

פ' דברים וט' באב תשפ"ד

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UPDATE

On Monday, Rav Sternbuch asked for the shofar to be blown after *davening*, even though it was *Rosh Chodesh*. After the shofar blowing, Rav Sternbuch said that we have apparently not yet repented sufficiently. Having said that, as I wrote in my email, the atmosphere in Rav Sternbuch's house is calm, as it appears to be in all religious households in *Eretz Yisroel*. In fact, on Rosh Chodesh the Rov encouraged all those present to be joyful. Even in Av one has to be happy on Rosh Chodesh (e.g. one has to have a *seudas Rosh Chodesh*), and even during the Nine Days one has to have a *simcha shel mitzvah*. That *simcha* can also help a person not to succumb to unproductive fear.

This morning (Thursday) an American *bochur* asked Rav Sternbuch whether he should go back to America for *bein hazemanim* or stay here. Rav Sternbuch answered that unless he learns better in America he should stay where he is.

MACHLOKES

And Chatzeros and Di Zohov (1:1) Rashi: "Chatzeros": Concerning the machlokes of Korach and Di Zohov: He rebuked them for the calf they had made as a result of their abundance of gold

The incident with Korach took place after the *chet ho'egel*, so why is this *possuk* not in chronological order?

In each generation, we continue to be punished for the sin of the Golden Calf, and since nothing incurs Hashem's wrath as much as *machlokes*, when the nation repeats that sin which was pivotal in the events surrounding Korach that triggers the ongoing punishment for the *chet ho'egel*. Hence, Moshe *Rabbenu* in his rebuke mentioned the Korach episode before the *chet ho'egel*, since *machlokes* triggers off the punishment for the sin of the Golden Calf.

BIZUY TALMIDEI CHACHOMIM

Alternatively, even though the *chet ho'egel* took place before the events of Korach, the latter were more severe, because whereas only 3000 members of the *erev rav* made the Golden Calf, and the remainder of the nation only danced, Korach and his congregation were joined by 250 heads of the Sanhedrin. Furthermore, someone who disparages a *talmid chochom* becomes accustomed to committing that sin repeatedly, and this is more dangerous than the sin of the Golden Calf, which did not cause a person to become habituated in sin. Therefore, Moshe *Rabbenu* reproved the nation first on account of the events surrounding Korach, because the nation itself stumbled in that sin, and because it was a more dangerous sin.

The *soton* knows how severe a transgression it is to be *mevazeh* a *talmid chochom*, and he therefore acts to incite a person to commit this most serious sin. Being *mevazeh* a *talmid chochom* is tantamount to being *mevazeh* the actual word of Hashem, and someone who commits this sin has the status of an *apikores* who does not have a portion in the World to Come.

The *Beis Halevi* (in *parshas Bo*) writes that just as in the period of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* the Sadducees denied the validity of *Chazal*, so too prior to the coming of *Moshiach* the evil inclination to disparage *talmidei chachomim* will increase greatly. He adds that the Jewish nation will suffer immensely prior to the coming of *Moshiach* from the Sadducees of the final generation who will deny the words of the *chachomim*, and only those who will remain complete in their faith will be privileged to witness the redemption. He concludes by stating that this phenomenon is palpably

evident in his generation and requires no further proof. These words were written more than 150 years ago, and they apply all the more so today.

It says that “He who is *mevazeh* a *talmid chochom*, there is no cure to his malady” (*Shabbos* 119b) and Rav Elyashiv reportedly said that the prevalence of *yene machala* in our generation should be attributed to the proliferation of this sin, either in speech, or when hearing someone else be *mevazeh* a *talmid chochom* and remaining silent.

Conversely, however, it stands to reason that someone who vehemently protests against *bizuy talmidei chachomim* acquires great merits and protection from this disease for himself and his descendants, since Hashem’s trait of beneficence is greater than His trait of punishment.

