

# פ' לך לך תשפ"ד

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## WAR

Rav Sternbuch is continuing to encourage people to increase their *emuna* and *bitochon* and not leave *Eretz Yisroel*.

An American girl studying in a seminary in Yerushalayim whose parents want her to come home was told that she could stay here since the merit of *Eretz Yisroel* would protect her.

During public prayer gatherings in *Eretz Yisroel* due to misfortunes taking place in *Eretz Yisroel* there is an obligation *mide'oraiso* to blow the *shofar* (see *Rambam, H. Taaniyos* 1:1). The person blowing the *shofar* should have in mind that he is fulfilling the mitzvah of blowing the *shofar* during times of trouble, and intend to be *motzi* the public.

*Tehillim* should continue to be recited in *shuls* even on *Shabbos*, although one must be careful not to cry on *Shabbos* (crying from distress is forbidden on *Shabbos*).

If a siren goes off, one should say three times *ein od milvado* ("There is none beside Him": see *Nefesh Hachaim* 3:12), and afterwards (and that is the main thing) contemplate and internalize the meaning of those words, following which one should recite *Tehilim* for his own protection and the protection of every Jew.

Whenever there is a danger facing *Klal Yisroel* in *Eretz Yisroel* this automatically means that the whole Diaspora faces danger, especially in light of the fact that Jews overseas do not have the merit of *Eretz Yisroel* to protect them, and, in any case, there is an obligation on all *bnai chutz lo'oretz* to take measures, such as fasting, when there is a misfortune in *Eretz Yisroel*, and certainly when misfortunes affect all the residents of *Eretz Yisroel* (see *Taanis* 21b and *O.C.* 576, 2 with *Remo ibid*).

In practice, anti-Semitism is already increasing in many places, and the situation is not likely to improve. Those living overseas would be well advised to support *Yeshivos* and *Kollelim* in *Eretz Yisroel* in order to accumulate merits.

Rav Sternbuch expresses concern that *kochi voztem yodi* elements have infiltrated into our society. Apparently thousands of chareidim have volunteered to join the Israeli army in order to fight the enemy. Instead of absorbing the crystal clear message from Heaven from the events of *Shabbos-Simchas Torah* that our salvation will not come from the might of our own hands, these people have succumbed to feelings of inferiority fed to them by the media. As discussed in a previous article, everybody is obligated to don a cloak of holy pride at being part of Hashem's nation and His army which is protecting the entire Jewish population through the holy Torah (see also "Hashem's Army", pg. 6 below).

We pray fervently for the safety and welfare of every Jew, soldier or civilian, but we know that Yishmoel can only be defeated through prayer and repentance (for more on Yishmoel see pg. 8 below). The danger is not from Hamas in the South or Hezbollah in the North, but only from our sins, and our salvation can only come from Hashem.

Regarding the fact that a terrible massacre of Jews took place on *Shabbos-Simchas Torah*, the culmination of the *yomim noroi'm*, one must not attribute this to the notion that our prayers during this period were not accepted or deficient, G-d forbid. Such an attitude demonstrates a lack of faith in the power and efficacy of prayer and repentance. If anything, a decree was enacted in heaven (see our article two weeks ago) and Hashem, due to His great kindness and love for His nation postponed the execution of that decree so that we could

accumulate the most amount of merits between *Elul* and *Simchas Torah*, in order to assuage the trait of justice as much as possible, thereby preventing an even greater calamity. However, in general, we must realize that we cannot fathom Hashem's ways, and simply have to believe that whatever happened is His Will, and for our good.

As for the people killed in the middle of *chilulei Shaboss* and Yom Tov, Rav Sternbuch notes that there are various levels of dying *al kiddush Hashem*, and, it is difficult for us to comprehend this topic. However, someone who dies in the hands of non-Jews (and because they are Jewish) obtains atonement (see *Y.D.* 340:5, *Remo and Shach*).

