

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Inflammable

At 450 degrees Fahrenheit, paper ignites spontaneously. So wrote Ray Bradbury in his futuristic novel, Fahrenheit 451. The novel's main character is a fireman called Montag. But unlike the firemen we're used to, Montag's job is not to put out fires or stop them. Montag's job is to burn books.

A hallmark of all repressive regimes is book burning. In May 1933, the Nazi Party decreed that any book which acts subversively on their future or strikes at the roots of German thought, the German home and the driving forces of their people, was to be burned. One of the books that the Nazis burned was written by Heinrich Heine a hundred years before the Nazis burned his books. Heiner wrote, "Where one burns books, one will in the end burn people." The nature of evil is to want to turn the light of knowledge into the dark heat of unbridled passion.

Heat is the characteristic of the summer month of Tammuz. One of the five disasters that we mourn by fasting on the 17th of this month of Tammuz was another book burning: the burning of our Holy Torah. The historian Flavius Josephus records that sixteen years before the great Jewish revolt against the Romans, robbers attacked and plundered a procession of a Roman official called Stefanus, or Apostamus, on the Royal Road near Beit Choron. Kumanus, the proconsul at the time, sent troops to arrest the local villagers. He held them re-

sponsible for not intervening. Now, during the arrest of the villagers, one of the Roman soldiers saw the scroll of the Holy Torah, tore it into pieces and set it ablaze. The fury of the Jews knew no bounds.

The 17th of Tammuz marks the first recorded book burning in Jewish history. But it certainly wasn't the last.

In the year 1242 under Louis IX of France, ten thousand copies of the Talmud carried in twenty-four wagonloads were burned at the stake before the eyes of grieving Parisian Jews. It's difficult for us to conceive the immensity of this loss. There was no printing in those days. Every one of those Talmudic tractates was handwritten. Those fires consumed almost all of Jewish knowledge in Europe. Jewish communities all over the world mourned.

During the Mussaf service of Yom Kippur, there's a section that describes the death of the ten martyrs at the hands of the Romans. One of those ten was Rabbi Chanina Ben Teradyon. The Midrash, the Oral Law, teaches that he was executed on the charge of teaching Torah publicly, a capital offense under the Romans. The Romans wrapped him in the Torah scroll that he always kept with him, and they set him and the scroll on fire. To prolong his agony, they packed the space between his chest and the Torah scroll with wool soaked in water. Rabbi Chanina said, "The parchment is consumed, but the letters fly up in the air. The Torah is fire, and fire cannot consume fire."

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 Pinchos
 Manish ben Esther
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 Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber
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 Chaya Raizel bat Dena
 Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva
 Reuven ben Rochel

The body of a Jew is like the parchment on which the Torah of his soul is written. When the parchment is burned, the letters fly up to return to their source.

One of the other five tragedies that we commemorate on the 17th of Tam-muz also involves the letters of the Torah flying into the air. When Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the First set of Luchot, he saw

the Jewish people dancing around the Golden Calf. As a result of that sin, the Jewish people were no longer worthy to receive the Tablets. The letters took leave of the stone and flew up into the sky. Without the words of the Torah engraved on those Tablets, they became too heavy for Moshe to carry. They fell from his hands and smashed to the ground.

The mystical sources teach that two

thousand years before the creation of the world, the Torah existed in its primordial form, as black fire on white fire. You cannot burn fire with fire. You cannot burn an idea. The Torah is the idea of G-d.

It is inflammable.

Rabbi Yehoshua Zitron

The Most You Can Do

Every person is obligated to put in their effort for their future. If you are endeavoring on a shidduch or an investment or a medical procedure, look into it. But after something happens and the events are behind you, never feel remorse for the past. Never question, "Why did I do this? Why did I do that?" If Hashem wanted you to find whatever you were looking for, you would have found

it. He would have shown it to you. For whatever reason, you didn't find it. This is the way it was meant to be.

People sometimes invest money with someone and are later frauded. They think to themselves, "If only I had looked more into this person..." A person goes for a medical procedure, and after the fact regrets it, thinking, "This person was not good. Maybe I should have paid a little bit more money and then my family member

would have stayed alive..." Expressing regret over what happened in the past is akin to kefirah, heresy.

Do not regret the past. This is the way Hashem decided it to be. He guides us in the direction we are meant to be moving in. Yes, take precautions, and put in your best efforts. But once it happens, step back and rest, and know that it is in G-d's hands. Accept it with full faith. Hashem has a much bigger and better plan.

Dr. David Lieberman

Saying "No"

Parents sometimes think that when they need to say "no" to their children, it will injure the relationship. First off, never say the word "no" if you don't have to. Let it be, "Yes, but not right now."

Your child asks if they can do this or that. As an adult, you know what it feels like to have your request flatly denied. You know how

it leaves you feeling. Be different when it comes to your child. Allow them to express themselves freely. Empathize with whatever they are experiencing. Once you have done this, then move on to helping the child resolve whatever it might be.

In relationships, we do not generally argue over "things." We argue over the right to be heard, to be respected and

to be appreciated. This is true of adults, and certainly true of children. We all just want to feel significant.

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

Your Tone

The tone of our voice affects others in remarkable ways.

A man in a small town sent his son away to make some money for the family. The father figured that

between his own income and the money that his son would bring in, they'd be able to support their entire

family. Sending his son off with a bundle of money and some ideas of what to do, the son began his journey.

A month later, the father received a telegram from his son. But being illiterate, he knew he would need some help. Taking hold of the letter, he immediately asked the first customer who entered his store the following day to explain the content of the letter. But the customer in no way was interested. He quickly rambled off the scribble on the paper angrily:

Dear Father!