DO NOT COMPARE

It came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, that Moshe spoke to the Bnei Yisroel (1:3). Rashi: This teaches us that he rebuked them only a short while before his death. From whom did he learn this? From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons only a short while before his death. He said, “Reuven, my son, I will tell you why I have not reproved you during all these years: So that you would not leave me and join my brother, Eisov”

It seems incredible that Reuven would abandon his father’s path, throw away the yoke of Torah, and cleave to Eisov because of words of reproof from his father. Therefore, instead of taking Rashi’s words literally, it may be suggested that what he means is that if Yaakov would have reproved Reuven, Reuven might have comforted himself with the thought that even though he was deficient in certain matters, he was still better than Eisov, and so Yaakov waited to reprove him until shortly before his death, so that he would not compare himself to those around him, but rather know that Hashem expected him to act based on his high level and the education he had received from Yaakov.

Sometimes a person comforts himself with the thought that his conduct is better than that of people in his immediate environment and his friends, but this is a mistake, since every person is judged based on his specific situation, and the special tools with which he has been endowed for his *avodas Hashem*. If a person analyses his thoughts, he will see that deep down he is accustomed to gauge his actions by comparing them to his friends’ conduct. He feels that he is completely righteous compared to his friends. However, our task is to always remember that, in reality, a person has to give an account for his actions based on his specific situation and abilities.

BURDENS

How can I bear your trouble, your burden? (1:12)

This teaches that they were apikorsim (heretics). If Moshe was early in leaving his tent, they would say, “Why does the son of Amram leave so early? Perhaps he is not at ease inside his house?” If he left late, they would say, “Why does the son of Amram not leave? What do you think? He is sitting and devising evil schemes against you, and is thinking up plots against you”

Rav Nachman of Breslov notes that the life of a non-believer is an unbearable burden, because a person’s life is full of trouble and sorrow, and without the support of faith in the Creator and the conviction that everything that happens to us is Divinely decreed, a person does not have the strength to bear his burdens. That is why Rashi explains the word “burden — *massa*” as a reference to *apikorsim* who are filled with heresy and doubt.

However, the Sifsei Chachamim says that “*apikores*” stands for “*afik resen*” (let loose the yoke), in other words someone who throws off the yoke of decrees and restrictions, in this case those enacted by Moshe Rabbeinu. They incited the nation with the claim that Moshe did not have their good at heart, but only wanted to make life difficult for them. In reality, those decrees were designed to restrain their desires. To this day, one comes across people who incite others not to obey *Rabbonim* based on the claim that they are too stringent, and people are not able to bear the burden of their restrictive rulings. People making such arguments are termed *apikorsim* here.

DILIGENCE NOT TALENTS

“Prepare for yourselves wise [chachomim] and understanding men, known among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you” (1:13)

On “*chachomim*” Rashi writes one word: “*kisufim*”, meaning desire and yearning. Moshe *Rabbenu* was looking specifically for wise people with a strong desire to make continuous progress and climb the rungs of wisdom. If a person is satisfied with his current state of wisdom and does not see the need to make any further progress, he cannot be considered truly “wise”.

Hence Ashkenazim refer to all their Torah scholars, even the greatest, as a “*talmid chacham*” and not a “*chacham*”, since even the biggest *chacham* still considers himself to be only a student aspiring to acquire ever more Torah. He always remains within the category of a *talmid*.

A Torah “*chacham*” is not the person born with great intelligence and talents, a born “*lamdan*” who can easily understand what his friend can only grasp after much effort, and does not fulfil his own potential based on his specific abilities, but rather the *masmid* who utilizes every moment of the day to increase his Torah knowledge. His toil and craving for Torah greatness will be crowned with success: he is the type of *chacham* Moshe *Rabbenu* was looking for.

On a related note, someone once came to Rav Sternbuch with his young son to ask for advice on how his son could grow in Torah. To the father’s surprise, instead of suggesting a certain regimen for learning, Rav Sternbuch said, “Your task now is to love Torah, not to pressurize yourself. If you love Torah greatly, you will automatically cleave to it your whole life”.

