



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

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Testify!

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, zt'l, was the elder *Gadol HaDor* in Pre-War Europe, and was universally regarded as the greatest of sages.

Once, when Reb Dov Genechovsky was visiting the Chazon Ish, Rav Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, zt'l, he noticed that the hat of the Chazon Ish seemed worn out, and offered to purchase a new one for him.

The Chazon Ish smiled in appreciation for the gesture, but turned down the suggestion:

“A hat that saw HaGaon Rav Chaim Ozer, zt'l, we don't exchange so fast...”

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Haazinu hashamayim — “Listen, O Heavens, and I will speak...” *V'tishma haaretz imrei fi* — “and let the earth hear the words of my mouth!” (Devarim, 32:1)

Calling upon Heaven and Earth as witnesses, our Parsha is Moshe Rabbeinu's ‘swan song’ and final exhortation, urging us to do Teshuva. Rashi explains that in

summoning “*shamayim*” and “*aretz*” to serve as witnesses to his final message, Moshe Rabbeinu is recognizing his mortality: “I am a man of flesh and blood, and tomorrow I will die. If Am Yisrael says, ‘We never accepted the covenant, who will come and refute them?’” *Shirat Haazinu* directs our attention to the human condition with an explicit allusion to the temporal nature of man. Heaven and earth will exist long after we are gone, and while their testimony will endure forever, we do not.

The Gemara (Taanis, 11a) shares a similar message and warning: “Lest a person say, I have acted in secret; who will testify against me on the Day of Judgment?” The Tanna explains that *avnei beiso v'koros beiso*, “the stones and support beams of a person's house will testify against him, as it is stated: ‘For a stone shall cry out from the wall, and a beam out of the timber shall answer it.’” (Chavakuk, 2:11).

Rabbi Nissan Mangel is a talmid chacham of renown, a Holocaust survivor, prolific author, and was commissioned by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to translate *Sefer Tanya*.

One of the major themes of *Tanya*, in *Shaar haYichud v'haEmunah*, is the Divine basis for all of Creation: anything that exists in this world or any world is

enlivened and given existence by a Divine spark, an extension of Hashem Himself. Furthermore, Torah wisdom and Jewish consciousness see Creation as divided into four 'kingdoms' or realms of existence: 1) *domem*, 'silent', inanimate creations or the mineral kingdom 2) *tzomeach*, 'things that grow', or the vegetable kingdom, 3) *chai*, 'living beings' or the animal kingdom, and 4) *medaber*, 'speaking beings', or the human kingdom.

This week is Shabbos Shuvah, the Shabbos of Returning

When it came to translating the kingdom of 'domem', Rabbi Mangel used the standard translation of "inanimate". When editing the manuscript, The Rebbe replaced "inanimate" with "silent", expressing the fact that even in the realm of 'domem', there is life, albeit an existence that is silent.

Still wanting to maintain a professional and classy style of writing, Rabbi Mangel kept the word "inanimate" and placed brackets around the word "silent". When the Rebbe reviewed the translation of *Sefer Tanya* for the final time, he changed Rabbi Mangel's version once again, emphasizing "silent" as the primary translation, placing brackets around "inanimate".

The difference between these two words is not semantic. The Rebbe's perspective reflects a deep awareness that everything in existence is alive, pulsating with Divine vitality, an expression of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Even that which seems to be lacking life — heaven, earth, the walls of our homes, or even an old hat — is awake and alive, even if seemingly silent.

This week is Shabbos Shuvah, the Shabbos of Returning. We await our judgement, once again looking over the way we lived during the past year and up until this moment.

Neither we, nor our hats, have seen Reb Chaim Ozer zt'l, but this year, approaching Yom Kipur, we may feel a bit worn out. However, there is no doubt that Heaven, Earth, and certainly the walls of our homes, can certainly testify that 5780 was a year of incredible sacrifice, extraordinary efforts in *Yidishkeit* and observance of Torah and *mitzvos* under very challenging circumstances.

This Yom Kipur, all of the *Olamos*, and all of Creation will bear witness that we have already been through enough, and that the time for our personal and collective Redemption has arrived. May we be inscribed in the Book of Life and the Living, together with *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, this year! ■



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