

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Avrohom Ebstein

Guaranteed Salvation

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 29a) cites the verse (Shemos 17:11), “And it was when Moshe raised his hands, and the Jewish nation was victorious (over the nation of Amalek).” Taking this Pasuk at face value, the Mishnah questions, “Was it Moshe Rabbeinu’s hands which won or lost wars? Rather, this is to teach that so long as Moshe Rabbeinu’s hands were raised and the Jewish people looked upward to Hashem and focused their hearts on Him, they were victorious. Otherwise, they weren’t.”

Rav Chaim Volozhin zt”l in his Nefesh HaChaim draws a remarkable insight from this Mishnah, as supported by the Gemara (Chullin 7b). The Gemara relates that a woman sought to perform witchcraft and cause harm to R’ Chanina. But R’ Chanina was confident that she wouldn’t succeed, for as it says, “Ein od milvado—there is none other than Hashem.” It wasn’t that R’ Chanina was relying on his own merits or righteousness to save him from the effects of witchcraft, explains the Nefesh HaChaim. Rather, he knew that when he held complete belief in Hashem, firmly rooting in his heart that no other power outside Hashem exists and that everything is an emanation of Hashem, he thereby connected himself to Him and did not need to not fear anyone or anything. This is because, in truth,

no will or power holds any influence over the world except Hashem.

R’ Chanina was therefore certain about the woman not being able to harm him because he had firmly attached his thoughts to this reality that nothing exists outside of Hashem. This, extends the Nefesh Hachaim (3:12), is something we all can do in our lives:

In truth, it is a significant matter and wondrous segulah to remove and nullify from upon oneself all judgements and wills of others that they cannot rule over him and cause any effect whatsoever when one firmly establishes in his heart, saying:

Isn’t Hashem the true G-d; and other than Him, Blessed be He, there is no other power in this world or any of the worlds at all. And everything is full of only His simple Unity, Blessed be His Name.

He negates in his heart with complete nullification and does not pay attention at all to any power or will in the world. And he subjugates and attaches the purity of his thoughts only to the Master who is One, Blessed be He. So will G-d fully provide that automatically all the powers and wills in the world will be nullified from upon him so that they cannot harm him in any which way...

And also, firmly believing this, one is able to affect matters and cause wondrous miracles that are the opposite of the order of nature, since he subjugates and attaches the purity of the faith of his heart in truth without

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Avrohom Ebstein
Guaranteed Salvation
Rabbi Daniel Coren
Light Within the Darkness
Rabbi Binyomin Pruzansky
Letters to Heaven
Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi
What Have You Acquired?

DEDICATIONS

L’iluy Nishmat

R’ Elchonon Yaakov z”l ben R’ Shmuel
Pinchos
Manish ben Esther
Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov
Bechor ben Rivkah
Shlomo Zalman ben
R’ Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi
Esther bat
haRav Avraham Halevi zt”l
Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber
Miriam bat Yeshayahu
Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim
R’ Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok
L’refuah Sheleima
Deena bat Shoshana
Chaya Raizel bat Dena
Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva
Reuven ben Rochel

faltering, placing it only in G-d. And to Hashem, everything is equal every moment, to effect along the order of nature that is established or the opposite of the order of nature.

The Rashba commenting on the above Gemara mirrors this sentiment of the Nefesh HaChaim, adding, “One who attaches himself to Hashem will not experience any harm, for he raises himself up on High to the spheres of Heaven, and nothing below existing in this physical world can rule over that which exists in the realms of Above.” When a person truly ingrains this belief into his heart, he lives on an entirely different plane of existence. He doesn’t believe in the power of other people and is neither scared of them, for he clearly knows that the entire world is only and purely a manifestation of Hashem and Hashem only. With this in his mind and heart, it is as if all the happenings of this world are null and void, and resultantly—as the Nefesh HaChaim emphasizes is the power of this segulah—such human and physical forces hold no sway or any influence whatsoever over the person.

When one finds himself in a difficult situation, turning one’s mind and heart to this profound concept can be literally life-altering.

This is the meaning of the Mishnah. Moshe Rabbeinu’s hands were not what brought about the Jewish people’s success over Amalek. Rather, they inspired and guided the Jews to attach their hearts and minds to Hashem Above, and firmly ingrain that it is only Hashem’s power that exists in the world. It wasn’t that Amalek themselves had power and decided to attack the Jewish people. Rather, Hashem brought Amalek against the Jewish nation for the purposes of stirring them to change their ways. Before, the Jewish nation had asked, “Ha’yeish Hashem b’kirbeinu

im ayin—Is Hashem in our midst?” The antidote to rectifying this questioning notion was to establish that there is nothing other than Hashem. Thus, the assault of Amalek and the subsequent guidance of Moshe Rabbeinu to direct their hearts to believe ‘Ein od mil’vado’—that Hashem is the sole power in the world—was the rectification.

