

פ' וישב תשפ"ד

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RESUMPTION OF WAR

On Thursday last week a terror attack took place in Yerushalayim claiming the lives of four people. The attack happened at about 7.40 am. At approximately 8.10 am Rav Sternbuch said the following before the shofar was blown in his *minyan*:

The Rambam holds that blowing the shofar [during a time of trouble] is a positive commandment, [and] we have that intention because that is the custom in Yerushalayim. They would always blow the shofar during a time of trouble, and there is no greater trouble than what we are experiencing at the moment, when Jewish blood is being spilt wantonly by our enemies. Everything depends on prayer, and therefore may the shofar come and arouse each one of us, and, primarily, arouse the angels of mercy to plead for mercy for us. We are in an exceedingly grave situation. Their intention is to blot out the Jewish nation from the world completely, and they are determined to do this gradually, this is their aim. We are asleep, we do not understand, and therefore we are blowing the shofar in order to fulfil the wish of the Creator to blow the shofar in accordance with the custom of Yerushalayim. If there is G-d forbid the possibility of bal tosif¹ we do not intend to add to the Torah². May Hashem have mercy on us, we beseech for mercy and may Hashem answer us from above. We cry out from below, and may He answer us from above.

When these words were spoken, nobody at that *minyan* knew yet that a terror attack had taken place. Just before the *minyan* started (i.e. before 7.30 am) Rav Sternbuch had asked his son anxiously to make sure that the *baal tokea* would be coming. Rav Sternbuch had not expressed his concern on any previous occasion about the *baal tokea* coming.

It was not the first time the shofar had been blown at Rav Sternbuch's *minyan*, but on previous occasions Rav Sternbuch had only spoken about the halachic issue revolving around *bal tosif* and the condition that has to be made (as he did on this occasion). He did not speak about blood being spilt, or the like, on previous occasions. Last week had in fact been a quiet "ceasefire" week, and therefore those present could not understand either the tone or the contents of Rav Sternbuch's words at this time. Subsequently, when they heard about the terrible shooting, they understood.

On Monday this week Rav Sternbuch spoke again before the blowing of the shofar in the *minyan* in his house. He initially noted that in Yerushalayim they used to blow the shofar even for a woman in labor. Ten men would blow the shofar.

He then said the following:

"The train has left the station, but unfortunately it is going in the wrong direction, as is apparent to anyone who understands a little bit... We have come together and are

¹ Meaning if it is not actually a positive commandment at the moment to blow the shofar.

² But rather intend to blow the shofar without intending to fulfil a specific mitzvah (that is how Rav Sternbuch put it on previous occasions).

praying. The ministering angels derive great pleasure from this, and we are judged favorably to counter the Soton's claims... We are blowing the shofar in order to fulfil Hashem's will. Hashem loves His nation, Yisroel, and we have the power to remove the accusers when He hears the Jewish nation blowing the shofar. Therefore we are reciting "Vaya'avor Hashem al ponov"³. Each and every individual should introspect to see what he can do to strengthen himself more.

"On the one hand, we have faith that everything will be good, and in the end it will be good, but we have to go through several stages. The Soton stands on the side and claims that Jews are degrading the Almighty. But we say that they are a tiny minority, they are nothing, and we do not take them into account at all.

"So now we will say "Kel erech apayim" until "Vaya'avor Hashem", And he shall blow a great shofar and the entire nation will shake from fear... the fear of judgement... We do not have to look far, suffice it to say that the situation is not good, I repeat: not good. The wicked are inciting the Soton to bring accusations against the Jewish nation."

RAV STERNBUCH URGES OTHERS TO BLOW SHOFAR

At his own *minyán*, Rav Sternbuch asks for the shofar to be blown on Mondays and Thursdays. Straight after *chazoras hashatz* before *vehu rachum* תשר"ת is blown followed by *yud gimel middos* (*kel erech apayim*...). Rav Sternbuch urges all *kehilos* in *Eretz Yisroel* to do the same. Rav Sternbuch tells the *ba'al tokea* to make the following condition: if it is a *mitzvah mide'oraiso* to blow the shofar during this current *es zoro* (time of misfortune) then he intends to fulfil this mitzvah, and if it is not a *mitzvah*, then it should be a *tekia be'alma*, the blowing of the shofar without a mitzvah (to prevent any issue of *bal tosf*).

Rav Sternbuch says that a *baal tokea* must feel the *es zoro* (time of trouble), otherwise his *tekios* are not worth anything.

