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THE DYNAMICS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT: UNDERSTANDING REWARD, PUNISHMENT, AND ATONEMENT

WRITTEN BY **RABBI SHAY TAHAN**

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While Hashem's judgment is profound and concealed from us, our sages (Chazal) have provided us with some insights into the general principles of how Hashem judges people. The period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur presents an ideal opportunity to contemplate and study these concepts, giving us a glimpse of what is at stake during this crucial time of introspection and repentance.

We will begin by categorizing the population into primary groups and then further subdivide them accordingly. There are three separate judgments occurring at distinct times: Rosh Hashanah, after an individual's passing and before תחיית המתים resurrection (Tosfot R.H. page 15,2). On Rosh Hashanah, people are primarily assessed within three overarching categories: Tzadikim (the righteous), Reshaim (the wicked), and Benoniim (those of intermediate righteousness). Among the Rishonim, there are few opinions regarding the interpretation of this concept.

While the Rambam (Teshuva 3), seems to interpret Chazal's words quite literally, stating that Tzadikim are inscribed for a year of life on Rosh Hashanah, Reshaim for the opposite, and the verdict for Benoniim is left pending until Yom Kippur. Some argue (tosfot) that the inscription of Tzadikim and Reshaim on Rosh Hashanah pertains to whether individuals will merit the next world, not the current one. In this view, all three categories have their books opened on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur. This perspective aligns with the Rema's statement that we bless one another with the hope of being written in the Book of Life, as the sealing is not completed for anyone on Rosh Hashanah, according to this opinion.

According to the Ramban and the Ran, the distinction between Tzadikim and Reshaim carries a different meaning. In their view, Tzadikim are those individuals who were sealed on Rosh Hashanah for a life without regard to whether they are genuinely righteous or not, while Reshaim are the opposite, signifying those who were sealed for a less virtuous path. According to this perspective, each person

should consider themselves in the "Benoni" category, the intermediate group. Consequently, they should strive to do everything in their power to ensure they are sealed in the Book of Life on Yom Kippur, recognizing the potential for change and improvement.

The Inscription of the Next World: Understanding the Process:

The judgment for the next world, which pertains to the life of eternity, follows a distinct pattern: Tzadikim are granted entry into the world to come, while Reshaim are destined for Gehenom (a place of punishment).

Tzadikim:

Even Tzadikim, who are inscribed for the world to come, still need to atone for the sins they committed during their lifetime. Hashem administers this purification process in this world, using various means of punishment to cleanse them thoroughly before they enter the next world. This process ensures that they are entirely free of sin and ready to receive immediate rewards upon their arrival in the world to come. (רמב"ן שער הגמול).

This explanation sheds light on an age-old question: when we witness a righteous person enduring suffering, we often wonder why this is happening. The answer lies in Hashem's great kindness and chesed. Suffering is a means through which Hashem purifies the righteous, ensuring their complete readiness for the world to come.

Benoniim:

The judgment for those of intermediate righteousness (Benoniim) concerning the next world differs from their judgment in this world. In this world, as we explained, their fate is pending until Yom Kippur. Yet, when it comes to the next world, if a person falls into the intermediate category, they are excused from immediate judgment. This is made possible through Hashem's boundless mercy מטה כלפי טון. There is, however, an exception to the aforementioned rule: the "Benoni" who has

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never worn Tefilin does not receive that leniency. (This underscores the importance of possessing a kosher pair of Tefilin and not solely relying on a merchant from Israel who appears to be religious.). Some contend that it's not just Tefilin but any positive Mitzvah that one was hesitant to fulfill throughout their entire life.

In such a case, they undergo judgment and face punishment for their sins, without receiving the above leniency. After completing their punishment, they ultimately merit entry into Olam Haba (the world to come).

Benoniim are individuals whose sins are considered equivalent to their merits, but they still need to atone for their sins. In their case, the punishment is primarily experienced in this world. Hashem administers this punishment through various means, including suffering, much like how righteous people may also undergo suffering as a form of atonement for their transgressions. According to the Sefer Hachinuch (mitsva 311), a Benoni encompasses all individuals who fall between the category of those who are completely righteous, free from any sins, and those who are entirely wicked, devoid of any merits.

Accordingly, it's easy to understand why we all prepare for Yom Kippur, as the majority of us fall into this intermediate category.

Reshaim:

As we discussed, the Reshaim undergo punishment for their sins. Typically, the duration of punishment is 12 months. However, the judgment for "Reshaim" who have never worn Tefilin is much harsher. They are subjected to punishment for 12 months, and beyond that period, their soul does not merit the next world.

