

פ' ויקרא תשפ"ד

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WAR AND REDEMPTION - THE CURRENT WAR AND *CHEVLEI MOSHIACH* BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF HARAV MOSHE STERNBUCH SHLITA

has just been released in both English and Hebrew editions. The books will be available during the week of Purim at “Bloy”, outside *Shuls* in Yerushalayim and Beit Shemesh.

RACHAMIM GEMURIM

Rav Zvi Kushelevsky’s son was born on Motzaei Shabbos *Vayakhel-Shekolim*. The following morning Rav Kushelevsky paid a personal visit to Rav Sternbuch to thank him for his *brocho*, which he said “had helped a lot”. Rav Sternbuch had been the *mesader kiddushin* at Rav Kushelevsky’s wedding about seven years ago. On that occasion Rav Zvi, who was about 80 years old at the time, and had not been blessed with children from his previous marriage, had been blessed by Rav Sternbuch that he should merit having children from this marriage. Rav Kushelevsky asked Rav Sternbuch on that day to be *sandak*, but Rav Sternbuch said that it would be preferable if he himself – the father of the child - would be *sandak*. In the event, Rav Zvi followed Rav Sternbuch’s advice, but Rav Sternbuch was honored with saying the *brochos* and naming the child.

In his conversation with Rav Kushelevsky, Rav Sternbuch noted that attributing wonderful news such as the birth of this boy to “miracles” is the non-Jewish way of analyzing events. Non-believers are in the habit of attributing events to “freaks of nature” or any other concept that they can concoct in order to avoid attributing events to the Almighty Himself. Our approach is to thank Hashem for all His kindness, to praise Him, acknowledge that everything comes from Him, and to express our gratitude to Him. In a similar vein, Rav Kushelevsky himself at the *Sholom Zochor* expounded the *Chazal* (*Vayikra Rabba* 1:15) that if a *talmid chochom* lacks *da’as*, a carcass is on a higher level than him. The *da’as* in question, said Rav Zvi, refers to living with the constant realization that everything one has is from Hashem, and that Hashem is *rachamim gemurim* (complete mercy).

When Rav Kushelevsky asked Rav Sternbuch that morning for a blessing that his son should become a big *talmid chochom*, Rav Sternbuch responded that that would be up to him, in his capacity as father. The more one invests in one’s child, the greater the chances that he will grow up to be a *talmid chochom*. See also last week’s article: “*Brochos* From A *Tzaddik* Not Enough”.

TAANIS ESTHER

Taanis Esther is not only a fast day, but also a day for prayer *bize’aka*, for crying out to Hashem, i.e. praying wholeheartedly and with great concentration. It is a propitious day for prayer, in which much can be achieved. Therefore, even someone who is not fasting should still pray as much as he or she can.

It is also a day which is “*mamtik*” (literally, “sweetens”) Purim. By praying a lot and fasting just before Purim, we demonstrate in advance that our merriment on Purim is not due, God forbid, to mere levity or lightheartedness. Rather, we are always performing the Will of Hashem: just like we were in control of our emotions and actions on *Taanis Esther* by fasting and praying, so too do we perform Hashem’s Will by being happy, drinking wine etc. on Purim.

When it comes to controlling our emotions and steering them towards *avodas Hashem*, we take our cue from our great leaders. Rav Sternbuch was seven and a half years old when the Chofetz Chaim passed away on a Friday. Rav Elchonon Wasserman was staying with the Sternbuch family at the time. The Sternbuchs had received a telegram telling them about the Chofetz Chaim's passing, but Mrs. Sternbuch decided not to break the news to Rav Elchonon, who had been very close to the Chofetz Chaim, due to the sanctity of the impending Shabbos. However, after *davening* in the Adass Shul in Stamford Hill on Friday night, Rav Elchonon saw the notice put up by the *gabboim* of the Shul announcing the news of the *petiro*. Rav Elchonon was very shocked and turned completely pale, but immediately composed himself because it is forbidden to express, or even feel, sorrow on Shabbos. For the rest of that Shabbos, Rav Elchonon behaved the same way as he did on any Shabbos, smiling, saying *divrei Torah* happily and with excitement, and singing *zemiros*. The time came for *havdolo*. Rav Elchonon recited the *havdolo* with his usual happiness and composure. However, as soon as he finished *havdolo*, he started crying terribly and his whole body shook. His crying went on for hours.

The contrast between Rav Elchonon's complete composure one moment, and his terrible anguish the next moment, left an indelible impression on the young Rav Sternbuch, and served as a lesson and inspiration as to how our monarchs, the *talmidei chachomim*, are not only not controlled by their emotions, but are, on the contrary, in complete control of them, serving Hashem throughout their lives in all circumstances and situations.