CHALLENGES

"And Yaakov dwelt" (37:1); Rashi: When Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility, the troubles of Yosef sprang upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility. Hashem said, "What is prepared for the righteous in the world to come is not sufficient for them, but they seek also to dwell in tranquility in this world!"

Yaakov had already endured much suffering by this stage: he had, among other things, spent twenty years with the fraudster Lovon, met Eisov accompanied by 400 men, and struggled with the angel. His desire for tranquility in his old age would seem to be understandable and justified. Why, then, was it held out against him?

Each of the *ovos* transmitted their specific qualities for all future generations. Avrohom transmitted the quality of *chesed*, Yitzchok that of *gevuro* (mastery of emotions) and Yaakov excelled in *emes*. Part of Yaakov's task was to sow the seeds of fortitude for his descendants, who were destined to be faced with trying circumstances during prolonged periods of *golus*. Trials are the main source and catalyst of a person's spiritual elevation

³ Prayer before the *yud gimel middos shel rachamim*.

and Hashem was telling Yaakov that his task was to continue to serve Him by overcoming tribulations, thus setting a precedent for his descendants and giving them the strength to follow his example.

Hashem does not expect everybody to be on the level of Yaakov and ask Him for trials, since everybody has enough of their own as it is, but He did want Yaakov *ovinu*, whose name was inscribed on the *kise hakovod*, to attain the superior level where he did not want to rest at any stage, but rather happily accept the difficulties of tribulations in order to achieve ever higher levels in the eternal afterlife.

A *bochur* once came to Rav Moshe Schneider asking for a *brocho* before his wedding. Rav Schneider asked him what *brocho* he wanted. The boy responded that he would like a blessing that everything should go smoothly in his life, and that he should not have to deal with any difficulties. Rav Schneider said that that was no *brocho*, and blessed him instead that when he would be faced with challenging situations, he would be able to overcome them successfully, adding that living a tranquil existence is not an ideal. Something attained effortlessly has little value, and it is by surmounting difficulties that we actualize our potential for greatness.

CREATING ARKS IN SPIRITUAL DELUGES

"For he was a son of his old age" (37:3) Rashi: *Onkelos translates it: "He was a wise son to him, because everything that Yaakov had learned from Sheim and Eiver, he transmitted to Yosef.*

Yaakov himself learned Torah from his father and grandfather. Would it not have been sufficient to transmit this Torah to Yosef?

Sheim lived in the generation of the *mabul* and Eiver in the *dor haflogo* (the generation which was dispersed following the building of the tower of *Bavel*), so that they were both surrounded by wicked people, and therefore had to lead a secluded existence. The Torah of Sheim and Eiver refers to the conduct required to maintain one's righteousness in an atmosphere of total wickedness without being affected by one's surroundings.

Yaakov *Ovinu* knew through *ruach hakodesh* that Yosef would be faced with difficult challenges in Egypt and therefore taught him specifically that even if he were to find himself in an environment consisting only of wicked individuals, he had to imagine that he was the only person alive in the world, and still fulfill his duties towards the Creator.

Unfortunately, most of us cannot shut ourselves off entirely from elements that are reminiscent of the society in which Yosef would have to spend most of his life, so this Torah of Sheim and Eiver, which teaches us to seclude ourselves either physically, or at least intellectually and emotionally, from moral depravity, is of great relevance for us too. Moreover, on the national level, we as *bnei Torah*, must also make sure not to let the harangues of our ignorant brethren against Torah learning or leading a Torah lifestyle affect us or our children.

Gedolim of the previous generation would convey this Torah of Sheim and Eiver to their students. The Brisker Rov, in addition to inculcating his students with the desire to be immersed in Torah and *medakdek bemitzvos*, would also frequently speak about the

situation of his generation and our duty to fight the machinations of anti-religious elements. Rav Elchonon Wasserman would also speak a lot about our duty to fight heretics, and Rav Sternbuch's Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Schneider, felt that since the winds of heresy were very strong, he was obligated to speak to students about topical matters, lest they be swept away by false views, and each time he heard about a religious breach, he would be greatly pained by it and mention it in his talks in the yeshiva.

