

MAY THE PRAYERS ENTER OUR HEARTS & EARN US GOD'S BLESSINGS

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The nature of New Year is recognizing God as the sole creator. As Rabbi Ruben Gober taught, this recognition raises our level of perfection, earning God's good decree. Focus on the prayers and what lesson is learned from each one.

NEW YEAR

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

New Years: For All Mankind

NOACHIDE: What is appropriate behavior for Noahides on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. I want to be very careful not to transgress by doing more than is permitted, not creating festivals for myself. But it seems to me--please let me know if I am mistaken--that at least Rosh Hashana is relevant to the whole world and perhaps I should mark it in some way.

And finally, I would like to know if there are

particular prayers from the Siddur that are permissible for the Noahide to pray.

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: The Noahide should know that he too is judged on Rosh Hashana by God just as the Jew and the rest of mankind. He therefore should pray all the prayers that the Jew prays, as he too is loved by God and through his repentance and prayer will be received by God and inscribed for a good year. Of course he must

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make some minor adjustments so that the prayer makes sense. For instance, instead of saying "our God and the God of our fathers", he can say "our God and the God of our Patriarchs" since he is not a direct descendant of the Patriarchs. But such obvious points are minor although they do require some awareness of what one is saying. But other than that technical point, all of the prayers even the piyut (additional prayers) are applicable and beneficial to the Noachide as it is to the Jew. Indeed, the whole theme of Rosh Hashanna is that there is one Creator of the universe and all God's creatures should recognize Him. What then can be more correct before God than to have the Ben Noach recognize Him and pray to Him on this day? Indeed the Ben Noach is in a very special position to do an act that has a special value, a dimension which his unique position allows him to accomplish, which the Jew cannot. As it says in the prayers, "Let all those who dwell on the Earth recognize and know that [only] to You shall every knee bow down...and all shall accept the yoke of Thy kingdom..and God shall be the king of the entire Earth and He and His name shall be one."

The Ben Noach prayer has a very special place before God as part of the fulfillment of His words. May the one who asked the question be blessed with all of God's blessings for a wonderful and a spiritually fulfilling year. There is one last point. In order not to violate making a holiday for himself since he is not commanded, the Ben Noach should not treat the day as a holiday by making it festive or imposing any prohibitions on himself. ■

New Year's Q&As

STUDENT: Why is the concluding statement "Nothing Compares to You" found only in connection with the Shofaros prayers?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: Exodus 15:3 records Moses' description of God as "a man of war," but not that God is a man, as Rashi says, (Ibid.) it is similar to "the man of Naomi," the man related to Naomi. [God

too is related to war.]

Shir Hakavod (the poem recited on Shabbos after musaf) says:

"I shall allegorize You, I will describe You, though I don't know You.

They allegorized You, but not according to Your reality, and they portrayed You according to Your deeds.

You are one, containing all the allegories.

They saw You as old and as young. And the hair of Your head was [both] hoary and jet black."

On the phrase, "and they portrayed You according to Your deeds," Eitz Yosef comments: "They gave You a nickname of a warrior. Also, a roaring lion, a bereaved bear, a leopard...the mightiest of animals."

Isaiah 40:18 says, "To what will you equate Me, and to what form will you arrange to Me?"

All these sources teach that God permitted man to have an idea of His presence. It is only in God's revelation of His presence—Shofaros—that such visions take place. This explains why the phrase "Nothing Compares to You" is said only in connection with Shofaros, the prayer discussing God's revelation. Such visions are concessions to man. [Isaiah's words "To what will you equate Me?" intend to clarify that such physical descriptions of God are only metaphors.]

When we say, "God is merciful; Ail Rachum," we don't mean God has emotions. But Torah says this to offer man a concept that God exists. Malchiyos and Zichronos—the 2 prayers discussing God's omnipotence and omniscience—are not where God relates to man, as is true regarding Shofaros, which is God's particular providence (hashgacha pratyos) of relating to man. Shofar/providence is the substratum, without which there is no Malchiyos or Zichronos, God's kingship over and His remembrance of man.

[Thus, "Nothing Compares to You" counters any literal misunderstandings of the visions man has of God during revelation, as on Mt. Sinai and at the

Reed Sea. But as Malchiyos or Zichronos are not revelations, there is no need to counter anything.] ■

STUDENT: Is Yom Kippur affliction?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: Yom Kippur concerns eating the day before the fast. We learn, "One who eats the day before is considered as having fasted for 2 days," something commendable. Judaism doesn't have the concept of affliction, which other religions value. Suffering on Yom Kippur is not the goal, rather, it is the removal from the instinctual life that Judaism values. By eating the day before, we make the fast easier; it provides the necessary strength to endure the fast in order to focus on the perfections achieved through the 5 privations and the prayers. But to pain the body, Judaism does not endorse. ■

STUDENT: Talmud Rosh Hashanah 17a says, "One who forgoes his character has his sins overlooked." What does this mean?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: This refers to a person who doesn't set boundaries for his friend's behavior. His friend overstepped certain boundaries of friendship and disturbed him, but he remained silent and accepted it. He recognized that his personal boundaries (likes/dislikes) are not real; only God's boundaries are real. [So he didn't act to defend himself.]

With "overlooking his sins," the Talmud means he is not taken to task. This perfected person breaks down the human desire to "take for himself" (follow his desires), precisely what we recite during Neila, "That we forgo the oppressiveness of our hands."

Since this person is traveling on a path towards perfection, he is not deterred by receiving punishments for his sins, which could derail his new, proper path and ruin his progress. He is traveling a path to approach God, so his course is not interrupted. This is done so he might break down the human desire for a life of physicality, which stems from the need for others not to violate his boundaries. ■

Haazinu

Dani Roth

Parshas Haazinu is a poetic speech that Moshe gives to the Jewish nation right before his death. The Parsha opens with Moshe telling the heavens and the earth to listen to his parting words. The simple question is, how could Moshe ask something inanimate to hear his words?

Rashi on this verse tells us that this statement was more poetic, and not meant to be taken literally. Moshe was telling the Jews once he is gone, they shouldn't feel that they can stray from the path of Torah, because the heaven and earth—which are immortal—will eternally respond to the Jews' behaviors. If the Jews follow God's commandments, they will have physical sustenance from the heavens, such as rain, and from the earth, such as produce. If they do not follow God's commandments, however, they will be lacking in sustenance (as stated in Shema, Devarim 11:17).

