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U'V'chein: Coming Before the King

A Word We Say Again and Again

One small word appears repeatedly in the Rosh Hashanah Amidah: וְכֵן תֵּן כְּבוֹד (And so, place Your awe), וְכֵן תֵּן פְּהֻדָּה (And so, grant honor), and וְכֵן צְדִיקִים יֵרָאוּ וְיִשְׂמְחוּ (And so, the righteous will see and rejoice). Anshei Knesses HaGedolah could have written each request without וְכֵן (and so). The fact that they repeated it tells us that the word itself carries part of the avodah.

The Abudraham explains that וְכֵן (and so) has the sense of וְאַזְּ (and then). But why choose this particular expression? He connects it to Esther HaMalka: וְכֵן אָבּוּא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ (And so I will come before the king) (אסתר ד:טז). The Tur gives the same reason. Rosh Hashanah is Yom HaDin (the Day of Judgment), and we are coming before the King of kings. (אבודרהם, תפילת ראש השנה; טור, אורח חיים תקפ"ב)

Esther's Words in the Machzor

Once we hear that connection, the Rosh Hashanah Amidah sounds different. Esther did not walk casually into the palace. The full pasuk is וְכֵן אָבּוּא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא כְדָת (And so I will come before the king, though it is not according to the law) (אסתר ד:טז). She knew that entering without being summoned could cost her life.

On Rosh Hashanah we also come before a King. We ask for life, health, children, parnassah (livelihood), peace, protection and another year. Yet the posture of the tefillah is not that these things are owed to us. Selichos gives us the language: כְּדֹלִים וְכָרְשִׁים דְּפָקְנוּ דְּלִתִּיָּהּ (Like the poor and destitute, we knock at Your doors). We come asking for a matnas chinam (a free gift).

Coming Without a Claim

Esther's words contain a second lesson that belongs directly to Rosh Hashanah. She did not merely say that she was coming to the king. She said וְכֵן תֵּן כְּבוֹד (though it is not according to the law) (אסתר ד:טז). She knew that she could not enter as though the palace owed her an audience. The language of Selichos asks us to carry the same awareness into our tefillah.

There are two very different ways to ask Hashem for another year. One person comes with an unspoken assumption that

the life he has now should simply continue. Another comes knowing that nothing about tomorrow is automatic. He asks for the people he loves, for health, for parnassah, for clarity and for the ability to serve Hashem because every one of them is a gift that must be given again.

That is the force of כְּדֹלִים וְכָרְשִׁים דְּפָקְנוּ דְּלִתִּיָּהּ (Like the poor and destitute, we knock at Your doors). It does not mean that a Jew should think that his mitzvos have no value. It means that he does not turn those mitzvos into a claim against Hashem. He can come with zechuyos (merits) and still ask for rachamim (mercy).

What U'V'chein Places Into the Tefillah

Before each request, וְכֵן (and so) quietly returns us to the same place: וְכֵן אָבּוּא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ (And so I will come before the King) (אסתר ד:טז). We know Who is giving, and we know who is asking.

That may be why the word appears again and again. The machzor does not allow us to rush from one request to the next without remembering where we are standing. On Rosh Hashanah, the first act of Malchus (kingship) is not announcing Hashem's rule over someone else. It is knowing how we ourselves stand before Him.

The King We Are Asking

The words Avinu Malkeinu hold both sides together. אָבִינוּ (Our Father) means closeness. מֶלְכֵנוּ (Our King) means that the One Who loves us is also the One before Whom the entire world is judged. Rosh Hashanah does not ask us to choose between those truths.

A child can ask his father with confidence and still know that the gift belongs to the father. A subject can stand before a king with awe and still know that the king is listening. The tefillah of Rosh Hashanah lives inside that tension. We come close, but we do not become casual. We ask boldly, but we do not become entitled.

So every וְכֵן (and so) becomes a small act of preparation. It reminds us before the next request: I am coming before the King, and I am asking the One Who wants me to come.

Perhaps This Is the Moment

Esther Had a Reason to Wait

Esther's first response to Mordechai was entirely reasonable. Everyone knew the law of the palace: anyone who entered the inner court without being summoned could be put to death. Esther added: *וְאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרָאתִי לְבוֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים יוֹם* (And I have not been summoned to come to the king for thirty days) (אסתר ד:יא).

She was not saying that Klal Yisrael did not matter. She was saying that perhaps there would be a safer time. Perhaps the king would summon her. Perhaps she could do the same thing later with less danger.

Mordechai Changed the Question

Mordechai answered with one of the most powerful lines in Tanach: *וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם לָעֵת כְּזֹאת הִנָּעַתְּ לַמְּלָכוֹת* (And who knows whether you attained royalty for a time such as this) (אסתר ד:יד).

