

Fascinating INSIGHTS

כ"ו אלול תשפ"א

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Amalek believes that all is coincidence.¹ If we think this way, then we erase Hashem’s name, as it says in this week’s parsha, וּמַחָה ה' אֶת שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.² We must fulfill תִּמְחָה אֶת זֵכֶר עֲמֶלֶק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם by eradicating this philosophy of theirs.

In 1982, David, a secular Jew that was once religious, who was a Holocaust survivor, was asked by a man named Yaakov to complete a minyan. David adamantly refused, explaining that he wasn’t granted his one request he expressed to Hashem which was that he should have a son remain alive so that he will live on. Months later, on Yom Kippur, when Yaakov was walking to shul for Yizkor he noticed David in a park eating a sandwich. He approached David informing him it was Yom Kippur and asked him if he would like to join him to shul for Yizkor for his son. After his initial refusal, David agreed since he was doing it for his son whom he so desperately wanted to survive the Holocaust. When they arrived in shul, Yaakov walked with him to the front of the shul to give the name of David’s son, Moshe ben Dovid, to the chazzan, who was himself saying Yizkor for his father. When the chazzan heard the name, he asked David for the last name. When David replied, “Shechter,” the chazzan nearly fainted. He exclaimed, “I am Moshe and you are my father!” The joy felt at Yizkor on that Yom Kippur was indescribable!

All that happens is השגחה פרטית, Divine Providence and as it says מִדֵּה מִצְעָדֵי גֵבֶר כּוֹנֵנוּ by Hashem are a man’s footsteps established.⁴ There is no such thing as coincidence.⁵ In fact, if we rearrange the letters of מִקְרָה, coincidence,⁶ we get מִקְרָה, only from Hashem, meaning that which seems like an accident is in essence Divine Providence.⁷ Indeed, מִקְרָה can be translated as prepare as in וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם,⁸ since every situation is prepared by Hashem. They say it is the Jews that run everything in the world. They are almost correct. It’s Hashem, the G-d of the Jews, that runs everything in the world.

R’ Mordechai Pogromonsky (1903-1949) once rode a train with a fellow Jew to get to another town for Shabbos. As it turned out they missed their stop. When his counterpart began to complain, R’ Pogromonsky responded that a Jew is never lost. They arrived at a town

¹ As it says regarding them אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ, by chance (Devarim 25:18).

² Devarim 29:19.

³ Devarim 25:19.

⁴ Tehillim 37:23. And as we say in Birchas Hashachar המְכִיֵן מִצְעָדֵי גֵבֶר, who prepares the footsteps of man.

⁵ Indeed, it has been said that the word coincidence in English can be broken up into Kah (Hashem, as in י-ה) inside, meaning Hashem is inside everything.

⁶ R’ Yeruchem Levovitz would say that nature is the name given to miracles that happen frequently.

⁷ Someone once remarked: “We all are tourists and Hashem is our travel agent who already fixed all our routes, reservations and destinations. So, trust Him and enjoy the trip called LIFE...”

⁸ Bamidbar 35:11, Rashi. Additionally, Targum Unkolos renders זָמִין as מִקְרָה (Breishis 27:20).

but to their dismay, there were no shuls there. However, they were directed to a Jew that lived in the town who agreed to host them. The host's wife had given birth to a boy seven days before. He shared his frustration with his guests about the Mohel he had ordered but soon canceled.⁹ It turned out that the Jew accompanying R' Pogromonsky was a Mohel who had the instruments for Mila on him. He performed the Bris on the eighth day!¹⁰

Take a Breathe

The Midrash¹¹ says על כל נשימה ונשימה תהלל יי, one should praise Hashem for each breath. The Kedushas Levi¹² explains that each time we exhale, our neshama seeks to exit our bodies and return to its source. However, Hashem in his mercy doesn't allow this to happen.

The Maggid of Mezerich writes that when we exhale, the neshama returns to its source and when we inhale, Hashem returns it to us. In essence, we are reborn with each breath. This should infuse us with a sense of renewal and fervor.

