



Standing Alone Before Hashem



The Mishna towards the beginning of Masechet Rosh Hashanah (1:2) informs us: “On Rosh Hashanah, all the creatures of the world pass before Him (*Hashem*) like ‘*Bnei Maron*,’ as it says, ‘He who fashions their hearts together, who understands all their actions.’”

What does it mean that on Rosh Hashanah we all come before *Hashem* “like *Bnei Maron*”?

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) provides three explanations:

“What is meant by ‘like *Bnei Maron*’? Here (in Bavel) they translated, ‘like young sheep.’ Resh Lakish said, ‘like the ascent of Beit Maron.’ Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel, ‘like the soldiers of the house of David.’”

Rashi explains each of these opinions: according to the first opinion, we pass before *Hashem* for judgment like sheep being counted for tithing as they pass through a narrow gate, one at a time. According to Resh Lakish, we pass before *Hashem* like a line of people climbing the ascent of Beit Maron, where the narrow path between two valleys only allows one person to pass at a time. According to Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel, we pass before *Hashem* like the soldiers of David, who went out to battle single-file.

The common message of these images is that on Rosh Hashanah we stand before *Hashem* as individuals. We cannot blame others, hide behind general societal decadence, or justify ourselves by pointing out those who achieve less than us. We are each judged in comparison to our own potential and must accept responsibility as individuals.

However, the continuation of the Gemara portrays a very different scene:

“*Rabba bar Bar Chana* said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, ‘And they are all scanned in one glance.’ Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, ‘We can also support this from the Mishna, ‘He who fashions their hearts together, who understands all their actions.’”

According to this, we are judged simultaneously, as one collective unit. This is not meant to contradict the previous sentiment, but to add a further dimension, for Rosh Hashanah presents us with a dual challenge. On the one hand, we pass before *Hashem* as individuals. At the same time, like the individual sheep who is an integral member of the flock and the individual soldier who is part of an army and represents his country, we stand before *Hashem* as part of something greater than ourselves. We cannot divorce our individual destiny from the destiny of our people or the destiny of the world.

The image of coming before *Hashem* “like *Bnei Maron*” is particularly poignant this year. At the time of writing

this article, it seems unlikely that we will have communal *Tefillot* in shuls this year, and even if conditions do allow it, we will be extremely limited in numbers and still exclude many individuals who would otherwise have been able to attend.

Rather than focus on what we are missing this year, we must use the opportunity to add meaning to our Rosh Hashanah experience. Though it is not advisable or sustainable as a long-term measure, there can be something deeply meaningful in standing before *Hashem* as individuals.

This year, we cannot delegate our supplications to the *Chazan* or treat our prayers like a spectator sport. Away from the “safety in numbers” of communal prayer, we have no choice but to accept responsibility for our own prayer experience as we stand as individuals before *Hashem*.

We have so much to thank *Hashem* for. And so much to pray for as well. Imagine being granted a private audience with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on one of her birthdays. This year, each of us can have a private audience with The King of kings on the day of His coronation over the Universe.

Wishing you a year of health, blessing and prosperity.

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