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# Rosh Hashana

## Depth behind Halachot: Two Days of Rosh Hashana

According to the *Torah*, *Rosh Hashana* is a one-day holiday. However, every year even in *Eretz Yisrael*, where we usually keep one day of *yom tov*, we keep two days of *Rosh Hashana*. As we know all Jewish holidays are dated according to the cycle of the moon. The process for declaring a new month was entirely in the hands of *beit din* (Jewish court). In order for *beit din* to declare a new month, two witnesses would have to come to court and testify that they saw the new moon. The simple reason for keeping two days of *yom tov* outside of *Eretz Yisrael* is because there was not enough time for the messengers to travel there and let them know on which day *Rosh Chodesh* was announced in *beit din*. Since they didn't have a way of knowing when *Rosh Chodesh* would be, they also didn't know which day *yom tov* would fall out on. Therefore they kept two days because of doubt.

The simple reason for why we keep two days of *Rosh Hashana* even in *Eretz Yisrael* is because *Rosh Hashana* is the only Jewish holiday that is at the beginning of the month and so even in Israel there was no time for the messengers to go around and announce that the *beit din* had declared the new month. Therefore even in *Eretz Yisrael* they kept two days as a result of the doubt of not knowing which day is really *Rosh Hashana*. On a simple level, even though today the calendar is fixed we still follow the *minhag* of our fathers and continue to keep two days. However even according to this, how can we say in our prayers that today is *Yom Hadin* (Day of Judgment)? After-all in reality is there not only one day of judgment?<sup>1</sup>

To begin to answer this question let's analyze the depth behind other decrees that were instituted by the Rabbis. *Chazal* made a decree that when *Rosh Hashana* falls out on *Shabbat* we do not blow the *shofar*. Similarly on the *Shabbat* of the holiday of *Sukkot* we do not bless nor wave the *arba'a minim*. The reason *Chazal* gave for this decree was to prevent the possibility of someone doing the prohibited *melacha* of carrying on *Shabbat* in order to transport his *shofar* or his *arba'a minim*.<sup>2</sup> Upon further inspection however this decree seems *halachically* unsound. There is a *halachic* principle that says to always go according to that which will certainly happen over that which may happen. But here *Chazal* uprooted doing a certain positive commandment based on the mere chance that someone will carry on *Shabbat*.<sup>3</sup>

Addressing this question the *Ben Ish Chai*<sup>4</sup> explains that blowing the *shofar* and shaking the *lulav* on *Shabbat* are not spiritually necessary. This is because all the spiritual influence that these *mitzvoth* cause, happen automatically through the spirituality of *Shabbat*. However, since the details of how this is so is not easily understood by everyone and since *Chazal* knew that it would be unlikely for the people to accept a decree for which they didn't know the reason, *Chazal* decided to give a secondary reason behind their decree. Based on this we can understand the *Gemara* that says:<sup>5</sup> *Only a Beit Din greater in size and wisdom can annul the words of a previous Beit Din*. Since *Chazal* often hid the real reason behind their decree, only a more qualified *Beit Din* can claim to have gotten to the bottom of their decree and decided that the reason for it no longer applies.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See **Michtav M'Eliyahu** II p.74-77

<sup>2</sup> See **Rosh Hashana** 29b and Tosfot there dibur hamatchil ha; According to the **Yerushalmi** and **Vayikra Rabbah** 29:12 this is actually a *gezeirat hakatoov*

<sup>3</sup> See the **Ran** to Megillah 2b (defei HaRif) who gives an alternative reason based on nigleh; See **Torah Lishma** 436; See **Pri Tzadik** ma'mar 16 on Rosh Hashana; See **Nesivos Shalom**, Rosh Hashana ma'amar shishi zichron teruah Rosh Hashana sh'chal b'Shabat

<sup>4</sup> **Torah Lishma** 436

<sup>5</sup> **Gittin** 36b; **Megillah** 2a; **Moed Katan** 3b; **Avoda Zara** 36a; **Edyot** 1:5

<sup>6</sup> See **Sifte Chaim** Pardes Hatorah (in the same volume as emunah ubechira) p.328; See Teshuvot of the **Rashba** 93? **Divrei Eliyahu** of the Gra, Shabbos 130 & **Beit halevi** to parshat Bo p. 120 & **Chatam Sofer**, derashot, chelek beit, daf 251, tur 4 dibur hamatchil "chacham" who suggest that even the reasons given for mitzvoth in the Torah itself is not the ultimate reason, the Ben Ish chai (Imrei Bina Chirei Lev "siman hei") says further that the Rabbis in formulating their takanot made them k'ein the d'oraita in not giving the ultimate reason behind them; See also **Kaf Hachaim** 1 to Orach Chaim 181:1; The **Kaf Hachaim** 590:6 says a similar idea regarding the number of the shofar we blow on Rosh Hashana. According to the Torah we have to hear nine sounds on Rosh Hashana. However because we are not sure what one of the sounds is supposed to sound like we blow one hundred sounds covering all the different permutations of sounds that are possible. This way we make sure that the required sounds were blown the right way. But according to the Zohar which reveals the deeper reason for the sounds we see that all the sounds are necessary. See also Kaf Hachaim with regards to chazarat hashatz and mayim acharonim (the Gra also says there are deeper reasons behind mayim acharonim)

