to he who is despised of men, to he who is abhorred of nations, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise” (Isaiah 49:7); and ministers by bowing, as it is written, in the same verse: “Ministers, and they shall bow.” Rabbi Zeira strongly objects to this interpretation, and some say it was Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani who objected. Had the verse written: And ministers shall bow, the meaning would have been as you said. However, now that it is written: “Ministers, and they shall bow,” this indicates that ministers will do this and that, i.e., they will both arise and bow.

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: I too say a similar idea. Not all are fit for light, and not all are fit for gladness. The righteous are fit to be rewarded with light, and the upright are fit to be rewarded with gladness. The righteous are fit to be rewarded with light, as it is written: “Light is sown for the righteous” (Psalms 97:11), and the upright are fit to be rewarded with gladness, as it is written, in the same verse: “And gladness for the upright in heart.”

NOTES

Light is sown, etc. – According to Rashi, the upright are on a higher spiritual level than the righteous, and their reward is correspondingly greater. Other commentaries maintain that the righteous are on a loftier plane, and that their reward, the Divine light, includes the gladness granted to the upright (Ritva; Otsar HaKavod). Similarly, some commentaries state that light, which is a purely spiritual gift, is only for the righteous, while the merely upright are rewarded with gladness, a more material blessing (Maharsha).
MISHNA What is the customary order of fast days? Normally the sacred ark in the synagogue, which was mobile, was kept in a locked room. However, on fast days they remove the ark to the main city square and place burnt ashes upon the ark, as a sign of mourning. And they also place ashes on the head of the Nasi, and each and every member of the community likewise places ashes upon his head.

The eldest member of the community says to the congregation: Our brothers, it is not stated with regard to the people of Nineveh: And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather, the verse says: And God saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way (Jonah 3:10). And in the Prophets it says: “And rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God” (Joel 2:13). This teaches that prayer and fasting are insufficient, as one must also repent and amend his ways in practice. They stood for truth. The congregation appoints an elder, who is experienced in leading prayer, to descend before the ark as communal prayer leader. And this prayer leader must have children and must have an empty house, i.e., he must be poor, so that his heart will be fully concentrated on the prayer for the needs of his community.

And he recites twenty-four blessings before the congregation: The eighteen blessings of the everyday Amidah prayer, to which he adds another six blessings, and they are as follows: The special series of blessings recited on Rosh HaShana, the Remembrances and Shofarot; and the sections of Psalms that begin with the verses: “In my distress I called to the Lord and He answered me” (Psalm 120:1), “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come” (Psalm 121:1), “Out of the depths I have called You, O Lord” (Psalm 130:1), and “A prayer of the afflicted, when he faints” (Psalm 102:1).

Rabbi Yehuda says: The prayer leader did not need to recite the Remembrances and Shofarot passages. Rather, he recites instead of them the passage beginning with: “If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence” (1 Kings 8:37), followed by the verse “The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts” (Jeremiah 14:1).

NOTES

Burnt ashes – המים: Rashi and many other commentators explain that burnt ashes are placed on the forehead as a sign of humiliation, as they are more demeaning than dirt. Others add that these ashes are called burnt to differentiate them from the ashes of the red heifer (Meir; RaShbi on Bava Batra 6a-b). Tosafot and the Arukh cite several interpretations of the term burnt ashes. According to one opinion it refers to ashes from burnt coals, according to another it means ashes from a stove, while a third interpretation is that it refers to ashes formed from a burnt human corpse.

And in the Prophets (Kabbala) it says – תְּפִלָּה שָׁבוּ: Several later authorities state that the term kabbala, which literally means: Receive, or tradition, is a general reference to the statements of the prophets. Rashi here explains that this expression refers specifically to commands of a prophet to the people. Elsewhere Rashi suggests that statements of kabbala are prophecies received in accordance with the requirements of the time, presumably in contrast to the narrative portions of the books of the Prophets and prophecies recorded for future generations. Others explain that actions that the prophets are commanded to perform are called statements of kabbala. The reason is that prophets are not permitted to innovate mitzvot of their own, and therefore any mitzva they perform must already have been received on Mount Sinai (Machzor VInh).

