

פ' בשלח תשפ"ד

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SPIRITUAL DANGER GREATER THAN PHYSICAL DANGER

“Hashem did not lead them by way of the land of the Plishtim for it was near, because Hashem said, Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt” (13:17)

This *possuk* teaches us that spiritual dangers present a greater threat than physical ones. The journey through the wilderness would definitely be longer and fraught with dangers and difficulties, whereas the shortcut through the land of the Plishtim would have been quicker and easier. Nevertheless, Hashem did not lead them through that route so that they would not be exposed to the spiritual danger of that environment, fail the test, and then seek to return to the *tumoh* of Egypt.

When the Brisker Rov was in Vilna at the beginning of World War Two, he had to choose between the options of travelling to *Eretz Yisroel*, on the one hand, which at that stage was relatively safe in spiritual terms, but was subject to the threat of Hitler’s armies who were already stationed in Egypt, and the United States, on the other hand, which was considered completely safe physically speaking. He resolved his doubts on the basis of this *possuk*, which makes it clear that it was preferable for the Jewish nation to take a major detour thereby traversing a dangerous location rather than taking a much shorter route and becoming exposed again to the *tumoh* of Egypt. The Brisker Rov reasoned that he preferred the physical dangers of living in *Eretz Yisroel* to the dangers that would be posed to his children’s education in America.

This principle can in fact be derived from an explicit *gemoro* (*Bovo Basro 57a*), which states that someone walking where there is immorality, even though he closes eyes and does not look, if there is a *darka acharino*, a different route, is considered wicked for not taking that route and exposing himself to spiritual danger.

If a person is offered a lucrative job position involving spiritual dangers, such as an immoral or irreligious work environment, he must be aware of his or her obligation to look after one’s *ruchniyus*, and rather take up a position in a place where no such spiritual dangers prevail, even if it pays less. Hashem will be sure to take care of this person’s material needs too, and he will surely not lose out financially from whatever sustenance has been decreed for him in Heaven by running away from a place of spiritual danger.

On the topic of faith and *parnosso*, Rav Sternbuch says that he has had the merit of being *meshamesh* many *gedolim* and *tzaddikim*, and he was asked what set the Brisker Rov apart from other *gedolim*. Rav Sternbuch answered that the Brisker Rov’s level of faith and trust in Hashem was unsurpassed. He was very particular not to make any unnecessary *hishtadlus*, and was always worried about whether a certain act might constitute a lack of *bitachon*.

The Brisker Rov once told Rav Sternbuch that a wealthy person had approached him with an offer to support his *Kollel* for an entire year, but he had declined the offer stating that he did not want to forego the spiritual benefit of strengthening his level of trust in Hashem and praying to Him that came with the uncertainty of not knowing how he would finish the month.

NO SHORTCUTS

“Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt. And Hashem led the people around by way of the desert” (13:17-18)

Egypt was the source of heresy and immorality, and the exodus from Egypt involved abandoning the *tumah* of Egypt in preparation for *matan Torah*. In every generation anyone who repents undertakes his own private *yetzias mitzrayim* from the *tumah* of his previous deeds.

When someone wants to become a *baal teshuva* he may *reconsider when he sees war*, the battle which he has to fight against the evil inclination, he may then change his mind about changing his lifestyle and revert to his private “Egyptian” way of life. That is why *Hashem led the people around by way of the desert*. One cannot take a shortcut all in one go. *Teshuva* has to be undertaken gradually. If one takes the roundabout route, one will not be frightened by seeing the distance that still has to be covered.

On the other hand, although this is the general rule, each individual should assess his own level, and if he feels capable of accepting the yoke of Torah completely in one go, he should do so, based on the guidance of *gedolei Torah*.

WILLPOWER

Hashem knew that the nation would not be able to withstand the test of passing through the land of the Plishtim, and therefore prevented them from being exposed to this trial. The late Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehudah Segal, said that this teaches us that if a person is subjected to a test it necessarily means that he is capable of withstanding it, because Hashem does not subject anyone to a test which he cannot withstand.

This thought should serve as an inspiration whenever one is faced with a trial. Even if a person feels that it is beyond his abilities to withstand a certain trial, he must take into account the divine assistance enjoyed by someone who exercises willpower to overcome his evil inclination. Those who are tenacious are rewarded with *siyata dishmaya*.

