

פ' תרומה תשפ"ג

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, raavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email benipray@netvision.net.il.

OUR CURRENT TROUBLES

If we would know what suffering we still have to go through potentially during the birth pangs of *moshiach*, we would go insane, but Hashem in His great kindness has kept this information secret throughout the generations, lest we despair.

The *amora* Rabi Yochanan suffered a lot in his lifetime. He lived for a long time (some say for 400 years), but his father passed away before he was born, and his mother passed away in childbirth, and he lost ten sons in his lifetime. And yet he still said that he did not want to witness the birth pangs of *moshiach* (Sanhedrin 98b). This shows how difficult these birth pangs must be. Some say that this is because of the spiritual suffering involved. Be that as it may, Hashem gives each generation the powers of endurance which it needs. We are like blind people being led by the Creator. Whoever withstands the trials of our generation, which are the final birth pangs of *moshiach*, serving Hashem properly with complete faith, will enjoy an inestimable reward.

During difficult periods, it is worthy to recite *tehilim*, but we must always remember that *Tehilim* supplement existing fixed prayers, and these are the main prayers. The *shmone esrei* prayer was instituted by the *anshei kenses hagedola* with *ruach hakodesh*, and should be recited with great concentration and slowly. We should come to *davening* on time and answer *yehei shemei rabbo* with concentration, so that our prayers may be answered, and evil decrees annulled.

JUDGING KLAL YISROEL FAVORABLY

On Shabbos *Beshalach* Rav Sternbuch was asked whether he would like to receive an *aliyah* for the section of the *mon* or for the *Shiras Hayam*. Rav Sternbuch responded: “My’ mitzvah is *mechias Amolek*, so I would like an *aliyah* for that section!” Rav Sternbuch is well known for staunchly opposing anything smacking of the heretical Amolek outlook that nature is the only “reality”, and so on.

However, Rav Sternbuch was once asked why during times of trouble he stresses how we are not fulfilling our obligations properly in terms of prayer, repentance and trusting Hashem, and that if we do not arouse ourselves, greater troubles will be in store. Why does he not judge us favorably and act as our defender?

Rav Sternbuch responded: “My approach, which I have received from my *rabbonim*, is to tell the truth as it is, without concealing it”. He added that we need not fear that this approach arouses the prosecuting angels. Take the case of the *kohen godol*. Even though he did not enter the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* in his golden clothes in order not to arouse the sin of the Golden Calf, when he stood outside, in front of the public, he would wear those clothes in order to arouse them to repent. The commentators explain that only in private places, away from the public eye, is it important to defend the Jewish nation and judge them favorably. In the public arena, we do not worry about “prosecuting” our fellow Jews (*kitrug*). On the contrary, we are duty-bound to arouse the public to repent, and this in itself eliminates all the prosecuting angels, which is what Hashem desires. He sends us troubles in order to cause us to repent.

In a similar vein, when Rav Sternbuch met the late Satmarer Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, in London, the Rebbe mentioned to Rav Sternbuch the *gemoro* (*Chullin* 91b) that Avrohom *Ovinu* waited until the morning to pray for the people of Sedom instead of praying for them at night, because it is forbidden for a *talmid chacham* to go out alone at night. The Rebbe said that this is difficult to understand. Why could Avrohom not have taken Eliezer with him, as he did at the time of the *Akeidoh*, so that he would not have been on his own? That way, he could have already prayed at night.

Rav Yoel answered that since Avrohom was asking Hashem to judge Sedom favorably, he did not want anyone to overhear the contents of his prayer to Hashem, because then any listeners might have concluded that there was indeed room to judge these people favorably, and they might therefore have

come close to them socially, and learned from their depraved ways. Hence, Avrohom wanted to restrict his prayer to a private dialogue between himself and Hashem.

Rav Yoel added that we too should judge our erring brethren favorably with regard to their sinful behavior, especially in light of the fact that it might stem from their terrible experiences during World War II (Rav Yoel was speaking in the 1960s, when these events were still fresh in people's minds), but that is only relevant to our prayers to Hashem. As far as our attitude towards these people themselves is concerned, it is a *mitzvah* to fight them with all our strength.

