

Rosh Hashana: Day of History and Destiny **by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

On Rosh Hashana we stand at the threshold of a new year. We are all wondering and trembling about how we will be judged for the coming year. This is true for us as individuals as well as being members of the Jewish people. As individuals, we all hope and pray for the health and well being of ourselves, our families, and our friends. As a community, we pray for the safety and well-being of our brothers and sisters all over the world and especially in Eretz Yisroel. We entreat the Ribono Shel Olam to display compassion to all of us as the world is being judged for the coming year. We try to repent for our past shortcomings and hope they will not be factored in to the verdict. In doing this we reflect on what we did the past year as individuals as well as think about our past 3000 year history as Am Yisroel. Indeed, this is a day that brings together our history and our destiny.

On the first day of Rosh Hashana we read about the birth of Yitzchok Aveinu. This was the fulfillment of the promise to Avraham and Sarah that even after many years of being childless, they will bear a son who will carry on their legacy and will be the next link in the creation of Am Yisroel. Even if Avraham was one hundred years old and Sarah, ninety, nevertheless, Hashem's promise was kept even if meant going against the natural order.

On the first day we also read the first chapter of the Book of Shmuel telling us the saga of the prophet's birth. His father, Elkana, has two wives, Chana And Penina. Penina has children. Chana does not. We are told how every year Elkana would go to Shiloh which then the place where all sacrifices were brought, fulfilling the Mitzvah to go to Hashem's house three times a year. He gave his wife Penina and her children portions of the sacrifices to celebrate Yom Tov. He then gave Chana a special portion because, as the Navi in the book of Shmuel puts it, 'Because Chana he loved but Hashem closed her womb'. If she would have had today's medical technology at her disposal and used our fertility clinics, there would have been no success. But what better proof do we need? The Navi, tells us that Hashem closed her womb .Chana then pours out her heart and prays for a child and expresses her yearning to experience motherhood.. Eli Hacoen thinks she is drunk as is probable during Yom Tov. She explains that she is not drunk but simply in great distress. Eli then gives her a beracha that whatever she prayed for should be granted Hashem remembers her and grants her wish. Traditionally she was remembered on Rosh Hashana, the same month that we also have a tradition regarding Yitzchak's birth. [There are various Midrashim on this subject regarding conception and birth of the patriarchs.] Even the name Shmuel 'Asked from Hashem' bears this idea of him being a child brought into the world only through divine intervention. Could we possibly imagine the joy Chana must have felt returning to Eli Hacoen and saying to him "It was for this child I prayed"According to the laws of nature he should not have ever been born. But here he is!

As the Jewish people we understand that we are not bound by nature. Nor are we bound by any other forces as many other religions teach. We are bound only by Hashems will which

we have a role in shaping We CAN pray for things. Of course it is up to Hashem to grant but we have the right to ask.

Hinduism teaches that we are all bound by Karma-predestined fate. This Karma is something we have no control over and everyone is under its control. All suffering experienced in this world is a result is a karmic retribution for what one committed in a previous life and there is no escape from one's destiny. If one is born into the *dalit* or untouchable class of society, that is their fate and it is impossible to do anything about it in this world but accept it and suffer. Such is a common trend of thought found in the oriental religions: everything is predestined and we are left with no control. Even Sikhism accepts the idea of karma with the idea of being able to be delivered from it if one adheres to certain principles. In other words, we find in the oriental religions the idea of a force of fate as a most powerful entity. This is a totally different idea of the omnipotence of G-d as is understood in our religion.

Calvinism also teaches that there is no freewill as we understand it. While it is a form of Christianity and accepts the Gospels, the movement teaches that whoever finds the means to be saved finds only because they were divinely chosen to be the ones who will take the steps to salvation and this is their idea of divine mercy. This is, again, so contrary to our belief that we have free will and can pray to improve ourselves and the world around us.

Importantly, Judaism teaches that we can and should pray to influence Hashem, as it were. Rav Aharon of Karlin-Stohlin underscores this point. In his commentary on Chumash[Genesis15:5] ,on the verse that Hashem takes Avraham outside and tells him to count the stars, he explains that Avraham's fate will be in Hashem's hands alone and not the stars. Because he believes in Hashem who is above the stars and fate as well as nature, he will not be bound by any of these things. This is unlike one who does not believe in Hashem and thinks that everything is only in the stars. In other words, Hashem took us out of that mentality. This entire belief and legacy of believing in Hashem alone as the controller of history and destiny was passed on to Yitzchak and Yaakov and ultimately to us as, their descendents. This is indeed our legacy: Torah and Tefilla, *Hakol kol Yaakov* "the voice is the voice of Yaakov." [ibid, 27:24] Esav, Yaakov's other son changed the world with his legacy, the sword. Countries have changed borders throughout history through warfare or 'blood and iron' as Bismarck put it. We are the children of Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov. Let us use our legacy of Torah and tefillah. We can change the world as well. Hopefully we will do it in a positive way. We have remained the Am Hashem for 3000 years and our ideas and traditions have not changed. We follow the same Torah given to us at Mount Sinai. Our Torah has remained unchanged for all of these years. Let us take this opportunity to use this day for davening to Hashem and hopefully everything will be changed in a constructive way. Let us be inspired by the beautiful tefillos written by our great rabbis of yore and the melodious voices of our chazzanim. Let us all pray together that we merit our prayers being heard and may we have a year of peace, health, happiness and peace for ourselves, Eretz Yisroel, and all of humanity.