



THERE IS NONE LIKE YOU

How many candles are there in a box of Chanukah candles?

Forty-four. The precise number of candles that are needed to light two candles the first night, three the second, until we light nine on the last night.

How many candles are left in the box at the end of Chanukah?

Zero, of course. But it's not always zero. Often there are a few left and the following year when we take out all of the Chanukah supplies, we find partially filled boxes. How does this happen?

Perhaps we buy extra boxes to coordinate colors? Or maybe we use different candles on Friday night when they need to burn longer? Or maybe we don't light the shamash each night, since it isn't necessary to fulfill the basic mitzvah?

Unfortunately, although those may be the causes for some, for others there seems to be a more obvious reason: people don't remember to light candles each night, hence the remaining candles in the box.

Understanding this phenomenon, I believe, is the key to Rosh Hashanah.

Allow me to explain.

There are three words in the Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah that have long inspired me, but only recently did I realize they seem completely out of place and perhaps even superfluous.

As we conclude the section of Shofros, prior to the bracha, we recite:

כי אתה שומע קול שופר ומאזין תרועה ואין
דומה לך ברוך אתה ה' שומע תרועת עמו
ישראל ברחמים.

For you listen to the sound of the shofar and heed the call of teruah and there is none like you, blessed are You Hashem Who listened to the sounds of the Jewish people's shofar with mercy.

It is a stirring culmination to the section of Shofros and in fact to the three special sections added into Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah.

There are three words that are true and inspiring on the day we coronate the king, but don't seem to belong. *Ve'ain domeh Lach* — and there is none like You — powerful words. But what are

they doing here specifically? They could fit into any part of the davening, but as a general rule we can conclude a pre-bracha paragraph with words that are *mei'ein hachasima*, similarly themed to the conclusion of the bracha. Why at this bracha? Why at this time?

Rav Moshe Shapiro z"l explained beautifully. There are two other times in our davening where we describe Hashem in a similar way, as *ain domeh Lach*, there is none like You. The first is every single day in the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei:

מי כמוך בעל גבורות ומי דומה לך.
Who is like You oh mighty one, and who is similar to You (umi domeh Lach).

What is the context?

What is the theme of the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei?

Techiyas hameisim — the revivification and resurrection of the dead.

Where is the second place?

In Shacharis on Shabbos — *ve'ain domeh Lecha moshi'einu l'sechiyas hameisim* — who is similar to You our savior for the revivification of the dead.

Again, the same praise of Hashem specifically in the context of *techiyas hameisim*.

Clearly then, the praise on Rosh Hashanah must have something to do with *techiyas hameisim* as well, but what and why?

Let's take a step back. What is unique about *techiyas hameisim* that it uniquely expresses that there is no other power similar to Hashem? And furthermore, why does it warrant its own bracha — the second in Shemoneh Esrei, referred to as *Gevuros*, the strength of Hashem? What is so powerful about *techiyas hameisim*?

Hashem created the world, all that exists, the laws of nature, physics, chemistry, everything. What is different about the revivification of the dead?

Perhaps the ultimate expression of Hashem's *gevurah*, His might, His unique might, is overcoming the natural laws He put into place. To clearly show, not just with divine providence behind the scenes, but to upend the natural order of the world and reverse it, in a sense, is greater even than the initial creation of life. That is the *gevurah* of Hashem. That is an aspect that is *ain domeh Lach*, no other has that ability. And it really in its essence is the ultimate expression of Hashem's uniqueness and therefore must be a core principle of our faith in Hashem.

As true a statement as it may be and even with our new understanding, why is it incorporated specifically in the mussaf of Rosh Hashanah? What does *techiyas hameisim* and that unique strength of Hashem have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

Let's return to the Chanukah candles. Why are there extra candles left in the box? It would seem that most people are excited at the beginning of the holiday and then it tapers off, so they don't finish the box. However, Daniel Pink, in his fascinating work *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* cites research indicating that 76% of the Jews surveyed lit on the first night, only 55% on the second, and the number continued to drop to around 40% on night 6, but by night 8 it climbed up again above 55% — creating a U-shape if you would graph it.

What happens in the middle? Why did the *hadlakas neiros* dip and pick back up?

While there are several possible theories, other similar research suggests that it is what Daniel Pink terms the "Uh-oh Effect." When we reach a midpoint, sometimes we slump, but other times we jump. A mental siren alerts us that we've squandered half of our time. That injects a healthy dose of stress — uh-oh, we're running out of time! — which revives our motivation and reshapes our strategy. Some people at the midpoint will yell "oh-no!" and continue the trajectory of their slump and miss lighting candles on subsequent nights, while others will yell "uh-oh," realizing we only have limited opportunity to still light, and it's time to pick back up!

Rosh Hashanah serves as one of those moments where we can pause, even if it isn't in the middle of the year, and assess where we are, what we want to do, what we have done and where we are heading. And then we can choose the "oh-no" or the "uh-oh," and we can

pick a path of teshuva. That in and of itself is a wonderful gift, to have these moments to pause, think and examine; but what Hashem really is giving us on Rosh Hashanah is far greater.

The gift of teshuva on Rosh Hashanah is manifest in this phrase that we append to the bracha of Shofros. As we call out in the primitive cry of the shofar to Hashem the king, we announce *ain domeh Lach*, there is none like You. In what way? We saw that this phrase is associated with *techiyas hameisim*; what does that have to do with Rosh Hashana?

Chazal are revealing to us that just as the unique strength of Hashem is manifested in uprooting the natural course of events and bringing life to the dead, teshuva is not just a process, it gives us a fresh start. It uproots the natural progression of having to be punished for what we have done and allows us to become new people, no longer bound and held back by our past errors and decisions.

As the Rambam so beautifully describes in *Hilchos Teshuva 2:4*, "*aini oso ha'ish*" — I am not the same person — not figuratively, literally, it is comparable to *techiyas hameisim*, and therefore we invoke this unique and special descriptive phrase of *ve'ain domeh Lach*.

May it be the will of Hashem that we take advantage of this special gift and hopefully when we reach Chanukah this year, we will look back at the months from Rosh Hashana proud of what we have accomplished and excited for the days ahead!



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