PROTESTING TRANSGRESSIONS

“Prepare for yourselves wise [chachomim] and understanding men, known among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you” (1:13)

Rashi notes that “*This teaches us that the Jews’ transgressions are hung over the heads of their judges, since they should have protested [against their sins], and directed them along the right path*”. This means that since the judges did not protest, the nation’s transgressions are attributed to them. The *gemoro* (*Kiddushin* 40a) says that “a righteous person who is not good” is “a righteous person who is good to Heaven but bad to his fellow human beings”. If he is bad to his fellow human beings, why is he still termed a righteous person?

“Bad to his fellow human beings” does not mean that his behavior is tainted with bad character traits, but rather that he does not confer spiritual benefits upon his fellow Jews, living the life of a recluse instead, and not bothering to rebuke others and show them the proper path. He does not make the effort to bring those who are far removed from Hashem closer to the Torah path. He is considered to be bad to his fellow human beings, because he is preventing them from receiving the spiritual benefits they are supposed to obtain from him.

Rav Schneider recalled the time when he was living in Memel, a town on the border between Germany and Lithuania, in which the *Haskalah* had created an almost-complete spiritual wilderness. There was, however, one exceptional individual who was a true *tzaddik nistar* (concealed righteous individual). On one occasion, Rav Schneider told Rav Hirsch Levinson, the son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim, who was visiting Memel, about this *tzaddik*. After he met him, Rav Levinson commented to Rav Schneider that this man was certainly a great *tzaddik*, but Memel needed *tzaddikim geluyim* (revealed righteous individuals) to stem the anti-religious tide, and not *tzaddikim* of this kind who had no influence over the population. “And you must be such a *tzaddik*!” Rav Hirsch Levinson told Rav Schneider. Rav Schneider in fact went on to found a yeshivah there, and was very successful in spreading *Yiddishkeit*.

Rav Sternbuch notes that nowadays many people come from overseas to *Eretz Yisroel* for a short period to enjoy the Torah and *chassidus* that abounds here, but many of them do not help us in our struggles to maintain the sanctity of Yerushalayim. A great reward awaits those who do make the effort to protect its sanctity.

TESHUVA MOVEMENT

“Your little ones, whom you said will be prey, and your children, who on that day did not know good and evil, they will go there and I will give it to them, and they will possess it.” (1:39)

Rav Shimon Shkop, speaking in the period before the Second World War, expounded this *possuk* as addressing those who were abandoning the religious path in his generation (Communists, Bundists, Zionists etc.): “You said you would take your children with as ‘prey’ following your mistaken path, but there will come a time when those same children will see the folly of their parents’ path, and “they will go there and I will give it to them and they will possess it”, they will have the merit of returning to the Torah path, inheriting *Eretz Yisroel* and receiving *Moshiach*. Rav Shimon was prophetically predicting the *teshuvah* movement of recent times.

AVOIDING OSTENTATION

“We circled Mount Seir for many days... and Hashem spoke to me, saying, You have circled this mountain long enough; turn northward” (2:1-3)

The *Kli Yokor* writes that during this long exile of Edom, when we have to “circle Mount Seir for many days”, the way to survive is by turning northwards (the root *tzofon* – north - also means to hide), as it says (*D. Rabbo* 1:19), “If Eisov’s hour has come, hide yourselves (*hatzpinu atzmechem*) from him”. This means that we must conceal our successes and not display them to the Gentiles, because doing so will only arouse their jealousy and hatred. He notes that Edom is the most jealous of us, because he considers Yaakov to have stolen the *brochos* from their ancestor *Eisov*. This means that their jealousy and hatred of us is deeply entrenched in their psyche. We should not think that by mimicking their way of life this will cause them to like us, but, on the contrary, that will only have the opposite effect.