The Ibn Ezra explains that perhaps Esther reached the palace for this very moment, so that she could save Yisrael. Her entire path to royalty may have been arranged around the one point at which Hashem would ask something difficult of her. (אבן עזרא, אסתר ד:יד)

The Malbim says on this point that Esther could have imagined that she would help a few days later, after being summoned. Mordechai tells her that tomorrow may have different agents and different opportunities. Hashem may have placed her in the palace specifically for today. If she waits until tomorrow, the opportunity may pass to someone else. (מלב"ם, אסתר ד:יד)

The Rescue Did Not Depend on Esther

Mordechai also told Esther something that at first seems almost contradictory. *רַחֵם וְהַצֵּלָה יֵצֵא מִלְּיָהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר* (Relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place) (אסתר ד:יד). Klal Yisrael would not disappear if Esther refused. Hashem's plan did not depend on one person.

But Mordechai immediately continued: *וְאַתָּה וּבֵית אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ* (but you and your father's house will be lost) (אסתר ד:יד). The question was not whether Hashem could save Klal Yisrael without Esther. The question was whether Esther would become the person through whom that salvation came.

That distinction is essential in avodas Hashem. Hashem is never trapped by our refusal. Torah will continue. Chesed will be done. People will be helped. The opportunity can move to someone else. What may be lost is our own chance to answer the particular call that reached us.

The Area We Keep Postponing

That idea reaches far beyond Esther. A person can learn, daven, give tzedakah and do many things well, while one area remains permanently postponed. There is a nisayon he does not want to confront. There is an apology he knows he

owes, a habit he knows is wrong, a boundary he knows he needs, or a commitment he keeps moving to a later date.

The usual defense is not rebellion. It is timing. "I will deal with it later." Esther teaches that later is not always neutral. Sometimes the point we keep postponing is the very place where our avodah matters most.

The Point of Bechirah

Much of a person's religious life may already be part of his routine.

He davens because that is what he has always done. He keeps Shabbos because it is woven into the structure of his life.

Those mitzvos remain precious. But there is another place where the choice is still alive, where two directions are genuinely pulling at him.

That place is often called the nekudas habechirah (*the point of choice*). It is where a person can still go either way. The very difficulty he wishes would disappear may be what makes this part of his avodah uniquely his.

Mordechai's question therefore reaches into ordinary life: *וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם לָעֵת כְּזֹאת הִנָּעַתְּ לַמְּלָכוֹת* (And who knows whether you reached this position for a time such as this) (אסתר ד:יד).

Perhaps the hard conversation, the resisted mitzvah or the habit that refuses to move is not an interruption in the avodah. Perhaps it is where the avodah has arrived.

Where Malchus Enters

Chazal describe the central avodah of Rosh Hashanah with the words *אָמְרוּ לִפְנֵי מַלְכוּת כְּדִי שֶׁתִּמְלִיכוּנִי עֲלֵיכֶם* (Say before Me verses of Kingship so that you will make Me King over you) (ראש השנה טז).

עֲלֵיכֶם (over you) makes the demand personal. Hashem's Malchus has to reach the place where our own will is active. It is easiest to speak about Hashem as King where nothing is being asked from us. The real test comes where there is resistance.

That may be exactly where Hashem is asking something of us. Not because the rest of our avodah has no value, but because this is the place where there is a real choice.

Esther answered Mordechai with *וּבִקְרֹב אָבוֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ* (And so I will come before the king) (אסתר ד:טז). She stopped waiting for the safer moment and accepted the moment that was hers.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, there is a simple question worth asking: what is the one area in which "later" has become our favorite answer?

Perhaps that is the place where Malchus is waiting to become real.

Where Malchus Becomes Real

When Two Wills Meet

Pirkei Avos gives a precise description of avodas Hashem: *בטל רצונך מפני רצונו* (Make His will like your will... nullify your will before His will) (אבות ב:ד).

The first half asks a person to pursue Hashem's will with the energy he normally reserves for his own. The second half addresses the harder situation: what happens when the two wills are not the same?

The Mahar'i Yaavetz explains that when a person truly wants something for himself, obstacles do not easily stop him. He looks for another route, another time and another way. *עשה רצונך כרצונך* (Make His will like your will) (אבות ב:ד) means that the will of Hashem should be pursued with that same determination. (פירוש מהר"י יעב"ץ, אבות ב:ד)

When the Avodah Is to Stop

The second half is even more revealing: *בטל רצונך מפני רצונו* (Nullify your will before His will) (אבות ב:ד). Sometimes the avodah is not doing more. It is stopping.

A person wants to say the sentence, send the message, look at what he should not look at, spend money he should not spend, answer an insult, or keep feeding a resentment. The ratzon is real. Precisely there, restraint can become an act of Malchus.

