

What Happens Now?

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

I recently had the good pleasure of meeting Rav Lipa Yisraelson. A grandson of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, this lovely and engaging person dedicates his life to publishing works of his grandfather, as well as those of his uncle, Rav Chaim Kanievsky. He gave me a copy of the "*Amudo Shel Olam*" biography that he published on Rav Elyashiv and told me that I would find material for an article on every page.

I opened the book to this story: In Israel, there was a particularly nasty election campaign in which the Leftist parties promised that should they get elected, they would draft *yeshiva bochurim*, among other things. When they won the election, their impending ascension to power had the religious community worried about what edicts would be coming their way.

One of Rav Elyashiv's *talmidim* asked him what would happen now that haters of religion would be in a position to carry out their plans. The answer shocked him. Rav Elyashiv didn't hesitate for a second. He said to him that to think about what will happen is *bittul Torah*.

Parshas Ki Savo is all about *emunah* and *bitachon*, demonstrations of faith in *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*. It opens with the obligation of bringing the first fruits of the harvest to Yerushalayim, where the grower stands at the *mizbei'ach* and recites *pesukim* that recall the *tzaros* of Yaakov Avinu and our forefathers' suffering in Mitzrayim.

He then tells how Hashem rescued us from Mitzrayim and brought us to Eretz Yisroel. He presents the first fruits of his labors to the *kohein* and returns home. He is then ready for the next part of the *mitzvah*: "*Vesomachta bechol hatov asher nosan lecha Hashem,*" to be happy with what Hashem has given you.

The key to joy is realizing that whatever one has is from Hashem. When we recognize that the determinant of our success is Hashem, we can be fulfilled. When we recognize that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*, who created the world and everything in it, including us, did so for our good and benefit, we can appreciate that everything that happens to us is for our good.

When a person finds himself in a predicament in which he does not want to be, he can either bemoan his sad fate and his bad luck or he can recognize that he is there because Hashem placed him there. When he realizes that and knows that he is there for a reason, he can deal with the situation without becoming broken. He does his best to deal with the situation as he waits for Hashem to decide that he can be removed from his predicament.

Three times a day, we recite the *posuk*, "*Posei'ach es yodecha umasbia lechol chai ratzon*" (*Tehillim* 145:16), which seems to indicate that Hashem fulfills every desire. Many question that we know that the desires of many people are not fulfilled. How can we reconcile that with the *posuk*?

The *Tzlach* (*Brachos* 4b) answers that the meaning of the *posuk* is that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* gives each person the understanding to be happy with what he has and to be content with what he received from Hashem through the sense that what he has is best for him.

When Yaakov Avinu was tormented by Lovon, and later in his life when he was forced to go to Mitzrayim, he did so appreciating that this was the best thing for him to do at that time. Though he did not want to go to Mitzrayim, and though he did not want to be mistreated by Lovon, he knew that these things were happening to him for a greater purpose.

And indeed, as the *posuk* states, he went to Mitzrayim with meager possessions and his children, but grew into a large and powerful nation there.

To be happy, a person must realize that although he can't understand why he is in any given situation, it is for his good and for the greater good. If that is his state of mind, then he will be able to persevere no matter what is going on, and eventually he will prosper in a fashion that will be visible by all.

Perhaps part of the reason for the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* is to force man to reflect on the good in his life. Too often, people concentrate on the negative. They complain about all the heartache they endure as they struggle to make a living. People fail to thank Hashem that they have a job and that they have a boss who pays them a salary. People don't always appreciate that they have a plot of land on which to grow their fruit and instead complain about the intensive labor they perform in order for their orchard to produce healthy fruit.

The *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* reminds the grower of when he planted one of his *shivah minim*, not knowing whether the seeds would take root or whether the trees would bear fruit. And it forces him to be thankful that, despite all the potential for ruin, in the end, Hashem helped him bring forth a good crop.

In Yerushalayim, he stands at the *mizbei'ach* and reflects on the mixture of hard times and good times the Jewish people have experienced throughout the ages.

Life is full of challenges and situations we wish we would not be in. There are times when people feel as if they are backed into a corner with no way out. Prices keep rising and they can't keep up. As hard as they work and despite their best efforts, they are not able to afford the costs of life in the twenty-first century.

Sometimes we feel as if a conspiracy of lies has spread an impenetrable web. There are times when it appears as if all the odds are stacked against us, and conventional wisdom indicates that it's time to give up the fight. The papers write scathing articles and people scramble to respond and fret about things to come. Government enacts laws people fear will negatively impact our lives. People fear. They wonder what will be.

And Rav Elyashiv tells us that to think about what will be is *bittul Torah*. To read the paper and grow fearful of impending doom is *bittul Torah*. When the Left is in charge and aiming for our way of life, we must know that everything that happens here is by Hashem's will and design.

The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 8a) quotes Rebbi, who said that *amei ha'aretz* cause all the bad things that happen in the world. The *Gemara* tells a story to illustrate.

It happened that the king obligated the people of Tiveria to prepare for him a new crown, a very expensive undertaking. [The crown of recently departed Queen Elizabeth is said to be worth \$139 million!] The townspeople decided to

divide the tax evenly between all of the city's citizens. The city was home to many *talmidei chachomim*, and Rebbi ruled that they would not be obligated to contribute, since *talmidei chachomim* do not pay taxes.

