

Moreinu HaRav Aharon Feldman
Rosh HaYeshiva

THE BEGGAR'S BEGINNING

אמר ר' יצחק כל שנה שרשה בתחלתה מתעשרת בסופה

שנא' מראשית השנה מרשית כתיב ועד אחרית סופה שיש לה אחרית

Any year which is poor in the beginning of the year is wealthy at the end of the year, as it says (Devarim 11:12), "From the beginning of the year to the end of the year." The Torah writes מרשית [without an aleph], "to the end of the year"—the end will be successful.¹

Rashi: שישראל עושיין עצמן רשין בר"ה לדבר תחנונים ותפלה כענין שנאמר 'תחנונים ידבר רש' (משלי יח)

Klal Yisroel acts as if they are poor (רשים) on Rosh Hashonoh to beg from the Ribono Shel Olam.²

Our attitude on Rosh Hashanah should be one where we believe that God is the sole source of all the benefits of the world, of our lives, of our health and our wealth. We must come to the recognition that we possess nothing of our own; that all is given us by the Creator. By arriving at this recognition, we will merit a positive judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Thus any Rosh Hashanah in which Klal Yisroel recognizes that they are "poor," i.e., that they possess nothing of their own. at the beginning of the year will be filled with a beneficence which will last them until the end of that year.

We derive this from the word מרשית השנה ("from the beginning of the year"—where ראשית is written without an א). The deficient א indicates the reading of the word רשית, which is related to the word רש—"poor" which implies "poverty." Why does the Torah allude to the suggestion that we make ourselves poor (רש) on Rosh Hashanah by means of a deficient word which literally means "the beginning"?

The word ראשית refers to the initial idea in a person's mind when he sets out to perform a task. For example, if someone decides to travel to another city, before he sets out on his trip, he must have planned to arrive at that city. This thought is the act's ראשית or beginning, since that thought initiates everything.

¹ Rosh Hashonoh 17b.

² Rashi *ibid.* (די"ה שרשה בתחלתה)

In line with this, the first words of the Torah, בראשית ברא אלקים—“In the beginning God created”—is translated by Targum as “God created the world with wisdom,” where the “wisdom” is the rendition of the word בראשית.³ This is because, as stated, at the beginning of creation, God’s wisdom devised a plan for the world He was about to create. What is that initial plan?

The Sages say that that בראשית refers to the Torah, to the Jewish people and to the Beis HaMikdash. All of these are referred to as ראשית in other places of the Torah. In other words, the translation of בראשית is, “Because of those things called ראשית God created the world. His initial plan for His world, then, was to infuse it with the holiness of the Torah, of the Jewish people and the Beis HaMikdash. Everything else followed this plan.

In our *posuk*, which refers to the ראשית of the year, this word, too, refers to the ultimate goal for the year which is in God’s mind at its outset. That goal is that mankind recognize that God is in control of everything. ראשית with a deficient א hints at this idea. The ראשית of the year is that man achieve רשית, a sense of his essential poverty before God. The ultimate plan for mankind during the year is to make itself subordinate to God’s will when He created the world (its בראשית), and to recognize that everything comes from Him. Thus if we stand as beggars before God on Rosh Hashonoh, we are in consonance with the will of God and we therefore deserve the flow of beneficence which God bestows on a world which operates in accordance with His plans for it. Thus, any year which is poor at its beginning will have a successful end to it.

A Seeming Contradiction

One might rightfully ask: Is indeed the purpose of man to see himself as a beggar? God commanded man and woman when they were created, *Redu ba’aretz vekivshuha* – “Conquer the earth and subdue it.” Man was given a mandate to rule over everything in the world. If so, isn’t man’s purpose to feel powerful and in charge of his destiny? How, then, can we be taught by the Sages that our purpose is to feel like lowly beggars?

However, there is no contradiction here. Making ourselves into רשים/beggars simply means that we accept upon ourselves the absolute yoke of Heaven. This is precisely how we make the world and everything in it ours. The world was created to be a vehicle for man to serve God. When man serves Him, his world becomes subordinate to him and his needs. Otherwise the world turns against him and seeks to destroy him. When we live to serve God, the rains

³ Targum Yerushalmi, *Bereyshis* 1:1.

fall in time, the earth yields its bounty and life flourishes. When we become subordinate to God, the world supports our existence.

When Adam was put in Gan Eden he was put there *Le'avda uleshamra*—"To cultivate it and to protect it." The Sages say this means that Adam was meant to perform God's positive and negative commandments. At that point, God took Adam throughout Gan Eden and told him, "Look how beautiful is My world which I have given you. Heed that you do not destroy it."⁴ This means that if man will not accept His yoke upon himself, he will lead the world to destruction. When he does not serve God, the evils of the world become unleashed against him. The rivers become polluted; the atmosphere become poisoned; strife abounds between people and man destroys his world with his weapons. If man would only live in accordance with God's plan and subordinate himself to God's will instead of to his own will, none of these evils would be visited upon him. For when man refuses to live for God's will and decides instead to live for this own self-aggrandizement and to add to his physical pleasure, power and wealth, he causes the destruction of the world. He destroys not only nature but himself as well.

Man's self-destruction stems from his refusal to make himself into a *אדם*. For that is the *ראשית* of Man's life.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16a.