When asked by *rabbonim* in *Eretz Yisroel* and overseas what people should mainly be focusing on in the current situation, Rav Sternbuch responds that one should focus on improving one's Torah learning. Firstly, because since Hashem is clearly inducing us to repent, Torah learning is the best form of repentance, since it is as important as all the other *mitzvos* put together. Secondly, because increased Torah learning means increased protection for the residents of *Eretz Yisroel*.

Wives and mothers should do whatever they can to facilitate the Torah learning of their husbands and sons.

### **KEDUSHAS ERETZ YISROEL**

*"Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you."* (12:1)

It says, "*lech lecho*", for your own benefit, because as long as Avrohom *ovinu* was in *chutz lo'oretz* he could not attain high levels of sanctity, and he was therefore forced to move to *Eretz Yisroel*. Even before *matan Torah* it was not possible to attain complete sanctity outside *Eretz Yisroel*, because only there does the *Shechino* reside.

However, those levels can only be attained by someone who lives with the awareness that he is living in the Palace of the King, the inheritance of Hashem that parallels its celestial counterpart, the *Eretz Yisroel shel ma'alah*, and intends to keep the *mitzvos* there. Moreover, someone who goes after his evil inclination and sins in this country is thereby rebelling against its sanctity.

Unfortunately, in our times many of the residents of *Eretz Yisroel* do not live with this awareness. It is a general principle that a *mitzvah* cannot be fulfilled if one does not intend to perform the act constituting the *mitzvah* (i.e. if he is merely *misasek*), and *mitzvas yishuv Eretz Yisroel* is no exception. It can only be performed properly through a constant awareness of where one is living and the ramifications of that fact.

Our erring brethren have succeeded in minimizing the feelings of love and awe which Jews had throughout the generations for *Eretz Yisroel*, and to supplant them with foreign nationalistic attitudes. Those teaching in Torah institutions should endeavor to infuse their students with love of *Eretz Yisroel*, and explain to them how privileged we are to be able to utilize the opportunities of living here, and how careful we have to be not to desecrate its sanctity by engaging in sinful or inappropriate behavior.

Jews overseas, who do not enjoy the privilege of living here, should support *bnei Torah* learning Torah in *Eretz Yisroel*, and thereby become partners in *Toras Eretz Yisroel*. That way they can partake of some of the light emanating from the sanctity of the Holy Land.

### **UNQUESTIONING FAITH**

*I will make you into a great nation (12.2). Rashi: "Hashem promised him children, wealth and fame"*

Both Rashi and the Rambam (on *Ovos* 5:3) state that Hashem's commandment to Avrohom to leave Choron for an unknown destination was one of the ten trials by which he was tested. Since Hashem promised him children, wealth and fame, why was this considered to be such a great test? Surely the difficulties involved in leaving your birthplace pale in comparison to the benefits promised by Hashem. Furthermore, the commandment was given by Hashem Himself, so who would not have obeyed it?

The Rambam writes (*H. Avodo Zoro* 1:2-3) that Avrohom brought tens of thousands of people close to Hashem by disassociating them from idol worship. The rewards for these actions was very great, because Avrohom was credited for all the good deeds performed by these people (see *Chovos Halevovos, Sha'ar Ahavas Hashem*, Ch. 6), and now Hashem was telling him to leave all his students and work and depart to an unknown destination. He had no idea whether he would be as successful in his new place of residence, but instead of telling Hashem: "Please let me stay here to continue my important work", he had pure and simple trust in Him and asked no questions, in the complete conviction that everything Hashem does is for the good.

Hence, the main trial was not whether Avrohom would obey Hashem, but whether he would follow it happily and unquestioningly.

Rav Dessler said that throughout history Jews were faced with the choice of saving their lives by abandoning their religion or dying *al kidush Hashem*, but in the Holocaust the Nazis sought to kill everybody without distinction, even apostates. In such a situation, sanctifying the Divine Name consisted in not attributing death to natural causes and not complaining that Hashem had abandoned them, but rather accepting the Divine decree lovingly and going to their deaths with the feeling that this was the Will of Hashem and that they were performing it. That way they would sanctify the Divine Name.

