



נחיש נחיש...!

Succot: A New Beginning

In Midrash Tanchuma (Parshat Emor) we find written:

“You shall take for yourselves on the first day [the fruit of the hadar tree]...”

(Vayikra 23:40). Succot falls on the fifteenth day [of the month], not on the first day; why then does the verse call it the first day? The reason is that this is the first day of the reckoning of sins.

Rabbi Mani and Rabbi Yehoshua of Sachnin said in the name of Rabbi Levy: A parable illustrates the point. A king once sent a writ of collection to a country under his rule that owed the monarchy taxes. The country ignored the writ and the king sent a reminder, which the country ignored also. The king summoned his retinue and set out to collect the taxes. The country’s citizens caught wind of the plan and sent their rulers out to appease the king. The king asked them, “What is it that you desire?” They replied, “We ask his majesty to have mercy on us for we are unable to pay the taxes.” The king told them, “For your sake I will halve the debt.” The king continued his approach. The country’s defense troops came out to meet him. The king asked them, “What is it that you desire?” They replied, “We ask his majesty to have mercy on us for we are unable to pay the taxes.” The king told them, “I have already halved the original debt, and for your sake I will halve the remainder.” The king continued his approach. This time, the entire population of the country, great and small, went out to meet him. The king asked them, “What is it that you desire?” They replied, “We ask his majesty to have mercy on us for we are unable to pay the taxes.” The



נתיב חיים ...

king told them, “I have already halved and rehalved the original debt, but for your sake I waive the debt entirely. Today will be the start of a new ledger.”

In the parable, the king represents the King of Kings, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, blessed be His name. The citizenry represent the Jewish people, who bear the accumulated debt of their sins for the year. HaKadosh Baruch Hu tells the Jews to repent from Rosh Hashana onwards; on Yom Kippur the Jews fast and repent, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu forgives their sins.

[The Divine “debt cancellation” takes place in stages.] The leaders of the generation fast on the eve of Rosh Hashana. On their account HaKadosh Baruch Hu waives a third of the generation’s sins. Exceptional individuals fast from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. On their account HaKadosh Baruch Hu waives a third of the generation’s sins. Finally, the people as a whole, men women and children [of age] fast on Yom Kippur. HaKadosh Baruch Hu waives all their sins, as it is written (Vayikra 16:30) “For on this day He will cleanse you, purifying you of all your sins” etc.

[In celebration] the Jews take their lulavim on the first day of the holiday, giving praise and veneration to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Now reconciled with His people, HaKadosh Baruch Hu forgives them, and announces, “I have absolved you of your past sins, and today is the beginning of a new reckoning.” That is why the Torah writes, “You shall take for yourselves on the first day...” meaning that this is the first day of the reckoning of sins.



נתיב נצחוני...

There is an apparent contradiction in this midrash: The midrash relates that HaKadosh Baruch Hu forgives the people for their sins when they fast and repent on Yom Kippur, yet it goes on to imply that forgiveness is granted only on the first day of Succot, when the people appease HaKadosh Baruch Hu through their mitzvot and veneration.

Rabbi Levy Yitzchok of Berdichev, in his classic exposition of Chassidic thought, *Kedushas Levy*, addresses this discrepancy in the midrash. He writes:

It is a fact that during the period from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur each and every person “opens his eyes to scrutinize his ways” (after Yirmiyahu 32:19), to return to HaShem, “each one praised according to his mind’s grasp” on his own level (after Mishlei 12:8), “from fear of HaShem and the glory of His majesty when He arises to judge the earth” (after Yeshiyahu 2:19), “for the day of HaShem is nigh” (after Yeshiyahu 13:1). Who can hold himself to be worthy in judgement? Who is the man who will not fear? Who is the person who will not agonize when standing trial for his every deed before “the Judge of all the earth”? (after Bereishis 18:25). For this reason, the one who trembles at the word of HaShem (after Yeshiyahu 66:2) will reach to the heavens in order to correct that which he made crooked. Teshuva thus motivated is known as “teshuva from fear.” [Teshuva from fear is reactive and stems from self-concern].

Following Yom Kippur the Jews are occupied with preparations for the mitzvot of Succa and the Four Species. They give charity with an open hand, emulating the generosity of the Creator. They strive in every way to serve HaShem in joy and gladness of heart. Teshuva thus motivated is known as “teshuva from devotion.”



נחיה מצותיו...

[Teshuva from devotion is proactive and stems from deep love and commitment to G-d].

Chazal teach us that teshuva from fear demotes deliberate sins to the less severe category of acts of negligence, while teshuva from devotion elevates deliberate sins to the category of worthy deeds (Yoma 76b). In His abundant mercy and compassion, HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires that we return to him completely, as it says [in the reader's repetition of the Yom Kippur Musaf-Prayer], "He desires not that the condemned should die, but for them to repent for their sins and live."

On Succot we seek "the protective shade of the Almighty" (after Tehillim 91:1,2). We reach out to Him in love through mitzvot and good deeds. This, our teshuva from devotion, completes the process of Yom Kippur and transforms the remaining acts of negligence into worthy deeds. Since HaKadosh Baruch Hu wishes us to be vindicated in judgement, He postpones reckoning the final balance until we have returned to Him from devotion.

By Succot, our spiritual ledger is clear. Succot in this sense is "the first day of the reckoning of sins." Succot is the day on which we begin our relationship with HaShem anew. Purified and whole, we are prepared to receive His overflowing goodness and blessings.

- Rabbi David Daniel HaCohen