We can see from this that Moshe's objective was that the Jews follow

Torah, even after he is gone. Moshe understood man's primary concern is survival. This is why he used the heaven and the earth as motivation for the Jews to follow Torah.

Another question arises, is physical sustenance the only objective of man? Of course the answer is no, but the truth is that most people are not on the highest level of perfection. Yet, Moshe must appeal to their physical survival. But the ultimate objective is that man realizes God's will, and that man enjoys God's wisdom. God desires that man has the highest level of enjoyment in his existence. And what is that enjoyment? The Rambam says it is the wisdom of Torah, and all the mitzvos target this objective with their halachic formulations, as seen in the Gemara.

In summation, to arrive at the objective of enjoying life through wisdom, one must first be compelled to follow Torah out of his physical needs...and through following Torah, man will ultimately see God's wisdom. ■



the Significance of Shofar

**Taken from a Shiur
by Rabbi Israel Chait**

What should a person have in mind when listening to the “Kol Shofar”, the sound of the Shofar? In Hilchos Teshuvah (3:4), Maimonides discusses the function of Shofar. Maimonides states that even though the voice of the Shofar is obligatory because of a decree of the Torah, there is also a philosophical concept. The voice of the Shofar is to awaken man from his slumber. It should cause one to investigate his actions, repent and remember his Creator. It is designed for those who forget the truth and waste their time in helpless and vain endeavors. It is to provoke them to analyze their souls, improve their ways and actions, and forsake their evil conduct and corrupt philosophies. This is a very large demand of an individual to be motivated to such a large degree by the simple voice of the Shofar. When one hears the Shofar it should prompt him to do teshuva. A total overhaul of the human personality is summoned by the Kol Shofar. One’s entire approach to life has to be changed. Maimonides is not referring to teshuva – repentance – from a specific sin, but rather,

a teshuva, which transforms the entire character of the sinner. How does the sound of the Shofar awaken a person to do teshuva? What is so unique about the Kol Shofar that can cause a person to redirect his life’s energies and change? It is apparent that the Kol Shofar must be related to a deep idea, which reflects upon human nature and stimulates one to change the focus of his life. The obvious question is what is this idea and how is it so compelling to evoke such a dramatic response. What is the philosophical principle that Maimonides alludes to? The sanctity of the day of Rosh Hashana is described in the Torah as “Yom Teruah”, a day of blasts. The Torah is very sparse in its description of the Kedushas Hayom, the sanctity of the day, other than saying it is a Yom Teruah. Why is the Torah so concise when describing the character of this day as opposed to Yom Kippur, where the Torah elaborates the sanctity of the day as a day of affliction? It is evident that these two words “Yom Teruah” must encapsulate the entire character of the day. This also reinforces the concept that the Kol Shofar strikes at the very heart of man, his very nature. The sanctity of the day as a Yom Teruah must embody this concept. How does the mechanical sound of a Shofar express the Kedushas Hayom? Onkelos translates Teruah as a “yevava”, weeping. The Yom Teruah is a yom yevava, a day of weeping. The Gemara teaches us that the yevava of the Teruah is expressed by the cry of the mother of Sisra. Sisra was a great warrior and waged many successful battles. His mother always anxiously awaited his return and celebrated his triumphs. However, at the time he was eventually defeated, she was looking out the window, anxiously awaiting his arrival as in past battles. As time transpired she started to realize that he was not returning and started to howl. Her crying is described as a yevava. It is that crying that the Kol Shofar replicates. What was so unique about her crying and why does the Gemara cite it as a paradigm for the Kol Shofar?

The Torah describes the Kol Teruah as the sound blown by the trumpets when the Bnei Yisrael moved their camp while traveling in the wilderness to the holy

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land. When God commanded Moshe to inform Klal Yisrael that it was time to embark, the sound of the Teruah summoned their departure. Onkelos again translates Teruah as a yevava, a cry. Rashi in his commentary states there were three factors that were needed before the camp embarked: the word of God, Moshe's instruction and the Teruah. The traveling of the camp was more than just a practical phenomenon. It symbolized that the entire destiny of Klal Yisrael – the nation of Israel – was in the hands of God. They were in the wilderness and needed the providence and direction from God in order to survive. They were helpless and vulnerable and their destiny was determined by the system the Torah sets out for their embarking. Three essential components dictated their movements. It had to be the word of God as transmitted by Moshe and summoned by the sound of the Teruah. Thus, the Teruah is not just significant on Rosh Hashana, but it also played a role in the destiny of the nation as reflected in the wilderness. It is interesting to note that the destiny of man cannot be determined by the word of God alone. After the giving of the Torah at Sinai, we require the interpretation of the Oral Tradition by Moshe, our teacher. Without the Torah a person will certainly go astray. A person needs God to direct his destiny but he also needs the teachings of the Torah. Because of man's limitations God alone is not enough; he needs the guidance of the Torah. God does not function alone because the gap between God and man is great. Man, on his own, cannot scale the chasm that exists between him and his Creator. He needs the prophet; he requires the teachings of Moshe to assist him. If he endeavors to close this gap on his own he will undoubtedly fall prey to the philosophy of the idolaters. This failure is exemplified by every organized religion that attempts to close the gap between man and the Almighty. They create their own false and corrupt systems, which cater to their emotional needs and desires. The third element required in the camps' movements were the sound of the Teruah. The sound of the Shofar is essential to shape the destiny of Klal Yisrael. Again we see that the Kol Shofar is not merely a mechanical sound but contains a vital message. The sound of the Shofar is unique. It is a

yevava, a cry. What is this cry? It is the inherent cry of every human that is part of his nature. It is the proclivity of man to cry, a cry of his state of depression. Why is man depressed? The Gemara in Nazir 3b tells of the story of a particular Nazirite about whom Rabbi Shimon Hatzadik commented. He said,

"I never ate the guilt offering of a defiled Nazirite except once. There was a handsome lad from the south who had beautiful eyes and wonderful locks shaped into curls. This lad shaved his head prompting me to question his actions. The lad responded that he was a shepherd and would gaze at his appearance in the well as he drew water for his flock. The lad said, 'Then I saw my evil inclination was overwhelming me and driving me from this world. I said to it, 'wretched one why are you arrogant in a world that is not yours...in the end you will be just maggots and worms'. The lad thereby said that he would shear his locks for the glory of God. Rabbi Shimon upon hearing the lad's response kissed him upon his head and said there shall be more Nazirites in Israel like you."