Rav Sternbuch recalls a conference that took place in London after the War under the auspices of Agudas Yisroel, which was attended by representatives from Jewish communities all over Europe, as well as survivors of the 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 that it was due to widespread *chillul Shabbos* in Europe before the War; another said 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 banged his fists on the table, and declared that we are not allowed to judge Hashem. There were no more speakers after that. The Brisker Rov too did not agree to hear any reasons for the Holocaust, nor did Rav Yitzchok Hutner.

Whilst private misfortunes should indeed make a person engage in introspection to determine why they might have happened, a public calamity of the scale of the Holocaust cannot be fathomed by the human mind.

### **KIRUV GUIDELINES**

*"And you shall be a blessing (brocho)" (12:2)*

The *Medrash* reads *brocho* as *breicho* (pool) - just as a pool (*mikveh*) purifies the impure, so shall you purify those who are far removed from Hashem. The *Kesef Mishne* (end of Ch. 6 of *H. Ovos Hatumah*) writes that a *mikveh* does not effect purification for a person still immersed in it, but only once he has left it. Similarly, those who engage in outreach work must realize that they cannot make do with delivering several *shiurim* in the hope that they will have the desired

effect. Even those who become observant can fall by the wayside after the initial period, if they do not receive emotional support subsequently. Their mentors must follow in the footsteps of Avrohom *ovinu*. He did not make do with making speeches and inspiring his followers, but rather became a father for many thousands of his followers, who became members of his household. It is especially incumbent on *kiruv* organizations to ensure that young people find appropriate marriage partners.

## **GIRLS' SCHOOLS**

*“And he pitched his tent” (12:8). Rashi: “First he pitched his wife’s tent and afterwards his own”*

Why did Avrohom act that way? The key for the future of the Jewish nation lies with the women, who are responsible for educating future generation, especially in a generation where immorality is rampant. Avrohom, who lived in a generation of heresy, recognized the importance of the woman’s task, and therefore pitched his wife’s tent first, since her influence was paramount.

In pre-War Poland girls lacked appropriate educational frameworks and many left the fold, to the extent that there was a shortage of girls willing to marry yeshiva *bochurim*. The establishment of Beis Yaakov schools saved the generation.

Even though she was a widow who found it difficult to make a living, Rav Sternbuch’s mother hired private teachers for each of her daughters to teach them *halochos, musar* and *Nach*. She made do with the bare minimum for herself, but spent generously for the sake of her daughters’ education, realizing how crucial it was to groom her daughters for the mother’s role.

## **INDIVIDUAL SHULCHAN ORUCH FOR BITOCHON MATTERS**

*“And there was a famine in the land, and Avrom descended to Egypt to sojourn there because the famine was severe in the land” (12:10)*

The Ramban says that Avrohom should have had more faith in Hashem that he, his wife, and his possessions would be saved, and he should not have gone down to Egypt, thereby endangering her. How can we understand this Ramban? Why was it considered a defect of faith to go down to Egypt in circumstances of famine? Surely Avrohom was obligated to do so in order to perform his duty of *hishtadlus*. On the other hand, if he should indeed not have acted this way, how could it be that Avrohom, the pillar of faith could be wanting in his level of faith?

When it comes to matters of faith and human effort, every person has his own individual *Shulchan Oruch*. The greater a person’s level of tangible faith, the less human effort does he have to invest. Someone with a high level of faith should not put in human effort to make a living or perform medical procedures, and trust in Hashem to take care of those matters, whereas someone with a less than perfect level of faith is obligated to make standard amounts of *hishtadlus*.

Avrohom, on his unusually high level, was expected not to go down to Egypt, and wait for Hashem to sort matters out.

## **ENVIRONMENTS**

*“Behold now I know that you are a woman of fair appearance” (12:11). Rashi: “Until now, he did not recognize her because of the modesty of both of them, but now he recognized her following an incident”*

It is brought down in the name of the Arizal that initially Avrohom had no notion of materialism, like Odom before the sin. Only when he came to Egypt, which was steeped in immorality, did his level descend and that was when he realized that the pull of this *tumah* could be so great that the Egyptians were likely to kill him in order to obtain his wife.

