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Rosh Hashana

Day of Judgment

Rav Nachman Bar Yitzchak said regarding judgment it [the pasuk] says: "from the beginning of the year until the end of year", [this means] from the beginning of the year there's a judgment about what will be at the end [of the year].¹

The commentaries explain that the astrological sign for the month of *Tishrei*, the *moznuyim* (scale)², hints to the fact that on this day *Hashem* weighs everything on His scale and decides what we will get for the entire year to come. One by one we pass in front of *Hashem* like sheep in front of a shepherd³, and He scrutinizes us and decides our fate. Riches, health, marriages, births, deaths- everything is decided on this awesome day.⁴ Though the judgment of Rosh Hashana is in many ways above what our minds can grasp,⁵ let's try to gain a simple understanding of what this special day is all about.

The Gemara says:⁶

R' Kruspedai said in the name of R' Yochanan three books are opened on Rosh Hashana one for the completely wicked one for the completely righteous and one for the intermediate. The completely righteous are written and sealed right away for life, the completely wicked are written and sealed right away for death and the intermediate are held in balance from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur, if they merit they are written for life and if they don't merit they are written for death.

On face value the above *Gemara* is problematic. After all, we see many righteous people who don't live out the year and many wicked people who do. How then are we to understand this *Gemara*?⁷ *Tosfos*⁸ addresses this question and answers that "life" in this *Gemara* is not referring to life in this world but rather life in the World to Come. This explanation takes care of the question on the *Gemara* however, according to this new understanding we are faced with a few other questions. First of all why is it that a person is judged for his share in the World to Come on *Rosh Hashana*? After all, as long as a person is alive he can lose his good deeds through regretting them⁹ or rid himself of his bad deeds through doing *teshuva*.¹⁰ Wouldn't it make more sense to delay the judgment for the world to come until after a person dies? What is the purpose of being judged for the World to Come specifically once a year? Furthermore the *Gemara* tells us in many places that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is with regards to **this** world as opposed to the world to come.¹¹ As the *Gemara* says:¹² *Rav*

¹ Rosh Hashana 8a

² Ran to Rosh Hashana 16a

³ See Rosh Hashana 16a

⁴ See the tefillah, unetaneh tokef that beautifully describes the awesome judgment of this day

⁵ See **P'nei Yehoshua** to Rosh Hashana 16b regarding sifrei chaim and meitim.

⁶ **Rosh Hashana** 16b

⁷ For different answers to this question see hasagot of the **Ra'avad** to **Rambam** Hilchot Teshuva 3:2; **Ramban** beginning of Sha'ar Hagemul; **Ran** and **Rashba** to Rosh Hashana 16b; **Tosfos** to Rosh Hashana 16b dibur hamatchil "v'nichtamin l'alter l'chaim, see also **Korban Netanel** 4 who explains Tosfos; **Sefer Hachinuch** 311; **Maharal** Chideushei Aggadot to Rosh Hashana 16b; **Ma'arit Ayin** of the Chida to Rosh Hashana 16b; **Ben Yehoyada** to Rosh Hashana 16b; See **Gra** to Orach Chaim 582:9; See **P'nei Yehoshua** who says very deep ideas are hidden in this *Gemara*; See **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p.102-105;

⁸ **Rosh Hashana** 16b, dibur hamatchil, "v'nichtamin l'alter l'chaim"

⁹ **Kidushin** 40b see Rashi there dibur hamatchil "b'toheh"

¹⁰ See **Rashba** there who asks this

¹¹ See **Rosh Hashana** 8a "mereishit hashana"; **Beitza** 16a "mezonotav shel adam"; **Berachot** 18b "ma'aseh bechasisd echad"

¹² **Rosh Hashana** 8a

Nachman Bar Yitzchak said regarding judgment it [the pasuk] says: “from the beginning of the year until the end of year”, [this means] from the beginning of the year there’s a judgment about what will be at the end [of the year]. How then are we to understand Tosfot’s answer that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is on the world to come?

There are many other questions that surround the holiday of Rosh Hashana. It is a known idea that names in Judaism always express essence.¹³ By studying the depth behind names a person can get an understanding of the spiritual nature of the person, object etc. bearing that name. Similarly the names of the holidays reflect their core. For example, *Yom Kippur* bears its name because on that day *Hashem* is *mechaper* (atones) for our sins. The same applies to all the other holidays. According to this if the primary idea behind the holiday of *Rosh Hashana* is judgment, then why isn’t *Yom Hadin* (the Day of Judgment) the primary name of the holiday?¹⁴ After-all the name “Rosh Hashana” (head of the year) seems to hint at nothing more than the date of the day. Furthermore, since *Rosh Hashana* is the Day of Judgment, wouldn’t it be more fitting to have it at the end of the previous year rather than the beginning of the New Year?¹⁵