ANTIDOTE FOR IMMORALITY

Alternatively, Yaakov chose to transmit the Torah of Sheim and Eiver because since Yosef was very handsome Yaakov realized that Yosef would have to face severe tests in moral matters. A person's character traits and characteristics are given to him in order to become elevated in his *avodas Hashem*, and a person who is *yefe toar* like Yosef becomes elevated by withstanding moral trials. The lesson Yaakov learned from Sheim and Eiver is that the only way a person can be assured of overcoming tests relating to *kedusha* is through learning and remaining absorbed in Torah (see Rambam, *Hilchos Issurei Biah* 22:21).

In our times, when the street is rampant with immorality and profanities, not to mention the ubiquitous Internet, the only remedy is to hide and remain immersed in the Tent of Torah, because Torah has the power to protect and save us from evil thoughts. *Bnei Torah* in our times have to remain within the confines of the *Beis Hamedrash*, and should only leave it for essential purposes, whilst remaining immersed in Torah thoughts.

MEASURED SUFFERING

“And they lifted their eyes and saw, and behold, a caravan of Yishmoelites was coming from Gilad, and their camels were carrying spices, balm, and lotus, going to take it down to Egypt” (37:25). Rashi: Why did the possuk publicize their burden? To let you know the reward of the righteous, for it is customary for Arabs to carry only paraffin and tar, whose odor is unpleasant, but for Yosef spices were arranged, so that he should not be harmed by an unpleasant odor

This episode demonstrates how much divine providence accompanies a person even in times of trouble. Yosef was being held captive by Yishmoelites, he had been separated from his father and entire family, and sold as a contemptible slave. And yet, even in this dire situation, Hashem was particular even about small details, such as an unpleasant odor. Even in the darkest moments the amount of suffering a person has to endure is precisely calculated in Heaven.

Rav Mordechai Pogromansky illustrated this point by comparing a murderer's knife to the one used by a surgeon. The former is used for a cruel purpose and is large and heavy, the latter for a merciful purpose and is appropriately small and delicate. Similarly, said Rav Pogromansky, the purpose of the spices was to show Hashem's "pleasant countenance" to Yosef, that Hashem was with him, and looking after him even in this situation. All the suffering he was enduring would be for his benefit ultimately – just like the surgeon's knife performs a kind mission, as cruel as it might seem to an ignorant outsider.

In "Brisk" they offer a different explanation. Yosef did not divert his mind from Torah even for a moment, and if the Yishmoelites would have carried paraffin and tar, whose

odor is very unpleasant, he would have been forbidden from thinking *divrei Torah*. Therefore Hashem orchestrated events so that Yosef would be able to continue delving in Torah thoughts also during his trip to Egypt.

TESHUVA BEFORE TEFILLA

“And Reuven returned to the pit” (37:29)

The *medrash* says that Reuven was the first person to repent a sin. However, we know that Odom as well as Kayin both repented for their sins, so what does the *medrash* mean?

The Brisker Rov explains that Reuven was the first person who before engaging in the mitzvah of saving someone’s life examined his deeds and repented before taking action.

Similarly, it is proper to engage in introspection and repent before *davening*. As Rashi says on the *possuk*, “Hashem, Open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise” (*Tehilim* 51:17), “Forgive me so that I can have an opportunity to declare Your praise”. When a person prays to Hashem he should contemplate Hashem’s greatness, because recognizing the greatness of the Creator makes us realize the enormity of sinning against Him.

In order to encourage us to repent before *davening shmone esrei* the *anshei knesses hagedola* directed that we preface the *shmone esrei* with the above *possuk* from *Tehilim*, in which we ask Hashem to forgive our sins and thereby make us worthy of having our prayers heard.

HOPE FROM DESPAIR

“And it came about at that time that Yehuda was demoted by his brothers” (38:1)

The *medrash* (*B. Rabbo* 85:1) comments that “the tribes were busy selling Yosef, Yosef was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, Reuven was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, Yaakov was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, Yehuda was busy taking a wife, and Hashem was busy creating the light of Moshiach the king... before the first subjugator (Paroh) was born the final redeemer (Peretz, the progenitor of *moshiach*) was born”.

Thus, whilst Yosef was taken down to Egypt, an event that turned out to be the harbinger of the Egyptian exile, and whilst all the tribes were in mourning, Hashem was busy preparing our redemption and salvation, and Yehuda too, although he had been demoted, and his father and brother were in mourning, did not focus on the past and on his pain, but rather concentrated on what could be done to ensure the continued development of the Jewish nation, and the emergence of the future redemption in the form of the House of Dovid.