In a similar vein, the Baal Shem Tov explains that the reason Avrohom noticed his wife's beauty for the first time when he went down to Egypt was that he enjoyed an intensely close relationship with Hashem so that his sense of sight was spiritual, and he did not derive material enjoyment from what he saw. However, the *possuk* says that "Avrom descended to Egypt" (12:10), meaning that he descended from his previous level as a result of coming into contact with the spiritual contamination of the Egyptian nation. Consequently, it was then that he noticed his wife's beauty for the first time.

Clearly, such levels are not attainable nowadays, but this does teach us that if contact with an immoral environment can have a detrimental effect even on the greatest people, how much more so do we have to be on our guard to eliminate or at least minimize such contacts. Doing so results in sundry spiritual and material blessings.

### **MACHLOKES BETWEEN BRETHREN**

*"And Avrom said to Lot, "Please let there be no quarrel between me and you and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen" (13:8)*

The end of Avrohom's statement ("*for we are kinsmen*") implies that a *machlokes* between brethren is even worse than one between people who are not close. Since it is an especially serious sin, the *yetzer horo* invests a lot of energy into attempting to entangle people into it.

Rashi (on 13:14) cites the *medrash* that as long as Lot was with Avrohom Hashem did not communicate with him, and yet until this stage Avrohom did not abandon Lot, because he preferred to attempt to draw him closer to the *Shechinah* rather than enjoying an intense closeness to Hashem. On the other hand, as important as it was to Avrohom to stay with Lot, even at the cost of losing out on an intense closeness to Hashem and prophecy, if continued contact with Lot would involve a *machlokes*, he would not hear of it, because *machlokes* is detestable and must be avoided at any cost, especially since a great *chillul Hashem* would have resulted from such a *machlokes* becoming publicized.

### **SACRIFICING ONE'S OWN RUCHNIYUS FOR KIRUV WORK**

Seeing that as long as Lot was with him Hashem did not communicate with Avrohom, why did Avrohom not in fact abandon Lot in order to merit prophecy?

We see from this that bringing even one person closer to the *Shechinah* was dearer in the eyes of Avrohom than meriting prophecy and the concomitant closeness and *deveikus* to Hashem. Avrohom decided to remain with Lot and attempt to draw him closer to Hashem in the full knowledge that he would thereby lose the opportunity to merit prophecy. He did so on his own accord without any special commandment from Hashem, due to the love of Hashem which burnt inside him, in accordance with the Rambam's statement (*Sefer Hamitzvos* Third Positive Commandment) that part of the commandment to love Hashem is to bring Jews closer to Him, and to "make Him loved by His creatures", as he puts it.

Almost six decades ago, Rav Sternbuch was learning in Bnei Brak when a messenger of Rav Yechezkel Abramsky came to him with a message from Rav Abramsky that he was opening a *kolel* for Yemenites in Rosh Ha'ayin and he wanted Rav Sternbuch to be the *Rosh Kolel* there.

Rav Sternbuch replied that he could not accept this position, since it would disturb his learning, and he would certainly find someone more suitable for the position. Rav Abramsky responded that the Chofetz Chaim explained that the commandment “and you shall love Hashem your G-d... with all your might [*bechol me’odecho*]” refers to something which a person loves very much, namely a person’s *ruchniyus*, which is the most important thing to him, and one has to give up even that for the sake of increasing *kvod shomayim*, and therefore Rav Sternbuch was obligated to go and disseminate Torah there, and that is what Rav Sternbuch did for several years there, and subsequently in South Africa, which was a spiritual wilderness at the time.

## **POWER OF DESIRES**

“*And Lot raised his eyes, and he saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that it was entirely watered... like the garden of Hashem, like the land of Egypt*” (13:10)

The *possuk* testifies that “the people of Sedom were very evil and sinful against Hashem” (13:13), and yet Lot still chose to live in their midst so that he could partake of the pleasures of this world. How could Lot have stooped to such a low level, and become so materialistic without being influenced by being in the vicinity of Avrohom *ovinu*?

