

BS"D

## Schwartz, Morrow and You – Not What You Think

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### משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק א:ב

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון בפסח על התבואה בעצרת על פירות-האילן בראש השנה

Here we would expect something like על החיים, על האדם, על האנושות, but that would not be fitting for the very goal of creation – man is not another object, crop or fruits. Man is not even an animal, but something much more exalted! And so the Mishna changes gears and details what is to happen on this new year's day, this day of Judgment:

כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר (תהלים ל"ג) היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם ...

Now, while I understand that God knows, that God “sees,” all our actions, Rashi explains this verse in Tehilim to imply that God knows our *thoughts*.

### רש"י תהלים פרק לג פסוק טו

(טו) היוצר יחד לבם - לב כלם יחד ויודע כל המחשבות. ורבותינו הסיבוהו אל ממכון שבתו השגיח היוצר יחד לבם, ודרשו מכאן שכולן נסקרין בסקירה אחת:

“He knows all our thoughts!” Now that is heavy; even scary. To think that God knows, not only our actions, but even our thoughts is almost too much to fathom. Basically this means that we have no where to hide (להתחבא). But if we think about it, this is precisely what Rosh Hashana is all about (mahut), we have no where to hide: not from God, and not from ourselves. The purpose of Rosh Hashana is to force us to face ourselves squarely (lehitmoded im atzmeinu b'keinut), to look ourselves in the mirror (מִרְאָה). Rosh Hashana gives us the time to reflect on who we really are and take stock of where we are personally (laasot heshbon nefesh), what are our strengths and what are our weaknesses.

The result of this self-introspection is that, at this time of judgement, we come before God, having judged ourselves. We say, honestly (for indeed how can we lie to One who knows our thoughts):

Have mercy on us,  
give us a New Year that we can improve ourselves –  
we know what to do.

So far I haven't said anything new, nothing we didn't already know. However, what I have said is something that we don't fully appreciate. Permit me to explain with a story that came out in the news last week.

## ~ The Schwartz/Morrow Story ~

The newspaper tells of Mark & Hanna Schwartz, a couple from Beverly Hills who have been living in Ashkelon for the past two of years. They are modern orthodox, retired, he was a chemist that consulted medical companies (מייעץ חברות תרופה), she worked in PR (יחסי ציבור). The [paper](#) wrote that:

They were very active in the congregation, went to shiurim (classes) and synagogue functions, and had lots of friends – all Anglos. They went out to dinner often, socialized, were very well liked and well-respected members of the Ashkelon Anglo community.

הם היו מאוד פעילים בקהילה, הלכו לשיעורים ולתפילות בבית הכנסת והיו להם הרבה חברים - כולם דוברי אנגלית. הם היו יוצאים לארוחת ערב לעתים קרובות, היו חברתיים, היו אהובים מאוד ומערכים בקהילת האנגלו-סקסית באשקלון.

Interestingly enough, I met them a number of times when I gave drashot in their Ashkelon shul. They were always very enthusiastic (nilhavim) about my drashot. Just last year after I gave a Shabbat Shuva drasha, Hanna made a point of telling me how meaningful it was and how it would forever influence her Yom Kippur davening.

So now you are probably asking yourselves: They sound like pretty run of the mill people (שאינו מיוחד בשום צורה), why were they written up in the newspaper? As it turns out, Mark & Hanna Schwartz weren't who they said they were but rather: Dr. David and Linda Morrow – an Orthodox Jewish couple who had a flourishing Plastic Surgery practice (מרפאת ניתוחים פלסטיים מצליחה) in Rancho Mirage (a two hour drive from LA near Palm Springs) and they simply got greedy (היו חמדנים).

According to the judge (shofetet) who sentenced Morrow to 20 years in a federal penitentiary (כלא פדרלי), “his greed knew no bounds,” (שלא היה סוף לחמדנות שלו) and he showed an “utter disregard for patients’ well-being and safety,” (והתעלם לגמרי מטובת) (הפציינטים) and fraudulently charged health insurance companies of more than “tens of millions of dollars for cosmetic procedures (nituchim plastiim) that were not medically necessary (שלא היה להם צורך).”

Now the sentencing occurred in absentia because the Schwartz-Morrows had somehow managed to escape the US and found themselves a cozy hideout in, you guessed it, Ashkelon. This worked for two years until not long ago (June/2019) the FBI (apparently, along with Israeli authorities) finally found them in their Ashkelon apartment.

