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Rosh HaShanah - The Time of Judgment For The Jewish People, the Nations, Creation, and the Angels

Parashas Nitzavim begins with the words, “And you are gathered today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d, your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Yisrael.” The Sages expound upon this verse that it is referring to the day of Rosh HaShanah, where all of *Klal Yisrael* is gathered together before Hashem in judgment.

The Sages teach that not only are the Jewish people judged on Rosh HaShanah, but all of the world pass before Him in judgment, like sheep before their master. Even more so, according to some opinions in the Sages (*Rosh HaShanah 16b*), even the wheat, fruit, and water are judged on this day.

Taking this further, the judgment on Rosh HaShanah is not only for this lowly World that we dwell on, but even for the higher worlds. The angels tremble from the day of judgment, as we recite in “*U’Nesaneh Tokef*”. In the higher and heavenly realms, the angels are being judged, on Rosh HaShanah.

The Satan Is Also Judged

One of the angels is the *Satan* (the accusing angel). It is an evil angel, but it is still an angel. The book of *Iyov* mentions the Satan and how it was sent to test Iyov with suffering, to prove that the righteous are able to stay righteous even after being tested with much suffering. When the Satan was finished testing Iyov with many difficulties, Hashem called it back to return to Him and report to Him what had transpired. Thus, the Satan is an angel and messenger of Hashem.

Thus, when Hashem judges the angels in Heaven on Rosh HaShanah, He is also judging the Satan, who is included as one of the angels, in spite of the fact that the Satan stands apart from the rest of the angels and it has the unique task itself to be the accusing angel of judgment.

But there also several other, deeper facets of how to understand the judgment upon the Satan - which affects our own *avodah* as well.

First of all, simply speaking, our merits are brought before Hashem by the angels, whereas our sins *chas v’shalom* are brought before Hashem by the Satan. After all of the merits are brought, the Satan is commanded by Hashem to scour the world and gather together all of the sins (of Jews), and bring

them before Him. But there is more to the role of the Satan than this on Rosh HaShanah. The Gemara says, "Why do we blow *shofar* when sitting, and then blow them again when standing? In order to confuse the Satan."^[1] *Tosafos* explains in the name of *Talmud Yerushalmi* that when the Satan hears the second sound of the *shofar*, it thinks that Hashem is blowing the final *shofar* of the future, where Hashem Himself will slaughter the Angel of Death.^[2] Thus, when the Satan thinks that the redemption has arrived, it is scared that it is about to be slaughtered.

On Rosh HaShanah, the "books of life and the books of death are opened before Him" , and the "books of death" on an inner level refer to the Evil Inclination, who is the root of all death; for the Evil Inclination is also known as the Angel of Death. "He is the Satan, he is the Evil Inclination, he is the Angel of Death." But when we overcome the "book of death" on Rosh HaShanah and instead we are inscribed in the "book of life", death is instead inscribed upon the Satan, as Hashem will slaughter the angel of death in the future.

And so, the Satan is judged on Rosh HaShanah. If the coming year continues as the year before it, and there is no Redemption, [this is like "death" to us, and] the Evil Inclination continues to be of influence, *chas v'shalom*, and the Satan is still around. In contrast, when we merit that the coming year will be the year of the Redemption, we merit "life" - and instead it is the Satan who is decreed for death, and Hashem "slaughters the angel of death".

The Renewal of the Satan\Evil Inclination Each Year

There is an additional way as well to understand the judgment upon the Satan, and it is this concept which mainly affects our own *avodah*. The Satan plays a profound role on Rosh HaShanah in our own *avodah* - let us see how.

Rosh HaShanah is the time where Hashem renews the world. It is the day where Hashem remembers that it is the beginning of the world; at the beginning of the world, the world was completely new, and man was new, with a newly formed *yetzer hora* (Evil Inclination) and *yetzer tov* (good inclination) that was created on the sixth day of Creation. Rosh HaShanah is a day where man can be remembered and renewed again as the "crown of creation" - which he originally was - but along with this, the creation of the Evil Inclination is also renewed every year.

To describe this in different terms, it is as Chazal say, that the *yetzer hora* is renewed every day (and according to a different opinion in the Sages, the *yetzer hora* becomes "strengthened" every day), and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overcome it.^[3] Every year, when the world is renewed, the Evil Inclination is also renewed - an entirely new Evil Inclination that is stronger than the year before it, which seeks new ways to bring man down from his exalted level.

On Rosh HaShanah, the Satan stands apart from the rest of the angels and accuses *Klal Yisrael* of their sins. This is essentially the new "Evil Inclination" that is revealed every Rosh HaShanah, which wasn't here the year before it. And in fact, with the more renewal that man undergoes each year, the more "renewed" the Evil Inclination becomes with it, in order to counter man's newly elevated level.

That is the depth of the battle we face with the *yetzer hora*, the Evil Inclination.

We all want a good year. Some people are mainly focused on *gashmiyus* (materialistic) concerns, and those who are more refined ask for matters of *ruchniyus* (spiritual). But in either case, we must understand that no matter how much we receive from Hashem, whether it is material blessing or spiritual blessing, the Evil Inclination is renewed just as much. Evil grows stronger whenever holiness is strengthened, and this is the depth behind the Gemara that "One who is greater than his friend, has a greater Evil Inclination".