The Nazirite was insightful in recognizing that this is a world that is not his. This story personifies man's constant struggle with his yetzer hara, his evil inclination. This lad recognized that man is not in control. The life of instinctual desires and pleasures as proposed by the yetzer hara, only makes sense if man is in control. Instinctual pleasures cannot bring happiness in a world that is not man's. This world is God's world and is governed by the will of the Creator. The lures of the world of instinctual pleasures, fueled by the powers of one's fantasy, is shattered when man comes to the recognition that this world is not his. Man's existence in this world is tenuous and transitory at best, and reality belies the illusion of the world of the physical. This perceptive lad recognized that this is not man's world. Man is but a resident for a short duration. Man cannot control reality, but rather, he must conform to reality and the will of the Creator. Upon such recognition, man can cling to reality by embracing the Source of reality, and his soul can

partake of an eternal existence.

The universal cry of mankind is the recognition that man is really not in control. Loss of control is a powerful psychological blow. Man desires to be powerful. The cry embedded in the human soul is that man is not in control and in reality, he is powerless. This world is not man's. He is totally vulnerable and at any moment he could be gone.

The mother of Sisra cried upon the recognition that he was vulnerable. The fantasy that he was invincible was shattered and she cried repeatedly. She cried the cry that exists within every created being. This world is not man's world. It is an "olam she-aino shelo", a world that belongs not to him.

The Torah chose the mechanical cry of the Shofar to convey that our destiny is in the hands of our Creator. This world is not our world that we can control. On Rosh Hashana it is a day of Teruah, a day where man cries and acknowledges that this is not his world. This recognition alone is insufficient: it must be accompanied by "Malchus Hashem", God's Kingship. This is the ultimate realization that this world is merely a reflection of God's will and God is the king. His royalty is proclaimed by mankind and is manifest by observing His creations. On Rosh Hashana Klal Yisrael blows the Teruah and proclaims the sovereignty of the Almighty. We are not depressed by the eternal cry of mankind, that this is not his world. We do not create man made religions to pacify our fears and allow us to deceive ourselves by continuing to live life based upon the false world of the instinctual pleasures. We recognize that this world is not man's. Our response is to proclaim the sovereignty of our Creator and cling to the source of reality. We recognize that our destiny is in God's hands and we live our lives as mandated by the teachings of his Torah. When we complete the initial set of our blowing, we recite a verse from Psalms, "Fortunate are the people that know the Teruah, Hashem in the light of your presence we shall walk." This obviously does not mean that we know 'how' to blow the Shofar. We are fortunate that we understand the 'significance' of the sound of the Shofar. Our response is that we follow the light of God's presence and are blessed that we can live our lives based upon true reality, as expressed in the Kol Shofar. ■

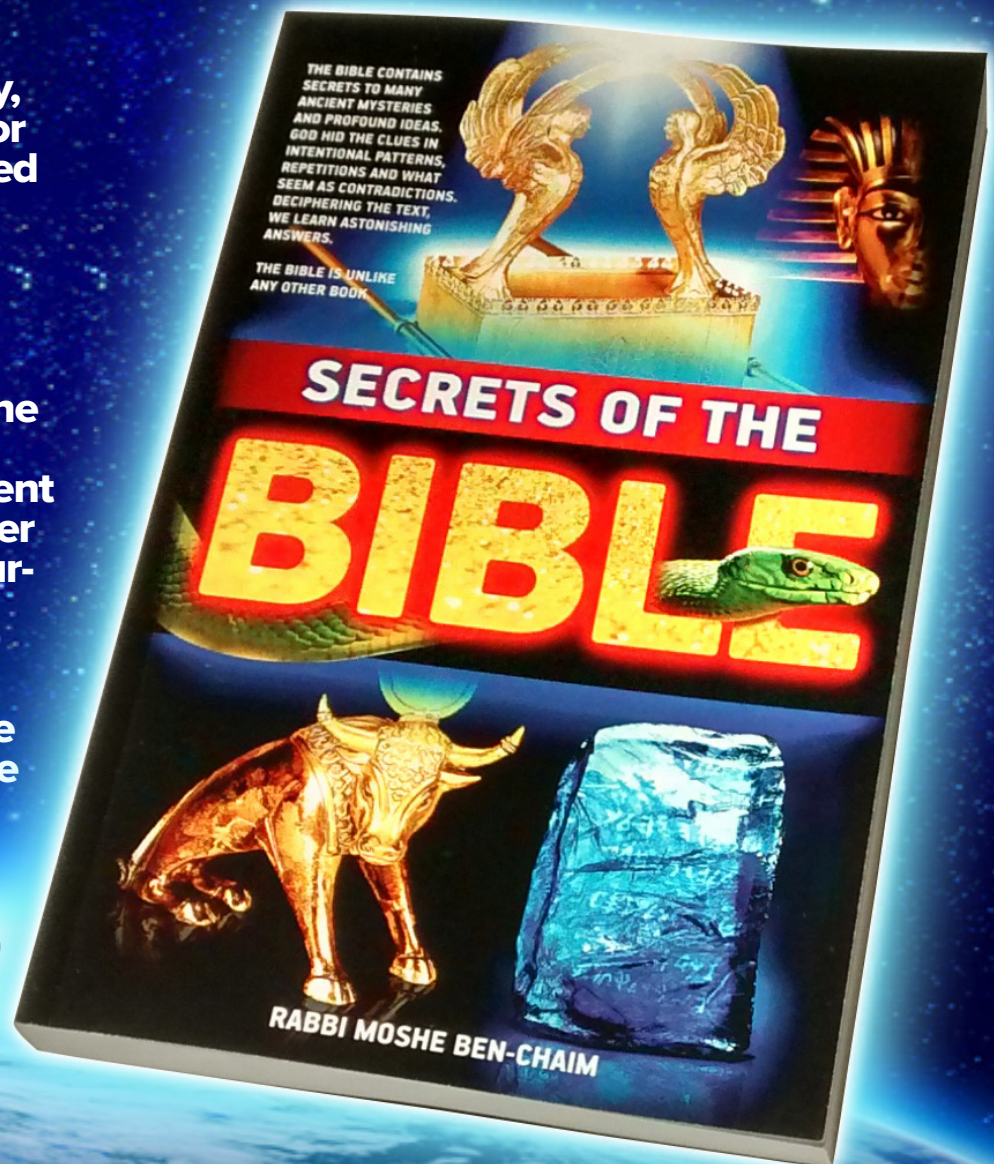
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NEW YEAR

Who do we Pray For?

