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ROSH HASHANAH: ACCEPT YOUR MISSION AND BREAK FREE



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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YONAH HANAVI'S LESSON

Let's say a person had challenges this year, and these challenges were sent to enable him or her to fulfill the mission for which they came to this world.¹ But instead of utilizing them to fulfill their mission they did the opposite. So then Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "We have to turn up the heat a little bit." But if a person passes the challenges, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Now you're ready for the next step." We'll first try to accept our challenges in a positive way, and Hashem will give us success to move forward.

In order to figure out our mission in life, we turn to the words of the Vilna Gaon. The Gaon of Vilna wrote a commentary on the book of *Yonah*. We read the entire book of *Yonah* for the *haftarah* on Yom Kippur. The book of *Yonah* tells about a man named Yonah, a prophet sent on a mission by Hashem to a country named *Ninveh*. Hashem told Yonah to go to *Ninveh*. It was a non-Jewish city. "Tell them that I'm going to bring destruction upon them, and they should change their ways." Yonah decided he didn't want to go on the mission. He decided instead of going to *Ninveh*, he will get on a ship and take a trip elsewhere. So he runs away to the sea, which is a place where Hashem does not communicate with people. He thought, "You know what? I'm sure that now I am not going to fulfill my mission." And Yonah gets caught up in a storm. Yonah gets tossed over the boat into the sea, and he thinks, "Now I'm surely not going to fulfill the mission." And then a whale comes and swallows him up and now he is sure, "Forget about it. The mission is history." But lo and behold, Hashem had a different plan for him, and he ended up fulfilling his mission.

The Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797) explains that the whole book of *Yonah* is a description of reincarnation, and the reason why we read it on Yom Kippur is because this is a book that tells the saga of all man.² Every man and woman comes to this world with a mission. But people get sidetracked. They don't want to fulfill their mission; they travel to places or get involved in things that distance

¹ This is part 3 (final shiur) on this topic from 5765. Parts 1 and 2 were printed in 5783, for Parsha Vaeschanan and Eikev. To read or download Part 1 and 2, please visit www.sichosisroel.org

² "והאניה חשבה להשבר" (יונה א:ז). והגוף חושב שעל כן ישבר עתה, כמו שנאמר בזוהר שכל ימיו חושב שכל העולם הזה הוא שלו אבל עכשיו רואה ומתחיל להזכיר שעל כרחו ימות עכשיו. והנשמה שאף על כרחו תסבול עוונותיו מכל מקום לא יאבד לנצח, שיתוקן בגלגול כמו שכתוב "פעמיים ושלוש עם גבר, וכו'" [איוב לג:כט] מה שאין כן הגוף שאינו מתוקן בגלגול תשבר לנצח והוא דומה לכלי חרס שצריכין שבירה. ואמרו שכיין שנשבר שוב אין לו תקנה. ומדויק לשון חשבה שאינו שייך על הספינה ממש. [ועוד כתב הגר"א איוב ד:ג, זז:ל] כי טוב מותי מחיי כמ"ש [בגמ' תענית כ"ה א] "ושבח אני את המתים שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר הם חיים כו'" ולכאורה "שכבר מתו" וכן "אשר הם חיים" ייתור דברים, אלא שרצה לומר שטובים הם המתים שכבר מתו ולא נצטרכו לבוא בגלגול מאותן שהם חיים עדנה שבאו בגלגול, ובזה מיושב דאמרו נמנו וגמרו טוב לאדם שלא נברא כו' עד יפשפש במעשיו [עירובין יג]. דקשה היאך אפשר לומר שטוב יותר, אם כן למה נברא. ועוד, "ועכשיו שנברא" קשה להולמו, ועוד, מאי "פפפש" כו', הוה ליה למימר יעבוד את ה' ויעשה טוב, אלא נראה דנחלקו בשוב אל הגלגול השני, שאלו אומרים טוב לו שנברא, כי בכל פעם הוא עושה מצות כמו שכתבו קצת מפרשים. ואלו אומרים טוב לו יותר אם היה מתקן גלגול ראשון ולא יצטרך בגלגול שני. וכן נמנו וגמרו כנ"ל. וזהו "ושבח אני את המתים כו' ". וקאמרי "ועכשיו שנברא" על כרחו לתקן מעשיו שמקודם ולא בשביל מצות לעשות, כי טוב לו כו' כנ"ל, ועל כן יראה עיקר לתקן במה שפשע מקודם כמ"ש "אבך במאי זהיר טפי, וכו' "

them from Hashem, whether consciously or unconsciously. But ultimately, you have to know that you will fulfill your mission.

FIGURE OUT YOUR MISSION

So, the Gaon of Vilna, in his commentary on *Yonah* (1:4) writes like this. He says if a person wants to figure out the primary reason he came to this world, what should he do? He should consider, first of all, what are the things that he stumbles on constantly? What is the area in which has a particular weakness? Now, that particular weakness is a root source that causes a lot of our behavior. So let's say a person struggles, for example, with *chessed*. That's a very common thing. Most people are not interested in doing *chessed*. Most people believe in *chessed*, but have a very difficult time doing kindness.³

Now, when we talk about doing kindness, we're not talking about saying, "Hi, how are you?" We live in a world where if you say hello in the morning to a guy, or you do a favor for somebody once in a while, we think that's called *chessed*. *Chessed* means to do unlimited kindness to others, to give of your time freely to people, not to be bothered by it, to give of your finances, to give your home freely to people, not with limitation - once a month, once a year, only when you are comfortable. *Chessed* means to really develop a sense of selflessness and to understand that the people you meet are opportunities for you to give to.