I'm sorry to tell you that I lost all my money. I need more! Send me more right away! I'm sure I'll succeed with Hashem's help.

Thank you very much.

Your son

"That's how my son talks to me!" ex-

claimed the father, shocked at what his ears heard. For the next few hours, the father couldn't get over himself. He had provided his son with hard-earned money to make the trek outward to find a job, and the son's tone was so distasteful, filled with anger, ingratitude and entitlement.

Toward the end of the day, as the father tidied up the last bits and pieces of the store, in walked a man. His footsteps were slow and calm, his voice measured. "Is everything okay?" asked the customer. "You don't look too good." "I've had such a hard day," replied the father. "My son wrote me a letter, and I can't believe how ungrateful he is!" Nonchalantly, the customer asked the father if he could look at the letter.

Unfolding it, the man began to read

the letter in a slow, calming, deep voice.

Dear Father,

I'm sorry to tell you that I lost all my money. I need more. Send me more right away. I'm sure I'll succeed with Hashem's help.

Thank you very much,

Your son

All of a sudden, the father's face grew soft. The words read by the man eased the father's tension, loosening his bitter anger.

The father's entire perspective changed. The same words which had previously made him angry and irritated now made him calm and appreciative.

And all thanks to the difference in tone of voice.

Rabbi Avi Slansky

The Two Wills

Before Mr. Reichman, known for his successful businesses and philanthropy, passed away, he drafted two wills. One will was intended, as he noted, to be read upon his passing, and the second will was to be read seven days later, at the conclusion of shiva.

When the family read through the contents of the first will, there were two important requests. The first asked that his children bury him in Jerusalem. The second request was that he be buried with his socks. In discovering this request and knowing that someone who passed away could not be buried with his socks, the family along with the Chevra Kadisha who oversaw the burial process discussed their next steps. After a lengthy back-and-forth, it was concluded, as had been origi-

nally assumed, that Mr. Reichman would be buried without his socks. Despite his request, it did not align with Jewish law and tradition, and despite the import of carrying out the wishes of the one who passed, this request could not be due to its halachic implications.

Throughout the period of shiva, this matter became a source of quiet concern. Why, in fact, had Mr. Reichman made this request? He was certainly aware that it could not be carried out. Until the shiva had concluded and the family opened the second will.

The second will outlined how the various funds should be allocated amongst the family members. In addition, it noted that despite the confusing request asked of the family in the previous will, Mr. Re-

ichman was certain that he would not be buried with socks, as per Jewish law. The reason he had requested, though, to be buried with his socks was in order to impress upon his children that even though they will be blessed with fabulous inherited wealth, there was a far more important lesson he wanted to convey: even our socks we cannot take to the grave. The money we are blessed with is a means to help and support others. It is not intended to stir us toward jealousy or live a lavish lifestyle. Increased kindness and support and learning of Torah are the goals.

It's a lesson for life. Even our socks don't live on forever. We can't take them with us. All that does remain is the goodness and kindness we accomplish in our lifetime.

Thank you for reading this edition of The TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. If you've enjoyed, please let us know – we'd love to hear from you! Email info@torahanytime.com.

Rabbi Eliezer Zeytouneh

It's Possible

If a person wants something enough, a person can handle any task or mission, or anything that comes his way.

Imagine a man comes to work and he gets yelled at by his boss and his customers, aside from the security guard in the elevator. When he returns home, he tells his wife that he wants to head straight to rest. He doesn't want anyone to disturb him or hear any noise coming from the kids. Laying on his bed, he takes out his phone and begins looking at it.

Sure enough, five minutes later, there is a knock on the door. Who is doing that after I asked for no disturbances? The man cannot

believe it. But he hears the whispers coming from behind the door. It is his wife. "You have a customer downstairs... He's at the door and he says that he's so sorry he couldn't place his order before. He seems to have a huge order to place."

Suddenly, hearing that a customer with a big order is waiting for him downstairs, the fellow quickly puts himself together with a suit and tie. In a great mood, he swings open the front door and graciously receives his customer.

Off to the side are the man's children. "What happened?" they wonder to themselves. Just a few minutes ago, their father was tired and down. Now, all of a sudden, he seems to be

in the best of spirits! How is it possible to go from one extreme mood to the other?

The answer is that it is possible. What rather happened is that the man lowered his threshold for patience and tolerance. But it was greatly within his wherewithal to expand it. Nothing changed. It was all his mindset and will. When he decided to be more tolerant and shift to a different mood, he did. That's all it took.

Power rests in our minds. Control it and your life will be different.

Rabbi Shlomo Landau

I Met Rashi

If I would tell you that I personally met Rashi yesterday, would you believe me? Probably not. Rashi lived close to a thousand years ago; how could I have met him?

Rav Chaim Palagi (sefer Torah V'Chaim) writes that when you learn the words of someone else—whether it be one of the rabbis of the Mishna, Gemara or later authorities—that Neshama (soul) descends from on High to the place you are learning. If you

are therefore learning Rashi, Rashi is there with you. If you are learning the commentary of the Ramban, the Ramban is there with you. If you are learning an insight from the Vilna Gaon, the Vilna Gaon is there with you. That alone is amazing and sounds heard to believe. But it's explicit in the Zohar.

But there's even more to it. Could Rashi really come to my study and be with me?

Yes. It's a Mishna in Pirkei Avos (3:6).

"If one person is learning Torah, the Shechina (Divine Presence) descends and dwells with you." If Hashem Himself comes to the place you are learning, then all the more so other souls. It is not a stretch that Rashi can be with you, or the Ramban or the Chofetz Chaim.

The power that we have when we are learning is beyond belief. It can bring into our very midst the soul of the greatest of those who have lived in this world, and even brings Hashem.

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