

Introduction

The Gemara, in *Rosh HaShana* 16b, describes the judgement of Rosh HaShana and the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*:

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין ברה"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה בינוניים תלויין ועומדין מרה"ה ועד יוה"כ זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה.

R. Kruspedai said in the name of R. Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh HaShana: one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous and one for those in the middle. The completely righteous are written and sealed immediately for life. The completely wicked are written and sealed immediately for death. The middle hang in abeyance from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for life. If they do not merit, they are written for death.

The Rambam quotes this passage in his *Mishneh Torah*, with one small, yet significant, change:

בכל שנה ושנה שוקלין עונות כל אחד ואחד מבאי העולם עם זכותיו ביום טוב של ראש השנה, מי שנמצא צדיק נחתם לחיים, ומי שנמצא רשע נחתם למיתה והבינוני תולין אותו עד יום הכפורים אם עשה תשובה נחתם לחיים ואם לאו נחתם למיתה.

Each year on Rosh HaShana, each and every person in the world has his or her transgressions weighed against his or her merits. Anyone who is found to be righteous will continue living, whereas anyone found to be wicked will be assigned a death sentence. The middle person is held in suspense until the Day



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of Atonement — if he or she repents, the decree will be for life, but if not, the decree will be for death.

Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuva* 3:3

In the Gemara's version, the "*beinoni*," the individual who expresses neither the righteousness of the *tzadik* or the wickedness of the *rasha*, is suspended in judgement pending the ultimate outcome on Yom Kippur. Yet when the Rambam records this statement of the Gemara, he posits that the determining factor for the *beinoni* is teshuva. Rav Yitzchak Hutner, in his work *Pachad Yitzchak* (*Rosh HaShana* 18), asks: If indeed the *beinoni* is a person who teeters between virtue and evil, why not simply demand that the *beinoni* exert a greater effort in tipping that scale through the fulfillment of mitzvos? Why does the Rambam introduce the complex and overwhelming institution of teshuva, when clearly, all that is needed is a greater commitment to the observance of mitzvos?

Rav Hutner explains that the categories of *tzadik*, *rasha*, *beinoni* do not refer to quantitative evaluations of an individual's Torah observance. It is nearly impossible to capture a status evaluation of religious commitment. We are constantly engaged in either fulfilling or ignoring the expectations of the Torah. Therefore, these

categories are what Rav Hutner describes as "*middos binefesh*," attributes of the soul. They represent an overall disposition of commitment and passion toward religious life. The *tzadik* strives to constantly embrace Torah and mitzvos as the foundation of life. The *rasha* may occasionally observe something proper, but has an overall disposition toward antagonism and dismissiveness of religious growth.

The *beinoni* is the one in the middle. The *beinoni* represents complacency, satisfied with living a life that is not too invested in religious growth, yet conforming enough to meet the threshold of basic Torah expectations. The *beinoni* leads a life of religious mediocrity, content to remain entrenched in his or her current state of observance and faith. The Rambam is instructing us that the path out of the *beinoni* identity is not simply found in doing another mitzvah. Rather, it requires a total reorientation of focus on religious growth that is framed by a passion and commitment to grow.

Teshuva, as explained by Rav Kook, *Oros HaTeshuva* (ch. 7 and 8) is an opportunity to discover the light within ourselves. A chance to reignite, not just our commitment to the expectations of Torah, but

to a religious personality that seeks meaning and purpose in everything that we do. This rejection of complacency and mediocrity is fundamental to shaping and nurturing a committed Jewish community that can inspire and educate the next generation.

The *tzadik* and *rasha* are judged immediately. The *beinoni* must look toward the future. The *beinoni's* judgment is based on how he or she confronts the challenges of tomorrow, which will ultimately shape his or her future. As Yeshiva University celebrates the investiture of our fifth president, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, this

is an opportunity for us to look toward the world of tomorrow — to find the passion and purpose that comes from engaging new frontiers and new challenges in all dimensions of our lives.



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