Extremely Wicked Individuals:

There is another category of "Reshaim" who are judged even more severely and carry the penalty of eternal punishment. The following (Rambam Teshuva 3,6) individuals do not have a portion in the world to come. Rather, their souls are cut off and they are judged for their great wickedness and sins, forever: the *Minim*, the *Epicursim*, those who deny the Torah, those who deny the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the Mashiach, those who rebel against Hashem, those who cause the many to sin, those who separate themselves from the community, those who proudly commit sins in public as Yehoyakim did, those who betray Jews to gentile authorities, those who cast fear upon the people for reasons other than the

service of Hashem,

Murderers,

slanderers,

one who extends his foreskin so as not to appear circumcised.

Exploring the intricate definitions and conditions for each of the categories mentioned above exceeds the scope of this essay, but interested individuals can find in-depth information about them in the works of the Rambam and related sources.



Four levels of sin:

Chazal categorized sins into four levels:

- 1) If a person violates a regular positive commandment (not punishable by excision - כרת) such as not wearing Tefillin, not reciting the Shema prayer, or failing to attach tzitzit to a four-cornered garment - as soon as they complete the repentance process, the sin is forgiven.
- 2) If a person transgresses a regular negative commandment, one that is not explicitly punishable by excision or one of the death penalties decreed by the rabbinical court, such as consuming pork or cooking meat with milk - they must repent. However, the sin is only forgiven after the arrival of Yom Kippur, and not immediately at the moment of repentance.
- 3) If a person violates a commandment, whether positive or negative, explicitly punishable by excision or one of the court-imposed death penalties, such as failing to offer the Passover sacrifice in its appointed time at the Bet-Hamikdash, eating chamets on Pesach, or engaging in adultery, among others, all of which incur the penalty of excision, or desecrating the Sabbath - even after they have repented, the sin is not completely forgiven until they experience suffering corresponding to their sin, which will complete their atonement.
- 4) If a person profanes the name of Hashem - חילול השם, repentance, Yom Kippur, and suffering are only preparations for atonement. The sin is only entirely forgiven on the day of their death.

Remedy:

How can one rectify sins that incur such harsh punishments? Rabenu Yona, in Shaarei Teshuva (chapter 4), suggests that individuals in the third category, those who have committed sins warranting capital punishment, such as desecrating the Sabbath, should engage in acts of charity, generously assisting the poor in various ways. Additionally, they should intensify their Torah study beyond their usual routine. Furthermore, those who violated the fourth category, which pertains to desecrating Hashem, can seek rectification by assisting others in sanctifying Hashem and His Torah in public and by spreading awareness of His power and the glory of His majestic presence.

MERCIFULL: THE ART OF FORGIVING- TOMER DEVORAH PART 3.

Continuing with the profound insights from the Sefer Tomer Devorah, it's worth highlighting the concluding words of the first chapter, which hold great relevance in the days leading up to Yom Kippur. Rabbi Cordovero writes: a person should resemble his Creator, which are the highest traits of mercy. And their special quality is that just as a person acts below, so too will he merit to open for himself the highest trait above - exactly as he acts, so will there be a flow from above. And he will cause that trait to shine in the world.

One should ensure that these thirteen traits do not slip from their mind. It is essential to keep reciting the verse and ingrain it in one's memory so that it serves as a constant reminder. When a situation arises where one needs to apply one of these traits, they will recall and say, "Indeed, this matter hinges on trait X, and I am determined not to deviate from it, thereby safeguarding this trait from disappearing and fading from the world."

Paying close attention to these words reveals that imitating these attributes yields two significant benefits. First, as we

MERCIFULL: THE ART OF FORGIVING- TOMER DEVORAH PART 3.

discussed earlier, Hashem will reciprocate in kind toward us. Second, our actions help perpetuate these traits in the world. In other words, because of our practice of Chesed, this attribute endures, sustaining the world's existence.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 17,2) states that Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that whenever the people of Israel enact the 13 attributes of mercy, they will be forgiven. Commentators question why it uses the word "do" instead of "say," and they explain that we are actually required to put these attributes into action, meaning to implement them in the same manner that Hashem does.

Sefer Tomer Devorah instructs us on how to put the principles and teachings of the 13 attributes into practice. Through this practice, individuals not only deepen their understanding of how Hashem assesses them but also encounter divine correspondence in the way Hashem responds to their actions.

This signifies that the manner in which we put those attributes into practice and interact with others reflects how Hashem responds to us. If we show great mercy to our friends, Hashem will extend abundant mercy to us.

עובר על פשע - The third attribute

The third attribute, "And passes over transgression,"- עובר על פשע, holds profound significance, as Rabbi Cordovero explains. He emphasizes that the sins one commits leave a deep stain, which must not be allowed to persist as it soils the divine presence of Hashem. Hence, it becomes imperative to cleanse and remove this stain. Who undertakes this task? It is Hashem Himself who must remove the stain.

