא רק העולם הזה.

The means that lead a person to this goal are the commandments which the blessed G-d commanded to us. The place of the performance of these commandments is only in this world.

But there must be a shift in our mindset. We must see ourselves as soldiers, not civilians or bystanders. In a world where there is so much that is antithetical to Godliness, today is a day to think about how we respond. We must reply כחילות בית דוד. We must be passionate about our objectives. When we pass before God on Rosh Hashana, when we are judged, we need to tell God that we're ready to fight for Him; for a life of Torah and *mitzvos*; because it is something that we care about and that gives us meaning.

But today, as Hashem is judging us, we must honestly ask ourselves: What do we fight for? What are we passionate about? Where do we stand?

What concerns us? What do we care about so deeply that we would fight for it? What is worth extending ourselves for? What inspires us? What motivates us?

Is it our families? Is it Jewish education? Jewish identity and survival? Talmud Torah? Eretz Yisrael? This is a day to ask--Was I too complacent this past year? Were all my actions *l'shem shamayim*?

What silliness have we fought for? What trivialities and nonsense have consumed our hearts and minds and resources during the past year? What did I think was important in the moment, but now I see it was insignificant?

There is a quote I once heard, [Alan Paton's *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*] "*When I go up there, which is my intention, the Big Judge will say to me, Where are your wounds? and if I say I haven't any, He will say, Was there nothing to fight for?*"

Let us find something, during this Yamim Noraim season that we want to change, and decide that this coming year, we are going to make that change happen. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that we can make a dramatic change in our outlook and lives. The **Gemara in Rosh Hashana** teaches that, on Rosh Hashana, Yosef was freed from prison. His brothers had sold him to a passing caravan, to become a slave in a far off land. His family had rejected him; his aspirations for greatness had vanished. As far as he could tell, he would live out his life as a slave, with a life devoid of meaning. As difficult as that was for Yosef, things get even worse. Falsely accused of assaulting his master's wife, he is thrown into prison. For all Yosef knew, he would languish in prison for the rest of his life. His hopes and dreams seemed to be lost.

However, in one day, Yosef goes from the lowest point in his life to a high point of greatness.

On that day, Rosh Hashana, a messenger arrives from Pharaoh to pull Yosef out of prison. Yosef suddenly finds himself standing before the mighty Pharaoh. After interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Yosef is promoted to become Pharaoh's second in command. He is given the royal signet ring, he dons royal garments, and he is accorded great honor as he rides in Pharaoh's royal chariot. **In the span of just one day, Rosh Hashana, Yosef goes from a hopeless prisoner to the powerful viceroy of Egypt.** The fulfillment of his childhood dreams is no longer a distant fantasy but a near reality. Because he had never given up the fight. In his words during the lowest moments אֲנִי יִרָא אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים, I continue to stand in awe of Hashem.

This same sudden change can happen to us, as well, on Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashana is a day designated for change, even dramatic change. On this day, every year, the world is refreshed and created anew. God judges each creation and decides whether and how it should be recreated for the coming year. This presents us with a golden opportunity. Since creation is being refreshed on Rosh Hashana, we can become different people this year. If we take our responsibilities seriously, dream big, and believe in ourselves; if we understand our place in the world, and in history, our connection to one another, and make ourselves crucial to the success of others; if we do *teshuvah* and *daven* with full devotion, Hashem will give us the tools we need to become the person we dream of becoming. Can we break out of our rut and become the person of our dreams? What are we ready to fight for in the coming year? May we all be *zoche* to a *ksiva vachasima tova* and a year of good health, happiness, *bracha*, and *hatzlacha*.