The *Kli Yokor* (who lived in the 16th and 17th centuries) bewails the fact that his contemporaries do not comport themselves in accordance with the Torah’s injunction here. To our generation it serves as a warning to avoid luxurious houses, fancy cars or eye-catching clothes. In addition to the personal danger of making themselves susceptible to an *ayin horo*, those who are not careful about these things are also responsible for arousing the Gentiles’ jealousy of us.

RUNNING AWAY TO TORAH

“We circled Mount Seir for many days... and Hashem spoke to me, saying, You have circled this mountain long enough; turn northward [tzofona]” (2:1-3) Medrash: “If you see that Eisov is attempting to provoke you, do not resist him, but rather stand aside, and hide yourselves [hazpinu] from him and run away towards the Torah, because ‘tzofona’ refers to Torah”

Eisov may be taken as an allusion to the evil inclination. Thus, “you have circled this mountain (Mount Seir, which belongs to Eisov) long enough”, you have encircled the evil inclination for too long, run away from it, because it will not succeed as long as you immerse yourself completely in Torah, “turn northward”, hide yourselves in the tent of Torah, because only that way will you manage to be saved from the evil inclination.

Rav Moshe Schneider explained that Torah learning is alluded to here by the phrase “hide yourselves”, because Torah learning has to take place “secretly” by detaching ourselves completely from worldly affairs. Only someone who conducts himself that way can avoid becoming ensnared by the evil inclination. Rav Schneider added that the task of *kollelim* in our age is to act as “cities of refuge” in which men hide away from the scourges lurking in the street. By delving in Torah all one’s interests will be focused on learning.

WORKING WOMEN

When it was brought to Rav Sternbuch’s attention that ladies from chareidi families working in non-religious or semi-religious workplaces were experiencing inroads in their *yiras shomayim* and

tzenius, and some of them were becoming completely irreligious, Rav Sternbuch expressed great sorrow about this, stating that the situation is very dangerous and likely to lead to a *churbon r"l*.

He noted that even the ordinary speech of the irreligious is full of coarse language. Even if the salary at secular workplaces is higher, we must not compare material gain to eternal spiritual reward. It is of the greatest urgency to warn people not to be tempted to enter such work places.

Rav Sternbuch added that some *poskim* say that employers are obligated *halachically* to employ chareidim rather than irreligious people even if the latter are willing to work for less. One should disregard monetary loss, since Hashem repays anyone who acts for the sake of Heaven. (See also *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* 1: 804 and 2:724).

ON EXILE AND REDEMPTION

SORROW OF THE SHECHINA

Rav Y.L. Diskin never went to pray at the *Kosel*, even though he lived near it. Rav Sternbuch heard many years ago from someone who had the merit of attending to Rav Diskin and afterwards to his students, that his students had a tradition that the reason their *rov* refrained from visiting the *Kosel* was that he was afraid of fainting when reaching the *Kosel* due to his great sorrow, and therefore, instead, he would frequently look out of his window to see the *mokom hamikdosh*, which would make him cry.

Tradition has it that when he moved to *Eretz Yisroel* he was on his way to the *Kosel* when he suddenly thought about the great sanctity of the place he was about to visit and about how the holy *Shechina* was in exile and suffering. He started sobbing and felt so unwell that he had to retrace his steps. He did not visit the *Kosel* after that.

How far removed we are from those generations. Due to the great sorrow he felt, Rav Y.L. Diskin did not visit the *Kosel* even on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, whereas today people dance there joyfully, completely forgetting about the sorrow of the *Shechina*. The *Bas Kol* that appeared to the *Shlo Hakodosh* told him that if people would be aware of even a tiny fraction of the sorrow the *Shechina* feels, they would be capable of feeling any joy. What then, can be said of our generation, when most of the nation is far removed from religion, and the irreligious rule over the Holy Land?

