

Sermon given at Kehillat Netzach Israel Ashkelon on Shabbat, Sept. 16, 2017 – Dedicated to Amit Esi Ilan-Shtygman

Shabbat Shalom to everyone!

The kiddush this shabbat has been donated in honor of our fourth child - Amit, and as in previous events in our lives, we decided that the place to celebrate this is in the Kehillah with our extended family. So, thank you to all of you who have come to honor us.

I want to say a few words in honor of Amit relating to this period of the year.

Wednesday is the eve of Rosh Hashanah, and the next day, Thursday, begins the holiday. We will all read the Piyut at the beginning of the Additional Service (Musaf) that opens with the words "This is the day the World was called into being" (hayom harat olam). This Piyut has two central motifs: the creation of the world and the judgment and law that the Lord placed on man.

The opening of the Piyut "This is the day the World was called into being" likens the creation of the world with birth. The idea of the similarity with the birth of the world relates to the idea that G-d can judge man as if we were his sons and daughters, who arrived in the world through pregnancy and birth.

The emphasis in the Piyut is on the birth itself- the birth of the world. Although it is traditional to say that man was created on Rosh Hashanah and not the world, the intention of the Piyut is to say that only when man was created can we say that the world was created. It is man who gives significance to the world that had been previously created. It is man who fills the world with content and meaning. Why is it therefore important that the writer compares the entire creation with that of man in particular, to the process of pregnancy and birth?

The root of the word "harat" in Hebrew is "herayon" or pregnancy, which in essence makes the Creator a parent and so on this day G-d becomes the parent of man, the parent of the world. What is the meaning of the word "parent" (horeh). A parent is a teacher (moreh) who guides the way and teaches values. This beautiful Piyut compares G-d to parents who want to teach their children the good and straight path.

On Rosh Hashanah, the day that the world was created, man, the Creator wants to examine whether he "did a good job", whether what he taught has come to fruition. In our case, there is a slight discrepancy in the situation. G-d is the parent and he is also the King. Therefore in this Piyut we ask him to examine us on two levels: also as a father who has mercy on us as his children and also as a king who has mercy on his servants.

The Torah readings and Haftorahs on both days of Rosh Hashanah brings us together with three women central in the Bible: Sarah, Hannah, and Rachel. In all three cases, G-d ended their barrenness and on Rosh Hashanah they were informed that they were to give birth to a son. The question arises: why did G-d choose Rosh Hashanah as the day to command them and what is the connection between these three women and Rosh Hashanah?

On Rosh Hashanah, G-d is reminded of what was renewed, of the beginning of creation, and he examines. He examines whether the world that he created has fulfilled its purpose, is the course that was begun worthy, are things worthwhile? We discover that through each of these women that I mentioned, something new came to the world.

Each one of them was barren. Their children were essentially an expression of this barrenness. Not only their own personal barrenness, but something specific lacking in the world. Each one of them carried in her womb a new announcement to the world that would improve it.

Sarah - gave birth to Isaac from whom came Jacob, and from him the twelve tribes that built the Jewish people.

Rachel - "the mother of the Jewish people" whose son Joseph went down to Egypt, followed by his brothers. There, in Egypt, they transformed from tribes to a nation and began a process that was completed when the Jews received the Torah and entered the land of Israel.

Hannah - gave birth to Samuel who brought the proclamation of kingdom to the people of Israel - the reign of David from whose descendants the messiah will come. In light of all which I have mentioned, it is clear why G-d commanded these women on the day of Rosh Hashanah. Their sons came to complete the act of creation, and to raise the purpose of the world to another level.

At each of the births that Ran and I have experienced, we were rewarded by G-d to witness the miracle of creation, the arrival of a new person to the world that was created just for him. Each time we received the news, we were thrilled anew to see the wonderful being that G-d chose to create through us.

Our Amit - we want to wish you that we will always know how to guide and teach you in the correct way, that you will find your way to change our world for the better, to complete the Creation in your own small way. May G-d always keep you under his wings as his son. May it be a good year for us all, with good health, love and giving.