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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 usually one day of yom tov is kept, we observe two days of Rosh Hashana. The simple reason for this is as follows. 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 custom of our fathers and continue to keep two days. However even according to this Rav Dessler¹ asks, 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?

Depth behind Decrees

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 fulfill the mitzvah of 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.² 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.³

Addressing this question the Ben Ish Chai⁴ explains that blowing the shofar and shaking the lulav on Shabat are not spiritually necessary. This is because all the spiritual influence that these mitzvot 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. In other words the reason of the worry that people will carry on Shabat was given to cover

¹ See **Michtav M'Eliyahu II** p.74-77

² 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

³ See the **Ran** to Megillah 2b (defei HaRif); See **Torah Lishma** 436; See **Pri Tzadik** ma'mar 16 on Rosh Hashana; **Shem M'Shmuel**, Rosh Hashana 5679, Yom Rishon, See **Nesivos Shalom**, Rosh Hashana ma'amar shishi zichron teruah Rosh Hashana sh'chal b'Shabat

⁴ **Torah Lishma** 436

up the deeper reason and thereby convince the people to accept the decree. Based on this we can understand the Gemara that says:⁵ 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.⁶

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 hashbatz* (the part of the *tefillah* where the *kedusha* is said). After *chazarat hashbatz* 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 hashbatz* why do we continue saying it? The *Ben Ish Chai* explains⁷ that following the institution of the *kedusha* of *uva letzion* the Rabbis noticed the unique 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*. They therefore decided to keep this section in the *tefillah* even after the decree against saying *kedusha*. 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 *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than that of *chutz la'aretz* (outside of Israel). What is spiritually accomplished in *Eretz Yisrael* in one day can only be spiritually accomplished outside of *Eretz Yisrael* in two.⁸ 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* explains⁹ 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.

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

⁶ See *Sifte Chaim* Pardes Hatorah (in the same volume as *emunah ubechira*) p.328; See Teshuvot of the **Rashba** 94; *Sefer Hachinuch* 95; See also **Divrei Eliyahu** (in the name of the Gra), *Shabbos* 130 & **Beit halevi**, parshat Bo p. 120 & **Chatam Sofer**, *derashot, chelek beit, daf 251, tur 4 dibur hamatchil "chacham"* & **Ben Ish chai's** *Imrei Bina Chikrei Lev "siman hei"* and "siman gimel, who suggest that even the reasons given for mitzvot in the Torah itself is not the ultimate reason, the **Ben Ish chai** (*Imrei Bina Chikrei Lev "siman hei"* and "siman gimel") 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 there where he gives other examples of only the simple reason for mitzvot are given in the Torah; See also the **Chida's** *Shiurei Beracha*, 286:1 with regards to *Shema* in the *kedusha mussaf*; See **Kaf Hachaim** 590:2:6 with regards to the number of *shofar* sounds on Rosh Hashana; See also **Kaf Hachaim** 124:1:2 with regards to *chazarat hashatz*; See also **Kaf Hachaim** to *Orach Chaim* 181:1:1 with regards to *mayim acharonim* (the **Gra** in *Maaseh Rav* is also said to have been careful based on deeper reasons behind *mayim acharonim*); see **Ben Ish Chai**, *Shana II, Balak* 1 with regards to *yayin nesech*; see **Ben Ish Chai**, *shana II, Vayera* 10, and **Kaf Hachaim** to *Orach Chaim* 268:5:38 with regards to *beracha* of *m'ein shava*; See **Ben Ish Chai** also with regards to *Tefilin* *Rashi* and *Rabeinu Tam*; See **Ben Yehoyada** to Rosh Hashana 23b "ta chazi ma bein" and **Aderet Eliyahu** of the Gra, *Ki Tavo* with regards to two days of *yom tov* in *chutz la'aretz*; See **Michtav M'Eliyahu** II p.74-77 with regards to two days of Rosh Hashana

⁷ **Ben Ish Chai**, *Year I, Ki Tissa*, 16

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

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

Perfect Justice

The *pasuk* in the Torah describes Hashem as:¹⁰ *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 Belzer¹¹ 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 Shmuelevitz¹² 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 gets 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.

This idea is also demonstrated through the *pasuk* in Tehillim¹³ that says: "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether they are upright". The real praise here is not just that Hashem's judgments are upright; that is not considered a praise to the Almighty. Rather the praise is that His judgments are upright **altogether**. In other words the totality of His judgments and the overall ramifications of His judgments are also upright.¹⁴

With this idea we can understand the Gemara¹⁵ 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 transgression of her husband? However, based on the above Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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 enough¹⁸ while another Midrash says it was a punishment intended for Ya'akov (Dina's father) who delayed in keeping his vow.¹⁹ Similarly we are told that Yosef was sold as punishment for slander²⁰ 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.²¹ 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

¹⁰ Devarim 32:4

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

¹² **Sichot Mussar**, M'amar 98, Ha'azinu 5733; See also **Michtav M'Eliyahu III** p. 252-253

¹³ Tehillim 19:10

¹⁴ **Michtav M'Eliyahu III** p. 252-253 quoting Rav Yisrael Salanter

¹⁵ **Shabat** 32b; see also **Sanhedrin** 22a that gives another situation where the wife of a person dies as a result of his action

¹⁶ **Sichot Mussar**, M'amar 98, Ha'azinu 5733; See also **Michtav M'Eliyahu 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.

¹⁷ See **Ramchal** quoted in **Michtav M'Eliyahu III** p. 253 who gives a deep insight into the intrinsic connection of not keeping a neder and losing a wife.

¹⁸ See **Rashi** to Bereishit 34:1

¹⁹ See **Rashi** to Bereishit 35:1

²⁰ See **Rashi** to Bereishit 37:1 "et dibatam ra'ah"

²¹ 22 years mida keneged mida

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.

Two Days of Judgment

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. 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.²²

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 Hashem orchestrated the events in such a way that the witnesses for the new moon would come early thereby giving the messengers enough time to spread the message that the new moon was declared. 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.²³

Most people today are not on the level of coming out of the first Day of Judgment victorious. Therefore 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 one 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. 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!

²² **Michtav M'Elياهو 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.

²³ See **Ben Ish Chai**, Imrei Bina chikrei lev, siman hei; **Bnei Yisaschar**, M'amrei Chodesh Tishrei, 2:2; **Michtav M'Elياهو II** p.77