Let's take, for example, a very common scenario: In this day and age, in the secular world and parts of the Jewish world, children are a burden. The Brisker Rav used to say, why did Hashem create a system of having children, that parents have to take care of children? In the animal world, the baby animal is taken care of for a few hours or a few days, and then they start running around. In a relatively short time, they're independent. Why are children dependent upon their parents for so many years?

The answer is because children lock us into a situation where we must do *chessed*. We must do kindness. You can't get away from your kids. If you have kids, you're busy doing *chessed* all the time. Tell someone today you have six kids, they're *chalishing*. Tell them you have ten, they get palpitations. Fifteen? Then they can't look at you anymore. It's not possible. You have no life. You have no days. You have no nights. You have no summers. You have no winters. For the rest of your history, you'll never have relaxation. You'll never be able to sit around when you're an old man because you'll have all these kids. It's amazing how people look at it.

People have to analyze this honestly. It might be that this is the purpose for which you came to this world.

Here is a person who is lazy. Many of us are familiar with that. Laziness is a big impediment. Certain things you like doing. So you make excuses all the time why you do those things; and what you don't like to do is another story. Every one of us has to study the Torah. So you say, "This is my area of weakness." Your area of weakness might be jealousy. Some people are eaten with jealousy. Some people pursue *kavod* all day long, honor. Their ego is so unbelievable.

³ והיאך ידע מה שקלקל מקדם, יש על זה שני סימנים, א' במה שנכשל בה בגלגול זה הרבה פעמים. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו" באיזה נכשל, ב' באיזה עבירה נפשו חשקה לו מאד לפי שהורגלה מקודם ונעשה טבע, ולכך יש בני אדם שחושקין בעבירה אחת יותר וזה בעבירה אחרת. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו", שימשמש מעשיו (הגר"א על איוב ד:ג)

Some people desire. They are just desirous, and their lusts consume them in an unusual way. A person has to know that's the reason he came to this world - to correct these various character faults.

So, something that you continuously stumble upon and you have a weakness for is an indication of your purpose in this world.

Someone once called me up and said to me, "How come I got stuck with my parents?" What happened was his parents were old and he had to bathe his father. It was terrible. He had his own family. He had many kids. I said, "Did you ever consider this as *chessed* time? You thought you were finished with *chessed*." He said, "You're right. I thought at some point my *chessed* was over, and now I'd be on the receiving end, just the *nachas* end. Now I'll have kids, I'll have grandkids. They'll take care of me." I said, "Hashem had other plans. Obviously, you didn't graduate yet." Not everybody gets stuck with caring for their parents in a challenging way. Some do and some don't. This is what we have to know.

AN UNUSUAL CHESHEK FOR A MITZVAH

Then there's another way to tell. There are certain people who are abnormally drawn to certain *mitzvos*, and when somebody is unusually drawn to certain *mitzvos*, that's an indication that that's what he came to the world to do. I read a story about a fellow in Toronto. He was in the city government, and he wanted to build an *eiruv*. He wanted to put up a string around the city of Toronto to enable the people to carry on Shabbos. They had bureaucratic red tape. The city gave this fellow a very hard time. But he put his life and his soul into his mission. He didn't understand why he had such an urge to do it. He was a secular Jew, mind you. But what he didn't do for this *mitzvah*! He went to bat. He put out his own money. He worked on weekends, he worked on holidays. The rabbis didn't understand what the story was. One day, he told them that he happens to be Jewish. They didn't know he was Jewish for the longest time. His wife was upset with him. He had this *meshugas* that he had to build this *eiruv*. It took him quite a few years, and finally it was put up. And the week it was finished, the man died.

Here is a story that happened in Willoughby Hills, Ohio. Not long ago, the city began to get some Orthodox Jews. There's a little complex there, an apartment complex owned by Orthodox Jews. The Jews in that little complex said they wanted to put up an *eiruv*. The people who owned the complex weren't interested. They said, "Who wants strings hanging around here? There is a problem with trucks. There is a problem with this and that." They didn't want it. They went to City Hall and some lady decided her mission in life is to get that *eiruv* up. I couldn't understand it. What she didn't do for this *mitzvah*! She got trucks from the city. She put it up. She ragged on the owners of the apartment complex, without any of the *frum* people having to intercede too much.

A number of the *frum* people came to me and asked me, "What's *peshat*? Why did she do this?" I said, "Maybe this is her mission." Maybe she came to this world before. Maybe there was once a city where she pulled down the *eiruv*, and she caused Jews to desecrate the Shabbos by carrying on Shabbos, and now she has an opportunity to fulfill her mission, to rectify. She's rectifying it.

You have to know that every single situation in our life is placed before us for a purpose.

Now, this is extremely relevant to Rosh Hashanah. I want to tell you why. There is a very interesting Chafetz Chaim. In his famous work called the *Mishnah Berurah* - the Chafetz Chaim's major work on the code of Jewish law - he quotes the reason why we read the *maftir Yonah*. He writes (סימן תרכ"ו) that we read this on Yom Kippur so that we remember and internalize that no one can flee from Hashem.⁴ Now listen to what the Chafetz Chaim adds. Listen closely.

IF YOU DON'T SUCCEED AT FIRST, YOU'LL HAVE TO TRY AGAIN

The Chafetz Chaim says (בשעה"צ שם ס"ק ר) as follows.⁵ The typical thought process people have is to think a number of times - not once, a number of times - that they should just give up on themselves. They decide that they're not able to fulfill the mission and overcome the challenges they face. They say to everybody else, "It's easier for you to talk. I wish you would have what I have. Let's see how you would manage. If you had what I have you wouldn't be able to deal with it."

In other words, a person thinks that there's no way in the world that he's able to be *mesaken* his ways. So you know what he does? He accepts his behavior, and he behaves consistently in certain way; whether it's that he can't learn Torah, or he can't give charity, or he can't do *chessed*, *bikur cholim*, *hachnasas kallah*, *levayas hameis*. Whatever he decides is his challenge. That's how he acts.