It was clear from his statements at the time that Rav Yoel was implying that even though he himself fought our erring brethren and their methods as much as possible - speaking out against them and warning everyone to keep a distance from them - when he was on his own, he prayed for them, judging them favorably and asking Hashem not to be angry with them.

In any case, we can be sure that Rav Sternbuch - who was close to Rav Yoel - when praying for *klal yisroel*, also has only positive thoughts about them, and beseeches Hashem to judge them favorably.

About twenty years ago, when the Arabs started changing their tactics, and instead of sending suicide bombers they started killing people using explosive devices activated through cellphones, Rav Sternbuch noted at the time that this change of policy on their part was of great benefit for the Jewish nation. As long as there were Arabs willing to commit suicide for their evil falsehoods, this did not reflect favorably on the Jews, who did not display enough self-dedication for Torah and the truth, and now that this phenomenon of suicide bombers had abated, a great source of accusation against us had vanished. Rav Sternbuch added that it was a major *avoda* (labor) to "sweeten" judgements (i.e. mitigate or even annul them) against the Jewish nation and to judge it favorably, and Hashem is very happy with those who engage in this *avoda*.

NO ROOM FOR DESPAIR

Moreover, in both the private and public sphere, Rav Sternbuch is very particular about making sure that no Jew ever has any reason to despair of improving himself.

A Yeshiva *bochur* once came to see him, when he suddenly burst out crying, confessing that he had become addicted to the Internet. Rav Sternbuch calmed him down, encouraged him to seek appropriate professional guidance, and told him to come back to report how he was doing.

On another occasion, Rav Sternbuch was asked for an approbation for a book dealing with matters of immorality. Instead of an approbation, Rav Sternbuch penned a letter to the author rebuking him gently that the book, which stressed the severity of the prohibitions, was missing a chapter on the great possibility of repentance. Rav Sternbuch noted that the Chofetz Chaim told Rav Moshe Schneider (Rav Sternbuch's Rosh Yeshiva) that he did not want to emphasize in his book that someone who speaks *loshon horo* has no portion in the World to Come, because such a "bombshell" would be likely to cause people to despair. They would reason that since they had no portion in the World to Come anyway, there was no point in making any effort to refrain from forbidden speech. In reality, the Gates of Repentance are open even for the likes of King Menashe. If someone is assiduous in his Torah studies, particular about his mitzvah observance, and guards his tongue and thoughts, Hashem will cure his spiritual ailments, since His mercies for His children know no bounds. Rav Sternbuch concluded that if the author were to add a chapter along these lines that would make his book valuable.

Also worthy of note, is how Rav Sternbuch tends to conclude printed letters to the public with handwritten words of encouragement. Thus, he concluded last week's letter about the current troubles (summarized in last week's article) with the handwritten exhortation, "*Chizku Veimtzu!*" ("Be strong and courageous!"), and - to cite another example - last year's letter containing a call not to read the books of a once-popular children's author, included the following handwritten addition at the end: "Happy are you, oh Jewish nation, which educates its sons and daughters with holiness and purity!".

MEMORIAL PLAQUES

“*Speak to the bnei Yisroel, and have them take for Me an offering (25:2)*”

Rashi says that there were three donations. The *beka* [half-shekel] per head, from which they made the sockets, the *beka* per head for the community coffers, from which to purchase the communal *korbonos*, and a third donation for the construction of the *Mishkon*. The first donations were compulsory and fixed, whereas the third one depended on the generosity of each individual.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin was once speaking before the War at a meeting of *rabbonim* convened for the purpose of collecting donations for the *yeshivos*, which did not have bread for their students at the time. One layman who was present suddenly got up and asked a question. Rav Meir Shapira was managing to collect large amounts of money for the construction of a beautiful building for his Yeshiva, would it not be preferable to designate those funds for *yeshivos* whose students were starving, instead of the construction of a new building? Rav Sorotzkin answered that people are happy to make donations to buildings, in which they can have their donation acknowledged by having the building or a room named for them, but he was sure that once the building was completed, Rav Shapira would find it difficult to cover the ongoing costs of the yeshiva, just like any other *rosh yeshiva*, because it is much more difficult to find donors for such “mundane” causes.