Imagine a couple of boys playing together when suddenly one boy calls out, “I’m coming after you!” Hearing this, the other boy quickly runs home and heads right into the arms of his father. Once there, protected by his father, the boy knows that his friend stands no chance of harming him. However, as soon as the boy returns outside and is out of his father’s sight, he runs the chance of his friend catching up to him again. The same is true with us and Hashem. Wherever we find ourselves, Hashem is the place to run. When our focus is attached to Him, no one can hurt us.

The story is well known of the Brisker Rav at the time he fled the Nazis. Moving from checkpoint to checkpoint, he had instructed his family to saturate their thoughts with the fact of ‘Ein od mil’vado.’ They had continued to make their way, until abruptly, a Nazi guard caught up to them. Immediately, the Brisker Rav knew the reason: his mind had momentarily diverted from concentrated thinking on ‘Ein od mil’vado.’ Recognizing this, he regained his focus and strengthened himself, and the Nazi guard left them alone.

Integrating the thought of ein od mil’vado is a true and tried practice, stemming back years upon years.

A store owner once caught news that the town’s tax collector would be going from store to store, inspecting and ensuring that each business owner had paid their due taxes. Knowing that the tax collector would unfairly

press the owner to pay much more than required, he sought the Beis HaLevi’s counsel. The Beis HaLevi, recognizing the trouble the owner found himself, headed to his seforim shelf and pulled out the sefer Nefesh HaChaim. And there, for the next two hours, the Beis HaLevi and the owner sat together and engrossed themselves in learning the section about ein od mil’vado, going over and over it, again and again.

Two hours later, there was a knock at the door. It was the store owner’s wife. “They left,” she said. The taxi collector had been going from house to house, and placed a red mark on the owner’s door before he and his the other collectors headed to a lunch break. When they returned, they noticed the red mark, and mistakenly thought that this had been the last house they checked. In fact, however, they had never gone inside and it had been the first house they wanted to check when they returned from lunch. Miraculously, the store owner was spared any issues whatsoever.

A twenty-three-year-old young man by the name of R’ Chaim was one of many who had been picked up by the Nazis and charged with various allegations. Faced with this difficult predicament, what came to mind was what he learned at age seventeen. In just a few minutes he would be speaking to the Nazi officials; what could he possibly do or say? Knowing that no argument would be convincing enough to spare him a terrible end, he asked for five minutes alone. They were granted.

For the next five minutes, R’ Chaim deeply engrossed himself in thoughts of ein od mil’vado. Turning to Hashem, he ingrained into every fiber of his being over and over: “I know there is no oth-

er power than Hashem. I know these Nazis have no power. It is only You who have any power in the world, and when I completely connect myself to You, You are there to save me." For those five minutes, R' Chaim's focus was completely riveted to these thoughts.

When the time had ended, he returned to the Nazi official, who looked him square in the face. "You remind me of my son," said the Nazi. "I can't bring myself to shoot you. Get out of here quickly!" And with that, R' Chaim ran away and his life was spared.

Such is the power of *ein od mil'vado*. When we attach ourselves to Hashem, we connect ourselves to the ultimate conduit of blessing and channel Heavenly salvation in ways that are truly wondrous and life-saving.

Rabbi Daniel Coren

Light within the Darkness

The eighth, ninth and tenth of Teves are known as three 'Days of Darkness' in the Jewish calendar, and are intended to be three days of fasts. (As fasting for three days can be a danger to one's health, one day—the 10th—is designated as the day to fast). Though the darkness is truly an entranceway to light, these days find a unique place in the annals of Jewish history. On the 8th of Teves, seventy-two Sages were taken into seventy-two different rooms and forced to translate the Torah into Greek, known as the Septuagint (Megillah 9a). The translation of the holy Torah into a foreign language cast a shadow of darkness upon the world, particularly since Greek culture, lifestyle and literature emphasized physicality and hedonism. In addition, the tenth of Teves is well known to be the day in which the armies of the Babylonian ruler Nevuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem.