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, that even though tens of thousands of Jews were taken to their deaths every day just from the ghetto, and sometimes the Germans would come on the day of a wedding sending all the participants to their deaths, parents nevertheless did not despair from marrying off

their children (or attempting to do so) in their great desire to merit organizing a Jewish match prior to appearing before the *kise hakovod*.

In *Eretz Yisroel* too, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the Ponovezher *Rosh Yeshivah*, arrived here in the middle of the War and started reconstructing the Ponovezher Yeshivah in Bnei Brak, even though his family and the population of Ponovezh were in dire trouble, and he would be one of the only survivors, because the work of developing the Jewish nation has to take place in all periods, even the darkest ones. In fact, specifically from the darkest times stems the greatest light.

In the future redemption too just when the Jewish nation will endure the most difficult situations *r"l*, and will lose all hope, *Moshiach* will come, as it says, "From where ["*meyayin*"] shall my help come" (*Tehillim* 121:1) – when the situation will appear completely hopeless [*ayin* – nothingness], that is when "my help" will come from Hashem, and the redemption will take place.

A SEFER TORAH OF GOOD DEEDS

"He would not listen to her, to lie next to her, nor to be with her" (39:10)

Anyone who resists temptation for no ulterior motive, such as fear, or the desire for honor, but merely to fulfill the Will of Hashem, fulfills the greatest mitzvah of sanctifying the Divine Name (see *Rambam Yesodei Hatorah* 5:10). Moreover, it says in *Yalkut Shimoni* that in the past a person who performed a *mitzvah* would have his deeds recorded by the prophets, but now that there are no more prophets Eliyohu and *Moshiach* record his deeds, and Hashem Himself *kivyochol* signs.

Sometimes a person passes away and he or she may have accomplished much during their lifetime, either in the public sphere by dedicating themselves to the material or spiritual welfare of *klal yisroel* or in the private sphere in the form of victories against their *yetzer horo*, but they leave nothing obvious behind them to eternalize them, such as an important *sefer*. The *medrash* makes it clear that, in the future, such people will have the privilege of having their names recorded in a commemorative book, which will be read by everybody like a *sefer Torah*.

SHECHINO'S MISFORTUNE OUR PERSONAL MISFORTUNE

"And Yaakov tore his garments" (37:34)

The wording of the *possuk* implies that Yaakov tore all his garments (see Rav S. R. Hirsch). Why did Yaakov do this, seeing that for a son one does not tear all one's clothes?

It seems that Yaakov *ovinu* did not only tear his clothes for his private tragedy, but also for the sorrow of the *shechino*, because he considered Yosef to have been his successor, to whom he had transmitted the secrets of the Torah, and his supposed passing represented a great loss for the eternity of the Jewish nation. That is why he tore all his clothes, just like he would for the sorrow of the *shechino*, and just like one would tear all one's clothes for the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Rav Chaim Sofer writes (*Shut Machane Efraim O.C. II Resp. 5*) in the name of the *Imrei Esh* on the words *עמדת להם צרתם* in *Al Hanisim* that as long as we do not feel that the

anti-religious decrees enacted against us by the wicked are our own personal misfortune, we will not merit Hashem's salvation.

Similarly, Rav Sternbuch once heard from a *godol* that if someone feels no pain when a *chilul Hashem* occurs that is a sign that his *neshomo* is defective *chas vesholom*.

Rav Moshe Schneider would say that when a *chilul Hashem* occurs Hashem expects us to protest, and such protests mitigate the trait of judgment aroused by the original *chilul Hashem*. Hashem records those who protest in a Book of Remembrance.

Similarly, a visitor from overseas once asked Rav Sternbuch why he spoke so much about how bad the state of religion is instead of focusing on how wonderful the situation is in some respects. Rav Sternbuch responded that the very act of protesting has the effect of "sweetening" (being "*mamtik*") i.e. overturning, or at least mitigating, *dinim* (decrees stemming from the trait of justice), as *Chazal* say, "Wherever there is judgement here below there is no judgement above". As Rav Schneider would say, "In Heaven they are asking whether anybody is protesting the breaches of the generation, and when they see that one old man in London (Rav Schneider meant himself) is protesting, that way all the judgments have already been fulfilled".

If we feel a *chilul Hashem* to be our personal misfortune, we thereby merit the speedy fulfilment of "and You with Your great mercy rose up for them in the time of their trouble".

CHANUKA

Unlike the *mizbeach* and the sacrifices, the purpose of the menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash* was not to achieve atonement, but rather to ignite the light of Torah, and nowadays we light the menorah on Chanuka in each generation to symbolize our obligation to spread Torah and delve its depths.