The *amei ha'aretz* threatened Rebbi that if the *talmidei chachomim* would not pay their share, they would move out of the city rather than cover the entire expense themselves. Rebbi did not bend. Half of the *amei ha'aretz* moved out.

The king suddenly announced that he was cutting in half the amount the city had to pay for his new crown.

The *amei ha'aretz* returned to Rebbi and insisted that now that they were obligated to contribute much less, the *talmidei chachomim* should now pay as well, since the burden would not be as difficult for them. Rebbi did not agree and said that they would not pay anything. Again they threatened to leave, and this time the remaining people all left the city.

There was one person, a cleaner, who did not flee the town, and the king decided that he alone would have to pay the bill. When the man heard that, he packed up and ran off.

The king suddenly announced that he was vacating the entire tax that he had placed on the town to pay for his new crown. Rebbi proclaimed that all had seen that he was correct in his statement that bad things occur because of *amei ha'aretz*, because once they were gone, the tax was canceled.

The media at that time probably had a field day bashing Rebbi and the anti-social *talmidei chachomim* who refused to participate in the communal

obligation. People who were deficient in their belief, who didn't have proper *emunah* and *bitachon*, might have worried what would be. In *shul* and wherever people gathered, the banter and chit-chat were over what would happen and the impending doom.

Each time things looked more austere, they ran to Rebbi and asked, "What will happen now?"

And Rebbi looked at them and said, "*Bittul Torah!* This is from Hashem. It will have a good ending. You go back and learn, and if you will dedicate yourselves to Torah and *mitzvos*, then everything will work out."

And it did.

The tendency to despair is understandable. But the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* encourages us to never despair and to always maintain our belief in Hashem, even on the dark days when the land lies fallow and an unbelieving and unknowing person would give up all hope of ever growing anything.

This is why, in the *Tochacha* in this week's *parsha* (28:47), the Torah says that the curses will befall us when we will not observe the *mitzvos* and *chukim* "because you did not serve Hashem with joy." Many question why a person is cursed if he fails to serve Hashem with joy. The answer is that a person who believes that everything he has – or doesn't have – is because Hashem, who is the Ultimate giver of goodness, willed it so will always be glad. He will serve Hashem with much joy and appreciation, while someone who doesn't signifies that his belief is lacking.

Living in troubled, turbulent times, we have to maintain our faith and seek to persevere and do the right thing, no matter how difficult the challenge.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky told of a man with whom he survived the Holocaust, as they were together in Siberia and then later in a refugee camp. The man lost his entire family and all his possessions. He arrived in Israel alone, with nothing, and sank into a deep depression.

Rav Galinsky suggested that he go to the *Chazon Ish* for support. The *Chazon Ish* told him the story of a woman who supported her family. She would travel to the big city with loads of cash and buy merchandise at wholesale prices before returning home to sell it at a profit.

On one of her trips, she lost her pocketbook, which was filled with her cash. As much as she searched for it, she could not find it. She was heartbroken, having lost all the money her family depended on for food and their other expenses for the year. In desperation, before heading home to inform her husband of their loss, she went to the city's *rov* and asked him to announce that if anyone found her pocketbook with the cash, they should turn it in to him.

A poor man found the bag. He responded to the *rov's* call and went to his home. There, he explained that since he is learned, he knows that the *Mishnah* states in *Machshirin* (and is brought in *Gemara Bava Metzia* 24a) that if someone finds a lost object in a city with a non-Jewish majority, he is permitted to keep it. He told the *rov* that the find represented an answer to his prayers. He saw it as a gift from Heaven to enable him to marry off his daughter.

The *rov* was inclined to side with the poor man, but since it was obvious that he had found the woman's lost cash, he told the man that he had to submit the question to Rav Yitzchok Elchonon Spector, the *rabbon shel kol bnei hagolah*, for a ruling.

Rav Yitzchok Elchonon responded that the money belonged to the woman. He said that the reason a person can keep an object found in a city with a non-Jewish majority is because we say that the owner surely gave up any hope of having it returned and was thus *meya'eish*. In this case, however, the money belonged to a woman. The *Gemara* in *Maseches Gittin* (77a) states that a husband takes ownership of all his wife's possessions, and the husband was not aware that she had lost the money and thus could not have been *meya'eish*. Therefore, ruled Rav Yitzchok Elchonon, the money must be returned to the woman.

The *Chazon Ish* looked the depressed man in the eye. "That same ruling applies to you," said the *Chazon Ish*. "Who gave you permission to give up – be *meya'eish*? *Chazal* teach that *'afilu cherev chada munachas al tzavaro shel adam,*' even if the executioner's sharp blade is on a Jew's neck ready to decapitate him, he must not be *meya'eish*, he may not despair, for Hashem can still save him.

"Are you the boss over what happened?" asked the *Chazon Ish*. "Do you own yourself? *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* determines where we end up and what happens to us. We must do our *hishtadlus* and *daven* that we succeed, but we have no right to be despondent and be *meya'eish!*"

May our firm belief bring us much joy and happiness in the remaining days of this year and in the year to come. *Amein.*