

פ' בא תשפ"ג

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INTERNET

Before the final redemption, the situation of the Jewish nation will be the same as it was before the Exodus from Egypt. Just like then, the Jews were steeped in the 49 levels of *tumah*, so too before the coming of *moshiach* will the *tumah* in the world increase on an unprecedented scale. The Internet is the tool of the evil inclination to entice us to contaminate ourselves before the coming of *moshiach*.

It is forbidden to use unfiltered Internet, since it has the status of complete *giluy arroyos*. The very possession of a device with unfiltered Internet is forbidden, as it says "and you shall not bring an abomination into your house" (*Devorim* 7:26). Such a device is a veritable time bomb, which can explode at any time, and has in fact already destroyed Jewish families.

If someone is aware of another Jew who uses such a device, it is forbidden for him to keep quiet. It is a greater obligation for him to intervene than it would be if the other person were to be drowning in a river, since "he who causes another to sin is worse than he who murders". Therefore, saving someone's soul from the clutches of such a device is a greater mitzvah than saving his physical existence.

One must keep a distance from workplaces using such devices. Furthermore, one should keep away from an individual with such a device, no less than one avoids the company of a person with a dangerous infectious disease. In both cases, it is irrelevant whether the person with the physical or spiritual defect is to be blamed personally for his predicament, regardless of that factor, one is obligated to avoid becoming contaminated physically or spiritually.

Those with parents or relatives possessing such a device must be aware that it is nevertheless forbidden to use it. Even one exposure to a forbidden sight fills the person with *tumah* and creates prosecuting angels. In the future, he will regret his inability to overcome his curiosity or desire.

Those who need to use effectively filtered Internet devices in their workplaces must take the advice of rabbis who are very familiar with these matters, and receive their approval. However, they should not use even such devices in the public arena in order not to dampen the aversion others should feel for the Internet in general. Those who are able to avoid Internet devices altogether should be commended.

Moreover, even those who need to use properly filtered devices in the workplaces should bring them into their houses only if absolutely necessary, and, in any case, they should not permit other family members to use them, warning them not to waste their time on them.

Parents are obligated to ensure that their children do not have any contact with the Internet. They must explain to them that these devices are the epitome of *tumah*. They must examine who their friends are, and where their children are circulating, because sometimes children befriend innocent-looking friends who may be immersed in the *tumah* of the Internet. Above all, one must beseech Hashem with many prayers to be saved from these destructive devices.

Someone who has been affected, even greatly so, by this *tumah*, should never despair. However hard it may seem to overcome an addiction, *Chazal* have told us that anyone who seeks to become purified merits great divine assistance¹.

The main reward awaiting us in the future is for overcoming trials and difficulties. May Hashem assist us down here in this world in this regard, so that above He may accelerate the coming of *moshiach*.

ANENU

¹ A yeshiva bochur was once talking to Rav Sternbuch in his house when he suddenly burst out crying asking for help with his Internet addiction. Rav Sternbuch calmed the boy down, and encouraged him to seek appropriate professional help.

Due to the shortage of rain in *Eretz Yisroel* Rav Sternbuch has ruled that the *Anenu* prayer should be recited at the end of *Shomea Tefilla* to arouse heavenly mercy for rain, and one should have particular concentration upon answering *omen* to the *chazan's Shomea Tefilla*.

EDUCATION

And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and grandson how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and [that you tell of] My signs that I placed in them, and you will know that I am Hashem (10:2)

If a person wants his sons to become *talmidei chachamim* and *yirei shomayim* preaching to them, or even intellectual persuasion is not enough. The best thing he can do is to influence them by way of personal example. He must endeavor not to observe *mitzvos* by rote. If he values his time by utilizing it for Torah and *mitzvos*, and if he has an emotional connection to *avodas Hashem* and genuine *emuno* and *bitachon*, his child will pick this up and wish to follow his father's example.

Hence the *possuk* here concludes with "and you will know that I am Hashem". Only if you, the father, have crystal-clear *emuno* will you be successful in inculcating that *emuno* into your children.

The Chofetz Chaim expounded the *possuk* in *keri'as shema* "And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children" as follows: if you display self-dedication in the education of your children, if you choose the best tutors for them, show an interest in their activities and welfare, keep tabs on their progress, and make a point of investing time and learning with them, that is a sign that you have internalized the Torah, that it is upon your heart, and that you love and fear Hashem. If someone loves Hashem and His Torah, he will make sure that his own beloved sons will study it properly.

The more that Torah and *yiras shomayim* are etched into a person's heart, the greater the chances of his imparting those values to his children and succeeding in their education.

OUR ELDERS

Moshe said, "With our youth and with our elders we will go (10:9)

It seems that Paroh wanted to keep the young people as slaves in his country, and was interested in letting the old people go, since he felt that they were of no value to him, and without the presence and influence of the older generations the youngsters could easily and quickly be assimilated into Egyptian society. To this Moshe responded that for the Jews its elders are the most important element, and have priority over the youngsters. Therefore, "with our youth and with our elders we will go".