This demonstrates that if a person does not make the effort to introspect and strengthen himself spiritually, nothing he experiences or witnesses will help him. Lot, despite having lived with Avrohom, did not make the effort to attempt to subdue his desires, and so when he was tested, he went to live with wicked people in order to fulfil his desires.

Even open miracles are not an automatic recipe for faith, not even for us. Rav Sternbuch recalls being with the Brisker Rov when a Jewish visitor from America came in and said, “We are living in a generation of *hester ponim*. If only Hashem would show us open miracles, the whole nation would repent and become observant.” The Brisker Rov responded that someone who lives his life in accordance with his heart’s desires will continue to live that way even if he witnesses miracles. Only someone who is not stubborn or full of desires will be in a position to contemplate events properly and recognize the Hand of Hashem and His great mercies. Therefore, we have to prepare ourselves for the coming of *moshiach* by working on our *middos* and contemplating the actions of Hashem, in order to attain true faith.

## **HASHEM’S ARMY**

“*And Lot traveled from the east (mikedem)*” (13:11). Rashi: *According to the medrash, he distanced himself from the Ancient One (mikadmono) of the world. He said, “I care neither for Avrom nor for his G-d.”*

The Alter of Kelm explains that this does not mean that Lot expressly said “I care neither for Avrohom nor for his G-d”, but the very fact that he agreed to leave Avrohom in order to pursue his physical desires was tantamount to such a declaration. Even though he was forced to leave Avrohom, who had told him “Please part from me” (13:9), he did not part because he was forced to, but rather for purely materialistic motives, thereby proving that he preferred material pleasures to cleaving to Avrohom, who would teach him the way of the Torah.

Similarly, concluded the Alter of Kelm, a *ben Torah* who leaves the yeshiva in order to engage in material matters to become wealthy, demonstrates that he prefers material pleasures to the way of the Torah.

Governmental leaders here in *Eretz Yisroel* often demand the enactment of legislation concerning the recruitment of yeshiva students. We, for our turn, must elevate the spirit of Yeshiva *bochurim* and make them aware that the entire world exists in the merit of their learning, that we are already recruited and serving in Hashem’s army, and that every *ben Torah*

who leaves the army of Hashem in order to join their army has the status of a deserter who evades his duties in the real army. The main thing is for every *ben Torah* to lift his head proudly and exult in the privilege of serving in Hashem's army.

## HOW TO ENSURE THAT WE DO NOT HAVE OUR MERITS DEDUCTED

*"After these incidents, the word of Hashem came to Avrom in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Avrom; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great" (15:1). Rashi: After this miracle had been wrought for him, that he slew the kings, he was worried and said, "Perhaps I have received reward for all my righteous deeds." Therefore, the Almighty said to him, "Fear not Avrom, I am your Shield" from punishment, that you will not be punished for all those souls that you have slain, and as far as your being worried about receiving reward, your reward is exceedingly great*

What is the meaning of Hashem's answer? If it is a general principle that one's reward in the afterlife is diminished by material pleasures and benefits derived in this world, why would Avrom's reward still be exceedingly great?

The *Yeshuos Yaakov* explains this on the basis of the *medrash* which says, "I am your shield, everybody knows that I am your shield", meaning that the miracle had become publicized and caused a great sanctification of the Divine Name. Therefore, Avrohom's merits had not been diminished, because the miracle did not take place because of him, but for the sake of *kvod shomayim*.

We can derive an important lesson from this. If Hashem showers us with many favors, as He does on the national level by protecting us from our enemies here in *Eretz Yisroel* for example, if we want to make sure our merits are not deducted on account of such miracles, we should make a point of praising Hashem's kindnesses verbally, and attributing them only to Him, and not to the actions of flesh and blood. That way His Name will be sanctified, and we need not be concerned about having our merits deducted, because it then turns out that the miracles performed for us were not performed for us, but for the sake of sanctifying His Name.