MAINTAINING STANDARDS

“And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him” (13:19)

Moshe kept Yosef’s bones “with him”, so that they could serve as an example for all future generations. They served as a reminder to the nation of how Yosef, despite having lived among a people steeped in immorality, and reaching the position of viceroy, nevertheless maintained his high moral standards all the time, despite all the trials he faced. We too are expected to keep the Torah and maintain our high standards in every situation in which we find ourselves, even when surrounded by people whose conduct is very far removed from those standards.

In addition, the Torah is intimating the following message. Yosef *hatzadik* served Paroh faithfully, making sure there was enough food throughout the years of famine and even subjugating the property and the very bodies of the Egyptians to the King. Yosef’s descendants were entitled to assume that they would always be treated well, since the King, or any of his successors, would not dare to forget what Yosef had done for the nation. However, they were

quickly disillusioned, and as soon as Yosef died, the process of persecution set in. Thus, Yosef's bones were to serve as a reminder not to put our trust in anyone except Hashem.

BELZER REBBE SPEAKS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

"Then Moshe and the Bnei Yisroel sang this song to Hashem" (15:1)

Rav Sternbuch heard from someone who was present there about the first *tish* held by the late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, when he came to *Eretz Yisroel*. The Rebbe asked how Moshe and the whole nation could have sung the *shiras hayam* joyfully after the majority of the nation had died during the plague of darkness.

He answered that someone who lives with faith in *techiyas hamesim* knows that this world is only a temporary passage, and he will meet his relatives in the eternal afterlife. Such a person's sorrow upon the passing of his relatives is not eternal. Hence, since the Jewish nation believed in *techiyas hamesim*, they could sing the *shiras hayam* joyfully, and that is what *Chazal* mean when they say that this *possuk* is the source of *techiyas hamesim* from the Torah (*Sanhedrin* 91b).

The Rebbe offered words of encouragement to those present and added that although his family members and thousands of his followers had been killed, since we believe in *techiyas hamesim* we must strengthen ourselves and joyfully sing to Hashem, thank Him for having been saved, and continue our *avodas Hashem* with joy and gratitude. Rav Sternbuch heard that the Rebbe's fortitude and personal example had a profound effect on his followers.

NO GRABBING

Whoever gathered much did not have more, and whoever gathered little did not have less; each one according to his eating capacity, they gathered (16:18)

When Rav Sternbuch was a child, Rav Elchonon Wasserman once came to his family for a Shabbos meal. Rav Sternbuch's mother, who had been widowed with nine young children, asked Rav Wasserman, "I have to have trust in Hashem, but, on the other hand, I have to make a living to support my children, and doing that takes up a lot of my time. How much time should I allocate to educating my children, and how much time to making a living?"

Rav Elchonon told her that although he could not give her exact instructions, one thing was for sure: having *bitochon* includes the conviction that it is not possible to "grab" anything of material value in this world, and someone who imagines that by working harder he will earn more, and be happier, is only deluding himself. A person who exerts himself too much in his efforts to make a living, even if he gains money in the short term, is likely to lose it in the future through expenditures such as medical expenses or bills for burst pipes, for example, which will "balance out" his previous "gains." In reality, his "grabbing" gets him nowhere.

Whatever is meant to be his, will become his in any case, and the main thing is to always bear in mind that we are on the way to eternal existence and have to prepare ourselves for that, instead of trying to grab some illusory transient benefits. Rav Elchonon concluded by telling Mrs. Sternbuch that she should do whatever she had to do to make a living, without forgetting that her main duties were always in spiritual matters, in leading a life of Torah, and in educating each child in the path of Torah each and every day.

HOLY PARNOSSO

“Take one jug and put there an omerful of *mon*, and deposit it before Hashem to be preserved for your generations” (16:33) Rashi: “And deposit it before Hashem: Before the *oron hakodesh*”

Since the purpose of preserving the *mon* was “in order that they should see the bread that I fed you in the desert” (16:32), we would have expected it to be placed in a public area such as the *azoro*, not in the *kodesh hakodoshim*, to which no one had access except the *kohen godol*. Rashi (16:32) does note that, when necessary, for example in the days of Yirmiyohu, the jug of *mon* was taken out to show the public, but the question still remains why it was permanently stationed in the *kodesh hakodoshim*.