I Want It, but I Do Not Do It

Chazal express the idea with unusual clarity: *לא יאמר אדם אי אפשי ללבוש שעטנז... אלא אפשי, ומה אעשה שאבי שבשמים גזר עלי* (A person should not say, I cannot wear shaatnez... rather, I could, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven decreed it upon me) (ספרא, קדושים, ויקרא כ:כו). Rashi brings the same teaching on the words *ואבדל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי* (I separated you from the nations to be Mine) (ויקרא כ:כו). (רש"י, ויקרא כ:כו)

The Mahar'i Yaavetz takes this directly into the Mishnah. He writes that the more strongly a person's own will pulls in the opposite direction, the greater the act of submitting it to Hashem. In a lo sa'aseh (a prohibition), the struggle itself can reveal the person's yirah (awe). (פירוש מהר"י יעב"ץ, אבות ב:ב)

The Desire Is Not the Failure

This is an important distinction. The existence of a desire is not itself proof of failure. In many areas, the desire is what makes the choice meaningful. A person can say, "I want this, but Hashem wants something else, and therefore I will not do it."

If there is no resistance, the mitzvah is still precious. But where there is resistance, a person discovers whether the King's will actually governs his own. The moment may be completely ordinary from the outside. No one sees a crown. But two wills have met, and one has yielded to the other.

The Greater the Pull, the Greater the Yirah

The Mahar'i Yaavetz says this explicitly. *כל שיתנגד רצונו משבכה* (The more it stands against his own will, the more praiseworthy the act) (פירוש מהר"י יעב"ץ, אבות ב:ד). In a lo sa'aseh (a prohibition), the person may receive no visible credit at all. He simply does not do what he wanted to do.

He continues that the greater the temptation to violate the prohibition, the greater the yirah (awe) revealed when the person holds himself back. *וכל שתגדל תשובת המקנים מצות לא תעשה לעבור עליה, תגדל יראתו* (The greater the desire of one observing a prohibition to violate it, the greater his awe when he refrains) (אבות ב:ד, פירוש מהר"י יעב"ץ, אבות ב:ד).

This does not glorify temptation. It explains why a struggle can have enormous spiritual value.

The victory may consist of a sentence that was never spoken, a screen that was turned away from, money that was not taken, or an angry response that never left the mouth.

The Coronation Inside a Person

Rosh Hashanah is filled with magnificent descriptions of Hashem's rule over the world. Yet *כדי שתמליכוני עליכם* (so that you will make Me King over you) (ראש השנה טז) will ultimately be tested in ordinary moments.

It may happen at a Yom Tov table when a person decides not to answer sharply.

It may happen in business when an easy shortcut is not honest. It may happen in a relationship when being right matters less than doing what is right. Hashem is King when His will is not merely admired but obeyed.

Who Has the Final Word?

A person can misunderstand Malchus by imagining that he must first stop wanting anything that conflicts with Hashem's will. Chazal say the opposite.

אפשי, ומה אעשה שאבי שבשמים גזר עלי (I could do it, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven decreed otherwise) (ספרא, קדושים, ויקרא כ:כו). The ratzon can still be present. The question is who decides.

That is why ordinary moments can contain an entire coronation. There may be no audience and no feeling of inspiration. A person simply reaches a point where his own will says one thing and the ratzon Hashem says another, and he gives the final word to Hashem.

Rosh Hashanah gives grandeur to that quiet decision.

כדי שתמליכוני עליכם (so that you will make Me King over you) (ראש השנה טז) means that Malchus must eventually enter the choices that belong only to us.

When the King Is Still King

Three Torah Pesukim of Malchuyos

The Torah pesukim of Malchuyos present three very different pictures. The first (שמות טו:יח) *(Hashem will reign forever and ever)* is the declaration of Klal Yisrael at the Yam. The second (דברים לג:ה) *(He became King in Yeshurun when the leaders of the nation gathered, together the tribes of Yisrael)* describes Malchus revealed through the gathering of Klal Yisrael.

The third pasuk is less obvious: *(Hashem his G-d is with him, and the King's friendship is within him)* (במדבר כג:כא). Rashi explains *(and the King's friendship is within him)* as an expression of affection and closeness. (רש"י, במדבר כג:כא) What does this teach us about making Hashem King?

Why the Third Pasuk Is So Different

The first two pesukim seem easy to understand as Malchuyos. At the Yam, Klal Yisrael declares that Hashem will reign forever. In V'Zos HaBerachah, His Kingship is revealed when the tribes gather together. But *(Hashem his G-d is with him, and the King's friendship is within him)* (במדבר כג:כא) sounds almost like a description of what Hashem gives us rather than what we give Him.

Rashi makes the question stronger. *(The King's teruah is within him, an expression of affection and friendship)* (רש"י, במדבר כג:כא). Onkelos renders it as *(The Shechinah of their King is among them)* (אונקלוס, במדבר כג:כא). Why is a pasuk about Hashem's closeness to Yisrael part of our declaration of Malchus?