Thus, the Satan who is “judged” on Rosh HaShanah – a.k.a. the Evil Inclination - is “judged” based upon how much a person will receive from Hashem this year. If a person will receive much abundance this year, whether in material sustenance or spiritual sustenance, the Satan becomes equally as powerful, and vice versa: the less that a person will receive this year, the less the Satan will become renewed.

The Renewal of the Evil Inclination In Our Times

If we understand this, we should know that this contains a deep point that affects our entire *avodah*.

Any sensible person is aware that in recent times, there is much abundance today. There is an endless amount of material abundance being poured down onto the world today, much more than in previous times. We can also see that there is much more Torah available today, which eclipses the amount of Torah in the world of the previous generations. But even more so, it is the amount of “renewal” today that is unprecedented. There are constantly new things coming out, both in the material world, as well in the spiritual world, of *chiddushei Torah*.

With regards to the spiritual abundance today of *chiddushei Torah*, there are more people than ever who are producing countless *chiddushei Torah*. Understandably, some of these *chiddushei Torah* are closer to the truth, and some are not as truthful, but the amount of renewal that there is today is the greatest, since the era of the giving of the Torah! Of course, there were always great sages throughout the generations who were able to produce *chiddushei Torah*, and their wisdom was much greater than the wise people of today, but there was never an abundance of *chiddushei Torah* for so many people as in today’s times.

If there is so much renewal today, both in the material world as well as in the spiritual world of *chiddushei Torah*, we can understand that the Evil Inclination is also renewed with this, in order to counter all of this renewal. Any sensible person can recognize that the *yetzer hora* that was around 10 years ago isn’t the same *yetzer hora* now in the year 5776. The amount of *chiddushei Torah* is unprecedented, and we don’t know how far it extends, but neither can we know how far the *yetzer hora* goes today, which thinks of creative new ways to entice people to sin.

Every year, the power of renewal increases, both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil, in order for the counterbalance to be equal [thereby allowing free will]. Every year the *yetzer hora* is different, and therefore whatever worked last year to fight the *yetzer hora* won’t work for this year’s *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* was always a sinister force to reckon with, even in previous generations, and it would always attack differently each time. But in the recent generations, this reality has become a lot more intensified.

Now that there is so much renewal in the world, the *yetzer hora* is much more devious than it ever was, and it attacks in so many new different ways. It cannot be traced to any one method of operation. Rather, the *yetzer hora* today attacks us today from all sides, all directions, in a way that our Sages never fathomed! If there was only one certain way that the *yetzer hora* fights us, we could know from which angle it is fighting from, and accordingly, we would know how to fight it. But since the *yetzer hora* today is attacking us from every possible corner, there is war with the Evil Inclination today on all fronts and from every possible direction, wherever we are, much more so than ever.

How Do We Fight The New Evil Inclination of Today’s Times?

How, then, are we ever to succeed in fighting the war with the Evil Inclination this year, if it is totally different each year?

Again, if we were clear about how exactly it sneaks up on us, if we were clear in how it will attack us

in the coming year of 5777, then perhaps we could figure out how to fight it this year, for we would know how it will attack us and we could be prepared for it. But the problem is that we do not know its main method of attack. It is constantly being renewed each year, so we are not able to anticipate in what way it will appear to fight us this year. So how do we prepare to go to war with the *yetzer hora*?!

Our Avodah Today: Accessing The Spiritual Abundance Available In Our Times

In our generation which we are in, the power of evil is so great today that we cannot be passive about it. It leaves a person with no choice but to enter into an *avodah* which is necessary for a person's spiritual survival today.

Hashem expects us to lead a totally different kind of life now. The great amount of renewal that pours down onto the world today is an abundance of spiritual light which has come to the world, and if one absorbs this light in his soul through a purified mind and a pure heart, and through a search for the truth - he has a much greater chance for change. The great abundance of renewal available in the world today gives a person the opportunity to improve himself, much more than the previous situations could do.

The ways of the Creator can be absorbed by one who searches for it and who reflects about it. A person can see, upon some reflection, that Hashem is bringing great changes to the world, with each passing year. It is like what the Chofetz Chaim said, that what used to take 100 years now takes 1 year. Hashem is bringing about changes in our times, and since man is a resemblance of the Creator, man can also receive great changes in the times we live in, and thereby change and improve on a far larger scale than in the previous generations.

But if one isn't trying to change and instead he is complacent with just a little bit of growth and a little improvement, he is vulnerable to the evils of our times which are constantly changing and swaying people, and he will be swimming against a powerful current, and he will be swept away with it.

The Final "Sorting Process" of the Souls

We are living in the time of the final "sorting process of the souls" (the "*birur hanefashos*"), which will prove the situation of each our souls, which will show how loyal each of us really is to Hashem. It is the time of history where Hashem is asking each person to decide where his loyalties lie. Each person now is being asked this question: "Do you want to connect yourself with Hashem, truthfully - and not just to say this as a superficial expression on your lips?"