UNREVEALED SECRET

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Moshe Schneider that during the period of the Cantonist decrees, when Jewish boys were snatched away from their parents and forced into 25 years of Russian military service, Russian rabbis convened and unanimously agreed that *Moshiach's* arrival was surely imminent. One elderly rabbi, a kabbalist, wanted to announce the date of *Moshiach's* coming based on an allusion by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary on *Safra Deznusa*, where he warns anyone who understands his hint - subject to an oath - not to reveal the secret. The elderly rabbi declared: "I know the secret of the coming of *Moshiach* hinted at by the Vilna Gaon, and according to his calculations that date will not arrive for a while yet, but since currently everybody imagines that his coming is imminent, and when he will not come people's faith will be weakened, G-d forbid, in my opinion the Vilna Gaon would also say that it is a *mitzvah* to reveal the date, and so that is what I will do". At that moment he suffered a heart attack and died in the presence of all the *rabbanim*.

GOG AND MAGOG

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky told Rav Sternbuch that he has a tradition from the Vilna Gaon's students in the name of the Vilna Gaon that the war of Gog and Magog will last only 12 minutes, and during that war a third of the world's population will die, a third will be injured, and a third will

remain unharmed. Rav Sternbuch says that it is the Vilna Gaon was talking about the world's non-Jewish population.

CHILUL HASHEM

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Elyah Lopian who heard from Rav Yitzchak Blazer that when Rav Yochanon said “let him come and let me not see him” (Sanhedrin 98b) he did not mean that he did not want to witness the coming of *Moshiach* because of the physical suffering associated with the birth pangs of his coming. After all, Rav Yochanon himself had endured the passing of ten sons in his lifetime, and so he would certainly be able to endure the physical tribulations of *chevlei moshiach*. Rather, he meant that he would not be able to endure the desecration of the divine name during those birth pangs, such as during the Holocaust when people asked “where is your G-d?”, and during our time when the irreligious rule over the Palace of the King in *Eretz Yisroel* and desecrate it terribly. Rav Yochanon felt that he would not be able to endure such a terrible desecration of the divine name.

MORALITY IN THE GENERATION OF MOSHIACH

The Gerer Rebbe, the Beis Yisroel, told Rav Sternbuch on one occasion that since the main area that needs to be amended in the generation of *Moshiach* is that of morality, he is very stringent about those matters, but he added that he is lenient with regard to repentance for past actions.

HANGING ON

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky once suggested the following parable: People who swam across the Channel separating England from France would be awarded a prize. There was one swimmer who, just before reaching the French side, said that he was so exhausted that he felt he could not swim even one more stroke. People tried to encourage him to work up just that extra bit of energy so that all the efforts he had invested would not be in vain. Similarly, we have suffered so many tragedies during this long exile. All we have to do now is hang on with determination and perseverance, because we are almost there.

TISHA BE'AV

The duty of repenting on *Tisha Be'av* is on the same level as the obligation to fast. Therefore, part of the duty of the day is to engage in introspection and account taking, especially with regard to the sins for which the *Beis Hamikdosh* was destroyed, such as those pertaining to *loshon horo*, which are very prevalent.

We also have to mourn and feel sorrow not only for the absence of the *Shechinah* in a revealed manner in the *Beis Hamikdosh*, but also for the fact that the wicked are reviling and treating the *Shechinah* with contempt.

On the other hand, the reward for *mitzvos* performed during a period of Exile is much greater, because Hashem's expectations of us are less when the *Shechina* is absent. This is especially so during periods of “*hester besoch hester*” (“concealment within concealment”), because keeping *mitzvos* properly in such times is especially difficult.

A great *tzaddik* in the time of the *Tach v'Tat* (the Chmelnitzki Cossack massacres of 1648–49) is said to have promised before he died that when he would get to Heaven he would not rest until Hashem would bring about the final redemption. After he passed away, he appeared to someone in a dream and told him that anyone who lives in *Olam Hazei* cannot imagine what he sees in Heaven. People have no idea of the great reward awaiting those who merit performing any *mitzvah* during a period of *hester ponim* (Hashem hiding His countenance, so to speak). Whatever used to require fasting and mortifications in previous generations, can be attained in later generation by stubbornly

resisting the temptations of each generation with regard to matters of faith and toiling in Torah. Those who are successful in this endeavor climb the rungs of greatness.

