

The Meaning of Multiple New Year's and Multiple Judgements

Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox, jfox@yeshivamaharat.org

בעזר החונן דעת

(1) משנה ראש השנה פרק א: א - ב

Mishna, Rosh ha-Shanna 1:1-2

1] **There are four days in the year that serve as the New Year,**
On the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings; And also for the Festivals.
On the first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes;
Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: The New Year for animal tithes is **on the first of Tishrei.**
On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for counting years, for calculating Sabbatical Years and Jubilee Years; for planting; and for tithing vegetables.
On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree; in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai. But Beit Hillel say: The New Year for trees is **on the fifteenth of Shevat.**

א] אַרְבַּעַה רֵאשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם:
בְּאֶחָד בְּנִסָּן רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה
לְמַלְכִים וְלְרִגְלִים.
בְּאֶחָד בְּאֵלוּל רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה
לְמַעֲשֵׂר בְּהֵמָה.
רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן
אוֹמְרִים, בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי.
בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה
לְשָׁנִים וְלִשְׁמִטִּין וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת,
לְנִטְיָעָה וְלִירְקוֹת.
בְּאֶחָד בְּשֶׁבֶט, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה
לְאֵילָן, כְּדַבְּרֵי בֵּית שְׁמַאי. בֵּית
הַלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, בְּחִמְשָׁה עָשָׂר
בּוֹ:

2] **At four times of the year the world is judged: On**
Passover judgment is passed concerning grain; on
Shavuot concerning fruits that grow on a tree on Rosh
HaShana, all creatures pass before Him like sheep [benei
maron], as it is stated: “He Who fashions their hearts
alike, Who considers all their deeds” (Psalms 33:15); and
on the festival of Sukkot they are judged concerning
water, i.e., the rainfall of the coming year.

ב] בְּאַרְבַּעַה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם
נִדוֹן, בְּפֶסַח עַל הַתְּבוּאָה,
בְּעֻצְרַת עַל פְּרוֹת הָאֵילָן,
בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם
עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תְּהִלִּים לֵג) הַיּוֹצֵר
יַחַד לֶבֶם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל
מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם. וּבַחֵג נִדוֹנִין עַל
הַמַּיִם:

2) Rambam, Commentary on the Mishna,
Rosh ha-Shana 1:2

And the simple language here is clear as you can see, but there is no doubt that the secret of the matter is difficult.

פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם ראש השנה
א:ב

...ופשט לשון זה ברור כמו שאתה
רואה,
אבל סודו וענינו אין ספק שהוא קשה
מאד.

Looking behind the Mishna's calendar and structure:

3) מסכת ראש השנה דף טז. (בסוף)

תניא אמר רבי יהודה משום רבי עקיבא מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו עומר בפסח? מפני שהפסח זמן תבואה הוא אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הביאו לפני עומר בפסח כדי שתתברך לכם תבואה שבשדות. ומפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת? מפני שעצרת זמן פירות האילן הוא אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת כדי שיתברכו לכם פירות האילן. ומפני מה אמרה תורה נסכו מים בחג? אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא נסכו לפני מים בחג כדי שיתברכו לכם גשמי שנה. ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה ובמה בשופר

3) Bavli Rosh ha-Shanna 16a

It is taught in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: For what reason did the Torah say: Bring the *omer* offering on the second day of Passover? It is because Passover is the time of grain, the beginning of the grain harvest season, and therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Bring the *omer* offering before Me on Passover so that the grain in the fields will be blessed for you.**

And for what reason did the Torah say: Bring the offering of the two loaves from the new wheat on *Shavuot*? It is because *Shavuot* is the time of the fruits that grow on a tree, when it begins to ripen, and therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Bring the offering of the two loaves before Me on *Shavuot* so that the fruits that grow on a tree will be blessed for you.

And for what reason did the Torah say: Pour water onto the altar in the Temple on the festival of *Sukkot*? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Pour water before Me on the festival of *Sukkot* so that the rains of the year, which begin to fall after *Sukkot*, will be blessed for you.

And recite before Me on Rosh HaShana verses that mention Kingships, Remembrances, and *Shofarot*: Kingships so that you will crown Me as King over you; Remembrances so that your remembrance will rise before Me for good; and with what will the remembrance rise? It will rise with the *shofar*.

(4) מסכת ראש השנה דף ח:

רַב נַחֲמָן בַּר יִצְחָק אָמַר "לְדִין" דְּכָתִיב מֵרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה - מֵרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה נִידוֹן מָה יְהֵא בְּסוֹפָהּ. מִמָּאי דְתִשְׁרִי הוּא? דְּכָתִיב תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר בַּכֶּסֶה לְיוֹם חֲגֹגוֹ. אֵיזָהוּ חֲגֵי שְׁהַחֲדָשׁ מִתְּכֶסֶה בּוֹ? הֲוֵי אוֹמְרֵי זֶה רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, וְכָתִיב כִּי חֵק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא מִשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב

4) *Bavli Rosh ha-Shana 8b*

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: When the mishna says that the first of Tishrei is the New Year for years, it is **with regard to judgment**, as on that day God judges the world for the whole year, **as it is written:** "A land that the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, **from the beginning of the year until the end of the year**" (Deuteronomy 11:12); **from the beginning of the year judgment is passed as to what will happen at the end** of the year. The Gemara raises a question: **From where** is it known that the day of judgment is in Tishrei? **As it is written:** "**Blow a shofar at the New Moon, at the covered time for our Festival day**" (Psalms 81:4). **Which is the Festival day on which the moon is covered, i.e., hidden? You must say that this is Rosh HaShana, which is the only Festival that occurs at the beginning of a month, when the moon cannot be seen. And it is written in the next verse:** "For this is a statute for Israel, a judgment of the God of Jacob" (Psalms 81:5), implying that this is the day of judgment.