Hashem does not delegate this cleaning task to a messenger; He personally takes it upon Himself. This should serve as a powerful warning to individuals not to sin, for it illustrates how serious it is when one's actions necessitate that Hashem Himself cleans up after their mess.

Imagine a person who is invited to the White House and, while sitting in a meeting by the Oval Office, starts eating fruits and carelessly tossing the pits and peels onto the floor. Since there was no one else in the meeting with the president to clean the mess, this person witnesses the president himself bending down to clean up the mess because he dislikes having his office in disarray. How deplorable it would be if this individual then continues with the same behavior, fully aware that it will cause the president to keep cleaning up after him.

Now, if we can grasp how disrespectful and inappropriate this would be in the presence of a mere human president, how much more should we be mindful of our conduct in the presence of Hashem, our Creator.

לשארית נחלתו - The fourth attribute

The fourth attribute, "To the remnant of His inheritance," unveils

the profound way in which Hashem relates to His people. It signifies Hashem's deep sentiment, almost as if He is saying, "What can I do with Israel? They are My relatives—flesh and blood of My own." They are akin to a beloved spouse to Hashem. Hashem affectionately refers to them as "My daughter," "My sister," and

even "My Mother." Hashem shares an intimate and profound closeness with them. As Hashem expresses, "If I were to punish them, then the pain would be upon Me," as conveyed in Isaiah (63:9), "In all their distress, the distress was to Him."

This fourth attribute differs from the first three because while the earlier attributes explain how Hashem operates in this world with us, this attribute

sheds light on why He does so. Hashem's compassionate behavior toward us is rooted in our relationship with Him. It can be likened to a parent who receives a phone call from the school principal complaining about their child's behavior. Instead of immediately agreeing that the child misbehaved, the parent instinctively seeks reasons to excuse the behavior. They might consider that the child didn't get enough sleep or that someone at school might have bothered them. The parent might even entertain the thought that the principal has the wrong child or is exaggerating the situation. This is because the deep love parents have for their children makes it difficult for them to readily see their faults. Similarly, Hashem's profound connection with us leads Him to act with great compassion.

We learn from this attribute that we should treat others with the same compassion and understanding that we extend to our own children. This perspective is particularly significant when we recognize that, in a spiritual sense, every Jew is connected and related, as each person shares a part of their soul with us.

לא החזיק לעד אפו: The fifth attribute

Up to this point, we've learned how Hashem acts in this world and why He does so. The next attribute teaches us about Hashem's approach during these actions. It's important to clarify that Hashem does not have emotions in the way humans do, and according to the Rambam, He may not have emotions at all. However, we are referring to the way Hashem communicates with us to provide some understanding of how we should act.

The fifth attribute, "He does not hold on to His fury forever," signifies a distinct aspect. It emphasizes that even when a person clings to their sin, Hashem does not perpetually cling to His anger. Even if there is a brief period when He holds onto it, it is not eternal. Ultimately, Hashem nullifies His anger, even if the individual does not repent.

We learn from here that we, too, should not harbor anger towards others after reconciling with them. Instead, once we've resolved our differences, we should aim to maintain the same positive feelings we had towards them before the conflict arose.



STRATEGIES FOR A FAVORABLE VERDICT: INSIGHTS FOR YOM KIPPUR

The approaching day of Yom Kippur carries great significance. While the primary means to secure a favorable verdict involves self-improvement and repentance for our sins, Chazal have also imparted additional strategies that, when employed, can greatly contribute to a positive outcome and our inscription in the Book of Life.

Chazal convey (Rosh Hashana 17b), "One who overlooks the

wrongs done to them will likewise find their sins overlooked in heaven." Rashi explains this concept, illustrating how, in moments of insult or harm, our instinctual reaction might be to retaliate. However, if we choose to remain silent, Hashem reciprocates this restraint by forgiving our own sins. This is an embodiment of the principle of "מידה כנגד מידה" (measure for measure). It's crucial to note that this works effectively only when one

STRATEGIES FOR A FAVORABLE VERDICT: INSIGHTS FOR YOM KIPPUR

exercises modesty and humility in their restraint, rather than other motives, such as retaliating more effectively or considering the matter beneath them.

Genuine forgiveness is grounded in acknowledging and maintaining humility and refraining from arrogance.

Another strategy for securing a favorable judgment is based on the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 16a), which teaches, "A year that begins poorly will end richly." This concept extends beyond material wealth and encompasses all that a person requires in life. Chazal assure us that if we appear "poor" before Hashem on Rosh Hashana, expressing our neediness through heartfelt prayer, Hashem will have mercy on us and bless us with a good year. Even if we possess what we need, we should approach Hashem with an attitude of humility, as if we were truly in need.

Furthermore, we can work toward a favorable judgment by looking at others favorably, even in situations that may appear sinful.



The Gemara (Shabbat 127b) teaches, "One who judges their friend favorably will be judged favorably by heaven." The extent to which we apply this principle to others reflects how it will be applied to us. An example is provided through the story of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer, demonstrating that understanding and forgiving the negative actions of others can result in a favorable heavenly judgment.

Lastly, we must not underestimate the significance of the primary mitzvah on Yom Kippur: the call to Teshuva (repentance) and heartfelt prayer. Embracing Teshuva symbolizes our return to Hashem and His ways. Through sincere Teshuva and heartfelt prayers, we invoke Hashem's mercy. Our commitment to these actions is crucial in obtaining a favorable judgment.

May we all be granted a favorable judgment and a sweet new year.

האם הקב"ה תמיד שומר?

שנות חייהם שהוקצבו להם. יש שיאריכו או יקצרו את ימיהם לפי מעשיהם, דהיינו מצוותיו ועוונותיו מהזמן שנקצב לו, ודבר זה נידון בראש השנה.

יתכן לפעמים שאדם שנקצב לו שיחיה עוד שנים הרבה, אף על פי כן ימות בלא עת במגפה או במלחמה. ודבר זה תלוי באדם עצמו שלא יכניס עצמו למקום סכנה, ומשום כן פסק הרמ"א (יו"ד סי' קטז ס"ה) שיש לברוח מעיר שיש בה מגפה.

וכבר האריך בספר החינוך (מצוה תקמו) לבאר שיש לנו לשמור עצמנו לבלי יקרנו מוות בפשיעתנו, ולא נסכן את עצמנו על סמך הנס, שכבר אמרו רבותינו שכל הסומך על הנס אין עושים לו נס. והסביר שלכן התורה ציוותה כשיוצאים למלחמה ואפילו היא מלחמת השם יתברך לעשות כל השתדלות על פי דרך הטבע על מנת להשמר מהמוות.

על פי הדברים האלו למדנו שאין לאדם לומר שאכניס את עצמי למקום סכנה והקב"ה ישמור עלי, שהרי אין כך המידה. והסביר החובות הלבבות שלעיתים אדם ניזוק והוא כעין עונש על זה שלא שמר את עצמו כציווי התורה: ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם.

ולכן אף שיתכן שראש הממשלה היה צריך להתנסח בצורה אחרת, מכובדת יותר כלפי שמיא, אולם גם אלו שצווחו עליו היו צריכים לדעת שכוונתו היתה לטובה, שהרי הוא יודע כמה המקום מסוכן ואחריות לשלום הציבור מוטלת על כתיפיו, וקל לאדם שאין לו שום אחריות לראות הכל כשחור ולכן ולצעוק על כל מה שלא נראה לו שזה כפירה וכדומה.

שלום לרבנים. ראש הממשלה עורר סערה בדבריו על הנוסעים לאומן לראש השנה, וכתב בהודעה רשמית שבצל המלחמה המתמשכת באוקריינה יש לדעת שהקב"ה לא תמיד הגן עלינו, גם לא על אדמת אירופה ועל אדמת אוקראינה. דבריו מיד ניתפסו בציבור החרדי כדברי כפירה ממש והרבה מהנציגים החרדים בממשלה גינו אותו בחריפות, וביחוד שבראש השנה נקבע מי יחיה ומי ימות, ואיך ישתנה גזירת שמים. לעומת זאת הרבה טענו שלפעמים יש הסתר פנים ואז מגיעות גזירות רעות. אבקש לסדר את הדברים אם אפשר.

שלום וברכה ושנה טובה ומבורכת.

ברוך הוא וברוך שמו שלום לרבבות עם ישראל שביקרו באוקריינה, ויהי רצון שנזכה כולנו לשנה טובה ומבורכת.

אכן יש לעיין בשאלתכם ולראות אם באמת דברי ראש הממשלה הינם לחלוטין דברי כפירה או שיש בהם מן האמת. ובודאי שהדברים נשמעים מתריסים בצורה ובאופן שהם נאמרו, אולם אנו דנו בתוכן הענין בלבד.

בפשטות אכן בתחילת השנה נגזר על כל אחד אם יחיה או אם ימות, כדברי רבותינו בגמרא (ראש השנה טז, ב), אולם יש לדעת שהדברים אינם פשוטים כל כך. הרשב"ש (הובא בפתחי תשובה יו"ד סימן קטז סק"ח) האריך בשאלה זו ותורף דבריו הם שכל אדם נידון לאחד משלושה אפשרויות הבאות:

ישנם שהוקצבו להם מספר שנות חיים על פי הרכב גופם, ואז אם זכו ישלימו את

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