In order to merit the light of Torah, it has to be studied with the realization that one is cleaving to divine wisdom. If one studies it like any other wisdom, he will become burnt by its fire, and it will become an elixir of death for him. Rav Zelig Reuven Bengis told Rav Sternbuch that when he went to see Rav Dovid Friedman of Karlin he noticed that he had a board in front of him containing the words *shivisi Hashem lenegdi somid* ("I have set Hashem before me always") in large letters, and Rav Dovid explained that he did not want to get carried away with the intellectual beauty of Torah and forget even for a moment He Who gave us the Torah, and that our purpose in studying it must be to understand His Will.

We say in *al hanisim* that the Greeks wanted to make us forget **Your** Torah and to force us to transgress the statutes [*chukim*] of Your Will. They had no issue with the rational parts of the Torah, in fact they admired them, but they could not countenance our observing *chukim*, which they did not understand, nor could they accept that the Torah was of Divine origin.

We light the menorah outside our houses in order to negate the philosophy which advocates being a Jew in our home but merely a *mentsh* (decent human being) outside, and in order to emphasize that we are not embarrassed of our Torah and *yiddishkeit*.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how Rav Moshe Schneider would endeavor to convey to his students that *bnei Torah* have to be aware of their elevated status, and that the existence of the celestial spheres, as well as of this world, is dependent on them. He said that for his generation it was imperative for *yeshivah bachurim* to appreciate the great privilege and responsibility associated with being *bnei Torah*. This applies no less today.

The other central message of Chanuka is the fundamental item of faith that there is no such thing as nature, since the whole of creation is constantly being re-created and dependent on Hashem's Will; nor is there such a thing as a "law of nature". As the Ramban notes, anyone who does not believe this is an *epikores* [heretic].

This is one explanation as to why we light a candle on the first night of Chanuka, even though the miracle only started on the second day, because there was enough oil for one day. The first day was no less a miracle than the subsequent ones, albeit a "hidden" one, to use the Ramban's terminology.

Just like Tisha Be'av is a day of mourning for all the calamitous events which we have endured during our tortured history in *golus*, so too on Chanuka we give thanks Hashem for the miracles performed in each and every generation on the national and personal levels, be they through open or hidden miracles.

The *gemoro* (*Rosh Hashono* 18b) notes that Chanuka was not canceled following the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdosh* because it "publicizes the miracle", and Rashi (*ibid*) notes that the *mitzvah* of Chanuka is considered as important as a *mitzvah* originating from the Torah. This is because the message of Chanuka contains fundamental messages for the whole of *yiddishkeit*.

One of the four exiles is that of *golus yovon*. Why is the subjugation of the Greeks considered to have been an exile, seeing that the Jews were neither exiled from *Eretz Yisroel* by the Greeks, nor did they destroy the *Beis Hamikdosh*? The Chasam Sofer explains that nevertheless since they persecuted us and attempted to abolish Torah and *mitzvos*, the period of their subjugation is considered to have been an exile.

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed, on the one hand, a proliferation of Torah learning, but, on the other hand, governments which are heretical, and whose entire purpose is to uproot Torah from the nation and to be a nation like any other. Our settlement in *Eretz Yisroel* in recent times has no connection to the beginning of the redemption; on the contrary, it is a further entrenchment of exile, since exile and redemption do not depend on settlement in the Holy Land. Redemption relates to a situation in which we are privileged to serve Hashem in *Eretz Yisroel* under the rule of the kingdom of *Beis Dovid*, and exile is a situation that distances us from that. When heretics rule the country and enact legislation against Hashem and His Torah, when clerks are forced to register same-gender "marriages", for example, we are deeply immersed in exile, even whilst dwelling in our holy country.

The *gemoro* says that he who is particular about the *mitzvah* of lighting candles will have sons who are *talmidei chachomim* (*Shabbos* 23b). Rav Yitzchok Sagi Nohor explains that even though everybody lights Chanukah candles, and most people fulfil the basic *halochos*, only a very small minority is careful to fulfil all the details and particulars completely, and only who he does so will merit having sons who are *talmidei chachomim*. It stands to reason that such a person will also merit becoming a *talmid chachom* himself. In any case, everybody should be completely conversant in all the details of *hilchos chanukka*, and fulfil them meticulously, so that when he lights the Chanukah candles he will merit divine assistance in acquiring the light of Torah.