The prayer leader did not need to recite – מצורא וְאֵין: Rabbi Yehuda’s wording here is puzzling, as he rules that one does not recite the Remembrances and Shofarot at all. One explanation is that Rabbi Yehuda is saying that although the Sages instituted that one must recite lengthy blessings, it is not necessary to include all of the passages of Remembrances and Shofarot, as they are not related to the issue of fasts. Others maintain, based on the Rambam, that Rabbi Yehuda does not dispute the basic requirement to recite the Remembrances and Shofarot but merely claims that they are not included in these additional blessings (Rtva).
And he recites at the end of all of these six blessings their unique conclusions. For the conclusion of the first blessing: Redeemer of Israel, he recites: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah (see Genesis 22:11–18). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel. For the second blessing, to which he adds the verses of Remembrances, he recites: He Who answered our forefathers at the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:15–16). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who remembers the forgotten.

For the third blessing, which includes the verses of Shofarot, he recites: He Who answered Joshua at Gilgal, when they sounded the shofar in Jericho (see Joshua 6:4). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who hears the terua. For the fourth blessing, he recites: He Who answered Samuel in Mizpah (see 1 Samuel, chapter 7). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who hears cries. For the fifth he recites: He Who answered Elijah on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings, chapter 18). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who hears prayer.

For the sixth blessing he recites: He Who answered Jonah from within the innards of the fish (see Jonah 2:1–3). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who answers in a time of trouble. For the conclusion of the seventh blessing, which is actually the sixth additional blessing, as the first blessing listed here is an expanded version of a regular weekday blessing, he recites: He Who answered David and Solomon his son in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 8:52–53). He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who has mercy on the Land.

The mishna relates: An incident occurred in the days of Rabbi Halafta and Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon, that someone passed before the ark as prayer leader and finished the entire blessing of the fast day, but the congregation did not answer amen after him. Instead, the attendant of the synagogue said: Sound the shofar with a long, unwavering sound, priests, blow the shofar. The prayer leader continued: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Once again, the attendant announced: Blast the shofar, with a wavering sound, sons of Aaron, blast. The prayer leader resumed: He Who answered our forefathers by the Red Sea, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day, and continued in this way.
And when this matter came before the Sages, and they heard the custom of Rabbi Halafta and Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon, they said: They would act in accordance with this custom only at the Eastern Gate of the Temple and on the Temple Mount. However, this ceremony is never performed outside the Temple.

On the first three fasts, the members of the priestly watch, who are in charge of the Temple service that week, fast but do not complete their fast. And the members of the patrilineal family, who perform the Temple service on that particular day, did not fast at all. On the second set of three fast days, the members of the priestly watch fast and complete the fast, and the members of the patrilineal family fast but do not complete their fasts. On the final seven fasts, both groups fast and complete the fasts. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua.

And the Rabbis say: On the first three fasts, the members of both groups do not fast at all. On the second three fast days, the members of the priestly watch fast and do not complete their fast, and the members of the patrilineal family do not fast at all. On the final seven, the members of the priestly watch fast and complete the fast, and the members of the patrilineal family fast but do not complete their fast.

The mishna mentions another difference between the members of the priestly watch and the patrilineal family: The members of the priestly watch were permitted to drink wine during the nights, but not during the days, as they might be called upon to assist in the Temple service, which may not be performed after drinking wine. And the members of the patrilineal family, who performed the Temple service, were not permitted to drink wine, neither at night nor during the day, as their tasks were performed at night as well. It is prohibited for both the members of the priestly watch and the members of the non-priestly watch to cut their hair or launder their garments throughout the week, but on Thursday it is permitted for them to cut their hair and launder their clothes in deference to Shabbat.

The mishna returns to the issue of fasting: Any day concerning which it is written in Megillat Ta'anit not to eulogize on that day, it is also prohibited to eulogize on the day before, but it is permitted to do so on the following day. Rabbi Yosei says: It is prohibited to eulogize both on the day before and on the following day.

The mishna continues: With regard to those days concerning which it is written only not to fast, it is permitted to fast on the day before and on the following day. Rabbi Yosei says: Fasting the day before is prohibited, but on the following day it is permitted to fast.