To prove his theory, he cited the above *possuk*, noting that when it came to the donations for the construction of the *Mishkon*, the nation gave willingly without being forced to, to the extent that Moshe had to announce, “Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the *Mishkon*” (*Shmos* 36:6), but with regard to the sockets and the communal *korbonos*, Hashem did not rely on the generosity of the nation, and therefore compelled every person to make the same donation.

Rav Sternbuch was once speaking to a wealthy person encouraging him to make a donation to poor *talmidei chachomim*. The person responded that he preferred to make a donation for a building that would commemorate his name for ever. Rav Sternbuch replied that Hashem wants us to give charity for His sake. If we do so, He will provide us with a heavenly and eternal “monument and memorial better than sons and daughters” and better than any memorial plaque.

Moreover, the Vilna Gaon said that if a *shul* or *Beis Hamedrash* are constructed with pure intentions and only for the sake of Heaven, those frequenting those places will merit immense divine assistance for their Torah and prayers, and if a *shul* is constructed from stones that have been hewn with holiness and for the sake of Heaven, then all the prayers in that edifice will be recited with proper *kavono*.

PARTING WITH WEALTH

The *Ba'al Haturim* on 25:2 notes that even though the *Bnei Yisroel* had become very wealthy upon leaving Egypt, Moshe *Rabbenu* still had to appease them to give donations to the *Mishkon*. Wealthy people have a special *yetzer horo* to attribute their wealth to their own abilities and actions, and the *yetzer* makes it a difficult task for them to part with their money.

When Rav Sternbuch was living in Johannesburg, he went to see an extremely wealthy person who had just built a luxurious home for himself, consisting of dozens of opulent rooms. After showing him his new home, Rav Sternbuch’s host asked him to arrange for about 40 *mezuzos*, but he added that he did not have the funds for anything other than the simplest and cheapest *mezuzos*. Rav Sternbuch responded that it was worth his while to invest in *mezuzos*, since they protected his house, but the host replied, “Hashem does not necessarily want the best and most *mehudar mezuzos*”. Rav Sternbuch felt this to be a clear demonstration of the power of the *yetzer horo*. This person had just spend extravagant amounts on a lavish home for himself, but when it came to a spiritual matter such as *mezuzos* the evil inclination managed to convince him that he had no money at all.

Hashem investigates the hidden recesses of every person’s heart and mind to determine the extent to which he has had to overcome difficulties in order to succeed in his Torah learning or observance of *mitzvos*. The genuine importance of each *gid* depends on the extent to which he has been successful in overcoming such trials, and each person has his own specific trials.

REWARD FOR EFFORTS

“*Shoham stones and filling stones for the ephod and for the choshen*” (25:7)

The *Or Hachayim* notes that the shoham and filling stones, being precious stones, should have appeared among the first on the list together with gold and silver in *possuk* 3, and yet they are mentioned last in the *possuk* above. This is because they were obtained effortlessly, coming as they did from the *anonei hakovod* (see *Yoma* 75a), and are therefore considered inferior to other items of seemingly poorer quality, which were donated with greater toil and effort.

It was the middle of World War II, and there was no food to feed the boys in Rav Moshe Schneider’s Yeshivah in London. Rav Sternbuch was about sixteen years old at the time, and was one of the few boys in the yeshivah who could speak English. The Rosh Yeshivah asked him to collect money for the Yeshivah in people’s homes.

Some people slammed the door in Rav Sternbuch’s face, others said that the boys should go out to work or contribute to the war effort instead of living off others. On one occasion, Rav Sternbuch did not even venture past the gate due to the sign warning “No hawkers allowed”. In short, by the end of the evening, the young Rav Sternbuch had not managed to collect even one penny, and, to make matters worse, he had been forced to spend the Yeshivah’s money on a taxi.

The next morning Rav Sternbuch and the Rosh Yeshivah said nothing to each other. At ten o’clock, Rav Schneider called Rav Sternbuch over to speak to him, and Rav Sternbuch was sure that he would receive a hefty rebuke. Instead, the Rosh Yeshivah said, “*Yasher ko’ach godol*, Moshe, someone has just donated 25 pounds (a fortune in those days) to the Yeshivah, and it’s all because of you!”

Rav Sternbuch was completely taken aback, because he had no connection to this donor. He replied, “The Rosh Yeshivah must be making a mistake. Last night was a complete failure, and I don’t even know who this person is!”

