



Ohr Yerushalayim News

ה'תשע"ה - פרשת שופטים - 22nd August 2015 - Volume 8 - Issue 7

News This Week

Kiddush This Shabbos

There will be a Kiddush this Shabbos after Davenning sponsored by Mr & Mrs Leivy Goldman.

Mr & Mrs Eli Weider invite the Kehilla to a Kiddush after Davenning at their home, 21 Danesway from 11.30am to celebrate the recent birth of their daughter, Orli.

Keep Up To Date

If you have recently moved house or wish to receive Shul correspondence via email please advise by emailing us at office@ohryerushalayim.org.uk so we can update our records.

Days of Awe

Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the Lord, your G-d, is giving you, for your tribes, and they shall judge the people [with] righteous judgment. (Devarim 16:18)

I had been aware of a certain person for some time and was only slightly impressed with him. I could see that he took prayer seriously and wished that I could put myself into my tefillah to the extent that he did. I knew that he learned Torah full time, but there was nothing particularly rabbinic about him to look at him as being more than just a colleague.

Then about a year later a good friend of mine happened to mention that he took all of his halachic questions to this particular person. I was surprised and thought that maybe he was making a mistake. There were rabbis of higher authority to ask, so why merely ask a "peer." He insisted that the person was far more than that. My curiosity was piqued.

I decided to test the person out for myself. I began to bring my halachic questions to him and made a point of discussing his conclusions with him. It did not take much time after that to realize that I had greatly misjudged the person, fooled by his humble appearance and demeanor. As my friend had insisted, this person was in fact a Gadol b'Torah.

Over time, I found out more about just how far this person's greatness probably goes. Needless to say that I am in awe of this person today, embarrassed that I had considered him to be nothing more than just a peer, albeit a more knowledgeable one. Today, in so many ways, I look at him as my Rav.

If the period of time from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur is called the "Days of Awe," then Elul Zman is the time to build our in preparation. It's not that we don't live with some element of awe from day-to-day. It's more that we do not live with enough awe of what is truly awesome: G-d, Torah, and the opportunity to live according to it.

I once used a bathroom in which someone had left behind their make-up bag. On the side of the bag were big letters that spelled, "Awesome." It made me smirk, but my smile quickly dissipated when it made me realize how misused the word really is. It should really only be used for G-d and G-d-related things, like Torah.

People go on vacations where they do little other than relax and have

fun, and when asked how it was, they say, "It was AWESOME!" The same word is used for a whole variety of things ("That was an awesome steak!") and experiences that would have a tough time making it into the category of "G-dly."

Obviously what people mean to say is that they had a great time, better than usual, great enough to be emphatic. They may even be saying, on some level, that it was such a great experience that they were humbled by it, because they feel so grateful for being able to have had it.

The only problem is that when it comes to language, usage impacts our intellectual appreciation of its meaning. That's why we have expressions like, "Talk is cheap," because people can make it this way. Most people have little idea that one of their most basic abilities is the very trait that makes us G-dly and, according to the Zohar, defines us as a person.

Therefore, for awesome to remain awesome, it should be used sparingly and only with respect to what is truly awesome, G-d Himself. Otherwise, it will be difficult to put into the Yemai Norayim—Days of Awe—what we must to get out of them what we need.

In a sense, this is what the Rambam indicates when he writes:

What is the process for coming to love and fear G-d? When one contemplates His actions and His wondrous and great creations and sees in them His wisdom, that it has no limit and no end, immediately he will love and praise Him, and desire tremendously to know His great Name. (Yad Chazakah, Yesodei HaTorah, 2:2)

The Rambam is saying that G-d is awesome, and this is supposed to make us want to love and fear Him. If we don't love and fear G-d it is because we do not understand just how awesome He is. Therefore, if you want to love and fear Him, you have to make a point of learning about G-d's awesomeness.

The Rambam even tells us how to do this. He says that one can glimpse

The Week Ahead

פרשת שופטים

1st Mincha	6.40pm
Candle Lighting	Not before 6.55pm
2nd Mincha	7.20pm
Candle Lighting	7.28 - 7.45pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.35am
Ovos uBonim	5.00pm
1st Mincha	6.00pm
2nd Mincha	8.12pm
Rov's Shiur	following
Motzei Shabbos	9.17pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Monday / Thursday	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tuesday / Wednesday / Friday	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.00pm

G-d's awesomeness by taking the time to appreciate the obvious. Everyday we wake up in a world that we completely take for granted, perform incredible tasks that seem mundane to us, and enjoy pleasures that we assume we have come to us. No wonder people are not in awe of life.

But just watch a documentary about World War II and see what life can become like. Just look at the pictures from the Holocaust and see what we narrowly missed. Or, go to the cancer ward of a hospital and watch people whose lives paralleled our own until they got sick and were forced to fight for their lives, people for whom a single breath may be a tiresome act.

Imagine touring an active nuclear facility and upon reaching the control center, seeing the top scientists responsible for the running of the facility playing ping pong—while on duty. Would it make you a little nervous? Even though the place is state-of-the-art and fully automated it would still seem inappropriate to be involved in such a recreational activity in such a serious place.