Let's conclude with how R' Tzvi Zidichover (1763–1831) fulfilled על כל נשימה ונשימה תהלל יי. With his inhale, he would concentrate on the name of Hashem יי-ה. In contrast, when he would exhale, he would concentrate on the name אלהים.¹³

A Cry For Mercy

We blow the Shofar during the month of Elul, which consists of 29 days, as well as the two days of Rosh Hashana.¹⁴ This gives us a total of 31. However, the Shofar

⁹ R' Efraim Laniado, who was the Chief Rabbi of Aleppo, Syria in the late 18th century, writes (Degel Machane Efraim, Yoreh Deah, 2) about a man whose son was born during a time when he was quarantined out of fear of a plague which raged through the city. The father refused to invite a *mohel* to circumcise his son. R' Laniado writes that this was acceptable, as the father was scared to open the door to his home due to the danger lurking outside. A similar ruling was issued by R' Moshe Hakohen (in his sefer Pnei Moshe, Yoreh Deah 263) of Djerba, Tunisia where he speaks of an epidemic that caused the community to remain in their homes. R' Moshe Hakohen ruled that it was permitted to delay the bris for the boys born during this period, given the danger entailed. Among what he writes is that just as the Jewish People didn't perform *bris mila* throughout the forty years of desert travel due to the harsh conditions which made the procedure dangerous, it is similarly legitimate to delay circumcision during the time of an epidemic when people quarantine themselves out of fear of infection.

¹⁰ Interestingly, whenever there was a Bris in the Kehila of the Chassam Sofer in Pressburg where he was a Mohel at, he made sure they daven Shacharis five minutes earlier than usual in order to fulfill מקדימין למצות (Pesachim 4a).

¹¹ Breishis Rabba 14:9.

¹² To the Yom Tov of Rosh Hashana, s.v. ענין הפרישה.

¹³ Of course if we saw him, we wouldn't realize he was doing this.

¹⁴ An interesting tangential point: The 40 days from Elul until Yom Kippur we stand in front of Hashem as we are told that these 40 days are ימי רצון (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:1. ימי רצון, days of favor, is called so because it is days in which one's teshuva is more readily accepted. Another explanation for this appellation is that it is a time to show our רצון to Hashem.). This is hinted by the fact that there are 40 Pesukim in Parshas

is not blown on Shabbos¹⁵ and Erev Rosh Hashana.¹⁶ Subtracting these five days (the four Shabbosim in Elul and Erev Rosh Hashana), we have 26 days where it is blown. 26 is the numerical value of יי-ה-וה, the name of Hashem that represents רחמים, mercy.¹⁷ This is what we especially desire during this time of year.

Blowing the Shofar arouses Hashem's mercy. This is shown in the beginning of the Torah. Counting 26 letters from the ש of השמים in the first Pasuk in the Torah we have a ו (of ובהו). 26 letters later is a פ (of מרחפת) followed by a ר (of אור) in another 26 letters.¹⁸ These letters comprise the word שופר.

It says תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו blow the Shofar...¹⁹ The letters that precede חדש form the word גזר. That is, before a ה is ז, before a ד is ג and before ש is יר. Let us do the same with שפר. Before ש is ר, before פ is ע and before ר is ק. These letters spell קרע. Lastly, let us do the same to כסה. Before a כ is י, before ס is נ and before ה is ד. That spells דין. So, we have קרע גזר דין which is alluding to that through the Shofar, a decree can be torn up!²¹

The Panim Yafos²² tells us that during these days we say יי-ה-וה לידוד ה' אורי because it says Hashem's name in it 13 times, corresponding to the 13 attributes of mercy.

During these days, we want רחמים. As a result, we say יי-ה-וה, the name of Hashem that represents רחמים, in 13 לידוד ה' אורי times. Being that we recite it twice daily, we mention the name יי-ה-וה 26 times! 26, the sum of יי-ה-וה!

The Bnei Yissochar explains the idea of dipping the Challa in honey: דבש has an equivalent of 306, the same as עשרת ימי תשובה and like we say during אב הרחמים in the second Bracha of Shemoneh Esrei—אב הרחמים.²³

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights in addition to being the host of The Fascinating Insights Podcast. His writings, some of which have been translated into Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

Nitzavim (which comes out at this time every year) as נצבים means to stand. אתם נצבים...לפני ה': these 40 days we stand before Hashem.

¹⁵ Rosh Hashana 29b. Indeed, שבת במקום is an acronym for שבת במקום תרועה.

¹⁶ Rema in Orach Chaim, 581:3.

¹⁷ Breishis, Rashi 1:1.

¹⁸ Breishis 1:1-3.

¹⁹ Tehillim 81:4.

²⁰ See Shaar Hakavanos, Inyan Pesach, Drush 2 regarding the method of exchanging letters with those that precede it.

²¹ Taamai Haminhagim, p. 316, s.v. עוד שם. Panim Yafos, Emor, s.v. ויש לרמז.

²² Acharei Mos, s.v. והנה נהגו.

²³ According to those who say אב הרחמן it also fits, as that too has a sum of 306.