What about the 9th? This is a day shrouded in more mystery.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580:2) interestingly notes that we do not know what ca-

lamity occurred on the 9th of Tevet. However, various reasons are given by a number of commentaries. Firstly, it is the *yaartzeit*, or day of passing, of Ezra HaSofer and some say Nechemia (see Mishna Berura, Magen Avraham, *ibid.*). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 21b) states that Ezra was so great that had he lived before Moshe Rabbeinu, the Torah would have been given through him.

A second reason advanced is that pope Simon Peter, known as Shimon Keifa and author of the liturgical poem *Nishmas* recited on Shabbos and Yom Tov, passed away on the 9th of Tevet. Shimon Keifa was sent by the Jewish community on a mission to infiltrate Christian communities and alter the Christian doctrine to become distinct enough from Judaism so that its proselytizing goals would be focused on non-Jews and not Jews.

A third reason given by the Rama in his commentary *Mechir Yayin* to Megillas Esther is that Esther was taken to the palace of Achashveirosh on the 9th of Teves. Lastly, the leader of Christianity was born on the 9th of Teves (Tosafos Chadasim, commentary to Megillas Taanis).

Taking all the above into a collec-

tive perspective of the 9th of Teves and its surrounding 8th and 10th of the month, we draw the theme that these "Days of Darkness" contain an element of unknown mystery and lack of clarity to them. 'Darkness' reflects an absence of transparency and understanding. It may be that we don't understand a fact or we don't understand why something is happening. How, in example, could Christianity originate with a Jew? How have we gone through so many exiles and persecutions? In life, we have questions. But such questions form the rhetorical answer. Darkness, or the lack of clarity, is endemic to the very experience of exile.

Yet, throughout all this darkness and particularly because these days contain so much of it, this time of year carries the greatest potential for that much more G-dly light to enter our world and lives.

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Rabbi Binyonim Pruzansky

Letters to Heaven

Our Parsha opens by telling us that Yehudah approached Yosef in the aftermath of Yosef taking Binyamin as a slave. At this point, Yehudah was unaware that behind all of this was none other than Yosef, his very own brother, Yosef. As such, “Yehudah came close to Yosef.” For what purpose did he “come close” (‘Vayigash’) though? The Midrash answers that word ‘Vayigash’ either refers to Yehuda approaching Yosef in order to “fight” or for “prayer.”

It makes sense why Yehudah would approach Yosef to fight, but what does it mean that Yehudah came close to Yosef for prayer?

The Nesivos Shalom explains that “coming close” in the context of prayer does not refer to Yehudah and Yosef, but rather Yehudah and Hashem. The opening Pasuk is therefore not referring, in this interpretation, to mean that Yehudah approached Yosef, but rather that Yehudah approached Hashem regarding the difficult situation he and his brothers were in.

Whenever a person finds themselves amidst a trying circumstance, Hashem is the place to turn. As the next words of the Parsha state, Yehudah uttered the words “Bi Adoni—Please my Master.” Bi, however, also means “In me.” At a time of challenge,

Hashem—your Master—is within you. During those moments, the closeness that can be experienced with Hashem is that much easier to access. It is certainly a prayer that comes from deep within and feels as if one is fighting a battle, given the energy that must be expended and the odds one might be facing. Yet, within all of this, Hashem is there with us.

Our prayers at this current time have taken on sentiments of ‘prayers of war.’ Not just because we are davening for relief and salvation from our enemies and an end to the difficulties we are in, but because our prayers stem from the depths of our heart and everything we have is poured out, much akin to the heart and seriousness we approach the physical battlefield with.

Rabbi Tuvia Steinhardter recounted how a class of elementary boys recently got off the bus, and amongst many of the boys, one of them was holding a siddur. The odd thing was that the boy was in primary school, and much too young to read by himself. “Yossi,” called out one of the teachers, “what are you up to?” “I’m davening Rebbe!” The Rebbe was moved. “You know how to read from a siddur?” “No...” replied Yossi. “But I do know many of the letters and I know the tunes. So I’m saying some of the letters out loud to

some tunes, and I’m davening!”

With these letters put together, Yossi’s words certainly traveled to the heavens.

Such a recent story is a throw-back to a story of a few hundred years ago, when Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev noticed a farmer who had come to shul on Rosh Hashanah. He had no idea how to daven, and yet he still opened and prayed from a siddur. When asked what he was doing, he replied, “I don’t know how to read the words, but I do know the aleph-beis. And so, I am reciting the aleph-beis, and telling Hashem, ‘Please take all the letters I am reciting and combine them together to create words that will be favorable to You.’” These words of this simple farmer averted a harsh decree which had been written in Heaven, said Rav Levi Yitzchak.

