



נבואה נצחית...

The Day of Judgement

The Gemara (Chagiga 4a) relates: *Rabbi Elazar wept when he came to the verse (Vayigash 44:3): “They [Yosef’s brothers] were unable to respond because they recoiled from him.” If such be the power of the reproof of flesh and blood, how much forbidding is the reproof of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Rabbi Elazar wept when he came to the verse (Shmuel 1 28:15): “Shmuel said to Shaul, ‘Why have you disturbed me to bring me up?’” If Shmuel the Tzadik feared Divine judgement, how much the more so should we be in trepidation. How do we know that Shmuel was liable to be judged? The evidence is from the verse that reads (ibid. 13): “The woman said to Shaul, ‘I saw men of great stature coming up [from the earth].” The expression ‘coming up’ implies that they did so twice. The first time Shmuel came up alone. The second time, Shmuel went to bring Moshe Rabbeinu with him. Shmuel told Moshe, “If I am summoned to judgement you can testify on my behalf that there is nothing you wrote in the Torah which I did not uphold.”*

This passage from the Gemara raises the following questions.

1. Why did these two verses, of all the many such in the Torah that mention Divine judgement, prompt Rabbi Elazar to recoil in fear?
2. What do these two verses have in common?
3. Re: the incident of the prophet Shmuel’s spirit arising from the dead.



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- a. Shmuel had been judged favorably already when he died. Why was he still in fear of judgement even after his death?
- b. Moshe Rabbeinu was not a contemporary of the prophet Shmuel and did not witness his actions. How could Moshe testify that Shmuel had upheld the entire Torah?

It is often the case that a person will commit a sin while fully convinced that he is doing a mitzvah. I heard a good example of such from Rabbi Gabriel Toledano, the head of Yeshivat Ohr Baruch. Rashi (Bereishis 39:1) points out that the Torah narrative juxtaposed Tamar's seduction of Yehuda with Potifar's wife's attempted seduction of Yosef. Tamar and Potifar's wife both acted "*leshem shamayim*" - from pure motives. Tamar foresaw with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) that the Messiah would descend from their union. Potifar's wife foresaw in the stars that Yosef was destined to bear children from her line. Tamar was willing to be put to death rather than shame Yehuda in public, but Potifar's wife provoked malicious gossip about Yosef when her attempt failed. The difference shows that Tamar's act was meritorious but Potifar's wife had in mind to commit a transgression.

There is no question that Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery convinced that they were in the right. Chazal tell us that the brothers had tried and convicted Yosef of conspiracy to murder. Yosef's laced his reproof of the brothers with the words: "Is my father still alive?" It was obvious to all that Yaakov was still alive: the brothers had spoken of their father the entire time. The brothers pleaded for Benjamin's release for



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the sake of clemency to their father who would be broken by the loss of his son. Yosef was pointing up their inconsistency. The brothers' callous disregard of their father's feelings when they convicted Yosef was clear evidence of their bias. When Yosef asked the rhetorical question "Is my father still alive," the brothers were shocked into the realization that their action, seemingly meritorious, was in fact criminal.

Rabbi Elazar wept when he came to the verse that describes the brothers' shock and dismay. A person who sins knowingly can still repent and be forgiven. But how is a person blinded by his own bias who mistakes his sins for mitzvot to repent? If the brothers of Yosef, the progenitors of the tribes of Israel, could lack awareness, how much the more so can ordinary human beings like ourselves be victims of our own bias.

Rabbi Elazar wept likewise when he came to the story of the spirit of the prophet Shmuel. Shmuel feared that the Heavenly Court would expose his self-deception. Shmuel therefore asked Moshe Rabbeinu to plead on his behalf that his readings and understanding of the Torah were accurate and unbiased: proof that his actions, grounded in Torah, were faithful and true.

The second question, why Shmuel feared double jeopardy, still needs to be addressed. The explanation that follows is based on *Sefer Arvei Nachal* by Rabbi David Eibeshetz.



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Rashi comments on the first verse of the Torah: G-d [*Elohim*] created – The verse did not state “HaShem - יקוק” created”, because at first it arose in thought to create it [the world] with the attribute of justice, [but] He saw that the world could not [thus] endure. He [therefore] gave precedence to the attribute of compassion and conjoined it to the attribute of justice, as implied by the verse (Bereishis 2:4) “On the day that HaShem Elohim made heaven and earth.” Now, it goes without saying that it makes no sense to imagine an omniscient being failing to gauge the consequences of his plans and having to change his mind. We may understand Rashi’s comment by glossing the expression *Bereishis* as alluding to the innermost thought, as it were, of HaKadosh Baruch Hu that established the highest echelons of the creation where the rule of strict justice prevails. As one moves to the lower levels of the creation the rule of mercy is introduced to temper justice. This idea of a sliding scale of mercy and justice is implicit in the Ari Za’l’s disclosure that a person is rejudged before being elevated to a higher station in Gan Eden. The same deeds which counted as meritorious from the standpoint of mercy may now require expiation and atonement from the standpoint of justice.

The prophet Shmuel was concerned that he was due to be retried before ascending to a higher position in Gan Eden. He knew intuitively that his earlier deeds would stand up to the rigorous scrutiny of a higher standard of accountability. Fearing, however, that he would be called to account for subtle, imperceptible mistakes in his explanations of Torah law, Shmuel called Moshe Rabbeinu to testify on his behalf.



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The reason that the creation ascends from mercy to justice is to maximize eternal reward. The Zohar tells us that the soul was initially ashamed to enjoy the unearned presence of the schina. The Zohar terms this feeling of diminishment and lack of esteem “eating of the bread of shame.” The soul descended to this world in order to make itself worthy of delighting in G-d’s presence by keeping Torah and mitzvot under very difficult conditions. The closer the soul comes to its source, the greater its entitlement must be to allow it to receive undiminished reward. That explains why the standard of accountability becomes increasingly strict the higher one goes in the creation.

In the prayer-service for Rosh HaShana we state, “The books of the living and the dead lie open before you.” On the above explanation, we can understand why the dead – slated for escalating reward in the world to come – should be judged yearly along with the living.

- Rabbi David Daniel HaCohen