

NITZAVIM (DEUTERONOMY 29:9-30:20)

Much Ado About...

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

This week's message is dedicated in memory of all of this year's victims of Arab terrorism, Hashem Yinkom Domam -- May G-d avenge their blood.

Most of this week's message was written before the horrific events of last Tuesday. The tragedy brings home the point even more poignantly.

This Monday evening will mark the beginning of the year 5762. Every year, on the last Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah, we read the stirring words of Moses "taking attendance:"

*"Today you are standing before G-d -- your leaders, the heads of your trib**es, your elders, your police officers, every Israelite; your children, your wives, and your converts; your woodcutters and water drawers" (Deuteronomy 29:9-10)*

Yes, we are standing. On the first day of the month of Tishrei, the 5761st anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, their Creator will take "inventory" of His creation. He will determine what the coming year will bring for the descendants of the First Couple from Eden.

I recently found myself in the presence of a fellow who found it very easy to be critical of others.

It was really quite amazing. This gentleman was not at all happy with the job being done by the employees of a company whose facility we were visiting. He was obviously very upset over the fact that things weren't going the way he wanted them to. It was, to be frank, ugly. He was screaming at the top of his lungs, finding fault with most of the employees. I felt funny about the whole thing, especially since my 12-year-old son was with me. He took it all pretty much in stride, understanding that there are people out there who make fools of themselves.

He was really nasty, bordering on racist. He was critical of the company manager for hiring a particular employee who happened to be from Japan. He loudly suggested that the employee should be transferred to a less prestigious affiliate of the company, or that he be sent back "where he came from!"

It was fascinating to observe how angry he was at almost everyone he saw. But the Japanese fellow caught the brunt of the abuse.

Then, everything changed. Mr. Criticism suddenly adored our friend from Japan. Things were now going his way. As a result of one event, he was instantly transformed into the Japanese fellow's biggest fan, calling out his name in adoration.

What was this single action, performed by the company's Japanese employee, which suddenly transformed his critic from foe to friend?

What this Japanese national, a millionaire by the name of Mr. Tsuyoshi Shinjo did was to smash a baseball over the right field wall, allowing his employer, the New York Mets, to tie the score with the visiting San Francisco Giants.

Isn't it amazing? The passion, the fervor that my fellow spectator at Shea Stadium put into a baseball game!!! He screamed and screamed as if this game was the most important thing in his life. I looked at this fellow who, judging by the Star of David suspended from his neck, appeared to be Jewish, and couldn't help wondering: Is he aware that Rosh Hashanah is coming? Does he invest this much emotional energy into the question of what next year will bring? Does he realize that we are all standing before our Creator who is determining, as we read in our High Holiday prayers, "...who will live, who will die ... who will be poor, who will be rich...?"

Does it really matter all that much which group of well-paid athletic entertainers sends more men across home plate? Isn't it ironic how much emphasis we tend to put on things that really aren't all that important?

We will turn to G-d this week and ask Him to grant us a year of health, success, and peace. These are things that REALLY matter. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every moment of our prayers this Rosh Hashanah could be at least as intense (though not as loud!) as the "supplications" of my "friend" at the baseball game?

Have a good Shabbos and a happy and healthy New Year. May we all be written and sealed in the Book of Life, Prosperity, and Peace ... Especially Peace ... G-d knows we need it.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz