

Today and Tomorrow Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

ב"ה

Parshat Yitro

“Go to the nation,” says the Eternal to Moses, “and sanctify them today and tomorrow.” (Exodus 19:10)

Why today and tomorrow? Why both? And why not yesterday as well?

Let us take the easiest question first. Why not yesterday? Because yesterday is gone. What happened yesterday is history; it's too late to change yesterday. Although, as our sages tell us, we can change yesterday by changing tomorrow; true, heart-felt, sincere repentance – the Hebrew word (תשובה) actually means a *turning* – can trigger such compassion in the Heavenly Realms that our transgressions will be counted as positive rather than negative. But we cannot directly change the past.

Why today and tomorrow? Why both? There are two reasons, seemingly opposite but, in fact, not entirely unconnected.

Being sanctified, being purified, becoming holy, in the Jewish tradition, is not a once-and-for-all-time act. We can – indeed, we often do – slip from even the highest spiritual levels. Thus, we pray every Yom Kippur (indeed, every day) that we may be healed of the effects of our transgressions. The spiritual healing from our foolish – even our willful – acts does not mean that we will no longer act in the same or other foolish ways. However sincere our repentance may be, and however much that repentance changes us, we are finite beings and we remain capable of transgressing again. Thus, even though Moses hallows the people “today,” he must be prepared to do so again “tomorrow.”

Further, we note that becoming holy, being sanctified, is not something which we can postpone until tomorrow. The יצר הרע (*yetzer ha'ra*), the negative (traditionally called “evil”) inclination, which exists within every human being, approaches us with a most seductive voice. “Listen to me, yield to my temptations today; you can sanctify yourself tomorrow.” We must turn to the Moses within us (for, as we have so often discussed, the stories in the Torah, the people in the Torah, the events in the Torah are all aspects of each individual's personality, of each one's psyche) and be hallowed. By that hallowing, we raise a defense against the importunities of our *yetzer ha'ra*. But only for the moment; one day at a time; one moment at a time! Thus, even though Moses will hallow the people “tomorrow,” he must to do so “today” as well!

May we all learn to tune in to our inner Moses, that we may hallow ourselves today as well as tomorrow, tomorrow as well as today.

Shabbat Shalom.