The *mon* symbolizes how Hashem takes care of a person’s sustenance. The jug of *mon* was to be kept in the *kodesh hakodoshim* to serve as a reminder for future generations that material matters such as reasonable efforts to make a living, and eating, do not contradict our efforts to become and remain holy. On the contrary, if done properly, a person engaging in these activities can become so sanctified that he is considered to be dealing with the Holy of Holies. Everything depends on a person’s intentions and thoughts, on the extent to which he places his trust in Hashem, and seeks to give pleasure to Hashem, Who has commanded us to look after our physical sustenance.

The location of the *mon* also reveals to us how dear and important the *parnosso* of every Jew is in Hashem’s eyes.

On *erev Yom Kippur* after *mincha* a lot of people would come to receive a blessing from the Chazon Ish. One year one of the visitors came to ask for a blessing and the Chazon Ish asked him how it was going with his *parnosso*. The visitor replied, “Rebbe, I’m not thinking about *parnosso* now before the Day of Judgment”, but the Chazon Ish responded that on the contrary, when he was in the *kodesh hakodoshim* one of the things the *kohen godol* prayed for was for *parnosso* for *yidden*, because it is very important in Hashem’s eyes, and that is why he was asking about this on *erev Yom Kippur*. The visitor was amazed by the depth of the Chazon Ish’s thought processes.

In another incident, someone told the Tchebiner Rov that he wanted to fire some employees who were *mechalelei Shabbos*, and hire Shabbos observers instead, but the Tchebiner Rov told him that taking such a step would be a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, because a person is dependent on making a living for his subsistence, and since we are obliged to at least sustain the employees’ young children who have not sinned, he was not entitled to fire them, and thereby expose their families to a dangerous situation.

Chazal say that a person’s sustenance is more difficult than *kriyas yam suf*. Clearly, Hashem is as concerned with the *parnosso* of a person as He is with his spiritual needs, and we too must be concerned about meeting our fellow Jew’s material needs.

DISEASES

“If you vigilantly obey the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and do what is upright in His eyes, hearken to His commandments, and preserve all His statutes, then every sickness that I brought upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am Hashem Who heals you” (15:26)

A well-tested secret for being saved from misfortunes is to say at the end of every prayer three times with concentration (before *yiheyu lerotzon imrei fi*): “I believe with complete faith that there is no nature or coincidence in the world at all, and everything depends

on You alone, and therefore I turn to You specifically to save me in Your kindness”. Every day a person should give at least 18 NIS to charity and say: “Just like I am giving charity, so too in Your great kindness perform kindness with me, and save me from this misfortune”, and if he is suffering from great misfortune, he should add “and if You will save me, I will say *Nishmas* when I will be saved”, and he should do so, and be saved.

It says “From where [*me’ayin*] shall my salvation come” (*Tehilim* 121:1), and the commentators explain that when a person feels that the only source of his salvation is from Hashem, and from nowhere else [*me’ayin*], then his salvation will come, because he sets his eyes only on Hashem.

We have a tradition that someone who says *asher yotzar* with concentration every time, and especially when mentioning Hashem’s name in that blessing, will be saved from all diseases.

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky related that he heard from his grandfather that it had been revealed to him in a dream that a great *segula* for meriting cures for diseases is to prepare one’s house already by Friday morning, making it beautiful for the honor of Shabbos, with the table covered with a tablecloth *lichvod* Shabbos, and the wine and *challos* ready.

SHIDDUCH FOR A BEN TORAH

“*And the people quarreled with Moshe, saying, Give us water that we may drink, and Moshe said to them, Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Hashem? The people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moshe*” (17:2-3)

The *Chiddushei Horim* notes that it first says “Give us water that we may drink” and only then “the people thirsted there for water”. He deduces from this that they asked for water to drink even before they were thirsty, being worried about the future, and Moshe responded that instead of worrying about the future, they should rely on Hashem to provide them with water even in the barren desert (see Rashi on 17:2). The *Chiddushei Horim* adds that the very act of having asked for water to drink instead of trusting Hashem actually caused the situation that they became thirsty. If they would have relied on Hashem, instead of worrying about the future, they would have merited receiving water when they needed it, and would not have become thirsty at all.