So what happens is the person thinks, "Nu, if Hashem wants me to die, I'll die. That's life." That's what the Chafetz Chaim says. אם יגזר עלי למות, let me die. Sometimes people even hope for that because the situation is so challenging. But the Chafetz Chaim says, this is a mistake of unbelievable proportions. He says, you know why? Because in the end, you will fulfill whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants from you. You're going to be forced to fulfill it. You're not going to have a choice. You're going to come back to this world, says the Chafetz Chaim, one time, a second time, and a third time. And against your will, you will fulfill the mission for which you were created. Let no one make an error, he says. Don't make that mistake. Everyone has to know this Chofetz Chaim.

If so, says the Chafetz Chaim, why should a person go through all the *tzaros* of having to live through a life of challenges and then suffer the pangs of death? When a person goes from this world, even if he comes back as a *gilgul*, it is not so simple. The *tzaros* he has to go through when he comes to the next world are complex. He mentions some of them. I'm not going to go into them in depth but mention them briefly. Each one is a whole subject in and of itself. He says there is something called *chibut hakever*. A person goes through such *tzaros* in their grave! And then there's *kaf hakeilah* and then there's Gehinom. Who knows what kind of *tzaros* a person would experience, until a person comes back again? He says, you will have to come back again and again!

⁴ בפרשת עריות - משום שנפשו של אדם מחמדתו ואם יש אחד שנטמא יחזור בתשובה ומפטיר ביונה שמדבר מן התשובה ועוד שאין יכולין לברוח מן הש"י.

⁵ וכוונתם, כי האדם חושב כמה פעמים לראש את עצמו שאין יכול לתען בשום אופן ועל כן יתנהג תמיד באופן אחד, ואם יגזור עליו הקדוש ברוך הוא למות ימות. אבל טעות הוא, שסוף דבר יהיה, כל מה שהקדוש ברוך הוא רוצה הוא מנפשו שיתקן מקרח הוא לתקן, ובוא עוד פעם ופעמים לעולם הזה ובעל כרחו יכרח לתקן, ואם כן למה לו כל העמל למות ולסבל חבט הקבר ושאר צרות ולחזר עוד הפעם? וראיה מיונה, שהקדוש ברוך הוא רצה מאתו שילך וינבא, והוא מאן בזה ונס לים, מקום שלא ישרה עליו עוד השכינה לנבאת כידוע, וראינו שנטבע בהם ונבלע בגד והיה שם במעין כמה ימים, ולפי הנראה בודאי לא יוכל להתקיים דברי השם יתברך, ומכל מקום ראינו שסוף דבר היה שרצון השם יתברך נתקיים וילך וינבא, כן הוא האדם בעניונו. והנה שאמרנו באבות: ואל יבטיחך יצרן שהשאלו בית מנוס לך, שעל קרחך אתה נוצר וכו'.

The Chafetz Chaim says the proof to this is from Yonah. Yonah is the paradigm. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted him to go on a mission. He refused. He ran here. He ran there. He should have drowned when he was thrown into the sea. He should have died at some point in his journey. His mission should have been over. Hashem says, “My desire is that you’re going to fulfill My mission right now.” And you have to know, the Chafetz Chaim says, there’s a *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (4:22) that says a teaching from our sages, “Don’t let your *yetzer hara* convince you that the grave is going to be an escape.” There’s nothing to escape to. You know why? “Because you were created against your will, and against your will, you will be held accountable.” You will fulfill your mission. You have a job.

I’ll never forget I was once called to the bedside of a very prestigious doctor. His claim to fame was that he was one of the biggest geniuses in molecular biology. His second claim to fame was that he made the most money of any doctor in Cleveland in his field in the last few years. Now, he was ready to take his life. That day he was planning on taking his life, *chas v’shalom*. He was suffering from a terrible disease, and he couldn’t sit up. He couldn’t open his eyes. He could barely breathe. He wanted to take his life. He had tried alternative medicine and Indian medicine. He tried every *meshugas* you could find in the world, natural medicine, and now he decided it was time to go.

Somebody called me. I went to his bedside. I said, “My friend, let me tell you something. I can’t stop you from taking your life. But I can promise you one thing. Don’t say I didn’t tell you. It’s not going to be better. Don’t think it’s fun on the other side. That’s where the action really starts. As long as you’re on this side, I could help you. If you get to the other side, I can’t help you. You’re beyond reach. Stay with me. Give me the chance.” Within three months, the fellow was up and walking around. I visited the guy a couple of times a week and spent hours with him and then he became better and better and better! About a year later, he even got a job. He started putting on *tefillin*. He started getting a little religious. Then, one day, he said, or his wife told me nicely, “Your services are not needed anymore.” I said, “Thank you very much. I will continue with my mission.” My mission was to show him that there was a Hashem. When I first came there, he swore there’s no Hashem. Then he started believing in Hashem. He told me, yes, he sees there is something to it, but now that he’s better, he doesn’t need Hashem. What a pity! What a tragedy!

A person has to know their mission must be fulfilled, no matter what.

A COMMANDMENT TO CHOOSE LIFE

At the of Parshas Nitzavim we read about Moshe Rabbeinu, and how right before he died, he called together the Jewish people and told them: הַעֲדֵתִי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם וְאֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבִחְרַתְּ בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתְּךָ וְזַרְעֶךָ “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life - if you and your offspring would live” (Devarim 30:19).

The Netziv, the *rosh yeshivah* of the Volozhin Yeshivah, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (1816-1893) asks a question: How could you tell a person: “choose life so that you would live”? If he’s not interested in living, you need to tell him a different reason. How can you tell him, he should choose it so that he should live? It doesn’t make any sense. So what do you mean by “choose life”?

