

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

העדותי בכנס היום את השמים ואת הארץ ... ובזכות בחיים למען תודה אתה וזרעך ... (ל-ט)

The Russo-Japanese War was fought between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan during the years 1904 and 1905 over rival imperial ambitions in Manchuria and the Korean peninsula. Although Russia suffered a number of defeats, Czar Nicholas II remained convinced that Russia could still win this war if it fought on; he chose to remain engaged in the war and await the outcomes of key naval battles. However, as hope of victory dissipated, he continued the war to preserve the dignity of Russia by averting a “humiliating peace”. Russia ignored Japan's willingness early on to agree to an armistice and rejected the idea of bringing the dispute to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague.

In the end, the complete victory of the Japanese military surprised international observers and transformed the balance of power in both East Asia and Europe, resulting in a decline in the Russian Empire's prestige and influence in Europe. Substantial casualties and losses for a cause that resulted in humiliating defeat contributed to growing domestic unrest, which culminated in the 1905 Russian Revolution, and severely damaged the prestige of the Russian autocracy.

In Poland, which Russia partitioned in the late 18th century, and where Russian rule already caused two major uprisings, the population was so restless that an army of over 250,000 soldiers - larger than the one facing the Japanese - had to be stationed to put down the unrest. Russia had mobilized thousands of Polish reservists during the war with Japan, contributing to unrest, including many Jewish conscripts. Numerous *yeshiva bochurim* were served with draft notices and forced to don a military uniform and fight on behalf of Russia, in a war they knew nothing about. Contemporary reports found that some Polish conscripts refused to serve and preferred death over fighting the Japanese for Russia.

The same year that the Russo-Japanese War broke out, was the final year in the lifetime of the holy **Gerrer Rebbe, R' Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter ז"ל**, famously known as the **Sefas Emes**. Unfortunately, thousands of young *Gerrer chassidim* were conscripted and dispatched to the battlefields of the Far East. In giving them his blessing and advice before they set out, he would begin by quoting a *posuk* in the *Torah* which was part of the announcement made to armies about to march forth: “*Who is the man who is afraid and faint of heart? Let him go and return to his house.*” The *Sefas Emes* gave the *posuk* a non-literal interpretation, however, as follows: “Who is the man who fears Heaven? Let him return in repentance; and then he will certainly return home from the battlefield safe and sound.”

So anxious was the *Gerrer Rebbe* for the welfare of these young soldiers that throughout the time they were at the Eastern front he did not once go to sleep in bed. He chose instead to sleep on the floor, lying on a single garment, which by morning was drenched with the tears he had shed over the anguish of his brethren. And they in turn warmly reflected his faithful attachment to them. From out of the trenches they would write to the *Rebbe* - hasty *shticklach Torah* on fondly-remembered Talmudic themes, and touching descriptions of their daily lot on the battlefields and in the trenches.

One budding *Talmid Chacham* who hailed from Ostrov utilized every hour of respite in his bunker and wrote a long treatise that discussed elements of *Rabbeinu Yonah's Shaarei Teshuvah*. After it reached Ger, his *Rebbe* wrote him a loving reply which opened with the words of the *posuk* in *Parshas Nitzavim*. In the plain meaning of its context, this *posuk* is spoken by *Moshe Rabbeinu*, in which he states: “*This day, I call upon the heaven and the earth as witnesses.*” The *Sefas Emes* was so taken by the incredibly inspirational words of the young *chassid* languishing on the Eastern Front and yet still able to write such a beautiful *shtickel Torah*. He replied in a non-literal interpretation. Instead of the word “העדות” meaning “*witness*,” the *tzaddik* regarded it as if stemming from the noun “עדי” which refers to a valuable ornament. Thus, he wrote, “... העדותי בכנס היום ...” - “*Today, with young scholars like yourself, have I (Hashem) ornamented heaven and earth ... You shall choose life, so that you and your offspring shall live...*”

יקרא לך שם חדש אשר פתח יקבנו ... (ישעי' כב-ב) **A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH BY AN UNEQUALLED HISTORIAN** **תורת הצבי על הפטרות**

Yeshaya HaNavi proclaims that the “*Nations shall see your victory ... and you shall be called by a new name that Hashem shall bestow.*” **R' Yonason Eibschutz ז"ל** wonders about this, and quotes *Chazal* who teach us that in the future, *Hashem* will ask the *Avos* why *Klal Yisroel* should be redeemed, saying “your children are sinners.” While *Avraham* and *Yaakov Avinu* offer varying excuses, *Yitzchok Avinu's* answer is perplexing in that he “reproaches” *Hashem* and counters that *Klal Yisroel* are not just his own children, but rather we are the children of *Hashem* as well.

It is possible to say that *Yitzchok Avinu's* response to *Hashem* touches on a deeper point. As descendants of the *Avos*, we are infused with their qualities and attributes.