This is a lesson for every *avrech* that he should not leave his learning due to worries about how he will make a living, but should rather rely on Hashem to provide him with *parnosso* (see Rashi on 16:32 that *bnei Torah* have been promised by Hashem to receive enough sustenance). On the contrary, if he leaves his learning because of worries about the future, he is inviting trouble for himself, because due to his lack of faith he will not merit making a comfortable living.

Rav Sternbuch recalls the time that a young man asked him to ask the Chazon Ish about a *shidduch* that had been proposed to him. The father of the girl in question promised to support his son-in-law comfortably for ten years following the marriage, after which he would open a store for his son-in-law in partnership with another person. The father’s only condition was that his son-in-law was to work in this shop for an hour or two a day in order to ensure the store’s continued operation. That way his son-in-law’s financial future would be secured, without any worries. However, the young man refused this condition, saying that he wished to remain in full-time learning in the long term too. The girl, for her part, said that if the young man specifically wanted to remain in learning his whole life, she was willing to make a

sacrifice for the sake of Torah so that he could remain in learning. Rav Sternbuch asked the Chazon Ish for his opinion about this *shidduch* offer.

The Chazon Ish replied that if this was considered a “sacrifice” for the girl, then she was not an appropriate marriage partner for a genuine *ben Torah*, and the young man should look for a girl who was happy to serve a *ben Torah* and considered it a privilege to be a partner in his Torah, rather than considering his Torah learning to be a loss, and something she had to make a sacrifice for. The young man heeded the Chazon Ish’s advice. He rejected that offer, and Hashem helped him find a wife with no material demands at all, who was happy to become the wife of a real *ben Torah*. She served him all his life and with her moral support he remained a genuine *ben Torah*. In addition, Hashem helped him, and all his material needs were met.

This is an example of someone with genuine faith. Even when faced with a *shidduch* offer to take care of him materially all his life, he rejects it, realizing that it would be at the expense of the Torah life, which he wants in his house. He gives up the offer, and relies on Hashem to find him another *shidduch* more favorable for him in this world and the next.

PREVAILING OVER OUR ENEMIES

“It came to pass that when Moshe would raise his hand, the Jews would prevail, and when he would put down his hand, Amolek would prevail” (17:11)

Rav Zalman Sender Kahana Shapira noted that it does not say, “*when he would lower his hand (yashpil)*”, but rather “*when he would put down his hand (yaniach)*”, indicating that not only when Moshe lowered his hand completely was Amolek able to prevail, but even when he let go a little and did not hold his hands up with all his force, was it considered as if he had dropped his hands completely, and Amolek automatically prevailed.

It says “*ka’asher yarim Moshe*” (literally: “when Moshe will raise” in the future tense), and therefore this *possuk* serves as a lesson for all future generations that we have to remain completely strong in our Torah learning in order to weaken the power of our enemies, because the Torah is a weapon which saves us in each generation, and if we attenuate our learning in any way, we will be unable to resist the Gentiles persecuting us.

Bnei Torah, and especially Yeshiva *bachurim* and *avreichim*, are the real protectors of the residents of *Eretz Yisroel*. Instead of feeling inferior or guilty for not serving in the army, they should feel proud to be *bnei Torah* and a sense of responsibility to act in a way befitting a *ben Torah*. Those learning Torah to their utmost should feel confident that they are protecting the nation — both soldiers and civilians. In fact, by virtue of Torah study, they are ensuring that the entire Jewish population - a sheep among seventy wolves - can remain alive.

Bachurim and *avreichim* should take a positive pride in their Torah learning and to rejoice in the fact that Hashem takes pleasure in their dedication to Torah, which provides “fuel” for the upper worlds, and in the realization that in the merit of Torah studied with sanctity below, the Almighty showers us all with an abundance of mercy.

Through our Torah learning we are protecting the entire Jewish population and preventing many misfortunes and wars. This knowledge will surely make us feel an enormous sense of responsibility to utilize every moment of the day for Torah and *chesed*. Torah learning itself is an immense form of *chesed*, since it protects and saves the lives of our coreligionists.