So the Netziv⁶ explains with the same *yesod*. Every single person has to fulfill his mission. If you see a person who is not choosing life, the Torah is still encouraging him to choose life. You know why? Because you have no choice. You will live, and you will fulfill your mission. You have no choice. Choose life now, so that you will live, it says in the *passuk*, and your children will live also.

What does it mean that “your children will live”? The Netziv explains that if a parent chooses not to choose the life that Hashem chose for him, you know what happens? The parent will fulfill his mission someday, that is guaranteed. The only difference will be, his children won't. He'll go to the next world, and his children will not fulfill the mission through him. They will have to come back again as children, and his children will also have to go through the turmoil.

Choose life, because if you choose the right path in this world, your children will also have a leg up and an advantage, and your children will also live in this world, instead of having to *drei zach* around and come back again and again until they fulfill their mission. This is the message.

WHAT STOPS US FROM WANTING TO DO OUR MISSION IN LIFE?

Now, why does a person not want to fulfill his mission? One reason is because a person becomes overwhelmed. A person becomes full of despair. A person has feelings of helplessness. He has feelings of failure. He has feelings of incompetence. He has

feelings that immobilize him, and he has feelings that overwhelm him, and he gives up. People raise their hands and give up.

Rosh Hashanah is called the beginning of the Days of Awe. Rosh Hashanah is associated, on one hand, with fear. We don't say *Hallel* on Rosh Hashanah like other *Yamim Tovim* because these are Days of Awe. On the other hand, on Rosh Hashanah, we have festive meals. Rosh Hashanah even nullifies a state of mourning. If a person is a mourner and it comes to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, he's not a mourner anymore because it's a holiday. How do we explain the fear and the *simchah*, the holiday aspect of Rosh Hashanah?

The answer is as follows. Take, for example, a person sentenced to a lifetime in prison, *rachamana litzlan*. One day, he hears that the prisons are so full, they're going to rehabilitate some of the people. You're going to come before

⁶ ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה. תני' בספרי פ' ראה שמא יאמרו ישראל האור ונתן לפנינו הקב"ה שני דרכים דרך החיים ודרך המות נלך באיזה מהם שנרצה ת"ל ובחרת בחיים משל לאדם שהיה יושב בפרשת דרכים והיו לפניו שני שבילים אחד שתחלתו מישור וסופו קוצים ויחד שתחלתו קוצים וסופו מישור. והיה מודיע את העוברים ושבים ואומר להם שאתם רואים שביל זה שתחלתו מישור בשנים ושלוש פסיעות אתה מהלך במישור וסופו לצאת בקוצים. ואתם רואים שביל זה שתחלתו קוצים בשנים ושלוש פסיעות אתה מהלך בקוצים וסופו לצאת במישור. כך א"ל משה לישראל אתם רואים את הרשעים שהם מצליחים בשלושה ימים הם מצליחים בעוה"ז וסופם לנדוח באחרונה שנא' כ"ל תהיה אחרית לרע וכו'. ולכאורה המשל אינו דומה לנמשל כלל. דלפי המשל בע"כ מיירי דשני שבילים מהלכים למקום א'. דב"ל"ז לא שי"ך עצה לעו"ש. והרי בנמשל כפי כן. אלא ביארו חז"ל בזה דבר גדול שדקדקו בזה המקרא ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה. אם אינו רוצה בחיים היאך אתה נותן טעם שיבחר בחיים כדי שיחיה. וע' ת"י שתרגם בחיים באורחא דחי' היא אורייתא. למען תחי' דתיתון בחיי' עלמא. אבל חז"ל פירשו דגם מי שחיב' כרת ונפשו מקולעת בכף הקלע. אינו לחלוטין ח"ו שהרי ודאי אינו דומה עונש חיב' כרת א' לחיב' כמה כריתות. ואם נאמר דכרת הוא לחלוטין מאי נ"מ לכרת א' לכמה כריתות. אלא כל כרת הוא לעת כפי משפטו. וסוף כל ח"כ לשוב למקור החיים. ולא ידח ממנו נדח. ומעתה הכל היאך לא מקום א'. ושי"ך העצה ובחרת בחיים. שמהא דבוק במקור החיים. למען תחיה אתה. שהרי לסוף בע"כ תחיה. הרי טוב שתחיה ברצונך הטוב. והיינו דתנן באתות פ"ד ואל יבטיחך יצר' ששאלו בית מוסד לך. פ"י שתהיה רחוק ממקור הנשמות צרה"ח וזה יהיה נוח לך. לא כן הוא אלא בע"כ אתה עתיד ליתן דין וחשבון לפני מלך מה"מ. ודין וחשבון אינו אלא כמה הוא מחויב לסבול אחר מותו. עד שישוב למקור החיים. והוסיף משה לומר וזרעך. עוד תועלת מבחירתך החיים. שגם זרעך יהיו בחיים. זרע כשר. משא"כ אם תלך בשרירות הלב יוכל להיות זרעו פסולים ובני גויה שאינם הולכים אחריו. והרי יהיה בודד גם אחר שישוב למקומו (העמק דבר, בדברים ל"ט)

a parole board. You're going to present yourself. You're going to say that you understand what you did wrong. You're going to renounce your former ways, and you're going to change your life. Plus, you promise if they let you out, you're going to make restitution to anybody you hurt, any families you damaged. You'll do anything. You're going to fix it up to the best of your ability. You're going to have to convince the parole board.

So you can be sure that anybody in that situation would be overcome with joy, but also overwhelmed with anxiety at the same time because he knows he has an opportunity to get out of the mess. He would prepare himself. He would ask, "Is there anybody who can help me prepare myself for this parole board? What should I say? What do they want to hear? What do they want to see me looking like?"

