

See the Good

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

I remember when I was a young, small child, sitting at a classroom desk in Yeshiva of Spring Valley, hanging on to every word of my *rebbe* as we learned *Parshas Vayeitzei*, describing Yaakov Avinu's dream, his years in Lovon's house, his marriages, and the birth of the *shevotim*. Ever since our earliest years, we've sat riveted by the account of many stones joining together to become the single rock upon which Yaakov rested his head. We were generally taught that Yaakov slept on *Har Hamoriah*, site of his father's *Akeidah* and the future site of the *Botei Mikdosh*.

The sun set early and all of Eretz Yisroel folded under Yaakov. In his sleep, Hashem promised him the land and assured him that He would watch over him and would bless him with many descendants.

Yaakov awoke in the morning and was overcome by the awesomeness of the promise he had received. He said, "This is a holy place. Hashem is here and I didn't know." He consecrated the stone upon which he had slept and promised to give Hashem ten percent of his possessions.

Yaakov traveled on to Choron, where he came upon shepherds sitting aimlessly with their flocks at a watering hole. They told him that they had come there to provide water for their sheep, but the underground well was covered with a large rock and they had to wait until more shepherds would arrive. Collectively, they would be able to push off the rock and access the water. When Rochel arrived with her sheep, Yaakov summoned the strength to roll off the boulder by himself.

Yaakov was the *av* of *golus*. What transpired to him as he left the home of his parents in Be'er Sheva to go to Choron was the introduction to Yaakov's first expedition into exile, as he began his journey into a long *golus*.

He walked until dark and then lay down to rest in a place seemingly devoid of holiness. Upon awakening, he realized that "*ein zeh ki im bais Elokim*, this is a place laden with *kedusha*, the house of Hashem and the gate to heaven."

Yaakov Avinu was demonstrating to future generations how to survive in *golus*. Forced to leave places that hosted us for several generations, we arrive in places that are desolate, barren of any good. They are

perceived as unable to receive any holiness, much less be a home for *kedusha* and people who seek to live exalted lives. The places are as inert as stone.

The *golus* experience is tragic, the Jewish family torn apart and spread across the world. We have endured all types of oppression and pain over the course of this journey. On the surface, it seems that we've been removed from the realm of the Divine, pushed into a world without holiness.

But we come to realize, as Yaakov Avinu taught us, that even the darkest places in the world are potential homes for *kedusha*. A stone can become a *mizbeiach*. *Ein zeh ki im bais Elokim*. This is the secret of survival in *golus*.

We don't give up on any place or any person. There was a time when it was commonly thought that nothing good could take root in America. They believed that anyone who immigrated to this land was doomed to a dark life of emptiness, and for many years that was the case. But eventually, *Hashgocha* orchestrated for giants who had learned the lesson of Yaakov to come to America as they sought refuge from the ravages of Europe.

They planted *yeshivos* where people said no Torah could grow. They insisted on *shemiras Shabbos* where there was none. They convinced parents to send their children to receive a Torah education when doing so was mocked and vilified as old-fashioned and wrong. They brought *kedusha* to a place of *tumah*.

Thanks to the efforts of good people everywhere, now in America we have *frum* communities from coast to coast and Torah is blossoming on a massive scale. This happened because there were enough of Yaakov's children who believed that any place could be transformed from inert stone into a *mizbeiach* and a *makom kadosh*.

Not only in America, but around the world, Torah is found in places no one ever thought possible. Wherever Jews who remember Yaakov's lesson go, the *brocha* he received that night in his dream of "*uforatzta yoma vokeidma v'tzafona vonegba*" is being realized on an unprecedented scale.

No matter where our people end up, they build, they believe, they plant and they grow. And while so doing, they uncover and reveal sparks of holiness in the largest cities, the smallest towns, and the lightest and darkest corners of the world.

We never give up on anyone. We never say that he or she is beyond repair. We never say that they are beyond hope, as inert as stone, as dark as a seemingly forsaken place, for we know that there is holiness and good everywhere. Our task is to find it and cause embers to flare up into flames.

The anthem of *golus* is “*Achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh.*” Never think that you are alone. Never think that you are forsaken. Never think that anyone is too far gone. Never think that there is a location that cannot be transformed into a place where we can live and flourish.

We are all familiar with Rav Chaim Volozhiner’s prophecy that America would be the final station of Torah in *golus*. When we uncover enough watering holes here, we get to finally go home.

We have been spread across the world, and wherever we have gone, we have established *botei Elokim*, spreading *kedusha* and Torah where naysayers said it couldn’t be done. The cycle repeated itself every few hundred years. Jews would grow accustomed to their host country after having brought as much *kedusha* to that land as possible. The country rose up against them and once again the Jews were on to the next bleak outpost. Finally, we are here, spreading Torah across the fruited plain, awaiting that great day of “*vehoyah Hashem lemelech al kol ha’aretz.*”

We often lose sight of those who refined and prepared the American landscape, enabling the Torah world to rise. The great impact of the famed post-war giants sometimes overshadows the silent, hidden *avodah* of those who came before them and first uncovered the “*achein yeish Hashem*” on these shores as well.

The going was rough in those early turn-of-the-century days, as millions of Jews escaped the poverty and pogroms of Eastern Europe and came here looking for a better tomorrow. They settled in cities and towns all across the country, eking out a living as peddlers, tailors, knitters, and shopkeepers. The *ruach* was stone cold. The water pits were blocked and refused to open.

With the peddlers came *rabbonim*, who sat at home and learned by themselves and with the people. They wrote *seforim* and corresponded with the giants of Europe. They fought for *Shabbos* and Jewish education.

The temptations were many and they were very strong. People who didn’t work on *Shabbos* found it very difficult to find employment. They went hungry. Their children begged for food, clean clothes and heat.