RABBI REUVEN MANN

On Rosh Hashana most Jews, filled with a certain tension, find themselves in Synagogue at some point. But we must ask, is the Jewish New Year a time of concern only for Jews? The prayers emphasize that on this day of Creation, all of G-d's creatures come before Him for judgement. This would seem to include gentiles, and thus they too should take heed of this holiday.

Moreover, in the Nesaneh Tokef prayer we read that on this day even "the angels quake with fear" because of the impending judgement which is happening then. Indeed, you may ask, what are the angels concerned about, are they also prone to sin? Such a premise would seem out of line with our understanding that angels are "intellects without bodies" i.e., beings that do not have a Yeitzer HaRa (evil inclination). So what could they have possibly done wrong?

This would seem to indicate that angels do not act entirely by rote, but instead must make decisions based on their understandings. Thus, they are not necessarily "perfect" and are subject to a certain degree of Divine scrutiny. Perhaps that is why this is a time of trepidation for them as well.

There might be another explanation for this phenomenon. Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the world's creation, and as such reminds us that our existence is contingent on Hashem's decision to invest us with life. We, therefore, cannot take our existence or that of the world for granted. G-d decided to bring the universe into being for reasons that are not known to us. According to the Rambam it is blasphemous to suggest that Hashem has a need for any of His creatures.

Therefore, it is grossly erroneous to believe that our praises or Mitzvot effectuate any benefit to the Creator. We should never maintain the notion that we are going to do something for Hashem. Man must have an accurate appreciation of the position that he occupies in the scheme of things. In the words of our father Avraham who reached

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an exalted level of prophecy and “challenged” Hashem’s decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, “Behold I have endeavored to speak to G-d, and I am but dust and ashes.” (Bereishis 18:27)

We cannot comprehend the reasons behind Hashem’s determination to create man and the world, but it would seem that the decision was not intrinsically “irrevocable”. The story of the Flood illustrates that. Every year, on the day of creation, the Creator visits His “Works” and sits in judgement. The essential question is whether the created beings are worthy of continued existence. Everything comes under His scrutiny, even beings more exalted than ourselves, such as angels. Accordingly, they quake with fear. So should we.

There is an element of selfishness in our approach to Rosh Hashanah. First and foremost, we are concerned about ourselves. This doesn’t mean that we don’t care about others; but it’s kind of like on an airplane where if a problem occurs and the oxygen masks come out you are supposed to put one on yourself first and then tend to your children. This means that you can’t be of help to anyone if you are not in very good shape yourself. So we come before the Creator and beseech Him for life on the basis of the fact that we recognize our flaws and are determined to correct them and become a better person. That is a person more deserving of life according to the terms which Hashem has established.

Alongside the selfish aspect of the Holiday, there is a decidedly altruistic one as well. We are concerned for those close to us such as family, friends and community. As Jews, our community is an extended one. We care about every single Jew on the planet of whatever race, color and religious orientation. But it is important to note that our involvement does not stop there.

We are unabashedly solicitous of the welfare of all mankind. This may sound strange, as the world doesn’t seem to be so caring about our wellbeing. In fact, most of the time we have to protect ourselves against the hostility of the nations who tend to persecute us. But we don’t bear grudges, and we don’t wash our hands from our responsibilities to others. That is because it is our mission to be the emissaries of

G-d to the world.

Contrary to what many people believe, Hashem in choosing us to be His people did not thereby declare that He has no interest in others. In the Ashrei prayer, we proclaim that Hashem is “Good unto all; and His mercies are on all of His creations. (Tehillim 145:9)” The “Goodness” of Hashem extends to all whom He has created. He gave His Torah to the Jews not because He is only concerned for their spiritual welfare. He is, but He wants the Jews to set the right example and become the religious teachers of mankind.

In the Laws of Teshuva the Rambam explains the rules that govern G-d’s judgement of the individual, the nation and the world. One may ask, why is it necessary for me to know how Hashem judges various countries and the world at large? Shouldn’t my concern be exclusively with myself, since I can only rectify my own behavior? However, the Laws of Teshuva teaches otherwise. We too, in emulation of the Creator, must cultivate a sense of compassion for all His creatures. We care about the various countries we may live in, as well as those we have never set foot in. And what must be our attitude to the continued existence of the world?

The Rambam teaches that a single good deed can tilt the scales of judgement favorably and bring salvation to the individual, the country and the world. He says, (Teshuva 3:5) “For these reasons it is customary for all of Israel to give profusely to charity, perform many good deeds, and be occupied with Mitzvot from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, to a greater extent than during the remainder of the year. During these ten days, the custom is for everyone to rise while it is still night and pray in the synagogues with heart-rending words of supplication until daybreak.” The Jewish People engage in these strenuous spiritual activities at this special time because of their unique sense of compassion for all the world’s inhabitants.

May we merit to perform many good deeds which together with our heartfelt prayers will find favor with Hashem and bring salvation to ourselves, the Jewish People and all mankind.

Shana Tova. ■

NEW

Moses: the quintessential man of action. But in Deuteronomy he appears as a great thinker, teacher, elucidator of the Torah entrusted to him. Rabbi Mann expounds upon Moses' final addresses in words so sublime, God included them in the Bible.