The Ohr HaChaim's Reading

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh reads the pasuk through Rabbi Akiva's final Krias Shema. As his flesh was torn with iron combs, Rabbi Akiva prolonged *(One)* and accepted Ohl Malchus Shamayim *(the yoke of Heaven's Kingship)*. (ברכות סא:)

The Ohr HaChaim explains *(Hashem his G-d is with him)* (במדבר כג:כא) as the Jew attaching himself to Hashem with complete love even when *(the blow of the King is upon him)*. Even while the iron combs were tearing his flesh, *(Hashem his G-d remained with him)*. (אור החיים, במדבר כג:כא)

Kingship When Life Hurts

Most people will never face anything remotely resembling Rabbi Akiva's nisayon. But the principle reaches ordinary life. It is easy to call Hashem King when events are moving in the direction we wanted. The deeper acceptance comes when the King is still King after the answer was no.

A plan falls apart. A door closes. Someone disappoints us. Money becomes tight. A tefillah seems unanswered. Torah does not ask us to pretend that pain is painless. The question is whether disappointment becomes a reason to leave the

relationship, or whether *(Hashem his G-d remains with him)* (במדבר כג:כא).

Nefesh Can Also Mean Retzon

The pasuk *(and with all your soul)* (דברים ו:ה) reaches its ultimate expression in Rabbi Akiva's willingness to give his life. Yet the Torah also uses *(soul)* to mean a person's desire: *(If it is your desire)* (בראשית כג:ח).

That usage gives the words a daily application. Most Jews are not asked to give up life itself. Every Jew is asked, repeatedly, what he will do with his retzonos. *(and with all your soul)* (דברים ו:ה) can enter the places where we want something strongly and still choose to keep the relationship with Hashem stronger than the want.

The Ohr HaChaim's reading of Malchuyos is therefore not limited to martyrdom. Its structure belongs to ordinary disappointment as well: even when the moment hurts, *(Hashem his G-d is with him)* (במדבר כג:כא). The difficulty does not cancel the relationship with the King.

B'chol Nafshecha in Ordinary Life

Krias Shema says *(You shall love Hashem your G-d... with all your soul)* (דברים ו:ה). Chazal famously explain this as *(even if He takes your life)* (ברכות סא).

Tanach also uses *(soul)* in the sense of desire: *(If it is your desire)* (בראשית כג:ח). In everyday avodah, that gives *(with all your soul)* another practical edge: bringing our retzonos under the love of Hashem.

The first four vorts now come together. *(and so)* teaches us how to enter the King's chamber. Esther teaches us not to miss the moment we were given. Pirkei Avos teaches us what happens when our will meets His. The pesukim of Malchuyos teach us that Hashem remains King even when life does not follow our plan.

That is *(so that you will make Me King over you)* (ראש השנה טז). The crown is placed where a human being says: I still choose to remain with You.

Malchus Is a Relationship

This also explains why the language of affection belongs in Malchuyos. A king who is only distant can be obeyed, but Rosh Hashanah asks for more than distant obedience. Klal Yisrael accepts a King whose Shechinah is among them and whose closeness remains even when His will is difficult to understand.

The first four vorts form one progression. We enter the chamber with *(and so)*. We recognize the moment that cannot always be postponed. We give Hashem the final word where our own ratzon pulls elsewhere. And we remain with the King even when events themselves are painful.

On Rosh Hashanah, You Are the Korban

Why Four Days of Selichos?

The Mishnah Berurah brings a remarkable reason for the minimum four days of Selichos before Rosh Hashanah. A korban had to be inspected for four days before it was offered. The same four-day period, he writes, is part of our preparation for Rosh Hashanah. (משנה ברורה, אורח חיים תקפ"א, ס"ק ו')

Why should the laws of inspecting a korban determine how long a person prepares for Rosh Hashanah? The answer comes from an unusual word in Parshas Pinchas.

The Mishnah Berurah's Own Language

The Mishnah Berurah writes: וְעוֹד טַעַם שֶׁקִּבְּעוּ ד' יָמִים, שֶׁכֵּן מְצִינוּ: בְּקִרְבָּנוֹת שְׁטֵעוּנִים בְּקוֹר מָמוּם ד' יָמִים קֹדֶם הַקֶּרֶבָה (Another reason four days were established is that korbanos require inspection from blemishes for four days before they are offered) (משנה ברורה, אורח חיים תקפ"א:ו').

That comparison would be difficult to understand if Selichos were only additional words of tefillah. The four days make sense when the person preparing for Rosh Hashanah is himself being readied for an offering. The time is meant for looking, identifying and repairing.

Not "Bring" but "Make"

By the korbanos of the Yamim Tovim, the Torah generally uses the language וְהִקְרַבְתָּם עֹלָה (You shall bring an olah). On Rosh Hashanah it says וַעֲשִׂיתָם עֹלָה (You shall make an olah) (במדבר כט:ב).