A person has to realize that this is an analogy for each and every one of us. Every single one of us is in jail. We are immobilized. By what? The Torah tells us that when a person chooses not to do the will of Hashem, and lives a life that's not in line with what Hashem wants us to do, walls go up around him. *Mechitzos*. These barriers surround you. They put you in your own jail, and it creates a jail. The only thing that's locked out of this jail is Hashem. All the garbage is contained in the jail and a person feels he can never get out. Then Hashem says, "On Rosh Hashanah, I'm going to give you a chance. Come before Me on Rosh Hashanah and say to Me as follows: 'Hashem this is a new year. You're renewing the world. I would like to be part of Your world in this new year.'" You know what Hashem says? "If you present yourself correctly, I'm going to take you out of this jail."

YOSEF GOT OUT OF JAIL ON ROSH HASHANAH FOR US!

The *gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (10b) says a very interesting statement.⁷ It says Yosef Hatzaddik, one of our great fathers, was let out of his prison on Rosh Hashanah. That's brought down in the *gemara* that discusses Rosh Hashanah. Of what relevance is that?

The answer is: The Jewish people go by different names. We're called Bnei Yisrael. We're called sons of Yaakov. We're called sons of Avraham. And we're called Bnei Yosef. We're called the sons of Yosef. You have to know that Yosef symbolizes the holiness, the fidelity, the commitment in the face of the harshest challenges that a human being could face and stick by Hashem. Yosef Hatzaddik was taken out of jail on Rosh Hashanah, to let us know that every single one of us has the ability to get out of his jail on Rosh Hashanah!

The *passuk* in *Tehillim* (34:23) says פודה ה' נפש עבדיו, Hashem redeems all those who are His *avadim*, who are His subjects, His servants. On Rosh Hashanah, we need to come to Hashem and say, "You are my *melech*. You are my king." By saying Hashem, You are my king, what I'm testifying is that, "Hashem, I'm your subject." And when a person testifies that he wants to be the subject of Hashem, Hashem takes you out of the prison on Rosh Hashanah.

I want to explain this point further. It's very important. Many people come to Rosh Hashanah perhaps sincerely. But you know what they don't realize? They think it's a get-out-of-jail-free card. It's not. Hashem takes them out of jail on Rosh Hashanah, and Hashem says, "Now I'm giving you ten days in Tishrei to

⁷ תגיא, רבי אליעזר אומר: בתשרי נברא העולם, בתשרי נולדו אבות, בתשרי מתו אבות, בפסח נולד יצחק, בראש השנה נפקדה שרה וחסה, בראש השנה יצא יוסף מבית האסורין.

show Me that you want to rectify and unload all the baggage that you picked up and got you into jail in the first place.” Here is a guy who gets out of jail. He says, “Eh, I got out of jail.” “Don’t forget, you have to do community service.” “Ah, forget about community service. I’m out of here. I’ll change my name. I’m moving out of state.”

I was once speaking to a young man who was on parole, and he got caught. I said, “What are you doing?!” He said, “I’m moving out of state.” I said to him, “Look at all the trouble in your life.” He said, “Nah, I’ll change my name.” I said, “You’re not interested in making amends.” Making amends means a person goes through Rosh Hashanah and now he says to Hashem, “I’m going to change my ways. I’m going to drop my baggage and I’m going to come back to You.”

That is the *pachad*. That is the fear a person is supposed to experience on Rosh Hashanah. A fear that’s based on anxiety because of the phenomenal opportunity that I am eligible for on this awesome day. By acknowledging that Hashem is my king, I can be taken out of jail. I can be given a new start.

Hashem opens up the lights for me. ה' אורי, אורי - זה ראש השנה. Hashem shows me the light on Rosh Hashanah, and Hashem says, “Now seek My salvation. Seek Yom Kippur.”

CURSES, BLESSINGS; FEAR, JOY, AND HOPE

A person has to know there’s a certain attitude, however, of how he must approach Hashem. I want to tell you this because it’s a very fundamental principle. When the Jewish people arrived in Eretz Yisrael, they underwent a special ceremony the first day they arrived. The Jewish nation was taken to a place called Mount *Grizim* and Mount *Eivel* where Hashem established a whole ceremony. Half the tribes were on one mountain and half the tribes on the other mountain. Some of them were in the middle. Hashem said like this: “I want you to pronounce the most basic *mitzvos*, eleven *mitzvos*, and I want you to emphasize these are the key *mitzvos*. These are keys to fulfillment of the whole Torah. I want that on one mountain you should say like this, ‘Blessed is the man or woman who fulfills this *mitzvah*,’ and on the second mountain you should say, ‘Cursed is the man or woman who doesn’t fulfill this *mitzvah*.”

But, if you look in the Torah, it only mentions the curses. It doesn’t mention the blessings. It only mentions the curses.

The Maharal (Rav Yehuda Loew, d. 1609), asks a question. Why does the Torah not mention blessings? He says, not only that, the blessings came first, and here the Torah skips the mention of the blessings and the Torah only mentions the curses.⁸

The Maharal says a very strange thing. He says this because the main point is the curses. The main commandment of Hashem was that the Jew should accept the Torah with the awareness of the negative consequences if he doesn’t fulfill the Torah.

