

THE DAY AFTER...

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The title of this essay can scare the reader, since it is mainly used in a context of supreme, Hiroshima-type disaster. However, the contrary, here it is a reference to the "happiest and holiest day of the year Yom Kippur and the day, or days after, or year after. Actually, the Kol Nidrei already referred to the full year that follows "from this Yom Kippur to the next Yom Kippur".

Apparently, the entire year is planned out with pledges to improve the conduct of our lives, Kol Nidrei only stipulating that these promises hold no oaths or vows. The need for Kol Nidrei is precisely because we do make pledges and commitments on Yom Kippur, to transform ourselves into better individuals, better toward G-d and to man. While we intend to honor these promises, we do not wish to be under oath. The real test, then, comes on the day after... or the year after, when daily compliance affirms the sincerity of the Yom Kippur commitments.

The chapter Kol Nidrei is unique even when measured by Yom Kippur standards. Much precious time is spent in chanting it thrice, and singing out every word, precisely during the intense moments of mighty emotions, when the holiest day of the year is ushered in. This is justified only because its real significance is not in the negative declaration that "no vows are meant", "no oaths intended". Its real depth lies in the positive undercurrent that, yes, there are solid pledges and commitments, though not in the category of vows and oaths. That is surely the spirit of Kol Nidrei. The new year will not be a carbon copy of the old, but one of new ambition and new achievement. For a person who makes no commitments on Yom Kippur, the Kol Nidrei declaration is void of meaning, a melody without words.

One passage in Deuteronomy, its scheduled reading coinciding with the High Holiday season, speaks volumes. "Yaarof Kamotor... My doctrine shall drop as the rain; my speech shall distill as the dew" (32:2). Rain is more effective than dew to generate produce. Having

mentioned voluminous rain, what is the significance of dew? The answer is obvious. Dew, though the weaker stimulant, has the asset that it appears day after day every day.

Yom Kippur may be likened to rain. It is a single day, coming once a year, containing a heavy load of AVODAH. Its success, however, lies in its ability to inspire and influence the rest of the year. The ensuing days of the year do not possess the majesty of Yom Kippur, but hold the key to the steady affirmation of the Yom Kippur pledge. The Talmudic tract on Yom Kippur is called "Yuma", THE day, because it is indeed THE day of days, unique in its sacredness and single in its impact upon the entire year (see Maharsha beginning Yuma).

"Day unto day utters speech" (Tehilim 19:3). The very days apparently beget "speech" and speak to one another. Certainly THE day has much to say to the rest of 365 days. What is the message that one day is supposed to convey the next day? One ventures to suggest it is the message of THE day, the commitments of Yom Kippur.

With the above in mind, how appropriately and harmoniously comes the Succos Yom Tov. Two major Mitzvoths are observed on Succos, and both, amazingly, refer to the above sentiments about "the day after..." (in the positive sense).

The Talmud (Succah 35a) records several insights to explain the reference to the Esrog in the passage (Vayikro 23:40) which speaks of PRI EITZ HODOR, literally the fruit of a beautiful tree. One explanation is that the Esrog has the special quality of Ha-DAR, it dwells on the tree from year to year; i.e. it cleaves to the tree for more than one season. The Medrosh teaches that the Esrog, having both good aroma and taste, is symbolic of the Jew who possesses both Torah scholarship and virtuous deeds. Apparently, this quality of cleaving to the tree for a longer time serves as guideline to the Jew seeking perfection. Not only the day after, but the year, and the second year, and the years that follow.

The Succah, too, carries the message of the years, even generations, that follow. The Torah clearly connects the Mitzva of

Succah with transmitting knowledge to future generations, "in order that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in Succos when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikro 23:43).

Such results, on "the day after", being transformed into a better Jew, bring uplifting joy. Both Mitzvochs of this Yom Tov contain the element of Simcha. In connection with the Mitzva of Esrog, Lulov... the Torah summons us "You shall rejoice before Hashem" (Vayikro 23:40). Regarding the Mitzva to dwell in the Succah, too, the Torah bids us "You shall rejoice on your festival..." (Devorim 16:14). The joyousness is even intensified leading to the apex of joy on Simchas Torah.

A scholarly Jew approaches a sour faced Jew who is told to be happy, today is Yom Tov. He gets the response: "Happy? For what?" Enumerating a list of Tzoros, he cries out "What do I have to feel happy?" The scholar replies softly, "Do you remember the story of Joseph? His father Yaakov did not see him for twenty two years, thinking he was gone forever. When the surprise came, Joseph standing before him alive and prosperous, and yes, a Tzadik, can one imagine a greater Simcha? For both Yaakov and Joseph!"

Yom Tov Succos, say the Seforim, is connected to Yaakov. "And Yaakov journeyed to Succos" (Beraishis 33:17, see Tiferes Shlomo). There are many Succos references to Yaakov. However the Simcha of Succos is certainly a meaningful connection to Yaakov. And, yes, Yom Kippur, and the transformation into a better Jew, is surely a solid basis of Succos joyousness. Our Father in Heaven longed for us, just as we did seek Him, "Dirshu Hashem... seek Hashem" (Isaiah 55:6). Once we return to Him, He reaccepts us mercifully. "V'irachmai hu" (55:7) as "Rachmonis", means mother-love, from the word Rechem, womb. Thus, the outpouring of joy, as Hashem invites us to His Beth Hamikdosh for Yom Tov.