There were few Hebrew schools. There was little choice but to send the children to public schools, where many were lost to assimilation. Every generation has its unique *nisyonos*, which cannot be overcome without much determination and belief, and it is unfair for us to judge people who lived in those generations.

Many failed and many were lost, but those who persevered increased the *kedusha* here. The *zechuyos* created by *limud haTorah* and *mesirus nefesh* for *kiyum hamitzvos* accumulated, balancing out the *klipos hora* and allowing *frum* people to live and thrive here. They made it possible for *shuls* and *yeshivos* to be built, and *botei medrash* and *kollelim* to flourish.

In Omaha, Nebraska lived Rav Tzvi Hirsch Grodzensky, cousin of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodeznsky who toiled in Torah. In Boston, Rav Zalman Yaakov Freiderman presided over huge *kehillos* and made sure that there would be *kashrus* and *rabbonim* in Massachusetts, as he learned and taught Torah. Rav Eliezer Silver of Kovno ended up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and from his pulpit there, he influenced the entire Torah world.

Travel across this country and you'll find Jewish cemeteries in the strangest of places. You think you're the first *frum* Jew to ever drive through some forsaken town off the beaten path, and then you pass the *bais olam* and realize that *neshamos* were *moser nefesh* to find sparks of *kedusha* in that location and prepare the country for its spiritual rebirth and the world for *Moshiach*.

Generations of such people, who came to the final *golus* from Europe, brought with them Torah and *mitzvos*, sometimes leading very lonely lives. Others were more fortunate. Whether they learned into the wee hours of the morning in the Rocky Mountains or led quiet *tishen* on Friday night in places very far from Mezibuzh, they were slowly but surely pushing away the rocks that blocked the water of Torah from spreading. History might not be aware, but everything that came after those pioneers is because they uncovered the holy spark of "*achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh*," and our existence here proves that.

Glance through the *Yated* on any given week and you'll see news items from places as varied as Elizabeth, New Jersey; Waterbury, Connecticut; South Bend, Indiana; Houston, Texas; Portland, Oregon; Phoenix, Arizona; Atlanta, Georgia, Columbus, Ohio; Scranton, Pennsylvania; Boca Raton, Florida; Chesterfield, Missouri and elsewhere.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Shulsinger wrote that during one of Israel's wars, people asked Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach for areas in which they should improve to help the war effort. He offered two suggestions. The first was to recite the first *brocha* of *Birkas Hamazon* from a *bentcher*. The second idea was not to be "*fartayned*" all day. "Don't be perpetually aggrieved," he said. "Some people go through every day of their lives with complaints against everyone. 'They didn't do what I told them to do.' Or, 'They didn't ask me how to do it. If they would have asked me, the whole thing would have come out so much differently – and better, of course.' People have complaints against their spouse, parents, children, *rabbonim*, *rabbeim*, *moros* and *chazzan*. They think that other people tried hurting them, harming them, and insulting them. People become bitter, angry and upset and get into arguments."

Stop, Rav Shach advised. Stop complaining. Stop seeing the incompetence of those around you and start seeing the blessings.

"A person can spend his day in *kapdanus* and bitterness," Rav Shach would say.

Don't say that this is an empty place. Don't say that the water is buried beneath a rock too heavy to move. Don't say that everything is bleak and hopeless. Rather, think, "*Achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh*." Open your eyes and see the potential. See the good. See what the good people do and want to do, and help to remove the stones and pebbles from their lives.

A person who lives with the awareness that the Master of the Universe maps each step and writes every chapter lives with *emunah* and *simcha*, for he knows that whatever happens, there is one reaction: *achein*, behold, *yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh*. Wherever it is, He is there too.

Nothing happens just because. Everything happens for a reason and a purpose.

Yaakov Avinu, throughout this *parsha*, faces many challenges. He travels, lonely and impoverished, and arrives in Choron with nothing. He faces Lovon's trickery and deceit, and then labors in extreme heat and in fierce cold for a selfish, unappreciative boss.

Never do we see him with *ta'anos*, focused on the evil being perpetrated against him. He never assumes the role of the *nirdof*. He isn't busy with Lovon's spite.

He saw the Hand of Hashem there, too. "*Achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh.*"

Thus, he emerged from *Bais Lovon* with all the *brachos* in the world, rich in family and possessions.

The purpose and task of *chinuch* is to bring out that value in a child, lovingly encouraging and motivating him from a young age to do good and be good. *Chinuch* works by helping a child believe in himself, enhancing his self-assurance and letting him know that if he aims to succeed, he will.

Hashem crafted man as a wondrous, spectacular creation, and infused each person with value. To close a door on a person is to lose out on beholding the glory. It wasn't about the inconvenience or difficulty, for *achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh*. Every person carries some of that *kedusha*.

In the place where Yaakov revealed Hashem's Presence, the *Bais Hamikdosh* will stand, testimony to the fact that along the entire journey through *golus*, Hashem has accompanied us: He was there, leading us home.

All along, dark and confusing as it may be, we have it within us to stop and say, "*Achein yeish Hashem bamakom hazeh.*" No matter where we are, how difficult things seem, how dark and cold and lonely we are, we need to always remember that we are not alone.

We all have the inner strength to roll away the stones that block our individual paths and the paths of others. Instead of being sorrowful, complaining of our difficulties, we should summon the abilities Hashem gave us to deal with and overcome our struggles.

It is easier said than done, but if at least we would change our mindset and not look at *nisyonos* as things that are impossible to overcome, but rather as challenges that are surmountable. With enough effort, *tefillah*, *emunah* and *bitachon*, we will be able to roll off the rocks that separate us from accomplishment and happiness.

Doing so will enhance our lives and hasten the arrival of *Moshiach*, may he come speedily in our day.