DELAYED BY A FUNERAL

The *medrash* says that when a boy first learns to read, we start teaching him *Vayikro*, so that those with a holy unsullied *neshomo* should first be taught the topic of holy *korbonos*. On a plain level, the reason we do not start with *Bereishis* is because if children were first to be exposed to the narrative part of the Torah, they would think that it is merely a storybook without any special sanctity. But when we teach them about *korbonos*, which epitomize *mitzvos* whose reasons we cannot completely understand, they immediately realize that learning *chumash* is about the Will of Hashem, and is a holy endeavor.

Moreover, *korbonos* atone for sins, and a child should be taught from a young age that every person has to give an account for his actions.

Rav Sternbuch had a regular time during which he would walk with the Brisker Rov, and talk to him in learning. Once he came late, and the Brisker Rov asked what happened. Rav Sternbuch replied that it was "just a funeral" that held him up. The Brisker Rov commented that there was no such thing as "just a funeral", since entire worlds are transformed when any Jew passes away. Every Jew is a complete universe in his own right, he is judged for his actions, and receives rewards or punishments commensurate with his actions. The Brisker Rov added that when he was about seven years old his father (Rav Chaim Brisker) taught him that we have to give an account for all our actions. His father told him about *gehenom*, on the one hand, and about the great reward awaiting us for every *mitzvah*, on the other hand.

TEACHER MUST LOVE STUDENTS

Rashi says that *krio'h* is an expression of affection. Since Hashem taught Moshe the Torah with affection, it stands to reason that the transmission of the Torah from *rov* to student should take place in the same manner, and the *talmid* should feel the *rov's* love for him, especially in light of the fact that the *rov's* task is not only to teach his student Torah but also to rebuke him and

demonstrate proper conduct and fear of Heaven. Only if the student feels his *rov's* love will he be willing to accept rebuke from him.

WHO IS A MAN?

“*If a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to Hashem*” (1:2)

The *gemoro* comments on this: "You are called man (*odom*), but idol worshippers are not called man" (*Yevomos* 61a). On a plain level, this means that only Jews who subjugate their desires to do Hashem's Will are worthy of the title "man". Gentiles do not generally do this.

Alternatively, the Jewish nation is one unified unit. Even though we are scattered around the world, when one Jew is in distress everyone shares his sorrow. Similarly, when one Jew speaks *loshon horo* in one part of the world, this weakens the *ruchniyus* of a Jew in another part of the world. Gentiles do not possess either of these characteristics.

Rav Meir Shapira explained that when one Jew commits a crime, all his co-religionists are held collectively responsible for that individual's sin, whereas when a non-Jew commits a crime, it does not occur to anybody to hold all the members of his nation responsible for his actions. For that reason it says "You are called man (*odom* - one man, in the singular)": you are all like one unified body, as opposed to the nations who are *anoshim*, many disparate people.

Rav Sternbuch suggested another explanation of this *gemoro*. When he was living in South Africa, Rav Sternbuch spoke to a large group of distinguished non-observant scientists, and at one stage he spoke about the theory of evolution. The audience expressed disbelief that any intelligent educated person could deny the validity of this theory. Rav Sternbuch responded by citing the above *gemoro* and observing that since non-Jewish scientists claim to be the descendants of apes they, by their own confession, cannot be considered "man", but we, who claim to be the descendants of Odom *Horishon* created by Hashem in the Divine Image, and of Avrohom *Ovinu*, are worthy of the appellation "*odom*".

PRAYER SCENTS

As a burnt offering, a fire offering, with a pleasing fragrance to Hashem. (1:9)

Just like a pleasant scent remains in the air even after the source of that scent is no longer in the room, so too in the case of a *korbon*, it should leave an impression even after its *avodos* have been completed. It is not sufficient for the person offering the *korban* to repent temporarily, but his repentance should remain apparent in the long term as well.

Similarly, *tefillah* takes the place of *korbonos* nowadays, and it is not enough to pray with *kavono*. Instead, the *yiras Shamayim* gained from the *tefillah* should leave an impression on the person throughout the day, even after he has finished his *tefillah*.

RECITING KORBONOS

At first glance it seems surprising that prayer corresponds to *korbonos*, since when sacrificing an animal a person is giving up something, whereas when praying, we are asking Hashem to receive something.

However, both prayer and sacrifices have a common purpose. The *Rishonim* explain that sacrifices teach us that a person has to be willing to dedicate his soul to Hashem, and the soul belongs to Him. Therefore, both prayer and *korbonos* teach us that nothing that we possess can be

considered our own. Not our intellect, our health, our sustenance, the redemption, nothing whatsoever. Everything comes from Hashem.

