

BS"D

Schwartz, Morrow and You – *Not What You Think*

R. Mois Navon

Beit HaKenneset Yitzhak David – Shabbat Shuva 5780

הושע פרק יד, ב-ג

(ב) שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֹנֶךָ :

Today we mark Shabbat Shuva with the prophetic call by Hosea to return to God.

The call to teshuva is made now because, as we know, we are now in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – the ten days of teshuva, days of judgement. At the heart of this judgment is a quality of God that we read about on Rosh Hashana, and again during the Selichot of these 10 days, and again on Yom Kippur, it is the quality of Omniscience - God knows everything.

Why is this important to Teshuva? Why is this critical to Teshuva? That is the question I would like to answer.

Let's look at some sources.

Regrading Rosh Hashana we read in the Mishna:

משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק א:ב

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון בפסח על התבואה בעצרת על פירות-האילן בראש השנה

At four times of the year is the world judged: on Pesah for the crops, on Shavuot for the fruits of the trees, and on Rosh Hashana ...

Here we would expect something like - על האנושות, על האדם, על החיים - "on man, on humanity, on life" - but that would not be fitting for the very goal of creation – man is not another object, crop or fruits. Indeed, man is not even an animal, but something much more exalted! And so the Mishna changes gears and details what is to happen on this new year's day, this day of Judgment:

כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר (תהלים ל"ג) היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם ...

Now, while I understand that God knows, that God "sees," all our *actions*, Rashi explains this verse in Tehilim to imply that God knows our *thoughts*.

רש"י תהלים פרק לג פסוק טו

(טו) היוצר יחד לבם - לב כלם יחד ויודע כל המחשבות. ורבותינו הסיבוהו אל ממכון שבתו השגיח היוצר יחד לבם, ודרשו מכאן שכולן נסקרין בסקירה אחת:

“He knows all our thoughts!” Now that is heavy; even scary. But it is an idea that appears again and again in the liturgy of the ten days of teshuva.

It is found in our Selichot – actually one of the oldest extant Selichot, found in the 9c siddurim of R. Amram Gaon (810-875) and R. Sadia Gaon (882-942):

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| יודע כל נסתרות טוב ומטיב לברייתו יודע כל נסתרות כובש עונות לובש צדקות | הדור בנפלאות ותיק בנחמות זוכר ברית אבות חוקר פליות | אדון השליחות בוחן לבבות גולה עמוקות דובר צדקות |
| חטאנו לפניך רחם עלינו | חטאנו לפניך רחם עלינו | חטאנו לפניך רחם עלינו |

“Tests of Hearts,” “Investigates of innards,” “Knows all hidden things.”

And it is found in the Yom Kippur davening in many places, for example:

סדר רב עמרם גאון (הרפנס) תפילת נעילה של יום הכיפורים
מה נאמר לפניך יושב מרום ומה נספר לפניך שוכן שחקים, הלא כל הנסתרות אתה יודע.

וידוי של יום הכיפורים
מה נאמר לפניך יושב יושב מרום ומה נספר לפניך שוכן שחקים. הלא כל הנסתרות והנגלות אתה יודע. אתה יודע רזי עולם. ותעלומות סתרי כל חי. אתה חופש כל חדרי בטן רואה כליות ולב. אין דבר נעלם ממך, ואין נסתר ממך עיניך:

To think that God knows, not only our actions, but even our thoughts is almost too much to fathom. Basically this means that we have no where to hide (להתחבא). But if we think about it, this is precisely what the Yomim Noraim are all about (mahut), we have no where to hide: not from God, and perhaps more importantly, not from ourselves. The purpose of Yomim Noraim is to force us to face ourselves squarely (lehitmoded im atzmeinu b'keinut), to look ourselves in the mirror (מראה). The Yomim Noraim give us the time to reflect on who we really are and take stock of where we are personally (laasot heshbon nefesh), what are our strengths and what are our weaknesses.

The result of this self-introspection is that, at this time of judgement, we come before God, having judged *ourselves*. We say, honestly (for indeed how can we lie to One who knows our thoughts):

Have mercy on us,
give us a New Year that we can improve ourselves –
we know what to do.

So far I haven't said anything new, nothing we didn't already know. However, what I have said is something that we don't fully appreciate. Permit me to explain with a story that came out in the news two weeks ago. It is the story of Mark and Hanna Schwartz, a story I imagine almost everyone here is familiar. For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the story, and for the sake of completeness, I will review briefly the story.

~ The Schwartz/Morrow Story ~

The newspaper tells of Mark & Hanna Schwartz, a couple from Beverly Hills who have been living right here in Ashkelon for the past two of years. They are modern orthodox, retired, he was a chemist that consulted medical companies (מייעץ חברות תרופה), she worked in PR (יחסי ציבור). The [paper](#) wrote that:

They were very active in the congregation, went to shiurim (classes) and synagogue functions, and had lots of friends – all Anglos. They went out to dinner often, socialized, were very well liked and well-respected members of the Ashkelon Anglo community.