ON THE COMING OF MOSHIACH

Whenever people bless Rav Sternbuch that he should witness the coming of Moshiach. Rav Sternbuch responded that a blessing should include the period after the coming of Moshiach too, because the Rambam has ruled that life will continue more or less as it is now. In fact, we especially yearn for that time, because then we will have no worries. One visitor amended his blessing: “May the Rov enjoy a long life also after the coming of Moshiach, and may he become Moshe *Rabbenu*’s deputy!” Rav Sternbuch response to that blessing was: “Oy..., when Moshiach comes, I will run away from Moshe Rabbenu. How embarrassed we will be in his presence!”

Rav Sternbuch once asked one of his congregants how he was doing, and the latter replied, “I’m waiting for Moshiach”. Rav Sternbuch responded, “Are you really waiting for him? You are still preoccupied with your car and your apartment, so your words don’t seem that sincere”.

Rav Sternbuch was once visiting the Brisker Rov when an American visitor told the Brisker Rov that in America people were waiting for Moshiach to come. The Brisker Rov asked him whether people were preparing themselves for this great event. The visitor responded that Moshiach should come already with or without our preparations. The Brisker Rov replied that this would not work. We must start the process of repentance and strengthening our faith now, intensifying our Torah and prayer and working on our character traits so that we will be worthy of welcoming Moshiach and witnessing the unprecedented miracles that Hashem will perform at that time. Even revealed miracles, the Brisker Rov said, will not change a person who is stubborn or steeped in his desires. Someone who is steeped in matters pertaining to *Olom Hazei*, and merely pays lip service to his desire for the coming of Moshiach, claiming that he is waiting for his coming, will be filled with embarrassment and shame when he does come. Good deeds and repentance is what is required, coupled with a real desire for the coming of Moshiach.

Awaiting the coming of Moshiach is a constant theme of Rav Sternbuch’s *droshos*. When he visited the United States several years ago, he made a point of focusing on this topic, noting that it had become neglected, and emphasizing the need to reinforce our yearning for Moshiach.

Rav Pardes, a *Rav* in Chicago, told Rav Sternbuch about a meeting he had with the Chofetz Chaim when Rav Pardes was a young *bochur*. The Chofetz Chaim asked him where he was from, and when Rav Pardes said that he was from America, the Chofetz Chaim asked him whether Jews in America were talking about and awaiting Moshiach. Rav Pardes hesitated about his answer but decided to say “*avade*,” of course they are. The Chofetz Chaim then went to a corner and started crying to Hashem. Rav Pardes overheard him saying the following: “It is one thing for us, who are suffering so much from poverty and other material problems, to yearn for Moshiach, because it could be that we are waiting for him so that he will redeem us from our material sorrows. But even our affluent brethren in America are yearning for him to come. How much longer must we wait?”

The first question we will be asked when in our judgement after 120 years is “*Tzipisa liyeshuah* — Did you anticipate the salvation?” Rav Yechezkel Abramsky notes that we will not be asked, “*Kivisa liyeshuah* — Did you hope for the salvation?” because every believing Jew *hopes* for the redemption. The question we will be asked is whether we anticipated it the same way that we expect someone to arrive for an appointment at a prearranged time. We do not *hope* that the person will arrive; we *expect* him to. Hashem has not revealed a prearranged date for Moshiach to come, but we are meant to hope and wait for him in eager anticipation and expectation.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how after World War II his mother was sure that Moshiach’s arrival was imminent. She refused to wear her best jewelry and nicest dress, stating that those were set aside for when Moshiach would come, and she waited for him every day.