The question that Rabbeinu Nissim (1320 - 1376, Girona) asks here addresses an obvious problem of the *Mishna* and could be seen as quite destabilizing:

הר"ן על הר"ף מסכת ראש השנה דף ג עמוד א
מתני' בארבעה פרקים בשנה העולם נידון. תמהני בשלמא אדם נדון בר"ה מדברי קבלה למדנו
דכתיב מראשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה מר"ה נדון מה יהא בסופה וילפי' דתשרי הוא מדכתיב תקעו
בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו איזהו חג שהחדש מתכסה בו הוי אומר זה ר"ה וכתביב כי חק לישראל
וכדאיתא בגמרא בפרקין [דף ח ב].

I can understand the idea that humanity is judged on Rosh ha-Shana as that is learned from tradition (*mi'divrei kabala*) from the *gemara* on *Rosh ha-Shana* 8b (see below).

אלא הני שלשה פרקין אחריני מבעיא לי מנא להו לרבנן?

However, when it comes to three other times [of judgement mentioned in the second *mishna* above] I am bothered, how did the Rabbis know this?

ומסתברא לי דילפינן להו מדאמרה תורה הביאו לפני עומר בפסח ושתי הלחם בעצרת ונסכו מים
לפני בחג וכדתניא לקמן אלמא בזמנים אלו העולם נידון בדברים הללו ולפיכך צוה הקדוש ברוך הוא
להביאן כדי שיתברכו.

And it makes sense to me that it is learned from that which was said taught in the *berayta* (on page 16a) - therefore we see that the world is judged on these matters at these times and God commanded to bring [these sacrifices] in order that we shall be blessed.

The answer that he offers is that the *berayta* of R. Akiva from 16a is the source of the *Mishna*. That is an interesting claim in and of itself, but it is the question that I am curious about. What does it mean for a 14th century *rishon* to turn to the *Mishna* and ask for a source? Isn't the *Mishna* itself an authoritative source? Can we ask that question about any *Mishna*? How does his answer ground the authority of the *Mishna*?

6) Prayer: A History, Zaleski, Philip & Carol (2005)

Introduction to Chapter Two, page 33

Two figures stand guard at the threshold of prayer: the magician and the priest. The magician commands; the priest offers. The prayer of the magician is an incantation, a charm, a chanted or inscribed word of power used to achieve a particular end: to heal the sick, revive the dead, send rain, open the womb, defeat an enemy, and so on. The prayer of the priest is an invocation, the spoken or sung portion of a sacrifice, which by honoring the gods attains both temporal and eternal goods. Magical prayer draws down power from the heavens; priestly prayer pours itself out on the altar stone and ascends to the heavens in fragrant smoke. These are archetypal actions. They belong not only to prayer's ancestral past but also to its present and future...

7) “Prayer and Jewish Thought: Approaches and Problems (survey)”, Professor Shalom Rosenberg, in Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change, ed. Cohn, Gabriel and Fisch, Harold (1996), pages 73-74. Translation from the Hebrew, *HaTefillah HaYehudit: Hemshekh VeHiddush* (1978)

Is prayer a magical act? The dangers of such an approach are obvious, in light of the existence of magical prayers in almost every period. Magical prayers, whose composers attributed them to *tannaim* or *amoraim*, are known to us from the earliest times, and there are even magical imitations of well-known prayers. The danger of seeing prayer as a magical act was one of the challenges to both kabbalistic and philosophic thought. This problem is particularly critical in the Neoplatonic tradition. In these sources, one finds a confusion of ideas taken from Plato and Plotinus and their students, and from magical traditions of late antiquity. While this problem exists with regard to all the *mitzvot*, it has special force in regard to prayer.

It is extremely difficult to define the border between prayer and magic. While it is generally possible to distinguish between prayer and the use of a magical formulae, it is difficult to isolate the distinction between them in principle. In the relevant literature,

this distinction is drawn in one of three ways:

1) The difference between prayer and magic is inherent in the different relationship to the text of the prayer. While the power and effectiveness of magic is dependent upon the correctness of the formula and its precise execution - that is, the words or actions which express it - the main element of prayer is the human intention involved.

2) Magic operates automatically, while prayer is not *necessarily* answered. The will of God is the bridge between prayer and its answer, and this will is not subject to any causal law. The pseudo-scientific approach which characterizes magic is transformed in prayer to a pseudo-personal one. Of these two approaches, the former typifies the stance of Medieval Jewish thought while the latter that of Jewish thought in more recent generations.

While the first approach is valid with regard to kabbalistic thought as well, this seeming resemblance forces us to seek an additional distinction between kabbalistic and magical forms of prayer. The distinction proposed is based on neither the structure of prayer nor the mechanics involved in it, but on its goal. It is as follows:

3) The purpose of kabbalistic prayer, or *mitzvot* or Divine service in general, is theurgical and not magical. Magic serves man; the purpose of theurgy is “to sustain the harmonious and smooth functioning of the Divine powers.” (Tishby, MHZ, pg. 434) In theurgy, man turns himself into an instrument of the Divine plan; the service is not for mundane needs but for the “needs of the Almighty.”