This idea goes even further. There are times when the Rabbis institute a decree for one reason but **they themselves** learn later that there were deeper benefits to it as well. Perhaps an example will clarify this idea. The *kedusha* that is said in the prayers every morning in the section of *uva letzion* was not originally part of the *tefillah* but was rather added later on. The reason for the addition was that at some point in history there was a decree forbidding the Jewish people to say *kedusha*. To enforce this decree, the enemies of Israel placed spies in the *shuls* (synagogues) for the duration of *chazarat hashatz* (the part of the *tefillah* where the *kedusha* is said). After *chazarat hashatz* the spies used to leave. Therefore the Rabbis decreed to say *kedusha* in a later part of the *tefillah* so as not to miss saying *kedusha* for that day.

One may ask since there is no longer a decree against saying *kedusha* during *chazarat hashatz* why do we continue saying it? The *Ben Ish Chai* explains<sup>7</sup> that following the institution of the *kedusha* of *uva letzion* the Rabbis noticed the special spiritual influence this *kedusha* had on the *tefillah*. They therefore concluded that the decree of the spies might very well have been Hashem's way of bringing about the institution of the *kedusha* of *uva letzion* into the *tefillah*. This is a perfect example of how the Rabbis made a decree for one reason but later realized that Hashem had His own deeper reason for causing them to make the decree.

This idea opens up a whole new way of looking at the decrees of the Rabbis. We mentioned above the simple reason for why we keep two days of *yom tov* outside of Israel. The deeper reason for keeping two days of *yom tov* outside of *Eretz Yisrael* is because the holiness of *chutz laaretz* (outside of Israel) is not as high as the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*. What is spiritually accomplished in *Eretz Yisrael* in one day can only be spiritually accomplished outside of *Eretz Yisrael* in two.<sup>8</sup> On a deeper level this is why we still keep two days outside of Israel even though now we have a set calendar and the dates of the holidays are no longer based on the declaration of the new moon by *beit din*. This idea however still doesn't answer up for Rosh Hashana where even in *Eretz Yisrael* we keep two days. What is the deeper reason behind this?

Let's go back to our original question: how can we say on both days of *Rosh Hashana* that today is the Day of Judgment when we know that only one of them is the real day? Rav Dessler explains<sup>9</sup> in the name of the *Arizal* that in reality there are two days of judgment. The first day is referred to as "hard judgment" while the second day is called "soft judgment". On the first day of Rosh Hashana, Hashem judges a person according to who he is. Hashem assesses whether this **person by himself** is fitting to pass the judgment. This is referred to as a hard judgment because a person needs tremendous merit to be worthy of passing the judgment solely based on his own standing. The judgment of the second day of Rosh Hashana is different. Let's analyze how this is so.

The *pasuk* in the Torah describes Hashem as:<sup>10</sup> *the Rock- perfect is His work for all His ways are justice, a G-d of faith without wickedness, He is righteous and fair.* Rav Yitschak Belzer<sup>11</sup> asks: why is the fact that there is no wickedness in His judgments considered a praise to Hashem? After-all even an earthly court is expected to at least meet that standard! Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz<sup>12</sup> offers the following answer. In an earthly court judgment is handed out solely based on the transgressor's action. If a person's actions deserve a certain punishment then he is given that punishment without taking into account how this will affect his wife, children, friends and all others around him. Hashem however orchestrates things in such a way that everyone will get exactly what they deserve. For example if a person deserves to get sick but his wife and children do not deserve to go through the trouble and pain of taking care of a sick husband, then Hashem will not make him sick. Obviously justice will be served at some point either in this world or the next but so long as his family doesn't deserve to the pain that would come about through his becoming sick, he wouldn't become sick. This is the praise of the *pasuk* that says there is no wickedness in his judgment. There is no wickedness even in how the judgment of one person affects those around him; everyone only gets what they deserve.

With this idea we can understand the Gemara<sup>13</sup> that says a person's wife can, G-d forbid, die as a result of him not keeping his vows. At first glance this seems very unfair. Why should the wife lose her life because of a

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<sup>7</sup> *Ben Ish Chai*, Year I, Ki Tissa

<sup>8</sup> See *Ben Yehoyada* to Rosh Hashana 23b "ta chazi ma bein"; *Aderet Eliyahu* of the Gra, Ki Tavo

<sup>9</sup> See *Michtav M'Eliyahu* II p.74-77; See also *Sifte Chaim*, *Emunah ubechira* II p.326

<sup>10</sup> *Devarim* 32:4

<sup>11</sup> *Kochvei Ohr* ma'amar 3 quoted in *Sichot Mussar*, M'amar 98, see there his own answer to this question.

<sup>12</sup> *Sichot Mussar*, M'amar 98, Ha'azinu 5733; See also *Michtav M'Eliyahu* III p. 252-253 quoting Rav Yisrael Salanter who explains the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (19:10) "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether they are upright" based on the same principle ie. Altogether (ie the sum total of his judgments) his judgments are also true.