The Mishnah Berurah explains: לְלַמֵּד שֶׁבְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם עֲצָמוֹ בְּאֵלּוֹ מְקַרִּיב אֶת עֲצָמוֹ (to teach that on Rosh Hashanah a person should make himself as though he is offering himself) (משנה ברורה, אורח חיים תקפ"א, ס"ק ו').

This is unusual language. We usually come to Rosh Hashanah thinking about what we need Hashem to give us. The Mishnah Berurah turns the question around. Before asking what we will receive, the day asks what we are prepared to bring.

The Four Days Are an Inspection

If the person is the korban, Selichos becomes more than additional tefillah. It is bikkur (inspection). A korban is checked because once it is brought, it must be fit for the Mizbeach (Altar). The same preparation asks a person to look honestly at himself.

That inspection cannot be outsourced. A rav can teach. A friend can encourage. A spouse can point something out. But no one else can finally decide which blemish keeps returning, which excuse has become permanent, or which area of life we have protected from change.

What Is the Inspection Looking For?

The word bikkur (inspection) changes the quality of preparation. An inspection is not a general feeling that something ought to improve. It looks for a specific mum. A person asks where he repeatedly falls, what he keeps excusing

and which part of his conduct he would be embarrassed to place openly before Hashem.

The answer will be different for every person. For one it may be speech. For another it may be money, anger, jealousy, what he looks at, the way he treats someone at home, or the amount of time he loses. The four days do not tell everyone to bring the same korban. They tell everyone to inspect the korban he actually is.

That is also why the preparation is hopeful. A mum is looked for because something can be done about it. The purpose of identifying the blemish is not to leave a person staring at what is wrong. It is to make the offering fit.

The Shofar Says the Same Thing

The Gemara explains why the shofar of Rosh Hashanah is ideally a ram's horn: תִּקְעוּ לִפְנֵי בְּשׁוֹפָר שֶׁל אֵיל... וּמַעֲלָה אֲנִי עֲלֵיכֶם (Blow before Me with a ram's horn... and I will consider it as though you bound yourselves before Me) (ראש השנה טז).

The wording is striking. The shofar does not only recall what Avraham and Yitzchak did. Chazal say בְּאֵלּוֹ עֲקַדְתֶּם עַצְמְכֶם (as though you bound yourselves). The Akeidah is meant to become personal.

What Can a Person Actually Bring?

No one is being asked to place his life on an altar. But everyone has something he guards as though it were untouchable: a habit, a grievance, a need for kavod (honor), a pleasure, a pattern of speech, a private indulgence, or an area in which the answer has always been, "This remains mine."

That may be the korban of Rosh Hashanah. A korban becomes sacred when something that belonged to a person is given to Hashem. In avodas Hashem, the same thing can happen to a ratzon. Something genuinely mine is placed under His will.

The purpose of inspection is not to manufacture despair. We inspect a korban because we want it to be fit. The willingness to look is itself an expression of hope that repair is possible.

The Question Changes

Rosh Hashanah naturally fills a person with requests. What will the year bring? What will happen with health, family, parnassah and all the things that matter most? Those questions are real, and the machzor gives us language with which to ask.

וַעֲשִׂיתָם עֹלָה (במדבר כט:ב) (You shall make an olah) adds another question before them: what am I bringing? The day is not only a moment in which Hashem writes the year for the person. It is also a moment in which the person presents himself before Hashem.

A useful preparation can therefore be very concrete. Name one blemish. Name one ratzon. Name one thing that can be placed on the Mizbeach. The korban becomes real when it has a shape.

The Blemish That Makes the Korban Unfit

The Mountains Had a Mum

Chazal describe the mountains seeking the privilege of Kabbalas HaTorah. Har Tavor and Har Carmel were great and imposing, yet Har Sinai was chosen. On the pasuk לָמָּה תִּרְצְדוּן הָרִים גִּבְעוֹנִים (תהלים) (*Why do you contend, O mountain peaks*) (סח:יז), the Gemara says that the other mountains were considered blemished beside Sinai. Rav Ashi concludes: הָאִי מֵאֵן דִּיְהִיר בַּעַל מוֹם הוּא (מגילה כט). (*A person who is arrogant is a baal mum*) (מגילה כט).

Chazal are not merely saying that gaavah (*pride*) is an ugly middah (*character trait*). They use a halachic word: mum (*blemish*). If the person himself is the korban, that description becomes serious. A blemish can make the offering unfit.

Why Gaavah Is Different

The Meshech Chochmah explains that many aveiros are rooted in the physical side of a person. Gaavah is different. והִנֵּה הַגָּאוֹן הָיָא גַם כֹּן בְּנַפְשׁ הַמְשַׁכֵּלֶת (Pride also exists in the thinking soul) (משך חכמה, ויקרא ח:ז). An animal can hunger and desire. It cannot construct an opinion of its own greatness.