⁸ ופתחו בברכה. דכתיב (פסוק כו) "ברכה וקללה", שמע מינה הברכה קודמת לקללה. וקשיא, למה נכתבו הקלות בפרשת כי תבא (להלן כז, טו-כו), ולא נכתבו הברכות. ונראה שעיקר המצוה היו הקלות, כדי שיהיו ישראל מקבלים את התורה באלה ובשבועה (רש"י להלן כז, כו), אלא שפותחין לעולם בזכות תחלה (ר' סנהדרין לג.), הקדים הכתוב הברכה. ולעולם עיקר המצוה הקלות, כדי שיקבלו התורה, וכו'. (גור אריה, דברים י"א:כ"ט)

Now, this sounds pretty harsh. Most of us would say this is harsh. What does Hashem have to give us curses for? Rav Hutner says an amazing concept over here. He explains this in a brilliant way, and I want everybody to listen to what he says. He says as follows. We can all picture a person who is a very good person who does no evil, really pursues good, and does good across the board. His whole service is a service that's being fulfilled out of the great pleasure that he gets from doing good. There are people who do good, and it gives them great pleasure. There are people that go to Africa and give their money over there. They give who knows what to people who are otherwise starving or dying. They do truly amazing kindnesses to people over there. But you know what Rav Hunter says? He says the whole service of that man is compared to someone who gives a donation. He's full of himself because he feels, "Ah! How much good I can do here!"

He says let me give you an analogy. Imagine we'd see two people writing out a check for \$100,000 to an organization. For one person, it's a donation, but for the other person, it's the repayment of the loan the organization extended to him. You know what the difference is? The guy who is giving the donation is smiling. "This organization is my favorite organization. This is one of my favorite charities. This is mine." He feels he's actually giving to the charity. The guy who is paying back the loan doesn't say, "Wow. I'm giving to this organization - yeah!" If the guy who is giving a donation, would not give it, would he feel it's a tragedy that he didn't give a donation? No. He's doing a positive action that's completely based on motivation, or something that gives him pleasure. He's happy and excited to give. But the fellow who is paying the loan, he's happy to get this obligation off his head. If not, he would feel a sense of tragedy, of going through life with a large obligation on his shoulders and never fulfilling it.

You can have one person, says Rav Hutner, who makes an absolute commitment to Hashem. "I'm going to do *mitzvos* because I love You, Hashem." That person walks around smiling. He is full of himself. And every *mitzvah* he does, he's doing it for Hashem out of the goodness of his heart. That person has never accepted the yoke of *mitzvos*. That person has never accepted the yoke of Hashem as his King. He has never acknowledged that Hashem is his king. He has never acknowledged that a *mitzvah* is a commandment. Accepting Hashem as your King, accepting Hashem as your commander means to say, "I'm under obligation. I understand that obligation, and if I will not fulfill that obligation, it will be a tragedy of tragedies." Sure, it's an opportunity for him, too. Sure, it's a great opportunity that Hashem chose to command him and not somebody else. True, it's a great opportunity that Hashem gave him all these wonderful commandments. But you have to know it's a yoke.

THE TRAGEDY OF MITZVOS NOT DONE

That's what Rosh Hashanah is. When the Maharal says that the main purpose of the *mitzvos* is to be done with an awareness of curses and not with blessings, what he means to say is this point. Not that we're trying to give you a fear factor. We're trying to instill in you the sense of obligation, the sense that if you don't do it, the tragedy of not performing your *mitzvos* - your obligation that you came to this world for - it is a tragedy of unknown proportions, of immense proportions. You must fulfill it. When a person says in the morning *שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד*, when on Rosh Hashanah he proclaims Hashem to be

his king, he says, "Hashem, You are my king." You know what he thinks? "Aren't I wonderful? Aren't I a great Jew, Hashem? I hope You appreciate this, Hashem. I'm looking out for You. Wow, what a nice person I am." You know how many Jews don't care about Hashem? That's a very wrong approach. The sense has to be: you must explain to yourself, you must clarify for yourself: "I am lucky that I have the awareness. I have the sense. I've been educated. I've been made aware. I've become aware of my obligations because of the immense proportions of the tragedy that would unfold, G-d forbid, if I wasn't here on Rosh Hashanah saying Hashem is my *melech*. That's my mission. That's what I must do."

A person has to know this is what Rosh Hashanah is about. The mission that Hashem gives me, I must do. If I don't fulfill my mission. If I don't overcome my challenges, ooooh. This is a tragedy of immense proportions. And if I fulfill my mission, *baruch Hashem!*

Here is a guy that's given a job, a very, very tough job. If he doesn't fulfill it, he's going to lose his job. But if he fulfills it, ah! Then he's going to feel good. There's going to be a bonus after. Then the mission is fulfilled. The *simchah* comes after the mission is fulfilled. You don't jump up and down when you're in the middle of fulfilling the mission. When you understand the stakes of your mission, when you understand what the role of a Jewish woman is, when you understand the role of a Jewish man, when you understand the role of a Jewish child, when you have children and are obligated to educate them and to educate yourself, of course, it's an amazing *brachah*. But you have to understand it's not just a *brachah*. It's not just, "Oh, I'm so happy I'm doing this." If you don't do it, you have to understand it's an immense tragedy. That has to give you amazing *pachad*. That has to instill within you fear and anxiety. Not an anxiety that immobilizes you. Not an anxiety that makes you helpless. Not one that gives you a feeling of nothingness and incompetence. You have to understand. You have to have feelings of hope because: "I have a chance. If Hashem didn't think I had a chance, I wouldn't be here anymore." If I'm still living one more year, that means last year Hashem felt every single one of us still had an opportunity to fulfill the mission for which he came to this world.

That's Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah you have to make that choice to choose to hold feelings of *simchah*, mingled with feelings of fear and anxiety and hope.

