

Chesed Hashem – The Key to Yom Kippur

יום כפור

The Sefer Hachinuch writes (Mitzvah 405), that the purpose of blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is to awaken us. Being that Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgement, “It is therefore necessary for each person to awaken his nature to beseech Hashem for mercy regarding his sins. This is because Hashem is compassionate and merciful, and bears sin, and cleanses those who return to Him wholeheartedly.”

It seems through a careful read of the Sefer Hachinuch, that the purpose of the Shofar is not to awaken a person to the reality and seriousness of the day of judgement. Rather it is to stir a person to beg Hashem for forgiveness. According to the Sefer Hachinuch a person can be fully aware of the seriousness of the day, yet be unresponsive and disconnected from this reality. The seriousness of the day can create a sense of dread and despair that overwhelms a person, and paralyzes him from responding. It is therefore necessary to awaken a person to respond to this reality.

“Through deepening our recognition of Hashem’s infinite kindness, we will be able to spring into action”

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter taught us that due to our many sins, the Shofar no longer has the power to stir us to change without limud Hamussar. As we approach Yom Kippur, a day in which our Tefillos and Teshuva are critical in order for us to merit in judgement, how can we generate a response and not be shut down by fear? What can we do if we have not learned enough Mussar to be stirred and awakened by the Shofar? What can we focus on to awaken us from our slumber, and beg Hashem for mercy?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in Mishlei in the third Perek, “That a person has to trust in Hashem’s abundant mercy and kindness. He should believe in the Middos of Hashem, and trust in them. Like דוד המלך said, ואני בחסדך בטחתי – I trust in your chesed...The hope that emanates from this trust won’t be equal to the fear, and when one encounters a צרה or fear of sin, the hope will overpower the fear. This is because the kindness of Hashem will overpower any sin, and Hashem is compassionate toward anyone who humbles himself and asks for mercy.”

From this Rabbeinu Yonah we can construct a formula that can enable us to not be overwhelmed by the fear, and rather beseech Hashem for mercy. First, a person must deepen his trust and belief in Hashem's kindness in the abstract, before he is facing any personal tragedy or judgement. It seems that to develop this hope after being confronted by the fear would be too difficult. However, once this trust is developed, even if a person encounters a personal tragedy or fear of sin, his hope will overcome that fear. This methodology can help us approach Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur without being frozen by fear. Through deepening our recognition of Hashem’s infinite kindness, we will be able to spring into action rather than cower in fear. We will be able to beg for mercy and face our shortcomings.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא