YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**YHE-HOLIDAY: SPECIAL ROSH HASHANA 5777 SHIUR**

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**In memory of Batya Furst z"l
Niftera 28 Elul 5765.
Dedicated by her family.**

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 **“Remember Us with Favor”**

**Harav Yehuda Amital *zt”l***

Translated by Kaeren Fish

The Holy One, blessed be He, said, “Pour water before Me on Sukkot so that you will be blessed with rain throughout the year. And say before Me on Rosh HaShana the Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, and Shofarot: Malkhuyot – so that you proclaim Me King over you, and Zikhronot – so that your remembrance will rise favorably before Me, and how will you say them? With the shofar.” (Rosh HaShana 16a)

In our Rosh HaShana prayers we ask, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You.” This request is difficult to understand: God forgets nothing. What, then, is this “favorable remembrance” that we ask for? It certainly does not mean that God should remember only the positive things we have done, while disregarding the acts for which we are deserving of punishment. “The memory of every being comes before You – each person’s acts and his purpose and the path that he chooses and follows, the thoughts and the plans of all mankind.” God remembers everything!

The truth is, even though we say, “Nothing is forgotten before the throne of Your glory, and nothing is hidden from Your eyes,” it seems that sometimes God does, in fact, “forget.” This is not the act of forget- ting of ordinary mortals, but rather a form of forgiveness. The Gemara (Berakhot 32b) teaches that God promises Israel that He will forget the golden calf: “These too shall be forgotten” (Is. 49:15).

But if this divine “forgetting” really means forgiveness, then it would be more appropriate to say, “Forgive us,” rather than, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You.” It seems, then, that when we ask, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance,” we are speaking of God’s way of running the world. To understand this better, let us consider the words of Rambam:

Every person has both merits and sins…. This reckoning is not based only on the number of merits and sins, but also on their magnitude…. This reckoning is carried out according to the wisdom of the Knowing God. He knows how to weigh the merits against the sins.” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 3:1–2)

An individual’s personality is not expressed only through his good deeds or his sins; there is more to a person than that. Other elements affect his conduct, and they should also be considered when he is judged. God remembers man and his actions; He remembers and judges “each person’s acts and his purpose and the path that he chooses and follows.” But He also knows everything that influences a person’s behavior: his childhood, his environment, his family, the challenges he faces, etc. This would appear to be the “remembrance” that we refer to when we say, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You.”

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In Gemara Rosh HaShana we find:

Why does the High Priest not wear his golden garments when he enters the Holy of Holies to perform the service? Because a prosecutor cannot become an advocate for the defense.… But he wears the golden garments outside [the Holy of Holies]! We are speaking of the service in the inner Sanctuary. But is the shofar not also sounded outside [the Holy of Holies]? Since its purpose is to awaken remembrance, it is as if it were used within. (Rosh HaShana 26a)

What do Chazal mean here when they call the sounding of the shofar “service within the inner Sanctuary,” where “a prosecutor cannot become an advocate for the defense”?

The Temple sacrifices are brought for the purpose of atonement, but there is more. The Temple service is meant to purify the souls of Israel from their taint, to unwrap them from their “husks.” The sacrifices purify a person’s negative tendencies and traits, the sources of sin, in addition to atoning for certain sins.

Similarly, the offering of the incense on Yom Kippur adds sanctity and purity, and increases a person’s integrity and pleasantness. The service of the High Priest is meant to affect the deepest recesses of a person’s psyche, the source of his wrongful actions and misdeeds. The High Priest enters the Holy of Holies not only to atone for the defilement of the Temple, but also to mend a person’s spirit, the “inner sanctuary” of his personality. Sin does not befit the human soul. Chazal teach:

“But the soul is not filled” (Eccl. 6:7) – To what may this be com- pared? To a regular person who marries the daughter of a king. If he brings her everything in the world, it will not impress her at all. W hy? Because she is the daughter of a king. So it is with the soul: even if you were to offer it all the delicacies of the world, it will not make an impression. Why? Because the soul comes from the upper worlds. (Ecclesiastes Rabba 6:6)

The service performed in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur serves to intensify the inner sanctity – that inner essence of a person which registers in his consciousness only on rare occasions. We say each morning, “The soul that You have placed within me is pure.” That inner purity is so delicate that even the hint of a foreign thought can disturb it. We can compare this to playing music: when an entire orchestra plays together, an outside noise will not be noticed. But when a single instrument emits a thin, delicate sound, even the slightest noise will disrupt.