As mentioned in previous essays, the Jewish idea of holidays is not only a commemoration of something that happened in the past. Rather each holiday is a re-experience of the same energies associated with each time period once and again, year after year.¹⁶ If so what is the special energy associated with *Rosh Hashana*? *Chazal*¹⁷ tell us that the first day of *Tishrei* marks the creation of man which in turn marks the completion of creation. It was on this day that man was given his first commandment not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and also the job of working and guarding the land.¹⁸ It was also on this day that *Adam Harishon* was given the tools he needed to accomplish this goal. He was placed in the ideal environment (*Gan Eden*) for growth, given the ideal spouse as a helpmate and the fruits of all the trees except the Tree of Knowledge as food. Ultimately he wasn’t missing anything he needed to accomplish the job that was assigned to him. However, *Adam Harishon* was unable to pass the test and sinned on the very day he was given the commandment. He was then judged on this day and was given a second chance but this time under different conditions. His ultimate job in the world was now different and therefore the tools he was given to accomplish his job also changed. His environment changed since he was expelled from *Gan Eden*, he now had to work for his food, *Chava* now had to endure childbirth pains, etc.

What can we learn from this about *Rosh Hashana* today? The *Maharal*¹⁹ explains that the Hebrew word for year (*shana*) has the same root as the Hebrew word for “change” (*shinui*). The depth behind this is that with every New Year there is a change in the details of the goals that need to be met and purposes that need to be brought to fruition in the world. Just like every generation faces new trials to overcome and jobs to accomplish, so too every year the details of what is expected from us changes. In this sense every year is like a new creation unto itself. This is the reason why a judgment is needed every year.²⁰

Based on the above the commentaries suggest that everything that happened at the original creation of the world, takes place every year on Rosh Hashana.²¹ Just like on *Rosh Hashana Hashem* created and judged *Adam Harishon* and decided on the ultimate job that would be given to him, so too on this day *Hashem* judges us to see what if any job we will be given in the undertaking brought about by the New Year.²² Furthermore, just

¹³ See **Yoma** 83b; **Ruach Chaim** of Rav Chaim Volozhohn on Adam Harishon giving names to animals; Rav Tzadok, **Pri Tzadik**, Chayeh Sarah, 2; **Michtav M’Eliyahu** II p.17

¹⁴ **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p. 92

¹⁵ **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p. 92

¹⁶ See **Derech Hashem** 4:8; **Kiseh David** of the Chida, reish drush chet; see **Lev David** of the Chida 29 who explains why Jews who weren’t under Achashverosh’s rule also celebrate Purim based on the above; **Kedushat Levi**, Chanuka, kedusha rishona; **Me’or Einyayim** to Parshat Yitro; **B’nei Yisaschar**, chodeshei Kislev Tevet 4:8; **Ben Yehoyada** to *Shabbat* 21b; **Ben Ish Chayil**, drush shlishi to Shabat Hagadol; **Michtav MeEliyahu** I P.103; **Michtav M’Eliyahu** II p. 21; **Chidushei Hagriz** al HaTorah 131; **Da’at Chochma Umussar** (Rav Yerucham Halevi) II Ma’amar 73 P’kol z’man v’et P’kol chefet; **Nesivos Shalom**, Sukkot, ma’amar tzila d’mehemnutah; **Siftei Chaim** II p. 53;

¹⁷ **Rosh Hashana** 10 according to Rabbi Elazar; See **Ran** to Rosh Hashana 16a who quotes the **Pesikta** (Piska 23) and says the reason why the first day of *Tishrei* is the beginning of the year instead of the 25th of Elul which marks the first day of creation is because man is the main purpose of the world and therefore his creation was primary.

¹⁸ See **Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer** who suggests that working was done through learning Torah and gurading was done through refraining from forbidden activities.

¹⁹ **Gevurat Hashem**, end of 51; See **Ma’amar Chochma** of the Ramchal quoted in **Siftei Chaim** in biur of yamim noraim tefilot

²⁰ See **Derech Hashem** 4:8; **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I p. 117

²¹ See the **Ran** to Rosh Hashana 16a; See **Sh’lah**, Masechet Rosh Hashana, perek Torah Ohr, ot 7; **Tanya**, Igeret Hakodesh 14

²² See the **Ran** to Rosh Hashana 16a; See **Sh’lah**, Masechet Rosh Hashana, perek Torah Ohr, ot 7; **Tanya**, Igeret Hakodesh 14

like *Adam Harishon* was given everything he needed to carry out the job he was expected to accomplish (both before and after his sin) so too every year on this day riches, health, marriages, births, deaths etc. is decided based on the personal job given to every single person. A person may be given lots of money to accomplish his goal of using it for good causes while a person may lack money to test his level of trust in *Hashem*. Every person's tools are decided based on his personal tests and goals for the year to come. There is however one major difference between the original day of creation and what takes place every year on *Rosh Hashana*. *Hashem's* original decision to create *Adam* was not dependent on *Adam's* actions, for the simple fact that *Adam* was yet to be created. Conversely the judgment of the day of *Rosh Hashana* is based solely on our personal merits.²³