הם היו מאוד פעילים בקהילה, הלכו לשיעורים ולתפילות בבית הכנסת והיו להם הרבה חברים - כולם דוברי אנגלית. הם היו יוצאים לארוחת ערב לעתים קרובות, היו חברתיים, היו אהובים מאוד ומערכים בקהילת האנגלו-סקסית באשקלון.

Now, while I was not as social with them as many others here, I did speak with them at all the shul kiddushes, especially after my drashot here. They were always very enthusiastic (nilhavim) about my drashot. Just last year, after I gave a Shabbat Shuva drasha, Hanna made a point of telling me how meaningful it was and how it would forever influence her Yom Kippur davening.

So, for those of you who aren't familiar with the story, you are probably asking yourselves: They sound like pretty run of the mill people (שאינו מיוחד בשום צורה), why were they written up in the newspaper? As it turns out, Mark & Hanna Schwartz weren't who they said they were but rather: Dr. David and Linda Morrow – an Orthodox Jewish couple who had a flourishing Plastic Surgery practice (מרפאת ניתוחים פלסטיים) (מצליחה) in Rancho Mirage (a two hour drive from LA near Palm Springs) and they simply got greedy (היו חמדנים).

According to the judge (shofetet) who sentenced Morrow to 20 years in a federal penitentiary (כלא פדרלי), “his greed knew no bounds,” (שלא היה סוף לחמדנות שלו) and he showed an “utter disregard for patients’ well-being and safety,” (התעלם לגמרי מטובת) (הפציינטים) and fraudulently charged health insurance companies of more than “tens of millions of dollars for cosmetic procedures (nituchim plastiim) that were not medically necessary (שלא היה להם צורך).”

Now the sentencing occurred in absentia because the Schwartz-Morrows had somehow managed to escape the US and found themselves a cozy hideout in, you guessed it, Ashkelon. This worked for two years until not long ago (June/2019) the FBI (apparently, along with Israeli authorities) finally found them in their Ashkelon apartment.

A pretty racy story for the sleepy town of Ashkelon. And now you are probably asking yourself, what does this have to do with the Yomim Noraim?! Their story starts to become more relevant when we read about the reactions of the people in the Ashkelon community. According to the newspaper article:

The Schwartzs/Morrows left this community, which welcomes new people into the fold with open arms, somewhat wary (חשדני) and mistrustful (חסרי אמון) to greet the next newcomers to Ashkelon and that in itself, is a crime. Many of their friends said it was like being in a bad play.

בני זוג שוורץ/מורו הפכו את הקהילה הזו - קהילה שמקבלת בברכה אנשים חדשים בחיקה בזרועות פתוחות – [הם הפכו את הקהילה] לחשדנית וחסרי אמון בקבל אנשים חדשים שבאים לאשקלון. וזה, כשלעצמו, פשע. רבים מחבריהם אמרו שזה היה כמו להיות במחזה רע.

Now, I can certainly sympathize (lehizdahot) with the feelings of being lied to, played, cheated of one's time and sincerity – they call this geneivat hadaat, geneivat hazman. That said, I think that the Schwartz-Morrows gave us the greatest New Years' gift ever, they gave us the gift of the truth.

~ The Truth ~

You see, we don't really appreciate what a gift it is to live the truth. I personally enjoy telling people who I am, what I do, where I'm from. Yeah I could say, "I'm a doctor from Beverly Hills." But as much as I appreciate doctors and as much as I appreciate Beverly Hills, that's just not me and I wouldn't really have any satisfaction in saying that. Just think if you had to live a lie. Everything you told people would really just be part of a cover-up (הכיסוי שלך, התדמית השקרית שלך). You can't even tell people your real name.

I think that the Schwartz-Morrows came to be part of a religious community because they wanted some of that true living (חיים אמיתיים), some of the sincerity (כנות) that comes with being part of a religious community. I think that the friendships they made were sincere. I think that when Hanna/Linda told me that my drash really made an impact on her – she meant it. I believe that to be true not because that's what I want to believe but because it was the one thing she didn't have to lie about.

As difficult as our reality is, it is our real reality. We have our real lives. We have the truth.

I believe this is what these Yomim Noraim are all about (mahut). It is about the truth. It is about being truthful. Truthful with ourselves, truthful with God. Indeed, with God there can be no fake names (shemot beduim), fake professions (miktzo'ot beduim), fake anything (shum davar badui). He knows our thoughts!

~ Celebrating of Judgment ~

I believe that this fact, that God knows our thoughts, as scary as it may be, is actually at the heart of the joy of these Yomim Noraim.