A story of hundreds of years ago hasn’t stayed as a story of the past. It has found its way into our Jewish world from our Jewish children. Truthfully, we all carry this ability. Wherever we are and whoever we are, what we say—no matter what it might be—reaches the highest of Heaven.

Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi

What Have You Acquired?

Chacham Ovadiah Yosef zt”l used to say, “Chochma kanitah, mah chasarta; chochoma chasarta, mah kanita—If you acquired wisdom of the Torah, what are you missing; and if you are missing

wisdom of the Torah, what did you acquire?” Embellishing upon this thought, Chacham Ovadiah cleverly explained the double entendre. When someone is knowledgeable in Torah, they will be missing the ‘what’ from their life. They will know

the answers to many questions in Torah and halacha and will not need as frequently to ask ‘what’ to do. On the other hand, when lacking Torah knowledge, they will be missing information and will have acquired the need to ask ‘what’ of others.

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 10 Tevet)

עידן בן דלית (שתיו)	יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)	אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי)	אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
עמירם בן שרה (קופר)	יורם בן בלה (מצגר)	אנדריי בן יבגניה (קוזלוב)	אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
עמית אסתר חיה בת אילנה אלן (בוסקילה)	יצחק בן אנטה (אלגרט)	ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)	אברהם גלעד בן ליאת (מונדר)
עמרי בן אסתר ורה (מירן)	יצחק בן גילה (גלרנטר)	אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	אגם בת מירב (ברגר)
פרננדו סימון בן טניה (מרמן)	ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס)	אריאל בן שירי (ביבס)	אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי)
צחי בן דבורה (עידן)	כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)	בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)	אוהד בן אסתר (יהלומי)
קית' שמואל בן גלדיס (סיגל)	כרמל בת כנרת (גת)	גד בן שרה (חגי)	אור בן טלי (לוי)
קרין בת אירינה (ארייב)	לואיס נורבטו בן נורה (הר)	גד משה בן שרה (מוזס)	אורי בן עינב (דנינו)
רום בן תמר (ברסלבסקי)	ליאור בן מיכל (רודאיף)	גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)	אוריאל בן נעמי (ברוך)
רומי בת מירב (גונן)	לירי בת שירה (אלבג)	גלי בן תמר (ברמן)	אילן שלמה בן מרים (וייס)
רון בן חנה (בנימין)	מישל בן סולמירה (ניסנבאום)	דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	איתי בן אורית (סבירסקי)
רן בן טלי (גואילי)	מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)	דולב בן יעל (יהוד)	איתי בן חגית (חן)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)	מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)	דורון בת סימונה (שטיינברכר)	איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
שגיא בן נעמית (חן דקל)	מתן בן ירדנה (צנגאוקר)	דניאל שמעון בן שרון (פרץ)	איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס)	נדב בן חנה (פופלוול)	דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבע)	אלון בן עידית (אהל)
שלומי בן רוזיטה (זיו)	נועה בת ליאורה (ארגמני)	דרור בן דורית (אור)	אליה בן סיגי (כהן)
שלמה בן מרסיל (מנצור)	נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)	הירש בן רחל (גולדברג פולין)	אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	נעמה בת איילת (לוי)	זיו בן תמר (ברמן)	אליהו יעקב בן הדסה עדי - נעדר
תמיר בן יעל (אדר)	עדן בת שרית (ירושלמי)	חיים בן נחמה (פרי)	אליקים שלמה בן אבישג (ליבמן)
	עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)	חן חנן בן ורד (יבלונקה) - נעדר	אלכס בן אוקסנה (לובנוב)
	עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)	טל בן ניצה (שוהם)	אלכסנדר ששה בן ילנה (טרופנוב)
	עומר בן שלי (שם טוב)	קורנגולד (יאיר בן רות אדית (הורן)	אלכסנדר בן נינה (דנציג)
	עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה)	יאיר בן פלור (יעקב)	אלמוג בן אורית (מאיר ג'אן)
	עידו בן כוכבה (קלדרון)	יגב בן אסתר (בוכשטב)	אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי)
	עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)	יהודית בת מרילין (ויינשטיין)	אלעד בן חנה (קציר)
		יוסף בן חנה (שרעבי)	אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)