<sup>13</sup> *Shabat* 32b; see also *Sanhedrin* 22a that gives another situation where the wife of a person dies as a result of his action

transgression of her husband? However, based on the above Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz<sup>14</sup> explains that the Gemara is certainly speaking about a case where for whatever reason the time had come for the wife to die, but the husband did not deserve the pain of losing his wife. Therefore Hashem kept her alive. However, once the husband didn't keep his vow, he became deserving (so to speak) of the pain of losing a wife.<sup>15</sup>

With this we can also understand many statements of Chazal that seem to contradict one another with regard to the reasons for catastrophes that came upon individuals. One Midrash says that Dina was taken against her will because she wasn't modest enough<sup>16</sup> while another Midrash says it was a punishment intended for Ya'akov (Dina's father) who delayed in keeping his vow.<sup>17</sup> Similarly we are told that Yosef was sold as punishment for slander<sup>18</sup> while another Chazal tells us it was a measure for measure punishment for Ya'akov (who extended his stay with Lavan thus delaying coming back to perform the mitzvah of honoring his parents) to part from Yosef his son for 22 years.<sup>19</sup> Based on the above we can suggest that the different Midrashim are addressing the reason for the tragedies according to different people. In each Midrash one reason is given for why the catastrophe happened to Dina or Yosef while the other Midrash explains why Ya'akov deserved the pain of seeing his children go through those hard times. Had any one of the reasons been absent, the tragedy wouldn't have happened since it would have negatively affected someone who didn't deserve it.

The above idea helps us understand the judgment of the second day of Rosh Hashana. On the second day a person is not judged solely on who he is but also according to what he contributes to those who do have enough merit to pass the judgment themselves. For example even though he may not have enough personal merits to be given life for the year to come, it could be that those people around him, who he is contributing to, do not deserve losing him. In this way he can be granted life based on the contributions he is making to them. The Arizal refers to this as the softer judgment because a person can merit passing the judgment by making himself a useful tool for others even though he himself is not worthy of it. It follows from the above that a very effective way of passing the judgment on Rosh Hashana is to be of help to as many people as possible. This way even though he may not have the personal merits to be given life, Hashem may keep him around for the sake of the many people who depend on him. According to this we can understand why we refer to both days as days of judgment; because in reality there are those who are being judged on each day.<sup>20</sup>

In the days of the *Beit Hamikdash* the people living in Israel were on a very high level and could pass the first Day of Judgment through the *kedusha* of *Eretz Yisrael* that's why they usually kept one day of *Rosh Hashana*. During the years that *Hashem* saw they dropped from their level, *Hashem* caused the witnesses who declare the new moon to come later thereby forcing them to keep two days of *Rosh Hashana*. This gave them the second "softer" Day of Judgment as a second chance to come out with a good verdict. However after the *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed the Jewish people dropped from their original spiritual level and therefore the Rabbis mandated that even people living in Israel should keep *Rosh Hashana* for two days to enable them to have the second "softer" day of judgment as well.<sup>21</sup>

Most people today are not on the level of coming out of the first Day of Judgment victorious. That's why it is so important to take the second day of *Rosh Hashana* as seriously as the first. Through preparing ourselves beforehand by making a connection with those people who are on a high enough level to pass the first day judgment and contributing to the community at large we can highly increase our chance of meriting a good judgment as well. May we all merit to have a *ketiva v'chatima tova!*

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<sup>14</sup> **Sichot Mussar**, M'amar 98, Ha'azinu 5733; See also **Michtav M'Eliahu** III p. 250-253 who quotes the Gemara (Shabat 105b) that a person's children can die as a result of not properly mourning the death of an "adam kasher", and explains it based on the same principle. See there where he also explains the Gemara (Shabat 105b-106a) of "echad min hachabura shemet" based on the same idea.

<sup>15</sup> See **Ramchal** quoted in **Michtav M'Eliahu** III p. 253 who gives a deep insight into the intrinsic connection of not keeping a neder and losing a wife.

<sup>16</sup> See **Rashi** to Bereishit 34:1

<sup>17</sup> See **Rashi** to Bereishit 35:1

<sup>18</sup> See **Rashi** to Bereishit 37:1 "et dibatam ra'ah"

<sup>19</sup> 22 years mida keneged mida

<sup>20</sup> **Michtav M'Eliahu** II p.74-77; See also Sifte Chaim, Emunah ubechira II p.326; See **Netziv's Meromei Sadeh**, dibur hamatchil "hacha" who explains the three interpretations of b'nei meron in the Gemara as three judgments of the individual. 1) the individual on his own 2) the individual within his community 3) the individual within klal Yisrael as a whole. Others (see **Ohr Gedalyahu**, Rosh Hashana) compare the idea of B'nei Meron, which implies individual judgment, to the lashon of "sekira achat" which implies a communal judgment.

<sup>21</sup> See **Ben Ish Chai**, Imrei Bina chikrei lev, siman hei; **Bnei Yisaschar**, M'amrei Chodesh Tishrei, 2:2; **Michtav M'Eliahu** II p.77