That is why the Torah connects pride with forgetting Hashem: וְרָם לְבָבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Your heart will become elevated and you will forget Hashem your G-d) (דברים ח:יד). Pride quietly moves a person from receiving life from Hashem to imagining that he stands independently.

Why Pride Reaches So Deep

The Meshech Chochmah connects gaavah to the Torah's warning וְרָם לְבָבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Your heart will become elevated and you will forget Hashem your G-d) (דברים ח:יד). The danger of pride is not simply that it makes a person unpleasant to live with. It can alter his basic picture of reality.

When a person begins to experience his abilities, money, position or intelligence as self-created possessions, the Giver slowly disappears from the picture. That is why Chazal say כָּל אִשָּׁה אֲדָם שֵׁשׁ בּו גִּסּוֹת הָרוּם רָאוּי לִגְדָּעוֹ כְּאַשְׁרָה (Anyone who has arrogance should be cut down like an Asheirah) (סוטה ה). The comparison to a tree of avodah zarah is severe because both place something else where Hashem belongs.

The Rosh Hashanah inspection therefore reaches past behavior into ownership. Do I know that what I have was given? That question can touch a person even when no obvious aveirah has occurred.

A Defect in Avodah

The Meshech Chochmah points to a Gemara about three Kohanim receiving portions of the Lechem HaPanim. One said that he received a double portion, another that he received an olive-sized portion, and a third described his tiny portion as כְּזֵנֵב הַלִּצְטָא (like a lizard's tail) (פסחים ג).

The Gemara first says that they found a defect in him, and then corrects the expression: אַל תִּימָא שְׁמִין פְּסוּל אֶלָּא שְׁמִין פְּסוּל (Do not say a trace of genealogical defect, but a defect of arrogance)

(פסחים ג). Rashi explains that he was a coarse, arrogant person who spoke contemptuously about kodshei Shamayim (*the sacred things of Heaven*). Character had become a defect in avodah.

When There Is No Room for the King

Chazal describe the danger of gaavah in even stronger terms:

Hashem says: He and I cannot dwell together in the world. (סוטה ה).

The Gemara derives this from the pasuk גְּבוּהַ עֵינָיו וְרָחַב לִבָּהּ, אֹתוֹ לֹא אוּכָל (תהלים קא:ה) (*One whose eyes are haughty and whose heart is proud, I cannot tolerate*), referring to the person whose eyes are raised and whose heart has become enlarged. Chazal read אֹתוֹ לֹא אוּכָל as though Hashem is saying: there is no room for both of us. This explains why gaavah can be described as a mum. The problem is deeper than boasting or behaving arrogantly. When the self becomes too large, it begins to occupy the place that belongs to Hashem. A person starts to experience his talents as his own achievement, his possessions as his own property, his success as something he produced, and his expectations as something the world owes him.

The avodah of Rosh Hashanah is Malchus. A King can only be crowned where there is room for Him. The more completely a person recognizes that what he has was given to him, the more space he creates for the מֶלֶךְ to enter his life.

Yissachar Ish Kfar Barkai

The Gemara tells separately of Yissachar Ish Kfar Barkai, who wrapped his hands in silk while performing the avodah because he did not want to soil them. The Azarah itself, Chazal say, cried out that he honored himself while desecrating kodshei Shamayim. (פסחים נז).

The problem was not cleanliness. It was the attitude that the avodah was beneath him. The Meshech Chochmah places this beside the Gemara of שְׁחֵץ פְּסוּל (*a defect of arrogance*) to show how gaavah can interfere with the very capacity to serve. (משך חכמה, ויקרא ח:ז).

Making Ourselves Poor

Chazal say כָּל שָׁנָה שֶׁרָשָׁה בְּתַחֲלֹתָהּ מִתְעַשְּׂרֶת בְּסוֹפָהּ (Any year that makes itself poor at its beginning becomes wealthy at its end) (ראש השנה טז). Rashi explains that Klal Yisrael make themselves poor on Rosh Hashanah, speaking before Hashem with supplication. Tosafos adds that because their hearts are broken, Heaven has mercy upon them. (ראש השנה, רש"י ותוספות, טז:).

This does not require a successful person to pretend he has accomplished nothing. Torah does not ask for false humility. It asks for accurate ownership. A person may be talented, wealthy or accomplished and still know that every ability, every opportunity and every breath is a gift.

The heart that says, "I have everything," is in danger of a mum. The heart that says, "Everything I have comes from You," becomes fit for avodah. ***

The Akeidah After the Akeidah

The Pasuk After the Mountain

One of the most revealing pesukim in the Akeidah comes after the great test is over: וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו וַיְלִכּוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל בְּעֵר שֶׁבַע (Avraham returned to his young men, and they went together to Be'er Sheva) (בראשית כב:יט).