As is well known there is a great tension on Rosh Hashana, a tension between Yom Hadin and Yom HaHag. That Rosh Hashana is Yom HaDin we already read in the Mishna we started with:

משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק א:ב
בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון ... בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו ... :

But the Gemara also teaches that it is a holiday:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף ח עמוד א-ב
תהלים (פא:ד) "תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו": איזהו חג שהחדש מתכסה בו - הוי אומר
זה ראש השנה וכתוב +תהלים פא+ כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב.

And based on this the Shul" A explains that we are to rejoice:

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ראש השנה סימן תקצז סעיף א
אוכלים ושותים ושמחים, ואין מתעניין בר"ה ולא בשבת שובה; אמנם לא יאכלו כל שבעם, למען
לא יקלו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה' על פניהם.

The Mishna Berura puts it all together noting that there is judgment but there is also a mitzvah of V'Semachta b'hageicha – he brings the famous passage in Nehemia in which Ezra tells the people to rejoice on RH:

משנה ברורה סימן תקצז סעיף א (א)
אוכלים ושותים ושמחים - ר"ל אף שהוא יום הדין מ"מ מצוה של ושמחת בחגך שייך גם בו
שגם הוא בכלל חג כדכתיב 'תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו' ונאמר בנחמיה ח' 'אֶכְלוּ
מִשְׁמְנִים וְשָׂתוּ מִמֵּתְקִים וְגו' כִּי קְדוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדֹנָינוּ וְאֵל תַּעֲצְבוּ כִּי חֲדוֹת יִקְוֶה הִיא מְעַזְכֶּם :

While there are a number of reasons for this rejoicing on judgment day – I would like to suggest that, in no small part, it is due to the truth of the day, the utter transparency of the day – God knows our thoughts.

We cannot hide from God; and so we cannot hide from ourselves. It is this utter honesty, that all is revealed (galui v'yadua), that is a source of our rejoicing on Rosh Hashana.

It is the reason that Sefaradim sing joyfully the Selichot of Adon Haselichot.

It is the reason that Ashkenazim sing joyfully on Yom Kippur, as noted in an [article](#) by Michael Bohnen:

When Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik first came to Germany in 1926, he was shocked when he heard the joyful tunes that were sung there as part of the Yom Kippur liturgy. He then realized that it was quite appropriate because “there is also great joy on the day that our sins are forgiven” (The Rav, by Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, Volume 2, p.176). Soloveitchik noted that the community recites the Al Chet prayer “with a sense of confidence and even rejoicing.” (On Repentance, Pinchas Peli, p. 119).

R. Soloveitchik was echoing the Gemara that calls Yom Kippur one of the happiest days of the year!

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף ל עמוד ב

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום הכפורים. בשלמא יום הכפורים - משום דאית ביה סליחה ומחילה, יום שניתנו בו לוחות האחרונות.

There is Selicha and Mechila, but ultimately it is based on our being honest with ourselves and with God. We find interesting support for this idea in the verse “Purify yourself before God” (לפני ה' תטהרו) in Vayikra.

~ Purity on Yom Kippur ~

Rav Prof. Aviad HaCohen explains this verse in an article entitled, appropriately, “Will someone like me runaway?”:

רב פרופ' אביעד הכהן (פרופ' למשפטים HUJI וגם VANLEER) **האיש כמוני יברח! יום כפור התשע"ה**

... יש בידינו זכות גדולה, של היטהרות, של זיכוך, של בירור עצמי. "לפני ה' תטהרו", קורא-מצווה אותנו הכתוב. כמה רבים הם אלה מבינינו ש"מיטהרים" כלפי חוץ, אלא שאין תוכם כברם, ומלוכלכים הם בחטא מבפנים .

לא כן הטהרה "לפני ה'", טהרת אמת, לא לעין כל, אלא רק לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, ש"יודע מחשבות [ביום דין]" הוא ו"בוחר לבבות בדין", דיין אמת לאמתו, שאין לפניו לא משוא פנים ולא מקח שוחד ולא עוולה.

We have a great merit, of purification, of refinement, of self-inquiry. “Before the Lord is cleansed,” - “לפני ה' תטהרו” - here scripture calls us, here scripture commands us! How many are those of us who "purify" themselves externally, but internally are sullied with sin.

That is not being pure/clean “Before the Lord.” True Purity, not only before others, but before the Blessed One who “knows our thoughts on the day of judgment” and “examines all hearts in the judgment.” He who judges the absolute truth, he who maintains no impartiality and accepts no bribes and allows no perversion of justice.

~ Conclusion ~

The Yomim Noraim give us an amazing opportunity to be truthful: truthfill with God, truthful with ourselves. Look, we all have our issues, we all have our strengths and we all have our weaknesses. The Yomim Noraim is the time we face up to them (mitmodedim itam). Now is the time we come before our Creator and say, we realize who we are, and we wish to be better. We realize who we are and, based on that very honesty, we ask for mercy to have another chance to improve, another year to work on ourselves.

Have mercy on us,
give us a New Year that we can improve ourselves –
we know what to do.

Gmar Hatima Tova.