



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

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THE ALSHICH'S ANALYSIS OF A FASCINATING MIDRASH

The *Yalkut Shimoni* (Remez 718) expounds as follows:

It says in *Tehillim* (32:1), *Fortunate is the person whose willful sin (פְּשָׁע) is forgiven (נָשׂוּי) [and whose inadvertent sin (חֲטָאָה) is covered up]*. R' Berechyah the Kohen said: Hashem causes our willful sins to be forgotten (מְנַשֵּׁי) and forgives our sins every year, as it says (verse 34), *This shall be for you as an eternal statute to make an atonement for Bnei Yisrael for all their sins, once a year.*

You find that the *Satan* comes on Yom Kippur to make accusations against the Jewish people, and details their sins. He says, "Master of the worlds, the Jewish people are thieves." Hashem then details all the merits of the Jewish people. What does Hashem do next? He takes the rod of the scales and examines the sins in comparison with the merits and they appear equally balanced. The *Satan* goes to bring more sins and put them on [the sinful] side of the scales to outbalance [the merits on the other side]. What does Hashem do [in the meantime]? He takes the sins from the pan [that has been holding them] and conceals them under His cloak. When the *Satan* comes back, he does not find any sins left there, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 50:20), *The sin of Yisrael will be sought but it will not be there.*

Consider the following questions:

1. What does R' Berechyah mean by saying that Hashem causes our sins to be forgotten? Hashem does not forget.
2. Furthermore, what does he mean by adding that Hashem "forgives our sins every year"? One cannot speak of forgiving something that has already been forgotten.
3. Why does it say that Hashem "takes the **rod** of the scales"? It should have just said He "takes the scales."
4. The Midrash seems to imply that every year the number of sins and merits comes out exactly equal. How is this possible?
5. What does it mean that Hashem "takes the sins from the pan and conceals them under His cloak"? If the sins have been forgiven, what need is there to conceal them? And if they have not been forgiven, how does it help to conceal them?

R' Berechyah was bothered by two things about the verse in *Tehillim*. First, if the word נָשׂוּי means "is forgiven" as the context suggests, it should have an *aleph* at the end and not a *yud*, as in *Yeshayahu* (33:24), נִשְׂאָ עוֹן (forgiven of sin). Second, the verse uses two different words for "sin," פְּשָׁע and חֲטָאָה, the first being a more

serious, willful sin and the second being a less serious, inadvertent sin. If so, why does the verse say that the more serious sin is “forgiven” (נָשׁוּי) while the less serious one is only “covered up”? For this reason, he expounded the word נָשׁוּי as meaning מְנַשֵּׂי, which means “forgotten”.

This interpretation solves the two difficulties that R' Berechyah had. A king will normally forgive his attendants if they do something wrong. But if they repeat the same wrongdoing a second or third time, he will not want to forgive them. He will say, “You are angering me on purpose; I have already warned you about this and you refuse to listen.” We might have expected Hashem to forgive a person on Yom Kippur only for new sins but not for those that he was repeating. It was compassionate enough for Hashem to have forgiven him for these sins when he committed them the first time. We would well understand if Hashem said that the person does not deserve forgiveness when he keeps repeating his offense. Nevertheless, when Yom Kippur comes, Hashem, in His infinite mercy, pretends He has forgotten that the person committed those exact sins before and considers it as if this is the first time that he has sinned like this. He does this each and every year. This is what R' Berechyah means when he says, “Hashem causes our willful sins to be forgotten and forgives our sins every year.” **[This answers Questions 1 and 2.]**

The Midrash continues: “Hashem then details all the merits of the Jewish people” to make them appear more numerous than the sins. Nevertheless, more sins remain than merits. So Hashem “takes the rod of the scales...” Why specify that He takes the rod? Scales consist of a horizontal rod with each end attached to a pan holding the things being weighed. A vertical pole is inserted into the middle of the rod, and the two suspended pans move up or down, depending on which holds the greater weight. Lifting the scales by the vertical pole still allows the pans to move up or down. But if one takes hold of the horizontal rod (at the center), neither pan would be able to move, no matter which side was actually heavier. Speaking allegorically, the Midrash is saying that this is what Hashem does: He takes the scales weighing the Jewish people’s sins and holds them by the horizontal rod, thus preventing the side with the sins from descending. This is the intent of the Midrash when it says, “He takes **the rod** of the scales and examines the sins in comparison with the merits and they appear equally balanced.” **[This answers Questions 3 and 4.]**

When the *Satan* sees this, he hurries off to search for more misdeeds to tip the balance. This gives Hashem the opportunity, as it were, to remove the sins from the scales and “conceal them under His cloak.” What does this mean? The Jews do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, and our Sages (*Yoma* 86b) say that so great is the power of *teshuvah* that it can transform even willful sins into merits – but only if the *teshuvah* is done through love of Hashem. If done out of fear, they are merely transformed into inadvertent sins. Therefore, activating the full force of His Attribute of Mercy, Hashem wraps the sins in His cloak of Divine Compassion that He wears on Yom Kippur and considers the people’s repentance as having been performed out of love, so when the *Satan* returns, “he does not find any sins left there.” **[This answers Question 5.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich’s true greatness.

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