Wicked people throughout the generations have always belittled the lives of the elderly, and attached importance to the younger generations.

Zionist leaders such as Weitzman made it clear that they were only interested in young people, not the old. He declared at the Zionist Congress in 1937 that the old people could be "left to their fate, they are the economic and moral dust of the world".

In a similar vein, Rav Sternbuch's *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rav Moshe Schneider, initially wanted to emigrate to *Eretz Yisroel* from Germany, and not to England, where he ultimately ended up. However, when he went to the Jewish Agency to apply for a permit to enter *Eretz Yisroel*, he was told that these were reserved for young people who had the strength to build up the country, and not for old people who were merely coming to die and be buried there. Rav Schneider responded that they were talking nonsense, because he wanted to go to live in *Eretz Yisroel* to sanctify the remainder of his life, and every religious person who joins his brethren there increases the sanctity and vitality of the Holy Land. "You, on the other hand," concluded Rav Schneider, "are sending to *Eretz Yisroel* young people who are unfortunately already spiritually dead, to defile the country." Rav Schneider was then promptly and unceremoniously escorted out of the room. He ended up moving to England, where he headed his famous yeshivah in London.

It is well known that the Zionists sought to sever the link between the religious youth and their parents. They brainwashed them that their parents were old-fashioned, belonged to the past and the Diaspora, and understood nothing. They realized that by getting children to disparage their parents they would succeed in their endeavor to uproot the youth from religion, and become part of the secular "melting pot".

The holy Torah by contrast, considers the older people to be most important, since they are the ones who transmit Torah and fear of heaven to future generations, and that is what Moshe was emphasizing to Paroh.

JEWISH MOTHERS AND WIVES

"... with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our cattle we will go, for it is a festival of Hashem. And he [Paroh] said to them... not so, let the men go now and worship Hashem, for that is what you request." (10:9-11)

Why did Paroh not agree to send the women, and what did he intend to gain by keeping them? The *Ridvaz* explains that Paroh knew that if the Jewish nation would leave and offer sacrifices to Hashem they would abandon the Egyptian way of life and its abominations and return to their original faith in Hashem. Hence, Paroh agreed to send the men only if the women would remain behind in Egypt, because they would then remain steeped in *tumah*, and influence their husbands to do the same.

He concluded by bewailing the state of European Jewry in his time where Jewish education for girls was still extremely deficient, and noted that the mother is the whole foundation of the Jewish home, and when she is influenced by foreign, heretical and impure sources, that has a detrimental effect on the entire home, and can even lead to its destruction.

Rav Sternbuch notes that in the decades since then the situation has thankfully improved dramatically with the proliferation of *Beis Yaakov* schools everywhere, but there are still girls studying in institutions where irreligious teachers impart views far removed from Torah values, as well as girls working in irreligious environments. These situations must be avoided, so that the sanctity of the Jewish mother and her home will not be affected.

Alternatively, the *Yismach Moshe* writes that an explanation for this *possuk* was revealed to him in a dream.

Paroh argued that the women should not be let out of the country, because their sole task is to be helpmates for their husbands, and they had nothing to do with serving the Creator. Therefore, only the men should go to serve Hashem, for that (*oso* means both "it" and "she") is what you seek, you need your wives, but they are not needed to serve Hashem, and for serving as your helpmates I am not willing to send them along with you.

But Moshe Rabbenu made it clear that this was a "Festival of Hashem", and both common sense and the Torah dictate that husbands celebrate joyful events together with their wives. Moreover, women have their own independent task to serve Hashem, they serve Him no less than men, and therefore they have to join the men in our festival.

INTERESTED IN OUR WELFARE?

And he said to them, "So may Hashem be with you, just as I will let you and your young children out. See that evil is before your faces". Rashi: I have heard an Aggadic midrash: There is a star named Ro'oh ["Evil"]. Paroh said to them, "With my astrology I see that star ascending toward you in the desert, and that is a sign of blood and slaughter" (10:10)

Paroh told Moshe and Aharon that the reason he did not want to send them was for their own benefit. Our physical and spiritual opponents throughout the generations have always been in the habit of adopting this argument advanced by Paroh. For example, an anti-religious measure, attacking the heart of our religion, is justified on the grounds that it will facilitate our "integration into general society and the workforce".

The Rambam notes in the *Igeres Hamusar* that Paroh symbolizes the evil inclination, and it too endeavors to convince us that its program is for our benefit, whereas in reality it harms us in this world and the next.