An absurd analogy. Yes and no. From our perspective, we take life seriously enough. From G-d's perspective it looks like many of us, perhaps most of us, are playing ping pong in a nuclear facility that we only assume is fully automated. This is essentially what the Talmud means when it says:

A person does not sin unless a spirit of craziness enters him. (Sotah 3a)

If the Talmud meant that at the time of sin a person is not in control of his faculties then he would never have to atone for his sin. Just as in a human court a plea of insanity can get a person off the hook, so can it with respect to the Heavenly court if it was in fact true.

Rather, the spirit of craziness to which the Talmud refers is the one about which we are talking. It is the inability to take life as seriously as we ought to which makes sinning a lot easier to do. The fact that people constantly sin and live to tell the tale mistakenly gives people the impression that sinning is not so dangerous after all.

Compare this approach to life to that of Yitzchak Avinu's:

Yitzchak shuddered a great shudder, and he said, "Who then is the one who hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate of everything while you had not yet come, and I blessed him? He, too, shall be blessed." (Bereishis 27:33)

According to the Midrash he [shuddered because] he saw Gehinom open beneath him. (Rashi)

Yitzchak did nothing wrong since he blessed the person whom he thought was technically fitting to receive it, Eisav. If anyone was guilty of Gehinom it was Ya'akov who deceived him. Yet, the fact that the blessing went to the "wrong" person created such a sense of negative consequence for Yitzchak that he envisioned Gehinom opening up as a result.

A rabbi once asked a group of not-so-religious young adults if they knowingly sinned. The fact that people squirmed in their seats answered the question for them, some were bold enough to verbally admit their conscious errors.

"How did you feel about it?" the rabbi asked one young man.

He thought for a moment, and then responded, "Fine."

"Fine?" the rabbi questioned. "Really?"

The young man thought a bit more, then added, "Well, maybe not fine, but it wasn't the worst sin I ever did." Realizing his self-incrimination, he quickly added, "But that one was by accident!"

The rabbi pressed, "How do you know that it wasn't such a big deal?"

"Because," he answered, "it didn't really affect anyone."

"How do you know?" the rabbi asked him.

"I just know . . ." was all he could answer.

"What will you do," the rabbi asked him, but really everyone in the room at the same time, "if you find out on your final day of judgment, that your sin caused someone to fall and break their leg?"

"What?" the boy asked, confused. "My sin did not cause anyone to

break anything!" he protested.

"As far as you were concerned, perhaps," the rabbi said. "But let me tell you how the spiritual world works . . ."

By the time the discussion was over, everyone had a different perspective on life. Previously they had thought that the impact of a sin could be contained, and they found out that though a sin is done in one location it can impact the outcome of an event far away in another location.

Spiritual proximity is a lot different than physical proximity, because the inflow of Divine light by performing mitzvos or the reduction of it by sinning instantly affects the entire world. Everything is also interrelated and interdependent in the physical world, but by the time the impact of an occurrence is noticed it may be too distant in time or space to see the connection between the two.

I have made use of the following verse in the past to point out how we can determine if a certain historical event is the result of overt Hashgochah Pratis:

This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23)

In other words, if something happens that seems bizarre to us, meaning that it is not the logical outcome of everyday historical forces, it is a good indication that G-d is directly and overtly involved in history. It remains only to figure out to what end.

There is a corollary of this verse as well. It says that if something does not seem as if it is from G-d, then it is because it is not wondrous in our eyes. It teaches that the more a person takes the miracles of life for granted, the less awesome life appears to him, the less he can discern the Hashgochah Pratis responsible for them.

Since the problem is not with Creation, because being the handiwork of G-d it is inherently awesome, the problem is with man. People just don't take the time to see Creation as it really exists, to appreciate what it really is. Since most people do not appreciate what they have while they have it, having it they don't appreciate it. They forget the old maxim: Abuse it, lose it.

The only reason why society needs the judges and enforcers mentioned in this week's parashah is because we fail to be our own. This is the time to judge ourselves, to determine how much we appreciate the awesomeness of G-d and life. It is the time to enforce an approach to life that enhances our appreciation of the awesomeness of both. This is the only way we can be ready for the Days of Awe, ready to put into them what we must to get out of them what we need.

Appoint Your Own Judge

Shlomo Katz (Torah.org)

Our parashah, which is always read in the month of Elul preceding the Days of Judgment, begins: "Judges and officers shall you appoint at all your gates--which Hashem, your Elokim, gives you--for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment." R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev z"l (1740-1809; early chassidic rebbe) writes that this verse is offering us a recipe for a successful judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem wants to judge us mercifully, but we must allow Him to do so. When we behave with kindness and judge our fellow Jews favorably, we awaken Hashem's kindness so that He can judge us the same way. Through such behavior, we open the "gates" of Heavenly kindness, allowing blessing to flow to all of the Jewish People.

This, writes R' Levi Yitzchak, is the lesson of our verse: You will appoint the judges and officers who determine your fate on Rosh Hashanah by choosing your gates, i.e., choosing which gates you will open. How? By judging all of the people with righteous judgment, i.e., by always seeing the righteousness of others and judging them favorably. (Kedushat Levi)

A related thought from the anonymous 13th century work Sefer Ha'chinuch (mitzvah 171): Our Sages teach that man is measured by his own measuring stick. However, he continues, this teaching is misunderstood. It does not mean that Hashem looks at how man behaves and responds accordingly. That is a human trait. Rather, through his own actions, man makes himself into a receptacle to receive reward or punishment.