

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is approaching. Jews around the world will pray for a happy, healthy New Year for themselves, for their families, and for the Jewish nation. But in order to fully experience this Day of Awe, it is critical that we prepare ourselves with a deeper understanding of what it is all about.

We know that the spiritual significance of the holidays is defined by the Biblical events that took place on them. The power of those events formed the nature of the day for all time. As we pass through the Jewish year, we pass through, and potentially relive, the events of our past.

There are several Biblical events that took place on Rosh Hashanah. The first Rosh Hashanah was the sixth day of Creation, the day on which G-d created man. It is for this reason that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment. G-d judges man on the anniversary of his creation. But if Rosh Hashanah is the day that man was created, then it is also the day that man sinned.

The Midrash tells us that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge on the very day that he was created. How did Adam deal with his mistake? He hid from G-d: “They heard G-d’s voice moving about in the garden with the wind of the day. The man and his wife hid themselves from G-d among the trees of the garden. G-d called to man, and He said ‘Where are you?’” (Bereishit 3:8-9).

That is the story of man on the first Rosh Hashanah. How do we fix that? We do the exact opposite. We do not run and we do not hide. We face G-d on Rosh Hashanah. We take responsibility for our actions, and we accept G-d’s judgment. This approach has a marvelous effect on G-d. It arouses His compassion.

But the midrash tells us of another biblical event that took place on Rosh Hashanah: the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac. (It is for this reason that we read the Akeidah on the second day of Rosh Hashanah.) What happened at the Akeidah? We all know the story. Avraham was commanded by G-d to sacrifice Yitzchok. He diligently prepares to do so, only to be stopped by an angel at the very last moment: “G-d’s angel called to him from heaven and said, “Avraham! Avraham!”

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“Yes.”

“Do not harm the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear G-d. You have not withheld your only son from Him” (Bereishit 22:11-12).

But the story does not end there: “Avraham then looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. He went and got the ram, sacrificing it as an all burned offering in his son’s place” (22:13).

This was no ordinary ram. This Mishnah in Avot tells us that this ram was specially created in the last moments of the sixth day of Creation (Rosh Hashanah!). This ram has been waiting around for about two millennia for the Akeida. Now it finally gets its chance to enter the Biblical stage. This is the purpose for which it was created and this is the moment it has been waiting for. And what does our ram do? It tries to escape! Fortunately, its horns get stuck in a thicket and Avraham gets his ram.

Look at the contrast. The ram attempts to flee its mission, while Avraham diligently fulfills Gd’s will, no matter how mysterious it may appear. The animal runs and tries to hide, but man faces G-d. That was the Rosh Hashanah of our father Avraham.

On Rosh Hashanah we declare G-d’s kingship. We try to experience the Rosh Hashanah of Avraham and not, G-d forbid, the Rosh Hashanah of Adam. On this Day of Judgment, may our prayers succeed in arousing G-d’s compassion for all of us, and may the Jewish people be blessed with a truly happy New Year.

Shabbat Shalom

The JSN Team