FOCUSSING ON THE FUTURE

There was total darkness in the entire land of Egypt (10:22). Rashi: why did He bring darkness upon them? Because there were among the Jews in that generation wicked people who did not want to leave [Egypt]. They died during the three days of darkness, so that the Egyptians would not see their downfall and say, "They too are being smitten like us."

In *Parashas Beshalach* (on 13:18) Rashi says that only one fifth of the Jews survived the three days of darkness, Other views in the Medrash say that it was one in fifty or even only one in 500.

The nation had suffered so much in Egypt, so why would they not want to leave Egypt? Also, how could so many Jews have remained wicked after witnessing eight unprecedented, supernatural plagues in which the Egyptians received so much retribution and the Jews were spared? Surely this would have made a profound impression on them and lead them to repent.

It seems that these people were not heretics, they were simply steeped in their desires and considered only the present moment. The Egyptian subjugation had stopped upon the commencement of the ten plagues and Paroh had granted them freedom. They felt comfortable in their new situation and did not want to leave the country for a precarious trip through the desert. Since they did not see the need for redemption and did not understand the importance of Torah and of *Eretz Yisroel*, they did not merit witnessing redemption.

This teaches us about the tragic consequences of living only in the present. A Jew always thinks about the future and about preparing himself for the Divine judgment, no matter what his current material situation might be.

TIME IS LIFE

And we do not know how we will worship Hashem until we arrive there." (10:26)

The *Beis Yisroel* expounded this *possuk* as follows. Sometimes we imagine that we are serving Hashem properly, but when we reach the Eternal World it may turn out that we have wasted the time allotted to us in order to earn eternal life, and we will then understand how each *mitzvah* illuminates our soul beyond imagination and how each sin soils it.

In this connection, Rav Sternbuch recalls that when the *Beis Yisroel* moved to a new apartment he looked at his new home and told to Rav Sternbuch, "Don't worry, I have not been enjoying this world for a while, since my wife and children were killed, and as for the World to Come, I don't know what is in store for me there".

The Chofetz Chaim said: "People say that time is money, but I say that time is a chunk of life", and squandering away one's time is the equivalent of squandering away one's life.

THE TEST OF WEALTH

Please, speak into the ears of the people, and let them borrow, each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver vessels and golden vessels (11:2)

The *gemoro* in *Brochos* (32b) cites Moshe Rabbeinu's argument in defense of the Jewish nation, that they had sinned with the Golden Calf due to the abundance of silver and gold that Hashem had showered upon them. In other words, following the test of poverty as slaves in Egypt, which they had withstood admirably, Hashem tested them with wealth. But this proved too much for them, to such an extent that Hashem wished to destroy the entire nation.

Just two generations ago, shortly after the end of World War II, Rav Mordechai Pogromansky told Rav Sternbuch that before the final redemption, the nation will have to undergo the same process. There will be tribulations, followed by "and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions" (15:14). We have already passed the first stage, continued Rav Pogromansky, with the slaughter of millions of Jews. These Jews passed the test by accepting it as the will of Hashem that they be killed for being Jewish. That was the test of "*b'chol nafshecha*." Now the time had arrived for the nation to be tested with wealth, to see if we will also serve Hashem "*b'chol me'odecha*."

Rav Pogromansky foretold that there was about to be an unprecedented phenomenon: many strictly religious Jews would become wealthy. When Rav Sternbuch asked Rav Pogromansky what he meant, he replied, "I don't mean millionaires, I mean billionaires. The general Jewish public will be tested to see whether they will use their wealth for the purpose of supporting the needy and Torah institutions, or whether they will forget Hashem and invest their wealth solely in worldly affairs." If they will pass this test, added Rav Pogromansky, the redemption will come speedily.

RAV DESSLER RECALLS PRE-WWI KELM

"Each man took from another man, and each woman from another woman" (11:2).

Each man took from another man, and each woman from another woman. This teaches us about the necessity of separating the genders as much as possible, and for a man to avoid speaking with a woman unnecessarily.

Rav Dessler told Rav Sternbuch that in the town of Kelm before the First World War there were separate streets for men and women, or separate hours designated for men and women respectively to walk in the same street. In shops men would serve men and women served women. However, after the War poverty became rampant, to such an extent that most of the population could only afford to eat simple food even on *Shabbos* and only the "rich" people could afford *challo*s. Unfortunately, poverty combined with the effect of the *haskolo* made inroads into the religious levels of the town during the inter-war period.

EVEN ANGELS STAY AWAY FROM TUMAH

Moshe said, "So said Hashem, At the dividing point of the night, I will go out into the midst of Egypt" (11:4)

On the *possuk* "And I will pass through the land of Egypt" (12:12) Chazal expound that Hashem said "I and not an angel". The *Zohar (Medrash Ne'elam, Vayero)* asks two questions. Firstly, why did the Egyptians receive the seeming honor of being punished by Hashem Himself rather than by a mere angel? Secondly, if the camp of the Assyrians was smitten by an angel (see *Yeshaya 37:36*), all the more so should the Egyptians have received retribution through the medium of an angel, because the Egyptian nation was the most degenerate and immoral nation of all, and an angel would seem to be the best medium for punishing them rather than Hashem Himself.

