



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Rosh Hashana - Vov Tishrei

The Context:

The Haftorah for the first day of Rosh Hashanah is the narrative of Chana's prayer. Pained by her childlessness, Chana went to the Mishkan and prayed fervently for a son. Eli, the Kohen Gadol, observed her:

“Channah was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, and her voice was not heard, and Eli thought her to be a drunken woman. Eli said to her: ‘Until when will you be drunk? Throw off your wine from upon yourself.’ Channah answered and said: ‘No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit, and neither new wine nor old wine have I drunk, and I poured out my soul before G-d.’” (*Shmuel I* 1:12-15)

Eli apologized and blessed her.

The Question:

How could Eli have misjudged Chana so drastically, accusing her of drunkenness when in reality she was “pouring out her soul”?

The Seed of the Explanation:

Eli did not think Chana was literally drunk. Her prayer was so intense that Eli thought she was “intoxicated” with her own needs, whereas it was inappropriate to display this sentiment in the presence of G-d. Chana explained that she was not intoxicated with her own needs; she was “pouring out her soul,” a lofty form of attachment to G-d.

The Explanation:

The prayers of Rosh Hashanah present a paradox: Rosh Hashanah is the day when we coronate G-d as King. This entails complete indifference to our own needs and desires; all our attention is placed on the King and His needs. But the prayers of Rosh Hashanah are also full of requests for our personal needs such as health and material wealth. How can we crown G-d as King while asking for our own needs?

But the request for personal needs is not self-centered; it is an expression of our subservience to G-d. In order for G-d to be revealed within the world — for His kingship to be recognized by all — we need to uncover the Divine reality that is embedded within Creation. Therefore, we need material possessions and healthy bodies and minds in order to enable us to transform our piece of the world into a home for G-d. We pray for material blessings the same way a soldier requests food and shelter — he is not concerned with himself, but rather, with the fulfillment of his mission.

This is true even for those who do not consciously feel that their prayers are for the sake of fulfilling their Divine mission. The physical desire and need for sustenance and success is actually prompted by the soul's desire to convert the material into the spiritual. We may not be aware of it, but our soul is what drives us to pray even for our seemingly self-interested requests.

Thus, Eli thought that Chana's personal, demonstrative prayers were self-centered. He therefore considered her prayers to be inappropriate in the Mishkan, where only one's humility before G-d should be expressed. Chana explained that, in reality, her prayers for children were not selfish; they were an outpouring of her soul's desire to transform all her material blessing into a home for G-d.

On Rosh Hashanah, the inner "Kohen Gadol" must drive us to erase all sense of selfishness, so that we do not become "intoxicated" before G-d. But we still must ask for the fulfillment of all our heart's desires, for we cannot crown G-d as King without them.