It won't be enough today if we are just "loyal" in the way we dress, in spite of the fact that it is very important not to change our manner of dress, as the Jewish people steadfastly kept to in Egypt, when they didn't change their style of dress. Today, the question for each Jew is: Whose side are you really on? Whom do you associate yourself with? Do you want an internal kind of life, a life of seeking Hashem Himself, and His Torah, and the fulfillment of His mitzvos, and doing His will completely?

What is being asked of each Jew today is not just to make small changes - which is certainly important and needed - but mainly, to change in the depths of our heart, internally; where the truth is. As Moshe said to the Jewish people: "*Who will be for Hashem, and come towards me?*" And as Eliyahu challenged the people to stand on his side if they believe in G-d, or in the false prophets who were worshipping idols; where everyone was forced to decide which side they were truly on.

In the times we live in today, this "sorting process of the souls" is now underway for every single Jewish soul. Each soul now must decide where the depths of his heart lie. If one considers himself to be loyal to Hashem today, that means he must direct his life accordingly, and be willing to go against the direction that the entire world is taking today.

That is the depth of the change which Hashem is asking of each person today. Hashem isn't asking each person today to jump into the sea, like Nachshon ben Aminadav did. Only a few individuals can be on that level [of absolute self-sacrifice]. What is being asked of each person today is to change the general direction of his life, and not to follow the rest of the world. If a person today wants to follow the direction of the rest of the world, he will fall together with them, with the newer and more advanced that it becomes, with the newer Evil Inclinations that appear everywhere.

But if one directs his life in the opposite direction that the world is taking today, and he decides in the depths of his soul that his heart belongs to Hashem, to His Torah, and to doing His will, and he is willing to go against the rest of the world – then he is fulfilling exactly what Hashem is asking of a person to do. When you go in the opposite direction of the world's lifestyle today, that is what will protect you.

As long as a person tries to stay within the lifestyle of the world today and he attempts to fight the Evil Inclination from there, he will be engulfed by the powerful amount of evil that surrounds him, because the evil today is a much bigger threat than it was to us in previous generations. In contrast, if one makes sure that the way he lives is not like the way of the rest of the world, and he truly searches for Hashem, the Torah, the mitzvos, and doing His will – if this is all he is concerned about in his life, he will be saved from all the evil today, and he will merit to be written for a “good” year.

But if one hasn't yet decided deep down where his loyalties lie, and he isn't ready to live differently than the way the rest of the world lives – he will be subject to the pressures of the Evil Inclination, who gets stronger every day, whose sole desire is to seek a person's destruction. Even after a person does decide to change his direction in life, he will still need Hashem to help him, for Chazal say that we cannot overcome the Evil Inclination without Hashem's help. But even though it is naturally impossible for us to overcome the Evil Inclination and we need the supernatural help from Hashem in order to overcome it, that is exactly what Hashem expects from us to do.

Seeking Truth

Upon understanding these words, we should reflect about the following.

We should know that when we go through Rosh HaShanah this year, it is not simply that we are going through another Rosh HaShanah, and another Rosh HaShanah, and then another Rosh HaShanah, as we go through each year. In the times we live in, there is no Rosh HaShanah that is like the Rosh HaShanah of the year before it. It is an entirely new Rosh HaShanah each year, because each year is so fundamentally different than the year before it; they are light years apart.

The “descent of the generations” increases with each passing year, making each year on a much lower spiritual level than the year before it, to the point that we do not know at all if the new year will come upon us for the good.

The change which Hashem wants to see from each of us is a fundamental change, to change our life totally, in the whole entire way that we are living our life, on an inward level. We need to clarify to ourselves what our life is about, what we truly want in life; to see if we truly want to become close to Hashem, to see if we truly want a life of Torah – and the emphasis is on if we “truly” want it, as opposed to trying to ‘get the best out of both worlds’ , using various “*heterim*” (halachic leniencies) of all kinds. Instead, we need to really seek truth, to live spiritually, to seek a life of closeness to Hashem.

In Conclusion

May Hashem merit us, together with all of *Klal Yisrael*, the time when Hashem will come and slaughter

the Angel of Death. But if, *chas v'shalom*, the world continues to exist with the Evil Inclination, where we must choose between following our good inclination versus our Evil Inclination, then the true power of choice lays before us - and when such is the case, may we merit to choose the truth. We should then understand that the Rosh HaShanah of the year 5777 will force each of us to make a deep, internal choice. That is where the depth of our life shall lie.

The various resolutions that we take upon ourselves for the coming year may be small changes, but the root of the changes in our soul must be awesome and profound. May we merit to make that proper root of change, and as all of our souls gather in front of Hashem and beseech Him, may we all merit to be written in the book of the completely righteous, for a good year, in which we will seek closeness with Hashem, as it is written, "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*"

[1] Rosh HaShanah 16a-16b

[2] refer to *Sukkah 52a*, and to *Hagaddah shel Pesach*, "And then the Holy Blessed One came, and slaughtered the Angel of Death"

[3] *Sukkah 52a*

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