The *Zohar* answers that specifically because they were so depraved and steeped in *tumah* was it not appropriate to send something as holy as an angel into their midst. Hence, this was a sign of disgrace for the Egyptians rather than a sign of honor.

So we see that the *tumah* of Egypt with its heresy and immorality was so severe that even angels were not to come into contact with it. This teaches us how foolish those are who go to live amongst irreligious or non-Jewish people whose way of life is very far removed from their own, thinking that they will surely not be harmed by this. If Hashem wants holy angels to stay away from places of *tumah*, how much more so mere mortals, who are surely even more likely to be harmed by their surroundings.

PREPARING FOR MOSHIACH

And this is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand" (12:11) Rashi: Your loins girded: Ready for the way.

Rav Sternbuch was once visiting the Brisker Rov when an American visitor told the Brisker Rov that in America people were waiting for Moshiach to come. The Brisker Rav asked him whether people were preparing themselves for this great event. The visitor responded that Moshiach should come already with or without our preparations. The Brisker Rav replied that this would not work. We must start the process of repentance and strengthening our faith now, intensifying our Torah and prayer and working on our character traits so that we will be worthy of welcoming Moshiach and witnessing the unprecedented

miracles that Hashem will perform at that time. Even revealed miracles, the Brisker Rav said, will not change a person who is stubborn or steeped in his desires.

On the same topic, Rav Shmuel Aharon Pardes, a *Rav* in Chicago, told Rav Sternbuch about a meeting he had with the Chofetz Chaim a year or so before the latter passed away. The Chofetz Chaim asked him where he was from, and when Rav Pardes said that he was from America, the Chofetz Chaim asked him whether Jews in America were talking about and awaiting *moshiach*. Rav Pardes hesitated about his answer but decided to say “*avade*,” of course they are. The Chofetz Chaim then went to a corner and started crying to Hashem. Rav Pardes overheard him saying the following: “It is one thing for us, who are suffering so much from poverty and other material problems, to yearn for *moshiach*, because it could be that we are waiting for him so that he will redeem us from our material sorrows. But even our affluent brethren in America are yearning for him to come. How much longer must we wait?”

The first question we will be asked when we will be judged after 120 years is “*Tzipisa liyeshuah* - Did you anticipate the salvation?” Rav Yechezkel Abramsky notes that we will not be asked, “*Kivisa liyeshuah* — Did you hope for the salvation?” because every believing Jew *hopes* for the redemption. The question we will be asked is whether we anticipated it the same way that we expect someone to arrive for an appointment at a prearranged time. We do not *hope* that the person will arrive; we *expect* him to. Hashem has not revealed a prearranged date for Moshiach to come, but we are meant to hope and wait for him in eager anticipation and expectation every possible moment.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how after World War II his mother was sure that Moshiach’s arrival was imminent. She refused to wear her best jewelry and nicest dress, stating that those were set aside for when *moshiach* would come, and she waited for him every day. Unfortunately, we do not await *moshiach* properly nowadays, the way previous generations did, and this state of affairs results in a delay of the redemption.

PRIVATE ACTS OF KIDDUSH HASHEM

“*The blood will be for you as a sign on the houses*” (12:13). Rashi: “*As a sign to you’ but not as a sign to others.*”

Blood signifies *mesirus nefesh* (dedication and self-sacrifice). This may be taken as an injunction to perform private acts of *Kiddush Hashem* within the confines of our own homes, to which no one is witness, which the Rambam talks about (*Yesodei Hatorah* 5:10). This takes place every time we overcome our evil inclination by refraining from sin, performing a *mitzvah*, or performing it with fervor, and when we set aside regular times for learning Torah and educating our children properly. In other words, the sign, which is situated outside as it were, should always be inside us too, serving as a constant reminder of our duty to serve Hashem with dedication and to refrain from sinning.

ETERNAL NATION

“*And the people kneeled and prostrated themselves*’ (12:27). *Mechilta (ibid)*: “*The Jews received evil tidings at this time, namely that the Torah would be forgotten among the Jews in the future. Others state that they received good tidings, namely that they would merit to see children and grandchildren.*”

The bad tidings of which the Jews were informed were that there would be heretics in every generation, and the good tidings were that there would nevertheless be continuity to the Jewish nation, with children and grandchildren continuing in the path of Torah who would say: “This is the Pesach-offering to Hashem”.

The Torah is telling us that even if heretical views would be held by the majority of the nation, they would still not succeed in uprooting its eternal sanctity, which remains incapable of becoming contaminated. When the nation heard these tidings, the people kneeled and prostrated themselves.