

# פ' שמיני תשפ"ג

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## **SHEVI'Y SHEL PESACH**

On this night we feel great joy, because the Egyptians attributed anything supernatural to *kishuf*, but the events of *kerias yam suf* proved that Hashem Himself was protecting us and taking us under His wings. Gentiles have *hashgocho* (divine providence), but only we enjoy direct divine providence.

The main aspect of a person's *avodas Hashem* in this world revolves around matters to do with *emuna* and *bitochon*, as it says "all Your commandments are faith" (*Tehilim* 119:86). In our times, this area needs to be worked on a great deal, since it is so prevalent to attribute events to natural causes such as politics, and not to the Creator. This tendency is very dangerous, since it can cause Hashem *chas vesholom* to act towards us correspondingly through natural means instead of supernatural ones.

After reciting the *shiras hayam* at about 12.30 am Rav Sternbuch told those in attendance (perhaps 200-300 people) that this day was a very propitious one for adopting resolutions, for example to not idle one's time away on nonsense. The *soton* tries to argue that the Jews' resolutions hold no weight, since they are not serious about implementing them, and our task is to conduct ourselves in such a way that angels will testify in our favor and disprove the *soton's* allegations.

## **GEDOLIM**

*And it was on the eighth day, that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons and the elders of the Jews (9:1). Vayikro Rabbo 11, 8: R. Akiva says: The Jews are compared to a bird. Just like this bird does not fly without his wings, so are the Jews not able to do anything without their elders.*

Just like a bird cannot reach summits without its wings, so too a person who wants to climb the heights of Torah and fear of Heaven can only succeed if he follows the instructions of the elders of the nation. Furthermore, just like a bird without wings loses its entire significance, becoming inferior to an animal, which did not have wings in the first place, so too the Jews without its elders and leaders are worse than the other nations. Fortunate is the generation, which has *talmidei chachomim* acting as its "wings", who assume the burden of the nation and direct them every step of the way, and whose members follow their directions obediently.

The other nations hold the younger generations in the highest regard because of their up-to-date knowledge and familiarity with technology. We, on the other hand, appreciate and respect our elders the most, because we derive everything we have from previous generations in a chain going back to Har Sinai.

Those far removed from Torah could conceive their ancestors as being apes, but we accord reverence to previous generations based on how far removed they are from *matan Torah*. The *Acharonim* cannot be compared to the *Rishonim*, and they cannot be compared to the

*Geonim*, and so on. The *zekenim* of each generation are our very lifeline to the greatness and Torah knowledge of former generations. The *Medrash* here notes that the Jewish nation is compared to a bird: just like a bird does not fly without its wings so are the Jews unable to do anything without their elders. Without their advice and guidance we are completely lost.

## **JEWISH HEROINE**

“*And Aharon was silent [Vayidom] (10:3). Ramban: “He cried out aloud, and then remained silent”.*

The Ramban’s commentary seems to indicate that Aharon at first cried out loudly, but when he heard from Moshe *Rabbenu* that he had merited the level of “I will be sanctified through those near to Me”, that their death had brought about a sanctification of the Divine Name, he remained silent and stopped crying. *Vayidom* may be related to the word “*domem*” (an inanimate object), indicating that even his facial expressions and body movements did not reflect any sorrow on his part.

Our holy ancestors bequeathed this quality to their descendants. Rav Sternbuch’s mother was widowed at the age of 33, with nine young children aged between 14 and 2. During the first three days after her husband’s *petira* Mrs. Sternbuch was so distressed that she fainted several times. On the third day, her father, Rav Shlomo Zalman Pines, said to her: “My daughter, it says ‘Three days for crying’, and one may not cry more than three days”. Mrs. Sternbuch responded: “*Tatte*, is that the *halocho*, or *midas chassidus* or a custom?” Rav Pines replied that that was the *halocho me’ikar hadin*. After that Mrs Sternbuch did not shed even one more tear for her husband for the remaining 59 years of her widowhood. Even on the day of his *Yahrzeit* when she would visit his grave, she screamed and beseeched Hashem in prayer to have mercy on her orphaned children, but she did not shed a tear, since that was the *halocho*: “Three days for crying”, and no more than that. She was a true Jewish heroine.