## STARS AND SOULS

*"And He took him outside, and He said, "Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So will be your seed" (15:5)*

In several places the Jewish nation is compared to the stars. On the plain level, this refers to the vast quantity of stars (see Rashi at the beginning of *Parashas Shemos*). Alternatively, just like the task of stars is to illuminate, so too each Jew's task is to illuminate his soul with the fire of *kedusho* by keeping Torah and *mitzvos*. We are compared to the light of the stars and not of the sun, because just like the stars illuminate at night, so too is the light of their souls most conspicuous during times of difficulty ("night-time"), when they dedicate their souls for the sake of Hashem's honor. When they conduct themselves this way, the light of their souls is the most prominent.

Furthermore, just like the stars do not have a light of their own but only receive the light of the sun, so too does a Jew not have an independent light to illuminate his soul, but he rather illuminates it when he keeps the Torah with enthusiasm and joy.

The best way to illuminate one's soul is by learning Torah, as it says "for Torah is a lamp, and *mitzvos* are a light" (*Mishlei* 6:23). This implies that *mitzvos* on their own only

have the quality of a lamp, and the Torah is the light and fire burning on it. Torah learning is the fire which kindles the desire and enthusiasm for keeping *mitzvos*, because through learning Torah a person becomes sanctified and cleaves to Hashem, thereby keeping *mitzvos* with joy and enthusiasm, and the *mitzvos*, in turn, sanctify the person, as we say, “Who has sanctified us with his *mitzvos* and commanded us”.

## **YISHMOEL AND PARAS**

“*And the sun was ready to set, and a deep sleep fell upon Avrom, and behold, a fright, a great darkness was falling upon him*” (15:12). Rashi: *An allusion to the troubles and darkness of the exiles.*

The descendants of Yishmoel continue to practice *milo* (albeit without *perioh*), and the Zohar notes that the merit of this act is sufficient to provide them with the right to dwell in *Eretz Yisroel* for a long time, giving them the ability to persecute us in the last generations before *moshiach*. This merit will eventually become exhausted and when the descendants of Yishmoel will be defeated *moshiach* will come straight away (see *Baal Haturim* on *Bereishis* 25:18).

The Maharal says (in *Ner Mitzvah Inyanei Arba Malchuyos* and *Netzach Yisroel* Ch. 21) that the nation of Paras (Persia, known today as Iran) is part of Yishmoel, and whereas the Four Nations differ in their actions and behavior, Yishmoel and Paras are the same in terms of their conduct. He adds that for that reason Yishmoel is not counted as one of the Four Nations, since they are included within the Nation of Paras.

In our times Yishmoel and Paras have joined forces. We pray for mercy in the merit and power of the Torah, which provides supernatural protection.

## **COUNTERING YISHMOEL**

*And Yishmoel, his son, was thirteen years old when he was circumcised of the flesh of his foreskin.* (17:25)

Rav Chaim Vital writes in *Eitz Hada'as Tov* that the most difficult exile at the end of days will be from the descendants of Yishmoel and only through heartfelt prayer can we be saved from them and accelerate the coming of *moshiach*. In *Parashas Ha'azinu*, the Vilna Gaon says that the *bonei Yishmoel* seek to destroy us, and we can only annul the decree by prayer. This is also hinted at by Yishmoel's name: “Hashem will hear”. Hashem will hear our prayers and save us from Yishmoel when we put our trust solely and exclusively in Hashem and turn to Him in prayer, in the conviction that no other power can save us.

The Chofetz Chaim said that since the Torah testifies that Yishmoel is a *pereh odom* (a rebellious creature, see *Onkelos*), this description will apply for all time; however much one might try to acculturate his descendants, they will not change their essence. He concluded with a prophetic sigh, “Oy, who knows how much suffering this *pereh odom* is likely to cause the Jewish nation at the end of days!”

Since their temporary power stems from the *bris milo* we are also able to counteract their influence and accelerate their downfall by observing our own *bris* - guarding our eyes and keeping away from printed or electronic media, which purvey immorality. Strengthening the sanctity of the *os bris* provides us with the ability to weaken the power of Yishmoel's descendants, and even if other nations join them to wage war against us, we will be in a position to defeat them. May the redemption happen speedily in our days.