One of the advantages of reciting *korbonos* every day at the beginning of *davening* is to inculcate the message that we have to be willing to dedicate ourselves completely to Hashem, and that we are completely dependent upon Him for everything. By reciting *korbonos* we gain the appropriate frame of mind for continuing our prayers, and become privileged to have them accepted.

HASHEM'S WILL

Rashi on the above *possuk* says as follows: “*pleasing נִיחוּיָה [This word stems from the same root as the expression נִתְחַת רִיָה, “contentment.” Hashem says: “This sacrifice] gives Me contentment, for I said [My commandment], and My will was fulfilled!*”

This Rashi demonstrates that Hashem’s contentment when we perform *mitzvos* consists in the very fact that we are performing His will, even more than from the fact that we are effecting great *tikunim* (“improvements”) in the upper worlds. Hashem rejoiced that “*My will was fulfilled*”.

The person blowing the *Shofar* in the Brisker Rov’s *minyan* asked him before the *tekios* which intentions he should think about when blowing the *Shofar*. The Brisker Rov replied that he should not think of any “intention” (*kavono*) at all, but only have one thought in mind, “the Almighty has told us: “Blow” (*Rosh Hashono* 16a), and I am blowing in order to perform His Will, to perform the *mitzvah* and to be *motzi* others (to cause others to fulfil their obligation)”.

REWARD FOR SELF-SACRIFICE

And if a person (“nefesh”, literally “soul”) brings a meal offering to Hashem, his offering shall be of fine flour. (2:1) Rashi: With regard to all the sacrifices, which were donated voluntarily, the only case where the possuk states the word “soul” is in the case of the meal-offering. Who usually donates a meal-offering? A poor man. Hashem says: “I consider him to have sacrificed his very soul!”

We see from this Rashi that Hashem considers the poor person’s actions undertaken with much difficulty to be the equivalent of giving up his life for the sake of sanctifying the Divine Name. This principle applies to all *mitzvos*. If someone performs *mitzvos* with difficulty, thereby sacrificing his comfort and desires for the sake of *kevod shomayim*, Hashem considers that person to have given up his life for His sake.

Therefore, if someone learns Torah in poverty, when he could make a living comfortably were he to abandon his learning, the *possuk* considers him and his wife to be literally giving up their lives for Hashem’s sake, and their reward is inestimable.

EDUCATION FOR EXCELLENCE

“For you shall not cause to go up in smoke any leavening or any honey, as a fire offering to Hashem (2:11)

Both the Baal Shem Tov and the Chido expound this *possuk* as follows. Leaven, which causes dough to rise, and honey (or sweet fruit: see Rashi *ibid*), which is sweet, both symbolize pride, and are forbidden to be used in *korbonos*, but the beginning of the next *possuk* says: “You shall bring them as a first [fruit] offering to Hashem”. When you first embark on your *avodas*

Hashem, do not be humble, telling yourself you are worth nothing, and not capable of achieving anything, lest this become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, have positive pride, be aware of your strengths, and aspire to greatness. Leave your humility for when you have started to realize some of your potential for greatness.

Teachers who tell students that they are not cut out for learning are actively responsible for their students' failure and ruining their future. Genuine education consists in encouraging students and getting them to believe that they are capable of succeeding in their *avodas Hashem*, if they only try hard enough.

STICKING TO HALOCHAH

For you shall not cause to go up in smoke any leaven or any honey as a Fire offering to Hashem (ibid)

The *Braiso* says that if a small portion of honey would have been included in the offering, its pleasant smell would have been unbearably intense, and the reason that honey is not added is because the Torah says "For you shall not cause . . .". Why did the Tanna of the *Braisa* see fit to talk about the wonderful fragrance the *ketores* would have had were it not for the prohibition of the Torah? This teaches us, says Rav Avraham of Chechnov, that just like we are forbidden to add anything to the *ketores* even though this would immeasurably improve its fragrance, thus ostensibly constituting a *hiddur mitzvah*, so too, must we not miss any of the fixed times prescribed by *halocho* for reciting *Krias Shema* or *tefillah*, however much the extra time afforded by such a delay would increase our concentration and devotion. Our task is to abide by *halocho*, and not be tempted to obtain worthy goals by breaching or circumventing it.

PRAYER DURING TIMES OF TROUBLE

And you shall salt every one of your meal offering sacrifices (2:13)

The Torah commanded us to salt offerings. Since salt possesses the quality of extracting blood from flesh, and since prayers replace offerings, this teaches us that a person praying to Hashem must purify his mind, and concentrate on excluding extraneous thoughts in order for his prayers to be acceptable.