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ETERNALLY YOURS

Rabbi Reuven Mann – Deuteronomy

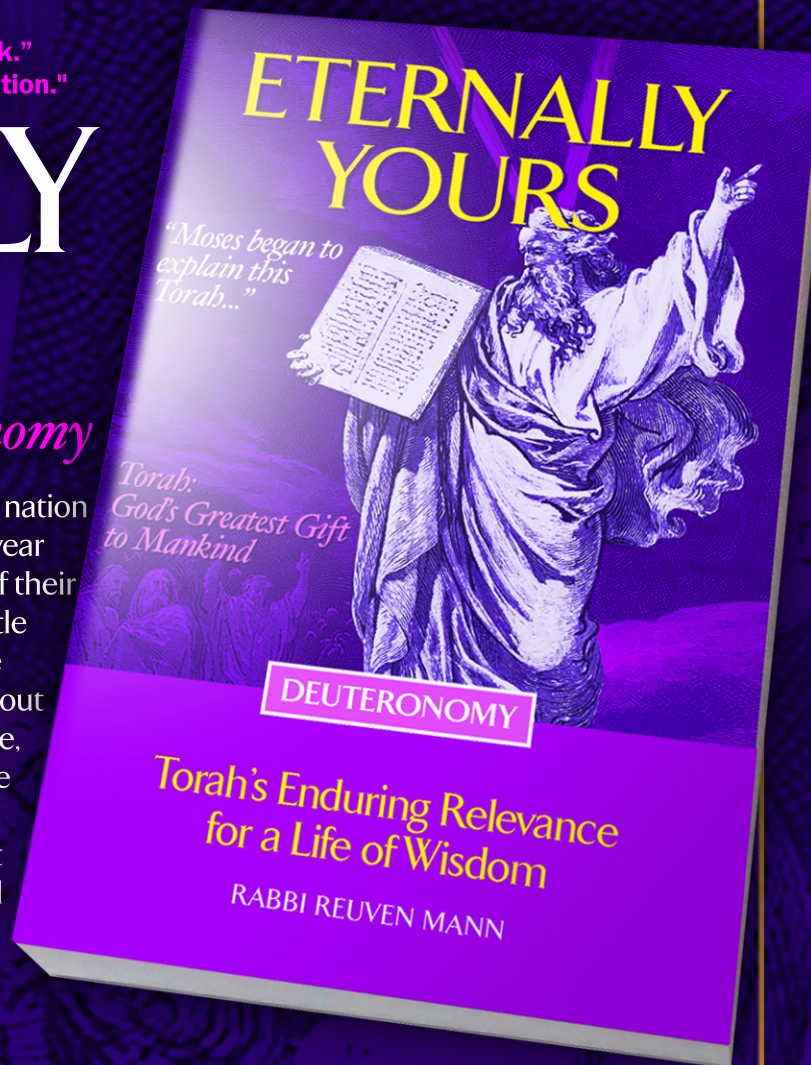
Devarim contains Moses' final communications to the nation he had led out of Egypt and guided through the forty-year ordeal in the Wilderness. The Jews were on the brink of their entry into the land which they would conquer and settle without him, their great leader. Moses' final talks to the Jews reveals his true greatness. He is not concerned about his own place in history; his only objective is to facilitate, to the best of his ability, the success of the nation in the land. He thus exhorts them to study, understand and fully implement the Torah which constitutes the surest guarantee of their longevity and well-being in the Land that God gave them so they would become a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." This book focuses on those lessons.