The mishna continues: One may not decree a fast on the community starting on a Thursday, so as not to cause an increase in prices. If the first of a series of fasts is on a Thursday, then Friday everyone will come to purchase their food for after the fast and for Shabbat, which will allow the storeowners to take advantage of the crowds and raise their prices. Rather, the first set of three fasts is on a Monday, Thursday, and the following Monday, and the second set of three is on a Thursday, Monday, and the following Thursday. Rabbi Yosei says: Just as the first three fasts do not begin on Thursday, so too, neither the second set nor the last set starts on a Thursday. Instead, all the series of fasts begin on a Monday.
HALAKHA

One may not decree a fast on the community on New Moons, on Hanukkah, or on Purim.19 A fast may not be decreed upon the community on New Moons, Hanukkah, or Purim, or on the intermediate days of a Festival. If the community has already started to observe a series of fasts due to an impending calamity, and one fast coincides with one of these days, the fast is observed until midnight, despite the semi-festive nature of the day. Nowadays, however, when even communal fasts are treated as private fasts, the series is interrupted on days of this kind, and the fast is observed on a different day (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 572:2; Magen Avraham, citing Bet Yosef).

As the serpent was cursed first – כְּוּלָּהּ / HaNasi

It can be suggested that the serpent was punished first for an entirely different reason, as it was the one ultimately responsible for the sin since it persuaded Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit. However, as God initially spoke to Adam, followed by Eve, the subsequent punishments should have been announced in that order. The change in order indicates that in matters of dishonor, one starts with the inferior member of the group (Nasek Matkadosh).

Each and every member places ashes upon his head - כְּוּלָּה / HaNasi

In the Jerusalem Talmud it is indicated that the sexton places ashes not only on the heads of the dignitaries but also on the heads of the common people. However, there was a difference between the two, as those people who could not reach would place ashes on their own heads. In the case of the Nasi and the deputy Nasi, in contrast, particular care was taken that the ashes were placed on their heads by someone else, to maximize their humiliation, as the Gemara explains.

One may not decree a fast on the community on New Moons, on Hanukkah, or on Purim. And if they decreed and began a set of fasts, and only afterward realized that one of the fasts would occur on one of these days, they do not interrupt the sequence. This is the statement of Rabban Gamliel. Rabbi Meir said: Although Rabban Gamliel said that they do not interrupt the sequence, he concedes that on these days, which are days with special observances, they do not complete the fast. And similarly, when the Ninth of Av occurs on Shabbat eve, the fast is not completed and one eats before the start of Shabbat, so as not to enter Shabbat while fasting.

GEMARA

The mishna teaches: What is the order of fast days? They remove the ark. The Gemara asks: And is this ritual performed even on the first set of fasts? And the Gemara raises a contradiction from a baraita: On the first and second sets of three fasts, everyone enters the synagogue and they pray in the manner that they pray throughout the entire year.

The baraita continues: And on the final seven fasts they remove the ark to the main city square and place ashes upon the ark, and on the head of the Nasi, and on the head of the deputy Nasi, and each and every member of the community takes ashes and places them upon his head. Rabbi Natan says: They would bring specifically burnt ashes. This baraita indicates that the full ritual is performed only on the final set of fasts. Rav Pappa said in explanation: When we taught the mishna as well, it was taught only with regard to the final set of seven fasts, not the earlier series of fasts.

§ The mishna further states that ashes are placed on the head of the Nasi and on the head of the deputy Nasi. And then it teaches that each and every member of the community places ashes upon his head. The Gemara asks: Is that so? Is this the proper order? Isn’t it taught in a baraita that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: With regard to matters of greatness, where it is a mark of honor and distinction to be treated first, one begins with the greatest member of the group, but for any matter involving a curse or dishonor, one begins with the least important member of the group.

The Gemara cites a baraita which provides the sources for this principle. With regard to matters of greatness one begins with the greatest member, as it is stated: “And Moses said to Aaron, and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons” (Leviticus 10:6). Moses first addresses the most important person, Aaron, and this was a matter of distinction, as the verse continues: “For the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you” (Leviticus 10:7). And for any matter involving a curse, one begins with the least important member of a group, as the serpent was cursed first, and afterward Eve was cursed and afterward Adam was cursed.

Why, then, are the leaders of the community, its most important members, the first to perform these fast day expressions of mourning, which are a response to a curse? The Gemara answers: The reason is that this leadership role in the performance of these acts is considered a distinction and an honor for them, as it is as though the community is saying to them: You are worthy of requesting compassion on behalf of everyone.

§ The mishna teaches: Each and every member of the community places ashes upon his head.20 The Gemara asks: Let the Nasi and the deputy Nasi also take ashes themselves and place them upon their own heads. What is different with regard to them, that someone else takes the ashes and places them on their heads? Rabbi Abba of Caesarea said: This is done intentionally, as one who humiliates himself, in this case by placing ashes upon his own head, is not similar to...