

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l The Lights of Darkness

Years ago, it was the Shabbos before Purim and my wife and I decided to go away to Monsey for Shabbos. We hadn't been there in a long time, and we'd have a few days away at the home of my friend. It would be a nice time to wind down and not feel the routine, daily pressures and stressors, along with affording us the chance to rejuvenate for the upcoming days of Purim. So we planned accordingly.

My friend lives on a block called Olympia Court. At the time, I didn't know that due to the dense snow, the nearby suburb's electricity had gone out on Thursday and many families decided to make their way to the neighboring area of Olympia for Shabbos.

Shabbos was to start at 5:25, with Mincha at 5:35. My friend began heading out to shul a few minutes early, and I planned on following him shortly thereafter. But at 5:26, the electricity in Olympia went out. At the happening of this, the crockpot turned off, the refrigerator shut off, and sunset was just around the corner. It was a scramble with time ticking, and a desperate effort to set out a few meager tealights began. It wouldn't do the job of lighting up the house, but it was at least something to put out before I needed to leave for Mincha. Eventually, I walked out the front door into the fading daylight, the darkness of the night not far

from covering us all.

It was beginning to dim in shul, though the setting sun was still casting a bit of light through the windows, aside from a couple small lights above the emergency exit powered by battery. In several hours, though, those emergency lights would be off too. And with the electricity down, it also meant no heat. It was one of those moments you think about as a scene in some distant city, yet here it was happening right before my eyes. Total panic could have set in, and there would have been justifiable reason.

But in the forefront of my mind was the fact that it was beginning to feel cold and dark in shul, and we ought to have davened quickly so we could get home before those few tealights burned out. If all the lights went out in the house, we wouldn't be able to see our food, and when you can't see your food, it's not as satisfying (Yoma 74b). I didn't want to think about what Shabbos would be like if the lights wouldn't turn back on at all, especially since we were staying at someone else's house. The last thing I wanted was to mistake one thing for another and end up rolling down the stairs.

The shul davening proceeded exactly the way I didn't imagine it. Nice and slowly it went along, from Mincha to Kabbalas Shabbos. I didn't understand why any shul would want to daven slowly when time spelled the difference between catch-

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ing the last few moments of twilight until nightfall ensued in full swing. But I was wrong.

All the while, I couldn't help but also think about the light that turns on every day and lasts an entire day: the sun. So there I was: standing in shul on the Shabbos before Purim when a buzz usually fills the air and here we were stuck almost in pitch darkness. "Hurry up" wasn't on anyone's mind, as it seemed, and singing Lecha Dodi soon began by the chazzan and the entire congregation as if nothing was happening. I was beyond stunned. Instead of everyone growing agitated and complaining why the electricity went out a minute after Shabbos began and it wasn't possible to set up any electrical or heating system or arrange for a generator or long candles to light up the house in advance, the mood was just the opposite. It would have been easy to whine why Hashem chose to shut off the electricity right as Shabbos began instead of a couple hours earlier! But everyone, contrary to such a reaction, was moving calmly and a soft buzz of excitement permeated the shul.

After we finished Lecha Dodi, someone in the shul began singing Shoshanas Yaakov, a song customarily sang during Purim. Before I knew it, the entire shul was dancing around the bima, as if they were telling Hashem, "You can turn off the lights, but you can't turn us off!" This shul never danced after Lecha Dodi, but tonight was different. Tonight, there was no light and all the reason to dance and show Hashem that no matter what happens, we will still daven and honor Shabbos.

Once Lecha Dodi concluded along with the dancing, I knew that now we'd finally be able to proceed so we could return home and start the meal. But I was terribly wrong. "L'Yehudim Haysah Orah (And for the Jews, there was light)" started to be sung imme-

diately after with equal enthusiasm and fervor, and another ten minutes went by! You wouldn't have believed it unless you saw it. Jews dancing in the midst of a full winter blackout, with not a light in sight and no heating. It was amazing.

As we finally began Maariv, I looked around the room and noticed everyone davening with distinct focus and concentration. I could feel something special going on. And then it registered. "Hashem, I got it," I said to myself. The decree set out in the days of Purim should have certainly been cause for pandemonium throughout the Jewish nation, and yet our response was and still is to cling only closer to Hashem. No matter what, we will never let go of Hashem. My thoughts were confirmed when the last of the Shabbos lights blew out just as we completed the meal. It was a small way of Hashem saying back, "I'm always with you too."