A pretty racy story for the sleepy town of Ashkelon. And now you are probably asking yourself, what does this have to do with Rosh Hashana?! Their story starts to become

more relevant when we read about the reactions of the people in the Ashkelon community. According to the newspaper article:

The Schwartzs/Morrows left this community, which welcomes new people into the fold with open arms, somewhat wary (חשדני) and mistrustful (חסרי אמון) to greet the next newcomers to Ashkelon and that in itself, is a crime. Many of their friends said it was like being in a bad play.

בני זוג שוורץ/מורו הפכו את הקהילה הזו - קהילה שמקבלת בברכה אנשים חדשים בחיקה בזרועות פתוחות – [הם הפכו את הקהילה] לחשדנית וחסרי אמון בלקבל אנשים חדשים שבאים לאשקלון. וזה, כשלעצמו, פשע. רבים מחבריהם אמרו שזה היה כמו להיות במחזה רע.

We can certainly sympathize (lehizdahot) with the feelings of being lied to, played, cheated of one's time and sincerity – they call this geneivat hadaat, geneivat hazman. That said, I think that the Schwartz-Morrows gave us the greatest Rosh Hashana gift, they gave us the gift of the truth.

### ~ The Truth ~

You see, we don't really appreciate what a gift it is to live the truth. I personally enjoy telling people who I am, what I do, where I'm from. Yeah I could say, "I'm a doctor from Beverly Hills." But as much as I appreciate doctors and as much as I appreciate Beverly Hills, that's just not me and I wouldn't really have any satisfaction in saying that. Just think if you had to live a lie. Everything you told people would really just be part of a cover-up (הכיסוי שלך, התדמית השקרית שלך). You can't even tell people your real name.

I think that the Schwartz-Morrows came to be part of a religious community because they wanted some of that true living (היים אמיתיים), some of the sincerity (כנות) that comes with being part of a religious community. I think that the friendships they made were sincere. I think that when Hanna/Linda told me that my drash really made an impact on her – she meant it. I believe that to be true not because that's what I want to believe but because it was the one thing she didn't have to lie about.

As difficult as our reality is, it is our real reality. We have our real lives. We have the truth.

I believe this is what Rosh Hashana is about (mahut). It is about the truth. It is about being truthful. Truthful with ourselves, truthful with God. Indeed, with God there can be no fake names (shemot beduim), fake professions (miktzo'ot beduim), fake anything (shum davar badui). He knows our thoughts!

### ~ Celebrating of Judgment Day ~

I believe that this fact, that God knows our thoughts, as scary as it may be, is actually at the heart of the joy of Rosh Hashana.

As is well known there is a great tension on Rosh Hashana, a tension between Yom Hadin and Yom HaHag. That Rosh Hashana is Yom HaDin we already read in the Mishna we started with:

**משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק א:ב**

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון ... בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו ... :

But the Gemara also teaches that it is a holiday:

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף ח עמוד א-ב**

**תהלים (פא:ד) "תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו": איזהו חג שהחדש מתכסה בו - הוי אומר זה ראש השנה וכתוב +תהלים פא+ כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב.**

And based on this the Shul"א explains that we are to rejoice:

**שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ראש השנה סימן תקצז סעיף א**

**אוכלים ושותים ושמחים, ואין מתעניין בר"ה ולא בשבת שובה; אמנם לא יאכלו כל שבעם, למען לא יקלו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה' על פניהם.**

The Mishna Berura puts it all together noting that there is judgment but there is also a mitzvah of V'Semachta b'hageicha – he brings the famous passage in Nehemia in which Ezra tells the people to rejoice on RH:

**משנה ברורה סימן תקצז סעיף א (א)**

**אוכלים ושותים ושמחים - ר"ל אף שהוא יום הדין מ"מ מצוה של ושמחת בחגך שייך גם בו שגם הוא בכלל חג כדכתיב 'תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו' ונאמר בנחמיה ח' יאָכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים וגו' כי קדוש היום לאַדְנִינוּ וְאַל תַּעֲצְבוּ כִּי חֲדוֹת יִקְוֶה הִיא מְעֻזְכֶם :**

While there are a number of reasons for this rejoicing on judgment day – I would like to suggest that, in no small part, it is due to the truth of the day, the utter transparency of the day – God knows our thoughts.

We cannot hide from God; and so we cannot hide from ourselves. It is this utter honesty, that all is revealed (galui v'yadua), that is a source of our rejoicing on Rosh Hashana.

Look, we all have our issues, we all have our strengths and we all have our weaknesses. Rosh Hashana is the day we face up to them (mitmodedim itam). Rosh Hashana is the day we come before our Creator and say, we realize who we are, and we wish to be better. We realize who we are and, based on that very honesty, we ask for mercy to have another chance to improve, another year to work on ourselves.

Have mercy on us,  
give us a New Year that we can improve ourselves –  
we know what to do.

Shana Tova.