



Insights on the Moadim

FROM THE TORAH OF RAV YAAKOV WEINBERG זצ"ל

ROSH HASHANAH AND MALCHUS

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One of the central themes of Rosh Hashanah is that Hashem is our *melech*, our King. We blow *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah to proclaim Hashem as *melech*, and we accompany the *shofar* blowing with *pesukim* of *malchiyos*. We *daven tefillos* on Rosh Hashanah that depict Hashem as *melech* and that harken to a future in which His *malchus* will be fully revealed to all. We fearfully experience on Rosh Hashanah Hashem judging us as a *melech* who judges His subjects. The *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah is designed to make us appreciate that the *malchus* of Hashem is not simply an abstract concept, but is something that should be front and center in our everyday lives. Rosh Hashanah calls upon us to accept Hashem as *melech* and to live our lives accordingly.

But what exactly does this entail? How do we accept Hashem as *melech* in our everyday lives? One might suppose that it means to accept the imperative of obeying His will as revealed in the Torah, but if so how does the message of Rosh Hashanah differ from that of Shavuot, when it is our *avodah* to accept the Torah, just as the Jews at Sinai did when they said *na'aseh venishma*?

Chazal teach us that at Sinai, when the Jews were expecting to receive the Torah, Hashem informed them that there was a prerequisite to being given the Torah. Hashem said, "*Tamlichuni aleichem...*, you must accept Me as your *melech* first, and only after that may you accept My decrees" (Mechilta to Shemos 20:3). How are we to understand this? Did not the Jews already subject themselves to Hashem's will unconditionally when they said *na'aseh venishma*? What more must they do to accept Hashem as *melech*? Evidently, committing oneself to absolute obedience of Hashem is not yet accepting His *malchus*. Accepting His *malchus* must be something that is even greater. But what is it?

The Mishnah states: "Be not like those slaves who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead, be like those slaves who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward" (Pirkei Avos 1:3). The Mishnah is not simply stating that we should serve Hashem selflessly; it is, rather, instructing us to follow the example of certain slaves, the ones "who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward." Who are these slaves? Why would any man serve another man if not for the sake of receiving a reward or avoiding punishment? We are accustomed to think that a slave works only because he is afraid of being whipped if he does not work, or because he receives a good meal, and perhaps other privileges, if he does work. Yet the Mishnah is telling us that while this is true for some slaves, there are other slaves who serve their master not for the sake of these rewards and punishments. Why, then, do these latter slaves serve their master?

The answer is that there is a type of slave who perceives the master, and his own status as a slave to him, as essential to his identity. If, for example, his master is the Duke, he takes pride in his master and says, "I am a slave of the Duke," and this gives meaning to his existence. Such a slave feels that he has no other justification for being, no purpose or sense of self other than being his master's slave. This slave does not work for his master out of expectation of reward or fear of punishment; instead, he serves him because the essence of his being is that he is the master's slave. In a sense, he is the only true *eved*: the other type of slave, the one that is motivated by reward and punishment, is an *eved* only in external deed, whereas this one is an *eved* in his very essence. This is the type of *eved* Hashem that we should strive to be, one who is an *eved* at the deepest and most essential level of his being, and not just one who acts externally like an *eved*.



Similarly, the concept of accepting the *malchus* of Hashem also refers to accepting Him as *melech* internally in our psyche and essence, and not just in deed. This means that it is not enough to obey Him as King, to **act** as His subjects, but we must actually **be** His subjects also. We must identify with Him, and understand that we have no purpose or reason for being other than to be His subjects and servants. We must define ourselves, the who and what we are, as beings that exist only to carry out His will.

What does this mean in a practical sense? What is the difference between obeying Him as King and actually being the King's subjects?

The difference is really quite stark. If I am only obeying Him as King, my essential self has not changed. I am who I am, with all my needs and desires, all my likes and dislikes, just I have agreed to limit my needs and to forgo my desires to serve Him. In effect, I have two identities: I as myself and I as a being obedient to Him. By contrast, if I actually make Him my King and become His subject, I have transformed my identity. All I am now is a subject and servant of His Majesty. My ultimate pleasure is to fulfill His will, and this is the only thing of significance and meaning for me. If I eat and exercise, it is only because this is a part of serving Him; it is not because I have a separate agenda for myself (see Orach Chaim 231). I have no needs and desires other than to carry out His will, because I have only one identity, that of subject and servant of the King Hashem.

Or, to put this another way: If I want a spacious house, a nice car, or a swimming pool because I find them pleasurable, even if I subject them to the overriding authority of Hashem and His Torah, I have not yet accepted Hashem's *malchus*. To the extent that I have desires for these or other worldly goods, Hashem is not my *melech*. I may obey all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, but I have not yet achieved the level of making Hashem my *melech* as long as I desire things other than the fulfillment of His will. Once I have made Hashem my *melech*, I will desire only the house and car that I can best use to serve Him.

This is what Hashem demanded of us at Sinai before giving us the Torah – He required that we not only accept to obey Him, but that we make Him our *melech* and become His subjects. He was teaching us that Torah and *mitzvos* are not

meant to be carried out as merely a part of life, but should rather define the totality of our lives. This is by no means an easy *avodah*; it actually requires us to become a different kind of person, a kind of person that does not naturally exist. We are all born with wants and desires for ourselves: how, then, can we transform ourselves and become beings who desire only His will?

To help us accomplish this, Hashem gave us the Yom Tov of Rosh Hashanah. Through the *tefillos*, *mitzvos hayom* and *din* of Rosh Hashanah, we come face to face with Hashem as *melech*. We come to realize that all that exists only to serve the Divine *melech*, and that we too should conform with this pattern and exist only to serve Him. This is why the *pasuk* of *shema Yisrael... Hashem echad* is in *malchiyus*, because *malchus* involves understanding that His will determines all of reality. Since He is *melech*, there is only one purpose and one focus for all that exists, and a person who accepts Hashem's *malchus* will likewise have only one agenda, one identity. His only agenda and identity will be to fulfill Hashem's will.

The task may appear quite daunting. There is, though, an *eitzah* that we can use that might make it easier. Chazal explain that when the *pasuk* states that Achav humbled himself before Hashem (Melachim I 21:29), his act of humbling consisted of simply postponing his meal (Yalkut Shimoni 222). This teaches the power of even a relatively minor, seemingly insignificant act. Achav did not give up any of the delicacies he was accustomed to; he merely started eating later. Still, it was considered an act of *hachna'ah*, of humbling himself before Hashem. So too, we can accept Hashem as King in one small part of our life; we can, for example, renounce one small, relatively insignificant desire that we may have. No matter how minor it is, this will be considered an act of being *mamlich* Hashem, of making Hashem King. This will, consequently, make it easier to accept His Kingship in other, more meaningful ways in the future. For once the imperative to make Him our King is no longer just a thought and a desire, but actually becomes concretized in deed, it becomes more real for us and it can then grow and encompass more and more of our lives. As long as we know what our goal is, and we make a start, even a small one, Hashem will help us in our quest to be *mamlich* Him.