Moreover, just like salt adds taste to meat, and only such meat is fit to be served as a royal dish, so too must *mitzvos* be performed and prayers be recited with taste and fragrance, with enthusiasm and devotion, and not half-heartedly, as if we were discharging some heavy burden imposed on us.

Regarding prayer, the *Shulchan Oruch* rules (*OC* 98: 3): "One must pray in a beseeching manner, like a pauper standing at the entrance, calmly, and so that it should not appear as a burden which he wants to discharge". In other words, one should be in the same state of mind as someone who needs something and has come to the King to make a request, and not to come and pray because one is obligated and merely to fulfil one's obligations, as explained by the *Mishna Berura* (*ibid*, section 9), who adds that one should be very careful about this. The *Beiur Halocho* mentions that according to some *poskim* this intention is mandatory, to the extent that according to them one has to repeat a prayer which is lacking this intention, although in practice the *Mishna Berura* rules that one need not repeat the prayer *bedi'eved* (*ex post facto*).

The Brisker Rov tended towards the opinion that someone praying in a *minyán* which *davens* quickly merely in order to discharge their obligation to pray, even though he himself prays properly by

way of entreating Hashem, nevertheless since the other members of the *minyan* do not pray in this manner, he is considered not to be praying with a *minyan*, because the prayer of the others is not considered a prayer at all.

One must be especially particular during a situation in which the Jewish nation is beset by trouble, and the obligation of prayer is *mide'oraiso* according to all opinions, because even the Ramban who holds that generally the obligation to pray is *miderabanon* (a rabbinic obligation), during a time of trouble he agrees that it is *mide'oraiso*. Hence, one must be particularly careful during such times to pray with the requisite intention and by way of beseeching Hashem, in order not to annul the positive obligation *mideoraiso* to pray.

MRS. STERNBUCH'S PRAYERS

Alternatively, just like salt extracts blood from inside the body, so too must a person reveal his innermost being (the *nefesh* is in the blood), his innermost thoughts and feelings, when praying to Hashem. The *Sefer Chasidim* (s. 130) says that even if a person is not worthy in terms of his actions, if he cries and offers a heartfelt prayer, he will be answered by Hashem.

Rav Sternbuch's mother would pray in *shul* with tears, and so loudly that she would be heard by the entire *shul*, especially when saying "a life in which the love of Torah and the fear of heaven shall be with us" in *Birkas Hachodesh*. Once, some congregants complained to the *Rov* of the Adass Shul in Stamford Hill, London, in which she prayed, Rav Yosef Tzvi Dunner, that Mrs Sternbuch's prayers were disturbing their concentration, and asked him to tell her to either pray more quietly or pray somewhere else.

Rav Dunner responded that a *shul* is designated for prayers with tears and, on the contrary, she was a source of great inspiration and was sanctifying the Divine name with her prayers, showing everybody the power of a Jewish mother's prayer, and how Hashem yearns for and accepts prayers of that kind.

RULINGS OF GEDOLEI YISROEL

"He shall put some of the blood on the corners of the altar which is before Hashem, inside the Tent of Meeting" (4:18)

The *gemoro* says (*Erchin* 16a) that the *ketores*, which was offered up in secret inside the *heichol*, atoned for the sin of *loshon horo*, which is spoken in secret. Similarly, when the elders of the congregation err in a ruling, the blood of the offering must be offered inside in the *heichol*, because lay people are likely to start defaming the *ziknei ho'eido* by unjustifiably finding fault with all their other rulings too. Following along the lines of the *ketores*, which atoned for *loshon horo*, this *loshon horo* too must be atoned for in secret by having blood sprinkled on the *paroches* and on the internal *mizbeach*. This serves as a warning against vilifying the *gedolei yisroel* of any generation by criticising or impugning their rulings. Those guilty of this type of *loshon horo* are committing an especially severe sin requiring special atonement in the *heichol*.

LOANS FOR LUXURIES

"But if he cannot afford a sheep, he shall bring as his guilt offering... two turtle doves or two young doves before Hashem" (5:7)

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira deduces from the wording of this *possuk* that even if he is short of only one *peruto* to buy a sheep he should still bring a *korbon oni* rather than borrowing a *peruto* for the purpose of bringing a *korbon oshir*. If even borrowing a tiny amount for the sake of bringing a superior *korbon* is improper, that must mean that loans are abhorrent.

Couples sometimes take out loans for the sake of superfluous luxuries. If they would be aware of how repulsive loans are in the eyes of Hashem, since often it is not clear how they will be repaid, they would think twice before taking out such loans.