Rav Schneider became very upset with Rav Sternbuch. “Don’t you have any *emunah* and *bitochon*? Our efforts do not always achieve immediate results. It is a divine decree that we have to make *hishtadlus* before Hashem will fulfil his decrees. You did what you had to last night, acting with dedication for the sake of Heaven, and today Hashem has rewarded you in a very big way from another source for your efforts and willingness to demean yourself for the sake of Torah”.

OUTREACH

“*And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst*” (25:8)

Nothing is more elevated than Hashem, and yet He still “lowered Himself” so that the *Shechina* could *kivyochol* dwell in the *Mishkon*. We too should learn from this by way of a *kal vachomer* not to find it beneath ourselves to interact with those who have not been fortunate enough to receive a Torah education, or with people who do not comport themselves the way they should, despite having received a good education. Instead of denigrating them, we should endeavor to bring them closer to *avodas Hashem*.

MUNDANE SPEECH

The Zohar notes that the above *possuk* refers not only to the *Mishkon*, but also to the construction of *botei kennesiyos* and *botei medrash*, which are considered a minor *Beis Hamikdosh* (*Megila* 29a), and when we construct a minor *Beis Hamikdosh*, Hashem fulfils His promise to dwell in our midst by making the *Shechina* dwell in *botei kennesiyos* and *botei medrash*.

The *halocho* is that levity and speech without purpose are forbidden in *botei kennesiyos* and *botei medrash* (*OC* 151:1), because talking mundane speech is disrespectful towards the *Shechina*, which resides there.

The *Sefer Chasidim* (section 18) writes that even non-Jewish kings act with trepidation in their houses of worship, and how much more so should we, who stand before the Almighty, act with appropriate awe and trepidation when praying to Him.

The Gerer Rebbe, the Imrei Emess, noted that Sefardi Jews were saved, for the most part, from the Holocaust (for example, although the Nazis reached the borders of Egypt and Morocco, Jews there were not harmed), and he attributed this to the fact that they are very careful about maintaining the sanctity of *botei kennesiyos* and refrain from speaking *divrei chulin* (mundane matters) there.

UNFATHOMABLE TORAH

“Two and a half cubits shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof” (25:10)

All the dimensions of the *Oron* were incomplete, whereas the measurements of the *Shulchon* were complete (“Its height was two *amos* and its breath two *amos*”). The *Oron* housed the *Luchos*, and its incomplete dimensions teach us that the person learning Torah is always very far removed from perfection, since the Torah’s depth is unfathomable. The more person a learns, the more does he see the Torah in a new light. Even *sugyos* which one believes to have mastered completely, upon learning them again, one sees them from a new perspective, and attains new previously unnoticed insights.

The *Shulchon*, on the other hand, symbolizes material matters, and with regard to those, instead of focusing on what he is missing, a person should always feel that he is “complete”, that he has attained all his material needs, as we bless in the morning, “Who has supplied my every want”.

TALMIDEI CHACHOMIM

“And you shall overlay it with pure gold; from inside and from outside you shall overlay it” (25:11)

The *gemoro* (*Yomo* 72b) says that this *possuk* teaches us that a *talmid chochom* whose external wisdom belies his character (literally: whose inside is not as his outside) is not a real *talmid chochom*. However, the *Oron* itself was made of wood and covered with gold, so that its interior was also not the same as its exterior, so this *gemora* seems difficult to understand.

Someone who knows that people consider him to be a *talmid chochom* is obligated to sanctify the divine name by behaving in the way described by the Rambam (*Hilchos Dei'os*, beginning of chapter 5). All his private and public actions as well as his speech will be in conformity with the elevated status expected of him. People expect him to behave in a superior manner, symbolized by the external gold covering, and also to be replete with *yiras shomayim* and *midos tovos*, symbolized by the internal gold covering.

However, in his private thoughts he lives with the awareness that he is nothing more than wood, since his deeds, speech and thoughts are still in need of much improvement in light of his true potential for greatness. Such a person is indeed following the path of a true *talmid chochom*: although his internal dialogue with the Creator is “wooden”, and reflects a genuine *anovo*, his external behavior, which is witnessed by onlookers, is appropriately gilded. His interior reflects his exterior in the sense that both are in conformity with the path a genuine *talmid chochom* is supposed to follow.