Rav Sternbuch was once speaking to a Rov when he suddenly sighed and exclaimed, “Oy, Moshiach may come already”. The Rov wondered about this statement, saying that surely Moshiach *must* come already. Rav Sternbuch explained his statement by recalling the time that his mother told her father Rav Shlomo Zalman Pines, “Moshiach has to come”, and her father told her off, “How can we say that he has to come, Hashem does not owe us anything. All we can say is “May he come” and if he is permitted to come, he will surely come”.

Rav Sternbuch says *Tikkun Chatzos* throughout the year, but many times he does not say the whole text, but only several chapters of *Tehilim* and the chapters from *Megilas Eich* at the beginning of the *Tikkun*.

At one stage, Rav Sternbuch would get up secretly in the middle of the night to recite *Tikkun Chatzos*. The late Rebbetzen only found out about it because she noticed that Rav Sternbuch disappeared in the middle of the night, and the following morning his clothes were covered with white dust. One night she decided to follow him to see where he was going. To her astonishment, he made his way to the storage room (*machsan*) and sat on a sack of flour to recite *Tikkun Chatzos* far removed from the eyes and earshot of others. However, the telltale white dust gave away the secret.

Many years ago, when Rav Sternbuch was living in the “*Shikun Harabbonim*” neighborhood in Yerushalayim, he confided to a neighbor that he had chosen to live specifically in that neighborhood because the only path to the Old City (at the time) was from the entry route to Yerushalayim, which was close to that neighborhood. This meant that when Moshiach would come, the residents of *Shikun Harabbonim* would be amongst the first to welcome him, and would not have to wait until he entered the other neighborhoods.

Similarly, when Rav Sternbuch moved to the Har Nof neighborhood of Yerushalayim, he said that since Eliyohu *Hanovi* is a *Kohen*, and since the whole of Yerushalayim is full of graves and bones, how will he be able to enter the town? The only option is to pass through the neighborhood of Har Nof, which is built on hard rock, and therefore does not contain any graves. Hence, those living here will merit saying Eliyohu *Hanovi* first.

Shortly before the *Rebbetzen* passed away, some 14 years ago, Rav Sternbuch bought a burial plot for himself and his wife at *Har Hazeisim*. When one of his confidants tried to dissuade him from doing this, stating that it may be difficult to visit graves there because of the security situation, and that it would be better to buy something at *Har Hamenuchos*, Rav Sternbuch responded: “Even if no one comes to visit the grave, the main thing is to merit being buried at *Har Hazeisim* in order to be amongst the first to welcome Moshiach”.

Characteristically, Rav Sternbuch signs off letters with the formula “I am expecting the salvation of Hashem and great heavenly mercies with yearning”.

As the Rambam notes (end of *Hilchos Melochim*) the exact details and chronology of the coming of *Moshiach* and *Milchemes Gog Umagog* are not known. Our duty is to reinforce our fear of Heaven and keep our distance from the forces of *tumoh* until the time that Hashem will reveal His glory (*Teshuvos Vehanhogos* 4:328).

The *gemoro* says that if we will be worthy, Moshiach will come with the clouds of heaven, and if not, he will come as a poor man riding a donkey (Sanhedrin 98a). This means that we will either be on a very high level, with the *Shechina* accompanying us, or on a low level. When the time will come, Hashem will not wait even for a moment, just like in Egypt before the dough had time to ferment Hashem already revealed Himself, and the final redemption will be similar to the first one. May Hashem accelerate the redemption with ease, just like in Egypt (*Teshuvos Vehanhogos* 5:297).

Three years ago, on *Tisha Be'av*, members of Rav Sternbuch’s household noticed that he was talking in learning in the middle of his sleep, and they told him about it when he woke up. Rav Sternbuch responded that he was not able to control his thoughts whilst sleeping [and he was therefore not responsible for the act of learning, which is forbidden on *Tisha Be'av* when one is awake].

May this coming *Tisha Be'av* be a day of joy and redemption, in which it will be a mitzvah to learn during all hours of the day to our hearts’ desire.