## **DAYAN ABRAMSKY DEMANDS SILENCE**

“*And Aharon was silent” (ibid)*

Rav Sternbuch recalls a conference that took place in London after the war, which was attended by representatives from Jewish communities all over Europe as well as survivors of Bergen Belsen, Dachau and other camps. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss why Hashem had meted out such terrible suffering on the nation. One speaker got up and said it was due to widespread *chilul shabbos* in Europe before the war, another one that it was because of rampant immorality, a third speaker said that not enough had been done to protest the sins of the public, and yet another speaker argued that more should have been done for *Eretz Yisroel*.

At that point Dayan Abramsky suddenly banged his fists on the table, and declared that we were not allowed to judge Hashem. When Aharon’s two righteous sons passed away, he reacted by holding his peace and accepting Hashem’s judgment. We have to accept that some things are beyond our comprehension. Why are some people rich, some poor, some sick and some healthy, some have children and some remain childless? We do not know the answer to these questions, but Aharon Hakohen taught us that we must respond to calamities with silence. There were no more speakers after Dayan Abramsky’s intervention.

Rav Dessler noted that to die *al kiddush Hashem* presupposes that those who are killed have a complete and unquestioning acceptance of the Divine Will, and there is a special place (*pargod*) reserved in *shomayim* for those who attain such a high level.

Yaakov *ovinu* is considered the greatest of our forefathers, and yet he was the one whose life was a series of endless suffering and misfortune. When the righteous are judged so rigorously in this world for miniscule transgressions, this gives us some idea of the difficult judgment awaiting us in the next world, which is the main place where divine punishment takes place. That is the message for the survivors of the *churbon* and their descendants. Our task is to strive to attain the level of those *kedoshim* who accepted the *din shomayim* and recognized that they were experiencing a period of *hester ponim* (Hashem's hidden countenance), and not some natural manifestation. If we do so, we will merit salvation.

### **POINTING FINGERS AT OURSELVES**

*And Moshe and Aharon went into the Ohel Moed, and came out, and blessed the people. (10:23). Rashi: Once Aharon saw that all the korbanos had been offered up, all the actions had been performed, and the Shechina had not descended on the nation, he became upset and said, "I know that Hashem was angry with me and because of me the Shechinoh did not descend on the nation" (Rashi, ibid.)*

Aharon immediately attributed the absence of the *Shechinoh* to his own faults, just like Yonah HaNavi said, "This storm is on account of me." Whenever a calamity happens, the Torah approach is not to disown our part by ascribing it to the sins of other individuals or the public, but to perform a thorough examination of our own deeds in order to determine our shortcomings, and what we can do to amend them.

### **EMPATHY WITH SUFFERING**

*Do not leave your heads unshorn, and do not rend your garment . . . but your brothers, the entire house of Yisrael, shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem has burned (10:6)*

The close relatives of Nodov and Avihu were told not to adopt any customs of mourning, because Hashem wanted them to accept His Divine judgment with joy, since only good stems from Hashem. However, the rest of the nation was expected to mourn for the death of the two *talmidei chachamim* (see *Rashi*).

Similarly, on an individual level, we must endeavor to accept everything that happens to us with joy, even when we do not immediately see the benefits of what seem to be misfortunes, but when we comfort others who are suffering from hardship, it would be sinful to preach to them to be happy and not overly upset. We must empathize with their suffering and not preach to them.

### **THE MOTHER'S SHARE**

*To distinguish . . . between the living thing (chayah) that may be eaten and the living thing that may not be eaten. (11:47)*

"*Chayah*" can also mean a woman who is giving birth. We can understand this *possuk* to be telling us about the effect a mother's actions have on her child both before and after it is born. If she eats forbidden food, the *tumah* will be passed on to the child, but if she is careful to refrain from any questionable food, and, in general, observes the guidelines of *kedushah*, for example, by not contaminating her mind with unsuitable literature, the child, which derives its sustenance from her, will be born with *taharah*, and this *taharah* will assist it to grow in Torah and good deeds.