THE JOY OF ROSH HASHANAH: FULFILLING ONE'S MISSION

Now, sometimes a person comes to Rosh Hashanah with high anxiety, and he feels nervous, and somebody says, "Are you happy to be here on Rosh Hashanah?" and he says, "No. It doesn't make me feel comfortable." Shame on him! Because you have a mission to fulfill. You know what the upside of this mission is? You know what the blessing of this mission is? Do you know what the understanding of being a partner with Hashem and actually fulfilling your purpose is? Have you ever heard of a guy who has a challenging job and he's not looking to get to the other end to be able to reap the benefits and to reap the *simchah* and to sing the *shirah*, the song to Hashem?! "*Baruch Hashem*, I finally fulfilled my mission." The *simchah* comes afterwards. But while you're in Rosh Hashanah, you're happy you still have the mission. You're in an anxiety mode, but that's because you're motivated to make sure to use every minute. Throughout Rosh Hashanah, you should also be full of your mission. When you

are getting a little tired think to yourself, “Hashem, I accept that You are my King. There are things I don’t like, but Hashem, You are the King. You know what’s best for me. You know what I need to fulfill my mission. You know exactly the conditions that I need to be presented with. You know the situations that I absolutely require to fulfill my mission.”

Maybe if we would have undertaken our mission last year and lived up to the challenges, maybe Hashem would have been able to give us easier conditions this year. Maybe for the next step of the mission, maybe the continuant phase of the mission, Hashem could say, “We’ll try a positive phase next year since I see you went through it.”

You have to remember the following thing. Rav Moshe Feinstein *zecher tzaddik levrachah* - was perhaps the world Jewry’s greatest leader in the last twenty-five, thirty years, or longer, the world’s leading halachic authority - actually asks a *kasha* on the pasuk we mentioned earlier. The passuk says “choose life so that you will live.” Rav Moshe asks, isn’t it obvious that if a person chooses life, he will live? Why does the Torah say “choose life in order you should live”?

Rav Moshe Feinstein says you should know the following. When Hashem gives us a mission to fulfill *mitzvos*, it’s not a personal involvement between me and Hashem. I am a social animal. Human beings are social beings. We’re part of a world. When I do a *mitzvah*, the purpose of me fulfilling my *mitzvah* has a dual role. It’s between me and Hashem, and it serves as an example for others. Every time a person does a *mitzvah*, he puts on *tefillin* in the morning, he thinks it’s a private kind of affair. A person keeps Shabbos. He thinks, “It’s my business whether I do *mitzvos*.” Here is a guy who gives *tzedakah*. “I give *tzedakah* in secret because it’s my personal business.” If that would be the reason, it would be fine. Sadly, it’s not the reason. Most of the time people want to keep their *tzedakah* secret because they don’t want people to know how little they give. That’s the reason. But they heard it’s a very important thing to give *tzedakah* in secret, so they hide behind that *mitzvah*. “Ah! I give *tzedakah* in secret.” A person has to think what his real motivation is.

BEQUEATH A POSITIVE FLAVOR IN MITZVOS

A person has to know when we give *tzedakah* or fulfill any other *mitzvah*, the point is, number one, to fulfill the commandment of Hashem. Additionally, it’s to demonstrate responsibility and to serve as an example for others. Hashem doesn’t want a Jew to do *mitzvos* just “between him and Hashem.” Hashem wants a Jew to do *mitzvos* so that other people who are involved with him will come to be infused by him with a passion, with an enthusiasm and a yearning to do *mitzvos* also. Rav Moshe Feinstein says that when a father does *mitzvos*, Hashem tells him, “Choose life in such a fashion that your children will want to go in this way. Make sure when you do the *mitzvah* you do it in such a fashion that your children want to do it.” Here is a mother preparing for for Shabbos or Yom Tov, doing *chessed*, hosting people, doing amazing kindnesses. You know what you hear sadly many times from men and women? “Oy vey. Another *mitzvah*.” Here is a guy knocking on the door, and the father is sitting on the couch. “Who is there?” It is a collector. And all of a sudden the father says, “Oy vey, another one. More *tzedakah*. When is this going to stop?” You know what that is going to teach that child? He’s going to detest charity. He’s going to detest Judaism. He’s not going to want to have anything to do with it. When he hears his father saying, “Enough is enough.” The kid is going to say, “I’m not going to do this. I’m going to put myself in suffering?”

Here is a guy on Shabbos who hears his parents say, “Oy, Shabbos. You know what I used to do on Shabbos? I used to go to the beach. I used to go and drive.” A woman once told me, “You know what my Shabbosos were? I used to wash my car.” I said, “Wash your car? It sounds pretty boring to me.” But for her, Shabbos was a day when she would wash her car. Somebody else used to play tennis. Somebody said, “Oh, I used to play golf every Shabbos.” I remember one woman told me, “My husband is never going to keep Shabbos. That’s his religion. He plays golf on Shabbos.” I said, “Maybe your husband doesn’t know about the beauty of Shabbos.” *Baruch Hashem*, that man discovered the beauty of Shabbos and never played golf again on Shabbos.

A person has to realize the Jewish person’s role when doing *mitzvos*. When you sit on Rosh Hashanah and somebody says, “Yes, I’m nervous.” You *should* be nervous. What are you nervous about? “I’m hoping I get out of jail. I’m hoping I could break my sleep state. I’m hoping I can break my involvement in my pursuit to distance myself from Hashem. I’m hoping I can break myself out and get a new chance to renew myself, to start again and free myself from the bonds and the clutches of my urges, and to be able to pursue Hashem with enthusiasm and passion.” A person says, “Wow. You’re happy on Rosh Hashanah?” One guy says, “For sure, I’m happy. I don’t have work today. I’m not going to work.” One guy says, “I like the holiday meals. I don’t take the holiday seriously.” A *shoteh*, a real fool also. Take it seriously. You *should* be happy. You should be happy about the hope that Hashem is demonstrating to you!