The remembrance in the sound of the shofar echoes that service in the Inner Sanctuary. The sound of the shofar is a simple sound that cannot be expressed in words. It evokes man’s inner essence that cannot be expressed outwardly. This is the meaning of the statement that “since its purpose is to awaken remembrance, it is as if it were used within.” Thus, God remembers a person’s actions, but we ask, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You” – remember the innermost parts of our personality, the pure soul that You have placed within us.

This request for remembrance strengthens our connection with God, so that our inner soul radiates sanctity and purity to all the layers of our psyche, whether consciously or unconsciously. “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You” means that the remembrance of God increases our own attachment to Him and sanctifies us. By the same token, we too are required to remember God: “Happy is the man who does not forget You, the child of man who takes courage in You.”

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The primary aim of our prayer on Rosh HaShana is to increase sanctity and purity. Therefore, the Men of the Great Assembly and the Tanna’im formulated prayers for Rosh HaShana which express God’s sovereignty, not for our needs. This is not limited in time: the prayer service that they instituted is suitable for all generations and for all times, just as the Torah is eternal (see Nefesh HaCHayim I I:13).

According to Rambam, the eternity of the Torah is bound up with the eternity of Israel. Against the background of Isaiah’s prophecy, “So shall your seed and your name remain” (Is. 66:22), Rambam writes:

Sometimes the seed remains, while the name has perished. For example, there are many nations that are descendants of the Persians or Greeks, but they are not known by a particular name; rather, they were absorbed into another nation. To my mind, this is another proof of the eternity of the Torah, by virtue of which we received our special name. (Guide of the Perplexed I I:29)

In other words, the eternity of Israel is derived from the eternity of the Torah.

The eternity of the Torah means that the Torah remains valid forever; more than that, it is relevant in each and every generation. Although generations change, the “plain understandings renew daily” (see Rashbam, Gen. 37:2; Chiddushei HaRim, Haazinu); every generation finds a new interpretation, new insights, relevant to that time and place.

In the same way, the prayer set by the Men of the Great Assembly is relevant to every generation. For instance, in the Aleinu prayer we say, “We therefore put our hope in You, O Lord our God, that we may soon see the splendor of Your might, that You remove the false gods from the earth.” The “false gods” of our time are not the same as the false gods of two thousand years ago: in our times Nazism, Communism, even democracy and unbridled freedom. Yet, despite the differences, the prayer remains the same. We say, “Grant honor, O Lord, to Your people, praise to those who fear You, and hope for those who seek You.” During the Holocaust, we could not have imagined how meaningful and relevant those words would be for us, and to what degree they would be fulfilled in our times.

Today too, with the future somewhat uncertain, we need to fulfill in the most literal way the mitzva, “You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God” (Deut. 18:13). As Ramban comments: “that we should dedicate our hearts to Him alone, and believe that He alone does everything, and that He knows what will happen in the future.” We say in our prayers, “Happy is the man who does not forget You,” and on the other hand we ask of God, “Remember us with a favorable remembrance before You.” May it be His will that we merit, through the sound of the shofar, to be remembered for good before God – amen.

[This sicha was delivered on Rosh HaShana of 5755 (1994), and is excerpted here from Rav Amital’s book, [*When God Is Near: On the High Holidays*](https://www.korenpub.com/maggid_en_usd/when-god-is-near.html) (Maggid, 2015).]