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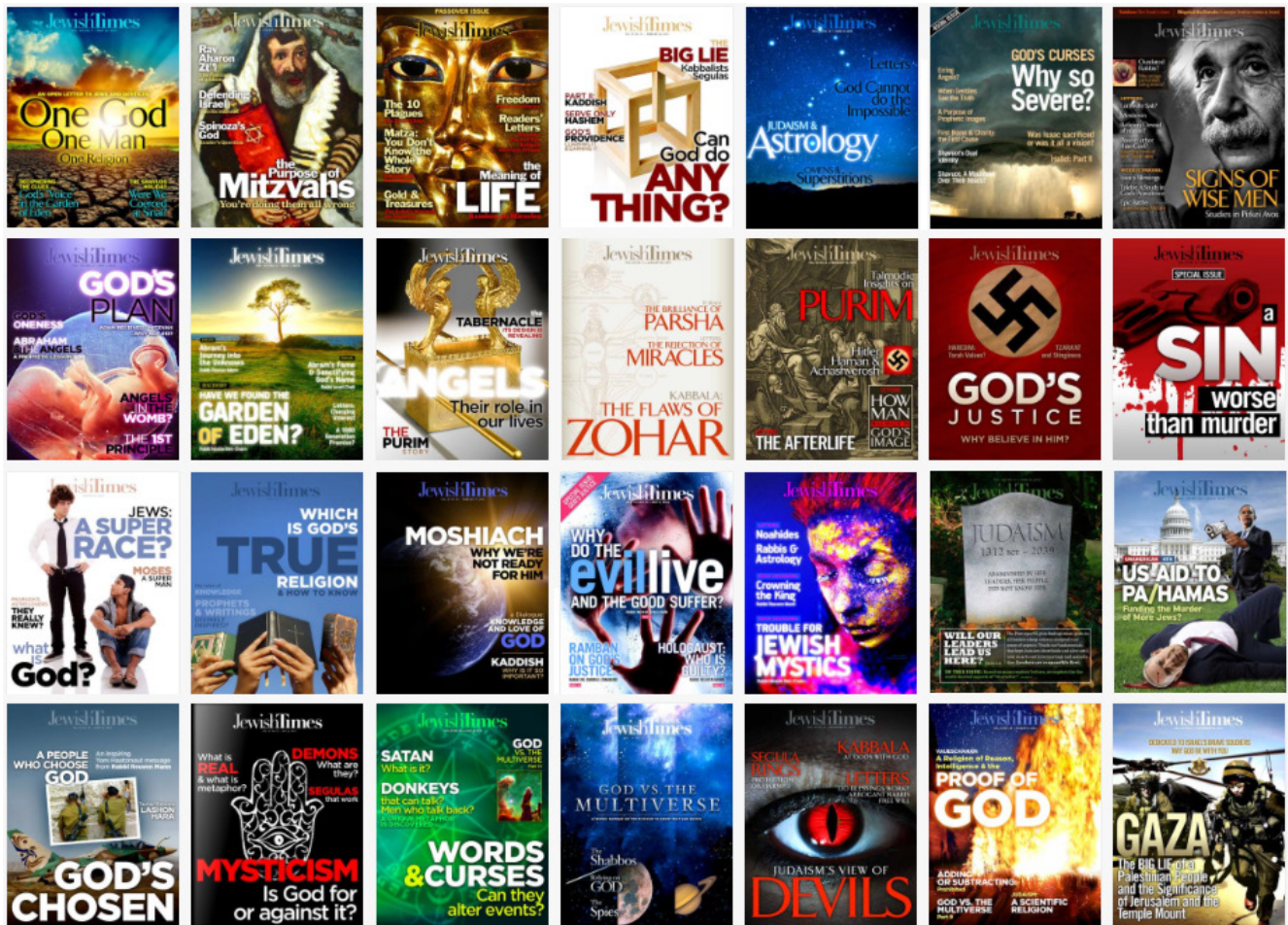
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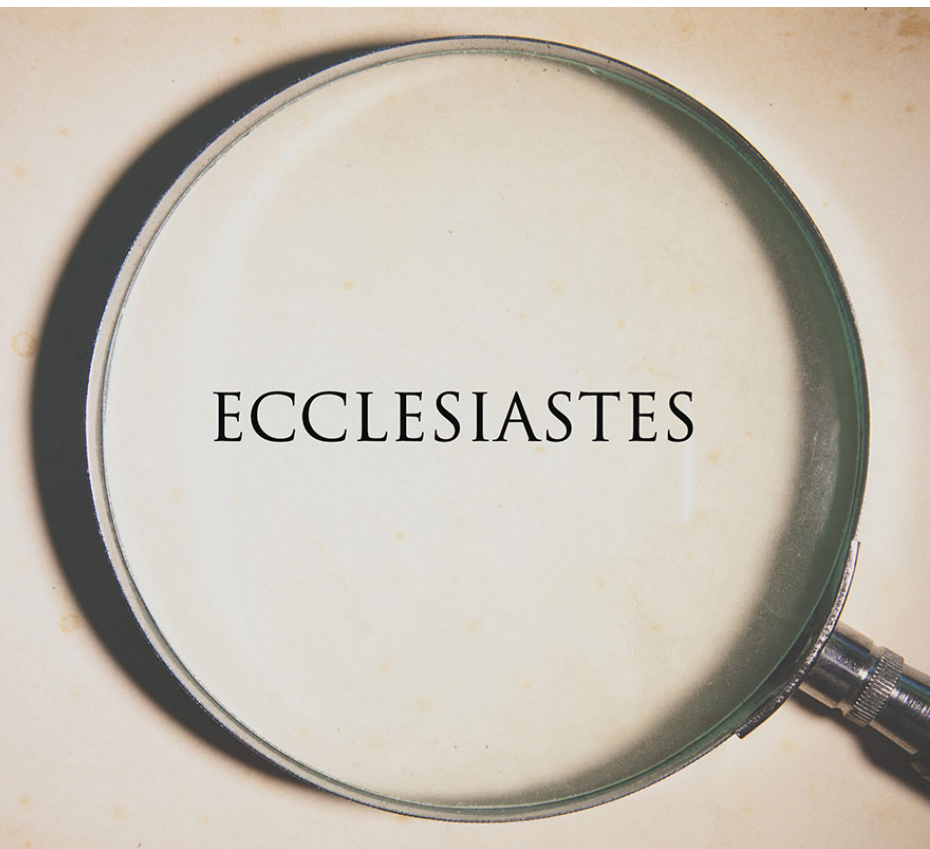
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KING SOLOMON

Assessing Our Values

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Wisdom is more valuable than weapons of war, but a single error destroys much goodness”

(Koheles 9:18)

Both statements compare a value to something lesser. The effects of wisdom outshine the power of the sword, which by comparison is lacking, because brute force doesn't yield the success of wisdom and strategy. This is in the area of the practical. But in the area of character perfection, “but a single error destroys much goodness.” So in both areas—external practicality and internal perfection—King Solomon is telling us to gauge what is truly of greater value. He enlightens us to a misconception where we place greater value on A than on B. But King Solomon teaches us that we sometimes are incorrect about what is of greater value. This is what the 2 halves of the verse have in common. We typically look at might as more formidable than intelligence, but this is wrong: as they say, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” And equally, we look at much good as more formidable than a single error or sin. Again, we are wrong because when our error or sin is severe, it can obliterate tremendous amounts of our previous good deeds. The lessons are not to value might as an absolute practical solution, and neither to value vast quantities of good actions as an absolute security in our lot with God. Sin places our mitzvahs and goodness at risk.

Just before this King Solomon elaborates on the greatness of wisdom:

This thing too I observed under the sun about wisdom, and it affected me profoundly. There was a little city, with few men in it; and to it came a great king, who invested it and built mighty siege works against it. Present in the city was a poor wise man who might have saved it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man [to ask his wise help]. So I observed: wisdom is better than valor; but a poor man's wisdom is scorned, and his words are not heeded. (Ibid. 9:13-16)

The same applies to Joseph's salvation of Egypt and the surrounding countries. Wisdom saved everyone from the famine. ■

Don't Forget GOD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Moses first describes how much goodness God provided for the Jews. Then he accuses them:

They forsook the God who made them and spurned the Rock of their support (Deut. 32:15).

You neglected the Rock who begot you, forgot the God who labored to bring you forth (Deut. 32:18).

These accusations come just before Moses says God will hide himself from the Jews, seeming to indicate that this is the “last straw.” Additionally, this accusation of forgetting God is repeated. What is this specific flaw?