As we wrapped up the evening, I turned to my side and casually remarked, "I don't want to show off, but I know when the lights are going to go back on." Turning to me, everyone wondered when exactly that would be and how I knew. "Tomorrow morning at 6:31," I said. All eyes turned to me confused. What was I saying? "I know what time neitz (sunrise) is tomorrow. At 6:31, the sun will be out and it will be light outside." Every day, guaranteed, Hashem turns the lights on. "Don't worry, because at 6:31, it's going to be bright for everyone." Man-made appliances sometimes work and sometimes don't, but everything Hashem makes works to perfection, without any glitches. The sun cannot turn off. Yes, it may be cloudy, but that doesn't mean the sun isn't shining, and moreover there will still be daylight outside.

Not only this, but that Friday

night, there was a full moon. Snow had covered every inch of the ground and it was cold as can be. But with the reflection of the full moon on the snow, it was lighter outside than inside. Knowing this, we opened the window shades and in came streaming the light from the moon reflecting off the snow.

When the Torah tells us in Parshas Bereishis that Hashem created "two luminaries" (the sun and the moon), it's literal. Hashem created two planets that truly illuminate the world. To take such a remarkable phenomenon for granted is overlooking one of the most basic yet profound processes of this world.

Shabbos morning brought no difference to the cold and dark. If you wanted to appreciate what it meant to have a blanket, this was the day. Without heat, having a blanket was like possessing a precious treasure, and all of a sudden, a simple amenity took on incredible value and benefit. With the refrigerator not working either, we took out all the perishable food and stuck it outside in the snow. All that Hashem created—the sun, the moon, the snow—came into sharp relief as to its magnificent utility and significance. Even if we don't have access to all the many manufactured conveniences that we are so used to, Hashem has prepared everything we need. Whether snow to keep food cold, the moon to brighten the darkness of night or the sun to provide light and warmth, we will be taken care of by Hashem.

But the most significant takeaway of all was witnessing how the community reacted. It was after Mussaf that Shabbos morning when the rabbi of the shul stood up to address everyone. The electricity was still off and it was still cold, but the congregation felt as warm

as any Shabbos, if not even more so. “Tonight,” began the rav, “we’ll be reading the Megillah here.” There was no expectation that the electricity would go on by then, so I couldn’t understand what he had in mind. Until I saw with my own eyes. Flashlights. But not only that, but a house trailer with large floodlights on top and a drove of car with their front lights beaming inside were landscaped all around the shul. It was beyond incredible to see just how everyone pulled together to create not only a workable environment to read the Megillah, but one infused with the full joy and excitement of Purim. It was as if the community was saying, “Hashem, you can turn off the lights and it can be freezing, but no matter what, we are going to read the Megillah in our shul.”

This is Klal Yisrael. And this is what happened on Purim. Ups and

downs and twists and turns occur in life, but this is how we react as Jews. The Gemara (Avodah Zara 3a) says that when Moshiach comes, the non-Jews will ask for an opportunity to perform a mitzvah and earn reward. Hashem will then provide them with the chance to carry out the mitzvah of Sukkah, though as soon as He brings out the sun in its full strength, they will kick the Sukkah and balk at its performance. In the mind of the world at large, performance of a mitzvah should be accessible and possible to observe, as well as forthcoming with its reward. But if its observance is too difficult or restrictive, there is little chance to see it through. To the Jewish nation, however, there is never the thought of disregarding a mitzvah because it is difficult. If it’s Sukkos and it’s hot outside, we don’t get angry. And if it’s cold and dark, we don’t grow irritated. To the con-

trary, we accept it and begin singing and dancing.

In life, from time to time, the lights go out. Things are not exactly the way you hoped or expected them to be. When this occurs, you have two ways to react. You can either kick and ask Hashem why He is doing this to you when you are doing everything right. Or you can turn around and say, “Hashem, You can kick me, push me or throw me around. No matter what you do, I am still going to love You. It doesn’t make a difference. Turn off the lights or make it cold or make it hard, I love you anyway.”

If we have the strength to forge ahead with this attitude in mind, Hashem will surely pave the way for our success. Hashem is just looking to see how we will react. And once we pass that test, Hashem will clear the path for us to reach the great heights we are all striving to attain.

Rabbi Fischel Schachter

My Brother

Rav Yitzchak Veks was once in the midst of attending a wedding when he experienced the pains of a kidney stone and was rushed to the Laniado Hospital in Netanya. After some time, in walked a nurse who was dressed in Arab-like garb. Rav Yitzchak wasn’t sure if she was Jewish or not, though in his estimation he assumed she was Arab.

Her thoughtfulness and attention to his every need went above and beyond. One morning, she approached Rav Yitzchak and mentioned that there had recently been an accident and one of the hospital patients was without Tefillin. Would it be okay if

he borrows Rav Yitzchak’s Tefillin? She would bring it to the other patient and be sure to return it. It was around five in the morning, and her shift was over at nine. By all means, it would be a simple matter for this other man to borrow the Tefillin and for it to be brought back with enough time for Rav Yitzchak to put it on himself.