Based on this idea we can begin to answer the questions we started out with. The Ramchal says that the reason why there is judgment on *Rosh Hashana* for one's share in the World to Come is because the results of that judgment affect what the person will get **in this world** for the upcoming year.²⁴ For example, *Hashem* may let a wicked person live out a prosperous year to repay him for the good deeds he did in this world so that he wouldn't have a reward left in the World to Come.²⁵ As it says in the *pasuk*:²⁶ *And He [Hashem] repays His enemies to their faces to destroy them.* The opposite may be true as well. *Hashem* may decree that a righteous person should suffer in the upcoming year so that in the World to Come he will have only merits.

There are many other examples of how the judgment of *Olam Haba* can affect the judgment of this world. For example the tools that a person will receive to serve *Hashem* can vary greatly based on one's spiritual standing. Furthermore, being judged as a righteous versus a wicked person can also determine the outcome of a person's actions.²⁷ As the Gemara says *Hashem* brings about good things to those who merit it while bringing bad things through those who don't.²⁸ Based on this we can understand why it is relevant to be judged for the world to come on *Rosh Hashana*. Really the main judgment of *Rosh Hashana* is for life in the upcoming year **in this world**. However for that to be determined, *Hashem* first judges whether we will merit having a place in the World to Come. Based on the outcome of that judgment *Hashem* then decides our fate for the year to come in this world.²⁹ This is the essence of the judgment that takes place on *Rosh Hashana*.

Based on this we can answer the rest of the questions we started with as well. Since every year brings with it new goals that need to be met a judgment is needed specifically once a year to determine the place of every individual in the new undertaking. Also since the purpose of the judgment of *Rosh Hashana* is not to hand out punishments for the *past*; rather it is a judgment for the *upcoming year*,³⁰ the judgment is on the first day of the **new-year** rather than the last day of the previous year. Finally, the name *Rosh Hashana* (head of the year) is more essential than the name *Yom Hadin* (Day of Judgment) since it is the fact that this day is the **head of the new year** (that brings with it new obligations) that in turn necessitates a new judgment.³¹ Therefore the name *Rosh Hashana*, like all other holidays, perfectly encapsulates the essence of *Rosh Hashana*.

²³ **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I p. 94; This is why in our tefilot we refer to the day of *Rosh Hashana* as only a remembrance of the original day of creation (*Siftei Chaim* in the name of Rav Dessler); See **Alei Shor** who brings proofs that the judgment is not on the past nor on the future rather it is based on how much we accept "ol malchut shamayim" on *Rosh Hashana*. But see **Rambam**, Hilchot Teshuva 3:3, who seems to suggest it is based on the past. As a *yishuv* perhaps we can suggest that if one cuts himself off from his past he can be judged based solely on his current state.

²⁴ See **Ramchal**, Ma'ar HaChochma, inyan sefer hachaim; See **Ramban's** Ma'amar on *Rosh Hashana*; **Leshem Shebo V'Achlama**, sefer Hakadosh, p. 31a; see also **Gra** to Orach Chaim 582:9; See **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p. 105 & p. 382; **Mishnat Rabbi Aharon**, Ma'amarim v'sichot Mussar II p. 179 "Shelosh Sefarim" for other examples of how the *din of olam haba* affects the *din on olam hazeh*

²⁵ See **Kiddushin** 40b; See also **Mishlei** 1:31; See also **Kochvei Ohr**, Siman 2, who gives examples of *tzadikim* who were also afraid they were repaid for their mitzvot in this world.

²⁶ **Devarim** 7:10

²⁷ See **Mishnat Rabbi Aharon**, Ma'amarim v'sichot Mussar II p. 179 "Shelosh Sefarim"; Based on **Shabat** 32a; **Sanhedrin** 8a; **Bava Batra** 119b; **Sifri** 289; **Tosefta** Yoma perek 4; See **Rashi** to **Devarim** 22:8

²⁸ Not an exact quote see **Shabat** 32a; **Sanhedrin** 8a; **Bava Batra** 119b; **Sifri** 289; **Tosefta** Yoma perek 4; See **Rashi** to **Devarim** 22:8

²⁹ See **Ramchal**, Ma'ar HaChochma, inyan sefer hachaim; See **Ramban's** Ma'amar on *Rosh Hashana*; **Leshem Shebo V'Achlama**, sefer Hakadosh p. 31a quoting also the **Gra**; See **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I p. 105 & p. 382; **Mishnat Rabbi Aharon**, Ma'amarim v'sichot Mussar II p. 179 "Shelosh Sefarim" for other examples of how the *din of olam haba* affects the *din on olam hazeh*

³⁰ **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p-92-7

³¹ **Siftei Chaim**, Moadim I, p-92-7