Avraham had just heard עֵתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יִרְאֶה אֱלֹקִים אֶתָּה (Now I know that you are one who fears G-d) (בראשית כב:יב). He had reached a spiritual height almost beyond imagination. Yet the Torah immediately shows him returning to ordinary life and walking יַחְדָּו (together) with the people who had remained below.

The test did not make him larger in his own eyes. He came down from the mountain without bringing the mountain into his ego.

The Shofar Brings Us Back

That gives another dimension to the ram's horn. The Gemara says: תִּקְעוּ לִפְנֵי בְּשׂוֹפָר שֶׁל אֵיל... בְּאֵלוּ עֲקֻדְתָּם עִצְמָכֶם לִפְנֵי (Blow before Me with a ram's horn... as though you bound yourselves before Me) (ראש השנה טז).

The Akeidah is not remembered so that a person can feel spiritually impressive. It is remembered so that something in him becomes more surrendered.

A Cry Without a Resume

The Yerushalmi explains the horns used on a fast day with a startling image: הַשֹּׁפָר בְּאֵלוּ גֹעִים כְּבָהֳמָה לִפְנֵיךָ (Consider us as though we are crying out like an animal before You) (ירושלמי, תענית ב:א).

The comparison is not meant to degrade a human being. It strips away the layers with which we usually present ourselves. An animal has no title, no resume, no social standing and no argument for why the verdict should be different. It cries because it needs.

Teruah Is a Broken Sound

Chazal identify the sound of teruah through two human sounds: גְּנוּחִי גְּנוּחִי גְּנוּחִי וְיִלּוּלִי יִלּוּלִי (groaning and wailing) (ראש השנה טז:לג). The shofar does not produce a polished melody. Its defining sound is broken.

That is fitting for a day on which a person is asked to become a korban. The broken sound does not celebrate brokenness for its own sake. It breaks the polished version of ourselves that we so easily carry. The shofar lets a Jew stand before Hashem without needing to sound impressive.

The Yerushalmi's image of an animal crying before Hashem takes the same idea further. The cry has no argument inside it. It simply says: I need You.

Why the Shofar Has No Words

The machzor contains some of the most majestic language a Jew ever says. The central mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah, however, is a sound without words. A shofar does not explain itself. It does not list accomplishments. It does not defend its record. It is breath becoming a cry.

That is exactly why the sound can answer gaavah. Pride depends on the story a person tells himself about what he

owns, what he deserves and how important he is. The shofar interrupts the story.

Receiving the Year Again

כָּל שָׁנָה שְׂרִישָׁהּ בְּתַחֲלָתָהּ (A year that makes itself poor at its beginning) (ראש השנה טז) means that the new year begins with receiving. Health must be received again. Parnassah must be received again. Peace at home, children, clarity, protection, opportunity and life itself must be received again. This is not a reason for panic. It is a reason for gratitude. The uncertainty of tomorrow exposes how many of yesterday's gifts we quietly converted into entitlements.

Nothing Is Owed Into the New Year

The phrase שְׂרִישָׁהּ בְּתַחֲלָתָהּ (that makes itself poor at its beginning) (ראש השנה טז) is especially powerful because the beginning of a year feels like a continuation. We walk into Rosh Hashanah with the same family, the same home, the same job and the same body we had the day before. The continuity can hide what the day means.

Rosh Hashanah teaches that continuity is itself a gift. The fact that something existed yesterday does not force it to exist tomorrow. When that truth is taken seriously, gratitude and tefillah become more specific. A person begins noticing how much he has been receiving all along.

The shofar therefore does two things at once. It unsettles the illusion of entitlement, and it awakens gratitude for everything that has already been given.

Coming Down From the Mountain

A person can have a powerful Rosh Hashanah, daven with intensity, make a difficult kabbalah (commitment) and still lose something if he walks away feeling superior to people who did not have the same experience.

Avraham teaches the final movement: וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו (Avraham returned to his young men) (בראשית כב:יט). The Akeidah continued after the knife was put down. He returned humble.

The real effect of the shofar may therefore be seen after the sound ends. If a person becomes softer, more grateful, less entitled and less certain that everyone owes him something, then the Akeidah has entered ordinary life.

The Akeidah Continues at Home

The test of Avraham did not end when the malach stopped the knife. The Torah still had one more picture to show us: he returned to the people waiting for him and went on with life. That may be the most practical part of the Akeidah for us.

A person can leave shul after a powerful tefillah and immediately meet the ordinary frustrations of family, meals, fatigue and other people. Those moments reveal whether the shofar remained a sound in shul or changed the person who heard it.

What Are You Putting on the Mizbeach?

Yosef Saw Himself as a Korban

Yosef HaTzaddik stood alone in Mitzrayim facing an extraordinary nisayon. Chazal place a remarkable sentence in his response to Eishes Potifar: לְמוֹד הוּא הָקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהוֹת (HaKadosh Baruch Hu is accustomed to choosing an olah from the beloved members of my father's house) (בראשית רבה פז:ה).

