



ROSH HASHANAH ♦ ראש השנה

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֵנָּה יוֹם הַדִּין לִפְקוּד עַל צֶבֶא מְרוֹם בְּדִין ... וְכָל
בְּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לִפְנֵיךְ כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן וְגו' (וּנְתַנָּה תוֹקֵף)

*And they declare, "Behold, the Day of Judgment."
The Heavenly host is arraigned in judgment... all
mankind pass before You like young sheep... (U'nesaneh Tokef)*

MASHAL

משל

Mashal:

A number of days before Rosh Hashanah, the *tzaddik* **Rav Yitzchak Gutfarb zt"l** was seen sitting in the waiting room of the *Badat"z* (*Beis Din Tzedek*) *Eidah Charedis* in Yerushalayim for hours on end. He was not involved in any *din Torah*, nor was he called upon to testify in any of that day's cases. So why was he there?

"I'm doing a little research," said R' Yitzchak with a conspiratorial smile. "I am observing how people react before their court cases. Some people pace nervously to and fro, rehearsing their pleas and/or their testimony. Others sit uncomfortably in their places, chain-smoking. There's a man who is literally pulling out the hairs of his beard. And there sits a lady reciting Tehillim, tears coursing down her cheeks."

R' Yitzchak looked about. "But what are they so scared about? A mere court case? Some money gained, some money lost? What's the big deal? Yet in just a few days, I will be sitting in a court case. A court case to determine my very existence; whether I live or I die this year. If these people are so nervous about simple stuff, should I not be terrified about what I am about to face on my Day of Judgment?"

Nimshal:

Year after year, we face our annual "tribunal"—the court case on Rosh Hashanah that will determine our lives for the coming year. We walk into shul and begin to *daven*. Are we nervous? Do we sweat, even just a little? Are we at all concerned about what is to take place over the next 48 hours? If the answer to any of these questions is no, then perhaps it is time to reevaluate our position. Let us focus on the case at hand so that we can earn the verdict of Life!

{ EREV YOM TOV }

The renowned Yeshivas Ohr Some'ach in Jerusalem is comprised of students from all over the globe. Young men who wish to understand more about Judaism come from many countries to the hallowed halls of the yeshivah and learn to grow spiritually. But only two students have ever been known to come from such an unlikely land as... Thailand!

The story begins a few weeks before Rosh Hashanah, when the famed *rosh kollel*, **Rav Shachne Zohn *shlit"*a**, traveled to America from Eretz Yisrael to collect money for his *kollel*. He planned to stay for a short time and return on a flight two days before Yom Tov. All went as planned and R' Shachne made his flight on time. However, when the flight made its scheduled stopover in Vienna and all the Israel-bound passengers disembarked in order to catch their connecting flight to Tel Aviv, R' Shachne—who doesn't hear well in the first place—was deeply immersed in a *sefer* and had no idea that the plane had even landed. Not even the flight attendants realized that he had failed to get off the plane. R' Shachne just sat in his seat and continued learning while the plane refueled and prepared to take off for its next destination: Beirut International Airport!

It was only once the plane had already taken off that a stewardess realized what had happened and, just as quickly, grasped the dire implications. When she managed to rouse the white-bearded Jewish man from his studies and he finally looked up, she explained where they were headed and how impossible it would be for a man like him to get off in a place like that. After further consultation with the captain, it was decided that R' Shachne would remain on board—concealed, to be sure—until they made their third and final stop in the distinctly un-Jewish city of Bangkok, Thailand.

Many hours later, R' Shachne disembarked into the balmy Bangkok air. It was Erev Rosh Hashanah and there was no chance of getting to Israel on time for Yom Tov. R' Shachne, in his Yerushalmi hat and garb, stood there for a moment, unsure of his next move. Then, he hailed a cab and told the driver to take him to the local Jewish synagogue. There was one, a Reform Jewish Temple not far from the city center, and the amused driver headed there straightaway.

R' Shachne walked into the Temple and shuddered. Like all Reform Temples, it had no *mehitzah* and the seating was mixed. How could he *daven* in a synagogue like this? And on Rosh Hashanah, no less! He decided that he would remain outside during the prayer services and would only

venture near the windows to hear *tekias shofar*.

A number of congregants arrived before the evening prayers and were surprised to find this authentic-looking Jewish rabbi from Israel standing outside their Temple. They invited him in but he refused mightily, stating that he could not walk into a sanctuary that contained mixed seating. The locals were a sympathetic bunch and were eager to show their hospitality to their dignified guest. But all their convincing and cajoling had no effect. He absolutely refused to enter!

After consulting among themselves, the congregants decided that if it meant so much to this rabbi to have separate seating, they would accommodate him and create a partition. However, the Reform rabbi objected vehemently. He told his congregants that *he* was the leader of this congregation and for all he cared, the black-hatted rabbi could stand outside or leave altogether. They were not going to change their style of prayer for some old-fashioned, antiquated and uncivilized custom!

Amazingly, the Reform rabbi's words had the exact opposite effect! The people were outraged at his insensitivity and kicked him out of the Temple! They then partitioned themselves—men on one side and women on the other—and asked the esteemed rabbi from Israel to not only join them, but in fact, to lead them in prayer! A grateful R' Shachne led the *davening* and even delivered an impassioned speech about the meaning of Rosh Hashanah and the Yom Hadin.