But as the hours marched on and seven became eight and eight became nine and the Tefillin had still not returned, Rav Yitzchak began wondering what had happened. It was only at eleven o’clock that she returned with the Tefillin in hand. “My shift was over at nine, but then

I noticed that your Tefillin hadn’t yet been returned.” Rav Yitzchak remained listening, wondering all the while why she hadn’t retrieved it from the other patient sooner. “I didn’t want to take it from him earlier,” she continued, “as I could tell how much focus he was having on his prayers. I couldn’t bring myself to disturb him.” The nurse had extended her shift by two hours so as not to disrupt the other man who was davening with sincere concentration.

But there was more. The nurse then began inquiring as to the different customs and practices relating to Tallis and Tefillin, tipping

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off Rav Yitzchak that there was perhaps more to this nurse than he had thought. "Are you Arab?" he finally asked her, uncertain himself at this point. "You don't know who I am?" she replied, surprised herself. "I'm your sister," she offered in response.

And at the mention of this, she began to pull back the curtain on a story that Rav Yitzchak would only hear now for the first time...

Rav Yitzchak's father, Nechemiah Tzvi, had gone by the same of Salish. He had been a Klausenberger chassid and had moved to Netanya. Soon after the war years, the Klausenberger Rebbe moved to Israel, and Nechemiah Tzvi became a close disciple and follower, watching the Rebbe establish, among many organizations, a house for orphans.

It was one year on Pesach that Nechemiah Tzvi disappeared during the Seder. No one in his family knew as to his whereabouts, until he reappeared close to daybreak. He had gone into the orphanage to be a part of the Pesach Seder for the children. They had food and shelter, but something else essential was missing: someone with whom they could recite the Mah Nishtana. And so, one by one, the kids had lined up, eager to recite it. One of the work-

ers suggested that all the children recite it together, but Nechemiah Tzvi was adamant that it be done otherwise. Each child would get to recite it themselves. It wound up taking hours until the Seder concluded, but it had been a Pesach to remember.

When the Klausenberger Rebbe heard of Nechemiah Tzvi's unusual expression of care and sensitivity, he knew he was the man for the job. "You're the perfect person to help raise these children to become upstanding Jewish boys and girls," the Klausenberger Rebbe told him. Indeed, Nechemiah Tzvi rose to the occasion.

"I was an orphan," now interrupted the nurse, interjecting where she came into the story. "I was taken from Yemen and brought to Israel and I had no idea who my father or mother was. But your father took me under his care. For my every need, he was there. So much so that he cared for me through my time in the army, and helped me avoid the combat unit so that I could instead enter nursing school. He even paid for me, which otherwise would have made it too financially restrictive. And I don't know if you remember, but when you were in yeshiva and your other brothers were out of the house, your father would bring home sev-

eral orphaned girls, including myself, and ensure we had a place to eat and sleep. He wanted us to have the feeling of sleeping in a home with a father and mother and make us feel like children again. We also got to see a Shabbos table and experience the joys and delights of Shabbos. So, in fact, I grew up in your house." Rav Yitzchak was taking in every word, an expression of disbelief softening his face.

"When I saw your name now, I knew that I'd do whatever I could to make you feel comfortable."

This nurse, unbeknownst to Rav Yitzchak, was reputed as one of the most committed nurses in the hospital. And here she was, unexpectedly, helping another Jew who needed a little support and a little comfort. But it wasn't just another Jew. It was her brother. The son of a man who had showed her love and care, and now she would do just the same in return.

The kindness of Rav Yitzchak's father would not go unnoticed or unrepaid. Never does a good deed fall into the forgotten blip of history and escape into oblivion. Never. It always remains, floating in the heavens and awaiting just the right person, the right place and the right time to repay the deed and echo for eternity.

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

The Greatest Investment

Going into the judgment of Yom Kippur, Rav Elya Brudny shlita advised that the greatest commitment a married couple can accept upon themselves is to learn two laws from the Sefer Chofetz Chaim (on the laws of Lashon Hara) each day. After Rav

Brudny once related this to a certain group, a man approached him afterwards and said, "Twenty years ago, I heard you say this, and since then my wife and I have been consistently learning the Sefer Chofetz Chaim!"

A few minutes later, a man who had been privy to the conversation

between this man and Rav Brudny remarked, "For many years, I've been wondering how this man's children have developed into such exemplary, G-d fearing individuals in the Jewish community. Now I know. It is thanks to their parents' unyielding commitment to learning from the Sefer Chofetz Chaim and being vigilant with the laws of Lashon Hara." It is truly a sefer that will bring you and your family incredible blessing and salvation.

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 9 Shevat)

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