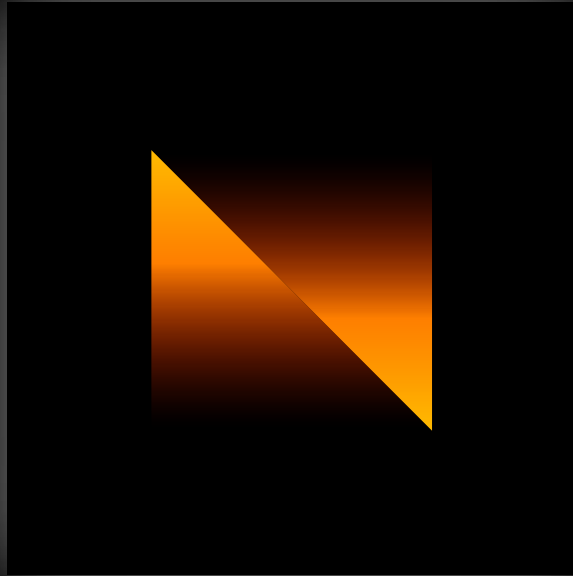
“So Jeshurun (Israel) grew fat and kicked—you grew fat and gross and coarse” (Ibid. 32:15) shares the dangers of success. Growing fat and kicking refers to success and subsequent rebellion. Moses' lesson is not to look at yourself a self-made but to remember who formed you: “You forgot the God who labored to bring your forth.”

Pride is prevalent and blinding. Rosh Hashanah aims to correct our self-aggrandizement and replace it with the recognition that we are creations, “we are clay in the potter's hands,” “cloth in the tailor's hand.” God created us all from nothing. He is king. Perhaps it is this specific facet of idolatry which is most grave: we are blinded by ego, and forget that we were formed: once we did not exist. And eventually our bodies return to dust.

Idol worship, mysticism and human deification that follow our successes are mere expressions of the underlying need for our security. It is then here that we must make a correction and accept our “dependent” existence as a created entity. With this realization of actually being created, only then can man focus on Who created him.

Moses focuses on the defining difference between God and all other imagined forces: God is the creator...the one who formed you...Who formed everything. It's astonishing that one can lose sight of this, but it is clear that pride is very blinding. Furthermore, this is very poignant because as God made you, He alone can give you what you're seeking from other gods, namely security.

Belief in and worship of false gods and mysticism is a result of the core error: forgetting the Cause of all existence. But if one clearly sees there is only one Cause for the whole universe, he could not possibly seek anything but God to guarantee a good life. ■



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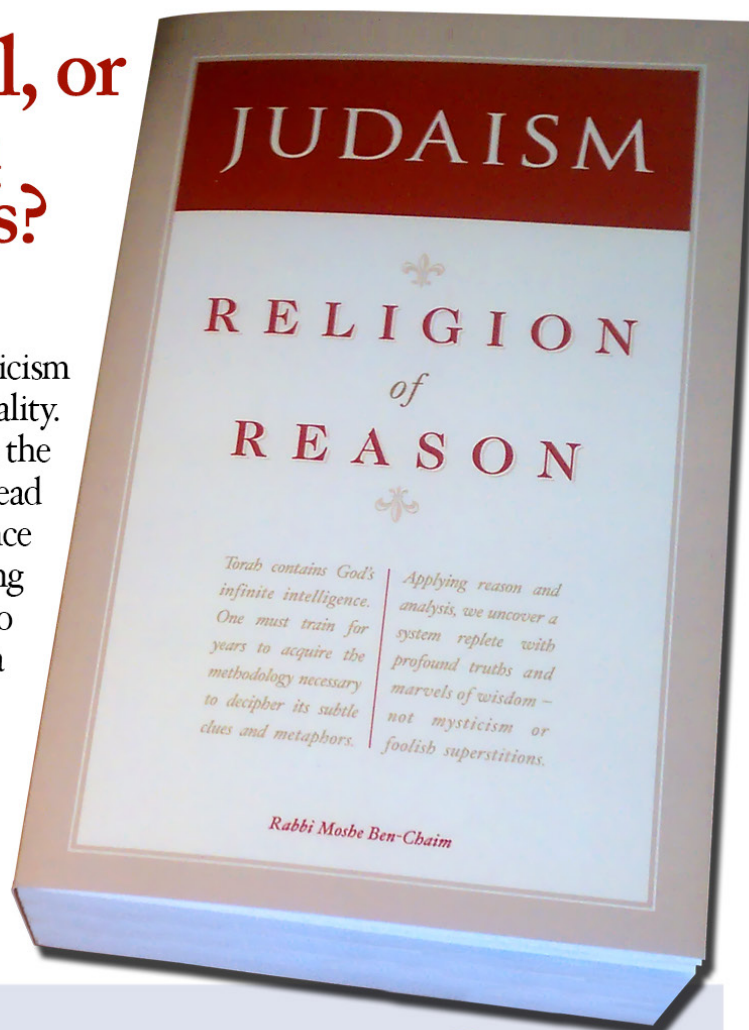
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God's Judgement

Rabbi Eliezer Barany

First three hours of the day

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: "When the kings wake up and place their crowns on their heads and bow down to the sun, the Holy One, Blessed be He, immediately grows angry." Rav Yosef says: "A person should not recite musaf during the first three hours of the day on the first day of the year individually. Since the judgment is reckoned then, perhaps the Heavenly court will scrutinize his actions and reject him." If that is so, the community should not recite at that time as well. The community is not rejected due to its many merits. If that is so, then shouldn't the morning prayer of one who is praying individually also not be recited at this time? Since there is a community that prays the morning prayer at that same time, his prayer is not rejected. But didn't you say that during the first three hours of the day The Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and engages in Torah? Reverse it. And if you wish, say: Actually, do not reverse. Torah, with regard to which it is written: "Truth," as it is written: "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23), the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not act beyond the letter of the law. Judgment, with regard to which it is not written: Truth, the Holy One, Blessed be He, can act beyond the letter of the law. (Meseches Avodah Zarah 4b)

The Gemara explains that a person shouldn't pray the musaf prayer on Rosh Hashanah during the first three hours of the day if they will be davening without a minyan. Why is that the case? Rav Yosef stated this directive in response to the kings waking up and placing their crowns on their heads and bowing down to the sun, which causes Hashem to become angry. Since judgement is taken during that time, a person shouldn't put themselves before the Heavenly court lest he not make it through unscathed. Then the Gemara explains that one who prays with a minyan is saved from such trouble because the congregation has many merits and its prayer will not get rejected. Finally, the Gemara ends off with a debate as to when God sits in judgement, as if it were possible to say. Is it the first half of the morning or the second half of the morning? Either Hashem is involved in Torah the first half of the morning and judging the second half, or vice versa.

