

The Birth of Man and the Coronation of God

By Rabbi Ruben Prawer



Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of the world, but it is unclear which of the six days of creation Rosh Hashanah commemorates. The common understanding is that Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the first day of creation. This aligns with what we recite in the Zichronot section of Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah, "This day is the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day." This is also the implication of the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah 11a, where Rabbi Eliezer proves that by the third day of creation Tishrei had already begun.

However, the Midrash in Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 23 teaches otherwise, "It was taught in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: The world was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul...It therefore follows that on Rosh Hashanah [the sixth day of creation] Adam HaRishon was created." The Midrash accordingly interprets the phrases "beginning of Your works" and "the first day," as referring to the sixth day of creation, the first day of man and the first day that mattered.

This dispute provides two fundamental perspectives on Rosh Hashanah, the world and man's place in it. If Rosh Hashanah marks the first day of creation, man is completely absent from the original Rosh Hashanah and was merely born into a world whose story had already begun to unfold. Rosh Hashanah is a cosmic holiday, and the emphasis is on God as King and Master of the universe He had begun to create. Tehillim 119:89-91 states that all creations are among God's servants; man is just one of many subjects during the Day of Judgment.

But according to Psikta D'Rav Kahana, the beginning

of the world is defined by the beginning of man. Man is an essential part of Rosh Hashanah. The original Rosh Hashanah was the day of man's birth as well as the day of our first sin. It is the day of our first trial before the Heavenly Court, and ever since, it is a day of introspection and repentance for mankind specifically.

Is Rosh Hashanah theocentric (centered on God) or anthropocentric (centered on man)? Is it the day of God's *meluchah* (Kingship) or our *teshuvah* (repentance)? Is the *mitzvah* to blow the *shofar* and coronate God as King or to hear the *shofar* to awaken us to repent?

The majority opinion is that Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of man, but this does not limit Rosh Hashanah as an anthropocentric holiday. Recognizing God's sovereignty over the world is a major theme, if not the primary theme, of Rosh Hashanah and its liturgy.

The Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, relates that his childhood teacher in Europe taught him that the Tzemach Tzedek called Rosh Hashanah "Coronatzia Nacht" (Coronation Night). This is because there are two components to God's rulership over the world, "*Adon olam* (Master of the universe) who reigned before any creature was created; When, in His will, all was made, then 'King' was His Name proclaimed."

God is the King of all. He is perfect, omnipotent, without flaw. He was King before the universe came into being, but when man was created, only then could He actually be called "King." The Ba'al Hatanya writes in the seventh perek of Sha'ar HaYichud that it is as if the existence of the world contributes to the perfection of God by adding another dimension to His kingship and that this was the entire purpose of creation for "there is no king without a people."

Teshuvah, then, is not an alternative theme to that of *meluchah*. It is *meluchah*'s ultimate fulfillment: the return to God and the recognition of Him as King. The Rav thus bridged the gap between *teshuvah* and *meluchah* by explaining that we coronate God during the Yamim Noraim by purging the world of the Evil Inclination. "And Hashem shall be King over all the land. On that day, Hashem shall be One, and His Name One" (Zechariah 14:9).

On Rosh Hashanah man stands before God as He sits in judgment and man offers Him the crown of Kingship. It is an awesome, daunting task, but it is also a tremendous privilege.