Rav Moshe Feinstein said this what the passuk is teaching us. Sadly, he says, Jews did not listen to this directive. That’s why so many of us, he says, had grandparents who were very, very religious Jews, but their grandchildren all went off the *derech*. He says why did they go off? You know why? Because Yiddishkeit was not a positive experience for them. They couldn’t transmit the joy. When you see Yiddishkeit as a positive experience it carries on to the next generation. I remember as a child being in the presence of individuals for whom Yiddishkeit was a very negative experience. I didn’t understand why exactly it was negative, but I was getting that feeling from them, “Yeah, it’s negative.” And I remember explicitly being in the presence of individuals who had such an enthusiasm, who expressed such a passion, such a yearning that at times it filled me too. I wanted some of that. I didn’t know what it was. If you would have asked me, “What are you looking for?” I would say, “I don’t know. But they seem to be enjoying themselves.” There seems to be something here; it’s palpable. You can feel the fire. You can taste the holiness. It creates a mood.

We have to create that mood on the day of Rosh Hashanah.

A TEFILLAH REQUEST TO REPEAT ON ROSH HASHANAH

Don’t focus on the apple in the honey. Don’t get caught up in the childish things, the superficial things. Concentrate on the holiness of this day. Yes, it’s a long prayer. Yes. And most people are not used to praying at all, and today, you have that long prayer. It’s a double whammy. But think about this long prayer. Spend time. Get yourself a *machzor* and say this idea over and over and over to yourself. Say it with your mouth.

Say it over, “Hashem, I want to get out of jail. I want to free myself from my bonds. I want to get rid of my ego that destroys me. The ego that’s eating at me. I truly want to shed it. I want to give it up, Hashem. I want to get past it. Please, Hashem, take all the desires that inflame my passion and my enthusiasm and free me from those desires. Give me a new start. Let it be that Hashem is my *Melech* and let it be that my enthusiasm and my passion for Hashem is renewed.”

Ask Hashem to let you do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur. That’s why you can’t do

teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah. It's impossible. It's like saying to a man in jail, "Why don't you make restitution to all the people you killed." Do you know what the answer is? "I'm in jail. I can't. Let me get out of jail first. Then I can show you I want to make restitution. I can show you I want to help. But if I'm in jail now, I can't do anything for you."

On Rosh Hashanah, you first have to get out of jail. Say over and over to yourself this *passuk*, פודה ה' נפש עבדיו, "Hashem redeems and releases from jail the soul of His servants."

When you're listening to that *shofar* blowing, you should feel immense joy. "Hashem, I'm proud that today I am part of Your nation, and I am part of those people who are consciously acknowledging that You are my King by blowing the *shofar*." That's the act of coronating Hashem as my king. "I am part of this great people, and I am doing Your *mitzvah*, and I'm sorry for all the years in the past that either I couldn't stand doing this *mitzvah*, and it had no meaning for me. It had no value for me. Maybe I didn't hear of the *mitzvah*, and it was a tragedy. I was living my life lost upon the high seas, and now I'm with You Hashem. I have great joy in that *mitzvah*, great joy in the fact that Hashem led me back." The only reason you're back is because Hashem led you back.

May we all, each and every one of us, have a renewal and merit to do *teshuvah* within the days allotted to us until Yom Kippur. Then without a doubt, all of us and all of Klal Yisrael will have a *shanah tovah*, and hopefully, this will be the year of the *Geulah Sheleimah*, with the coming of Mashiach, *bimheirah beyaminu, Amen!*

✧ IN SUMMARY ✧

From the dramatic story of Yonah Hanavi, we learn that a person cannot escape the mission that Hashem gave him. If we want to figure out the mission that we came to this world for, one way is by noticing the recurring challenges to our *avodas Hashem*, and another way is when we have an unusual pull towards fulfilling a certain *mitzvah*. The Chafetz Chaim says that we are often faced with such a challenge that we believe that there's no way we can *mesaken* that challenge or that *mitzvah* - and we give up hope of ever improving. That is a mistake because Hashem is there to help us overcome the challenge. In fact, we are commanded to choose life. The fact that Yosef Hatzaddik was released from jail on Rosh Hashanah reveals the potential of Rosh Hashanah as a day when we can ask Hashem to take us out of the jail of our lives. On Rosh Hashanah, we hold two conflicting emotions in our hearts - the joy of potential freedom, and the anxiety and fear of judgment. We should ask to be freed from whatever weighs us down so that we can serve Hashem and accept Him as our king. The fact that *avodas Hashem* is an obligation helps us understand our role, which is accepting the mission that Hashem gives each of us. We each become a partner with Hashem; when we are fulfilling such an enormous mission we are serious and focused. Yes, only after the mission is fulfilled can we experience the ultimate joy of a job well done. But we also must experience joy on Rosh Hashanah itself because of the potential, hope, and confidence that Hashem will help us be successful in this mission and judge us favorably. Being obligated to do *mitzvos* reveals to us that every *mitzvah* we do has a dual role: It's between me and Hashem, and it is an example for others to serve Hashem with a *geshmak* and a yearning to do *mitzvos*. Like passing on our enthusiasm to our children. Practically, there is a lot we can do to create a balanced Rosh Hashanah mood of seriousness and happiness. This week, I will (*bli neder*) prepare for Rosh Hashanah by doing some of the following: think about the holiness of the day; ensure I have a good *machzor*; repeat, "Hashem, I want to get out of the jail of my ego and my desires"; ask Hashem to help me make a new start and that I can accept Hashem as my *melech*; ask Hashem to help me do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur; repeat the *passuk*, פודה ה' נפש עבדיו, be ready to listen to the *shofar* and be proud to be part of Klal Yisrael that acknowledges Hashem as the king by blowing the *shofar*.

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