

Yom Kippur, 5775, 2014:

Rabbi David Etengoff

To Be Before Hashem

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shmuel David ben Moshe Halevy, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and to the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel.

The mitzvah of *reayon*, appearing in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), was one of the high points of each of the *Yamim Tovim* (Jewish Festivals):

Three times in the year, every one of your males shall appear before the L-rd, your G-d, in the place He will choose: on the Festival of Matzoth and on the Festival of Weeks, and on the Festival of Sukkoth, and he shall not appear before the L-rd empty-handed. (*Sefer Devarim* 16:6, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*).

Rav Pinchas Kehati *zatzal* (1910-1976) offers a concise halachic analysis of this *pasuk* (verse):

From here we may learn that there is a commandment incumbent upon every Jewish male who has reached the age of majority to travel up to Jerusalem during the Three Festivals. He must do this in order to appear in the *Beit Hamikdash* so that he may offer the sacrifices known as the *olat reiyah* (completely burnt offering) and the *shalmai chagigah* (festival offering). No measure was biblically ordained for this commandment. That is to say that the Torah did not stipulate how long or how many times the pilgrim was obligated to appear in the Holy Temple during a particular festival. This means that someone theoretically could have fulfilled his obligation by appearing in the *Beit Hamikdash* for but a moment. If he chose, however, to linger in the Holy Temple – this was certainly praiseworthy... (*Mishnaiot Mevuarot, Mishnah Peah* 1:1)

The commandment of *reayon* was given great prominence within Rabbinic thought. This is illustrated, for example, in the well-known first Mishnah of *Mishnah Peah*: “These are things for which no measure is prescribed: Leaving over the corner of the field for the needs of the poor, First-Fruits, appearing before Hashem in the Holy Temple, the practice of loving kindness, and Torah study...”

Given the manifest importance of the mitzvah of *reayon*, one cannot help but wonder why the Torah did not require Jewish males who had reached the age of majority to appear in the Holy Temple, as well, on Yom Kippur. After all, contrary to popular misconception, Yom Kippur is the most joyous day on the Jewish calendar – for on this day, if we engage in heartfelt *teshuvah* (repentance), we are forgiven for all of our sins. This, in turn, gives us the opportunity to achieve true reconciliation with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One blessed be He) and encounter Him as His beloved and loyal people. Rav Nissan Alpert *zatzal* (1927-1986), perhaps the greatest disciple of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zatzal* (1895-1986), in his posthumous work entitled *Limudei Nissan* (volume II, page 187), noted that the renowned Torah giant Hagaon Rav Zalman Sorotzkin *zatzal* (1881-1966) both asked and answered the question, “Why was Yom Kippur excluded from the mitzvah of *reayon*?” Rav Sorotzkin’s answer is at one and the same time deeply insightful and spiritually inspiring. Moreover, it enables us to gain a new appreciation of the singular character of Yom Kippur:

Why did the Torah not require the Jewish people to ascend in pilgrimage to the *Beit Hamikdash* on Yom Kippur? This was the case since at that time [i.e. on Yom Kippur] *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was equally close to them (the Jewish people) wherever they may have been. In addition, anyone who has the least spark of Jewishness [in his heart] can intimately feel the overwhelming nature of this holy day.

Thus for Rav Sorotzkin, Yom Kippur has an entirely different character than the *Chagim* (Festivals) of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. These *Yamim Tovim* require man’s appearance in the Holy Temple since that is where G-d is found at these times. In stark contrast, Yom Kippur does not require man’s pilgrimage to the Holy Temple, since Hashem’s *Schechinah* (Divine Presence) is so manifest and palpably present on this day that the physical space outside the *Beit Hamikdash* “contains” His glory no less than the

Holy Temple itself!

There is a well-known Mishnah that appears in *Mishnah Yoma* 8:9:

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you O' Jewish people. Before whom are you purified and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven. As it says: [*Sefer Yechezkel* 36:25] "I will sprinkle upon you the purifying waters and you will become purified." It says as well [*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 17:13] "Hashem is the hope (*mikvei*) of the Jewish people." Just like a Mikveh purifies the impure ones, so, too, does the Holy One blessed be He purify the Jewish people.

Rav Alpert utilized Rav Sorotzkin's above-found answer to provide us with a novel understanding of this passage:

And this is what Rabbi Akiva said when he declared: "Happy are you O' Jewish people. Before whom are you purified and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven." This means that on this day they [the Jewish people were and are] before Hashem since the entire world is filled with His glory [on Yom Kippur], since He is close to us [as He is on no other day]. With these words Rabbi Akiva was able to comfort his colleagues [compare *Talmud Bavli, Makkot* 24b]. Even though the Holy Temple was destroyed, and they were exiled amongst the impure nations, on one day during the year the Holy One blessed be He drew near to them to purify them, to recognize their merits, and to sanctify them. (Brackets my own)

With G-d's help, and our own heartfelt efforts, may each of us recognize that Yom Kippur is the one day during the year, even in the absence of the *Beit Hamikdash*, wherein the Holy One blessed be He draws near to us to purify us, to recognize our merits, and to help us become a truly holy nation before Him. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, G'mar Chatimah Tovah, and Tizku l'shanim rabot

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