Yosef was thinking about the Akeidah. Hashem had chosen Yitzchak from the family of Avraham. If Yosef surrendered to the aveirah, the Midrash says he feared that he might then be chosen for an olah and become disqualified from the korban: אֲשָׁמַע לְיָד וְשָׁמָּה אֶבְחַר לְעוֹלָה וְאֶפְסֵל מִן הַקֶּרְבָּן (If I listen to you, perhaps I will be chosen as an olah and become disqualified from the offering) (בראשית רבה פז:ה).

That is why נִמָּאָן (and he refused) (בראשית לט:ח) becomes such a powerful word. His refusal was not only a denial of temptation. It was an offering.

A Nisayon Can Become a Gift

When temptation is viewed only as deprivation, a person feels that something is being taken from him. When he sees restraint as a korban, the same act changes direction. He is giving something to Hashem.

That can be a desire, a taavah (craving), a grudge, a need to win, a piece of gossip, a private behavior, a resentment, a comfort or a refusal to apologize. When a person moves beyond a ratzon because Hashem wants something else, the ratzon itself becomes part of the avodah.

The Korban of a Broken Heart

Dovid HaMelech gives the final definition: זִבְחֵי אֱלֹקִים רוּחַ (The offerings of G-d are a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart, G-d, You will not despise) (תהלים נא:יט).

Rabbeinu Yonah calls hachna'ah (humility and submission) the seventh foundation of teshuvah: הָעֵקֶר הַשְּׁבִיעִי, הַכְּנִיעָה בְּכָל לֵב (The seventh foundation is wholehearted submission and humility) (שערי תשובה א:כג). He brings Dovid HaMelech's broken heart as the proof that hachna'ah is one of the foundations of teshuvah.

The Radak explains the pasuk with striking simplicity: הַזִּבְחִים (The sacrifices He wants are a broken spirit) (רד"ק, תהלים נא:יט). A broken heart is not rejected even when there is no animal korban.

The Malbim adds another layer. The heart is the outer vessel in which desire is awakened and in which the power to restrain it operates. When the heart is humbled before Hashem, the force of desire weakens. A person can still want, but he no longer treats every want as a command. (מלבי"ם, תהלים נא:יט)

Broken Does Not Mean Destroyed

A broken heart in Torah is not a destroyed person. It is a

person whose illusion of self-sufficiency has cracked. He knows his failures, but he also knows where to bring them. He is no longer protecting every desire as sacred.

Recognition Comes Before Hachna'ah

Rabbeinu Yonah explains why hachna'ah (humility and submission) belongs among the foundations of teshuvah: כִּי הַמִּכִּיר אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ יָדַע כִּמָּה הָעוֹבֵר עַל דְּבָרֵי שֵׁחַ וְשָׁפַל וְנִגְרַע מֵעָרְכּוֹ (One who recognizes his Creator understands how low and diminished a person becomes when he violates His word) (שערי תשובה א:כג).

The order matters. Humility does not begin with telling ourselves that we are worthless. It begins with recognizing the Borei Olam. Once the greatness of the King becomes real, the illusion that our own will is supreme becomes harder to maintain.

That is why Dovid HaMelech calls the broken heart a korban. Something has actually been surrendered. The person no longer approaches Hashem while protecting the assumption that he is answerable only to himself.

Two Kinds of Breaking

The Radak and Malbim help define what kind of brokenness Torah is asking for. The Radak speaks of the spirit that no longer stands proudly before Hashem. The Malbim describes the heart as the place where desire is awakened and where the power to govern desire operates. (תהלים נא:יט)

The result is not a person who has stopped wanting. It is a person whose wants have stopped ruling him. A heart can be alive, energetic and full of desire while still being נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְּכָה (broken and humbled) (תהלים נא:יט) before Hashem.

Give the Korban a Shape

The practical avodah does not have to be enormous. Choose one real thing. Not "I will be better," because that has no shape. Choose a place where there is actual resistance.

Perhaps it is one person you will stop speaking about. One resentment you will stop feeding. One piece of time you will protect for Torah. One indulgence you will give up. One apology you will finally make. One area in which you will stop negotiating with what you already know to be right.

The difficulty does not necessarily mean the choice was wrong. It may mean you have reached the point of bechirah (choice). The resistance is what allows the act to become an offering.

On Rosh Hashanah we ask Hashem for life, health, brachah (blessing), parnassah, nachas (joy from one's family), simchah (joy) and peace. We ask because He is הַמֶּלֶךְ הַדּוֹשֵׁף בְּחַיִּים (the King Who desires life). But we can come with something in our hands as well: one ratzon we are willing to move beyond, one blemish we are willing to inspect honestly, one place where we are ready to make Him King.....

וְאַתָּה יְיָ לְבַדְּךָ. And You, Hashem, will reign alone..

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