Two medical students, local boys on leave from their studies in London for the High Holidays, had come to the Temple for the prayers. After hearing R' Shachne *daven* and speak, they felt a spark of religion ignite inside and begin to burn bright. Soon after, they left Bangkok and traveled to Eretz Yisrael, to Yeshivas Ohr Some'ach, where they flourished in their newfound religious lifestyle.

היה נא מצליח דרכי אשר אנכי הולך ועומד לבקש רחמים
עלי ועל שולחי (תפילה לש"ץ קודם מוסף)

*Please, help me succeed in the mission which I have undertaken—
to stand [before You] and to seek mercy for myself and for those
who have appointed me. (Chazzan's prayer before Mussaf)*

For many years, R' Nachum Bergman served as the *chazzan* for *Mussaf* for the Yamim Nora'im in the shul of **Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l**,

Dedicated by
Mr. and Mrs.
Yaakov Kiffel
and family

לעילוי נשמות
האשה חיה בת
ר' אברהם ע"ה
נפ' ג' תשרי
תש"ע
תנצב"ה

{YOM TOV}

in the old city of Yerushalayim . The entire congregation was always deeply moved by his heartrending *tefillos*. In 1905, R' Nachum died quite suddenly, not long before Rosh Chodesh Elul, after a very short illness. He was survived by his entirely distraught wife, Baila, and a son, Eliyahu, a fine young man in his early twenties.

As the month of Elul approached, a group of the leading shul congregants approached the great *gaon*, R' Yosef Chaim, and asked him to select a new *chazzan* who would be a worthy successor to the late R' Nachum. R' Yosef Chaim assured them that he was giving the matter serious consideration. But when Rosh Hashanah eve arrived, and there was still no word from the *Rav* regarding whom he had chosen as the *baal Mussaf*, the entire congregation was perplexed and more than a bit concerned.

On Rosh Hashanah morning, however, shortly before *Mussaf* was to begin, the *Rav* hurriedly walked over to R' Nachum's son, Eliyahu, who was sitting among the worshipers, and instructed him to lead the congregation as the *baal Mussaf*. The young man was astounded by this request.

"But Rebbe," he protested, "I am not prepared."

R' Yosef Chaim assured him that he would do well, and strongly urged Eliyahu to serve as the *chazzan*, despite the fact that the halachah clearly stipulates that it is prohibited for a mourner to serve as the *chazzan* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Upon completion of the *davening*, R' Yosef Chaim explained to his perplexed congregants that he was well aware of this halachic stipulation. The reason for this halachah, he explained, was to not mar the joyous spirit of the Yom Tov. In this instance, however, where a widow's heart was broken because of her husband's untimely death, hearing a new *baal tefillah davening* in his stead would cause her untold anguish, and would only add to her sorrow. Upon hearing her son taking his father's place, her pain would be greatly alleviated. This merit, in turn, R' Yosef Chaim concluded, would make the *tefillos* of the congregation more readily acceptable to the Almighty.

Rav Wolf of Zhitomir זי"ל (Ohr Hameir) would say:

"Since the entire universe was created for the sake of Klal Yisrael, its entire existence hangs in the balance when Klal Yisrael is judged. Everything flourishes or withers according to the merit of Klal Yisrael."

זכרנו לחיים מלך חפץ בחיים וכתבנו בספר החיים וכו'

*Remember us for life, King who desires life;
and inscribe us in the Book of Life.*

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) states: “Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah: one for the totally righteous, one for the totally wicked, and one for those in the middle. The totally righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life; the totally wicked are immediately inscribed and sealed in the Book of Death; and those who fall in between are left pending from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they become deserving, they are inscribed in the Book of Life; if not, they are inscribed in the Book of Death.”

Why do we urge and insist that Hashem “inscribe” us in the Book of Life? Is it absolutely necessary that our judgment be recorded? What is the significance of being “inscribed” in the Book of Life?

A wedding once took place in the city of Baranovich. Unlike the normal custom in those days—where both sides would decide upon and write in the *tenaim* papers their stated amount of support for the young couple—one side flatly refused to write anything down.

“Don’t worry, you have my word,” said the father indignantly. “There is no need to write anything down.”

But a custom is a custom, and the people finally came to **Rav Elchanan Wasserman zt”l Hy”d**, asking him to speak to the unrelenting party.

R’ Elchanan told the father, “*Chazal* tell us that the Heavenly Court is obligated to follow the decrees and rulings of the Earthly Court, in matters pertaining to this world. Here, when a *beis din* issues a ruling, it is immediately drawn up and recorded in official court documents, lest people doubt the veracity of the *psak*. As a result, the Heavenly Court records each ruling in the appropriate ledgers. Just as people want their ruling written down when it comes to *beis din* on Earth, as this is what obligates them to follow through with *beis din*’s decision, the Heavenly Court likewise writes down our rulings. Don’t you want the Heavenly Court to inscribe the rulings it gives *you*? Then how can you refuse to write down what is required of you down here on Earth?”

On Rosh Hashanah, and throughout these Days of Awe, we ask Hashem: Please remember our good deeds and issue a positive judgment. And then, write it down to be recorded for eternity.

Dedicated by
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