In any case, we see from the above *gemoro* that even if someone knows the entire Torah, and is a big *lamdan*, if he has not refined his character with the traits expected of a *talmid chochom* and his conduct is no different from that of an *am ho'oretz*, that means that he has not learned Hashem’s Torah, but has only studied it like a student, so that the Torah has not elevated him, and he has not earned the title of a *talmid chochom*.

Rav Moshe Schneider would say that although there are many *lomdei Torah*, true *bnei Torah* are few and far between. A *ben Torah* is someone who has a deep connection to Torah even when he is not busy studying it. Thus, his Torah has refined him to such an extent that his entire conduct, prayer, *brochos*, his manner of speech, eating, etc. are all affected and shaped by the Torah which he has absorbed, and he is busy learning even in the evenings, on Fridays, *Shabossos* and *Yomim Tovim*.

In addition to gold, the Torah is also compared to glass: “Gold and glass cannot equal it” (*Iyov* 28:17). A *ben Torah* is transparent like glass in the sense that his external behavior reflects his inner state, and by examining his conduct an onlooker can tell whether he is a genuine *ben Torah* (see also Rabbenu Bachaye on *Shmos* 25:11).

HOLY UNITY

The *gemoro* (*Bovo Basro* 99a) points out that another *possuk* (*Divrei Hayomim* II 3:13) states that the faces of the *keruvim* were towards the House (facing eastwards and some say westwards). The *gemoro* resolves this discrepancy (according to one opinion) by saying that when the Jews performed the Will of Hashem the *keruvim* faced each other, but when they did not perform the Will of Hashem, a miracle took place and the faces turned towards the House.

The *gemoro*'s explanation may be taken to hint at the idea that when the Jews perform the Will of Hashem, when there is unity between them, and everybody is concerned for their fellow Jew, this auspicious state of affairs is reflected in the state of the *keruvim* with their faces towards each other, symbolizing the love between husband and wife (see *Rashbam ibid*), which is itself symbolic of Hashem's love for His Nation.

When, however, everybody is immersed in his own affairs, and not concerned for the needs of his fellow Jew, or only for the needs of his circle of friends or group or community, and not for the entire nation, this state of affairs is reflected by the *keruvim* facing the House, as if to say that only the needs of their own house interests them. In such a situation, the *Shechino* does not dwell amongst the nation.

TALENTS IRRELEVANT

And you shall make a Menorah of pure gold. The Menorah shall be made of hammered work. (25:31). Since Moshe found difficulty with it, Hashem said to him, "Cast the talent into the fire, and it will be made by itself." Therefore, it is not written: "You shall make [the Menorah]" but rather "The Menorah shall be made." (Rashi, ibid.)

The Menorah symbolizes the light of Torah, and the message being conveyed here is that it is impossible to attain Torah using our resources alone, but only with Divine assistance. A person's task is merely to throw himself into the fire of Torah, and then he will automatically merit Divine assistance.

Moshe did the best he could, and then Hashem assisted him so that the Menorah was constructed "on its own". Similarly, a person should not assume that based on his abilities he has no chance of succeeding in Torah, and it is therefore not worth his while to invest any efforts in that direction. Instead, he should realize that a person's only obligation is to do the best he can, and to pray to Hashem. Hashem will then surely provide him with the *siyatta d'Shmaya* to understand the Torah, even if he is not talented.

CREATING OUR SHARE IN THE UPPER WORLDS

"And see that you make them in accordance with their pattern, which is being shown to you on the mountain" (25:40)

The *gemoro* (*Menochos* 29a) derives from this *possuk* that an *Oron* of fire and a *Shulchon* of fire and a Menorah of fire descended from Heaven. Moshe saw those objects and constructed the vessels for the *Mishkon* accordingly.

Similarly, each action in this world creates a corresponding creation in the upper worlds, the quality of which depends on the devotion, energy and enthusiasm invested by the person. Therefore, in the Time to Come, Hashem will show each person, for example, the *Shacharis* of fire which he prayed with devotion and enthusiasm, and the same applies to all prayers, Torah learning and other *mitzvos*.