Rosh Hashanah Musaf

Many strange elements present themselves in this narrative. First of all, when do all of these issues occur? Is it

merely on Rosh Hashanah or is it every day of the year? To that Rashi responds that there is something special about the musaf prayer on Rosh Hashanah. Although this calculation seems to present itself throughout the year, "The musaf prayers throughout the year are praise and stories, but the musaf of Rosh Hashanah, since he prays Kingship, zichronos (memories), and shofaros, judgement is taken more seriously. And a person shouldn't separate themselves from the congregation" (Commentary of Rashi on Meseches Avodah Zarah 4b).

So we see that there seems to be verdicts present throughout the year, not just on the day of judgement. However, what is the Gemara trying to teach us concerning this debate about the two halves of the morning? What does it mean that God is involved in Torah for three hours of the day? What purpose would it serve for Him to learn Torah? He already knows everything! Additionally, the Torah comes from Hashem, so what could He possibly be doing with the Torah?

Additionally, it is not so easy to say that Hashem is spending three hours a day judging. The Ramban points out

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(Commentary on Sefer Vayikra 23:24) that the Torah didn't mention that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgement, as it would teach an erroneous idea. A person shouldn't think that Hashem is tied to a specific time, as He is beyond time. So what is the Gemara doing when it says that Hashem is involved, so to speak, with certain things during each time?

Relating to God

What is apparent from the Gemara is that this directive about not praying musaf individually on Rosh Hashanah only occurs during the first three hours, regardless of when He is judging. Meaning, if He is judging during the second three hours of the day, this admonition is still relegated to only the first three hours of the day. Therefore, we see that these two segments of time, regardless of their label, reflect a certain level of harshness of accurate reflection during the first half of the morning and a softer side during the second half of the morning.

When the Torah refers to some time of action or emotion on the part of God, it is speaking metaphorically. Rather, these are terms we label certain actions or dispositions because that is what it seems like to us. For instance, if Hashem does something good for us, we view it as Him being merciful or forgiving, not that there is some emotion that overtook Him (Mishneh Torah Foundations of the Torah 1:12). So we see that this Gemara is expressing two different ways of how Hashem relates to the world during these times.

Involved in Torah

What does it mean that Hashem is involved in Torah? As we pointed out, there is nothing He could gain from the Torah, as the Torah comes from Him. Rather, the midrash is teaching us that Hashem relates to the world based on elements of the Torah of truth. So if a person steals during this time, God would respond via direct punishment, not slow His "anger" or take the whole person into consideration for a judgement. After the first three hours there is mercy present, and people are not immediately punished. Why should the first three hours merit such decisive action?

The Gemara explains that the kings would get up, put on their crowns, and bow to the sun. The Maharal points out (Be'er HaGolah 4) that this bowing need not actually occur, rather the kings serve the sun through their actions. The sun typifies the laws of nature and the kings worship the laws of nature as opposed to God. This is not the will of God, and this is the cause of the "anger." However, what is unique about this time-period as opposed to the rest of the day?

The Gemara is telling us a psychological insight about

the beginning of the day. We have in our common parlance expressions such as "conquering the day" or "not letting the day pass you by." When titans of industry begin their day, they hit the ground running. They start the day off very strong and come with an attitude that they are in charge. They believe that if they "take control of the day" that they will be able to conquer nature.

Control

Kings take charge and want to feel in control of their kingdom. In fact, we learn that we can say the daytime Shema until three hours into the day, which is when the princes get up (Mishnah Berachot 1:2). Princes need not worry about leading the nation just yet, so they take their time to get up. However, kings are responsible for leading their nations. They are more susceptible to feeling the need to try to develop a sense of security. If God would allow a person to cheat during this time, they would be led to the improper conclusion that the laws of nature run supreme, and not the Supreme Ruler.

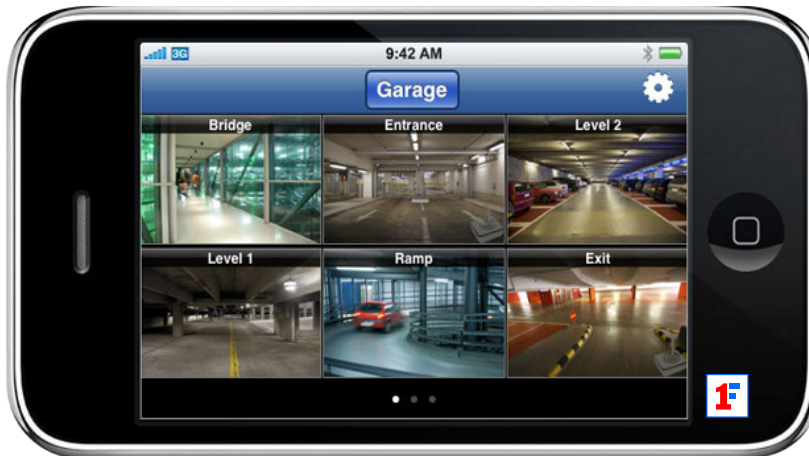
Now, how do we counteract this notion of thinking that we are in charge? We accept upon ourselves that Hashem is in charge: Shema; that He is the King. On Rosh Hashanah, we coronate Hashem, reestablishing Him as the King of the world. So shouldn't the first three hours of the day be the best time to contemplate this action? If we see why it is appropriate for a congregation to do this, maybe we can understand why it might be detrimental for an individual.

Powerful influences

The congregation has many merits so they need not worry about this time-period. People are influenced by their surroundings. As such, a person who is not congregated with a group of like-minded individuals, is subject to the ideologies of those who surround him. So even if a person chooses to try and coronate Hashem as King, he may be unduly influenced by those around them and not properly appoint God as the King. He may relate to the Ruler of the world in a less than optimum way. He may not, as the Gemara says this is a fear that exists, not a forgone conclusion. However, a person shouldn't put himself in such a situation.

Hopefully we can continue to reinforce within ourselves that God is in control. Although we may lose focus on that during the day, if we consciously recognize that the beginning of the day, every day, is an especially auspicious time for such a misunderstanding, we can realign our thoughts toward the proper recognition of God. Certainly we can hope to join our congregation in properly recognizing Hashem's authority this Rosh Hashanah. ■

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