Avraham exemplified the *middah* of חסד (kindness), *Yitzchok* was גבורה (strength), and *Yaakov Avinu* perfected the attribute of אמת (honesty). While *Klal Yisroel* personifies all three, the attribute of גבורה - *strength*, is one that requires more intense focus and effort to achieve, and a Jew needs to exert copious amounts of energy to achieve true strength.

Thus, *Yitzchok Avinu's* answer reveals that true גבורה not only requires a Jew's personal determination; it also requires the Almighty's assistance to infuse him with a Divine strength. This explains *Yeshaya's* proclamation in that when we take a step closer to *Hashem* and display strength to repel sin, *Hashem* infuses us with His strength making us as though we have been reborn with a new name and identity.

ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך למען חייך ... (ל-ב)

Chazal teach us that the first letter of the four words “את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך” spell out the word “אלול”. The question is: Just because you do *teshuvah*, how and why does that effect a transformation in “זרעך” - your children?

Another famous *remez* for *Elul* is the *posuk* ל"י *אני לדודי ודודי לי*. I am to *Hashem*, and He is to me. The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin* says that there are three partners in a person - the father, the mother, and *Hashem*. It's fair to say that the more these partners function as a cohesive unit, the greater the positive impact on their charges will be. Thus, to the degree that it's *אני לדודי לי* and *דודי לי* will be affected too.

Another thought can be as follows: This *parsha* would seem to indicate a תשובה מאהבה, a *teshuvah* born of a love of *Hashem*, not due to fear of Him. If one repents out of fear, their children may not subscribe to it. If, however, they see the enthusiasm and love for *Hashem* and His *mitzvos* that their parents demonstrate, they'll realize how lucky they are, and how special it is to be a *Yid*. As a result it won't just be לבבך, but לבב זרעך as well, *B'ezras Hashem*.

R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin ז"ל explains the connection to the next *posuk*. The *Torah* tells us, ונתן ה' אלקיך את כל האלות, *Hashem* will place these very curses upon those who hounded you. He explains that *Hashem* forces himself to punish us in order to steer us toward repentance. If we do תשובה מאהבה, the תשובה then become זכויות, and the pain we endured at the hands of the *Goyim* was retroactively undeserved. Hence, *Hashem* will take these *klalos* we received and punish *them* with it instead.

May we have the *siyata d'shmaya* to do the proper *teshuvah*, enabling our next generation to grow closer to *Hashem* too, as **our merciless opponents are swiftly punished for their actions by our merciful Father.**

משל למה הדבר דומה

ושבת עדי ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקלו ... (ל-ב)

משל: World renowned speaker, **Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro** relates the following incident: A man was irreligious for a great chunk of his life but became freshly observant in more recent times. In doing so, he cut contact with most of his friends and family. He tried to keep his spirits high and for the most part succeeded but driving down an empty parkway late one night made him feel lonely and very dejected.

With no one to call to divert his mind or cheer him up, he turned to *Hashem*. He cried out to *Hashem*, asking Him for a sign that what he was doing was the right thing and that he should continue on. No more than a few moments passed when all of the sudden, a large eighteen-wheel truck passed him on the side, displaying in big neon-green letters “G-O-D” on the front hood. He was shocked! Only moments

had passed and *Hashem* quite clearly communicated with him in the most startling way. His mind was put to ease and his commitment to religion was strengthened.

P.S. This truck was actually part of the many “Guaranteed Overnight Delivery” vehicles that are often found on the many highways across the U.S. To save energy, they illuminate only their company's initials! *Hashem* has His ways!

משל: *Hashem* yearns for a connection with all of His children. While some people may receive “feedback,” the great majority of us probably don't. Nonetheless, we are told many times in the *Torah* how *Hashem* yearns for nothing more than for His children to stay close and connected. Especially now with the approach of the great Day of Judgment, there's no better time to strengthen our connection and commitment to Him. And when we do our part, He will surely shower us with success and prosperity for all our years to come.

כי המצוה הזאת ... לא בשמים היא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו ... (ל-א-ב)

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON MIDDOS TOVOS FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

דרגה יתירה

There are two ways a person can live his life. He can either live according to nature or he can live ABOVE nature. **R' Eliyahu Dessler ז"ל** explains that if a person lives ABOVE nature, raising himself above his own natural inclinations, then *Hashem* will act with him accordingly. *Hashem* will take him “למעלה מן הטבע” - and his life will be elevated in every way.

R' Ezriell Tauber ז"ל says that there are 3 kinds of Jews: BT= *Baal Teshuvah*, FFB= *Frum* from birth and FFH= *Frum* from habit! This last category is describing so many people who really are *frum*, but are missing the point because they don't have a real relationship with *Hashem*. We say in *davening*: “*Repentance, Prayer and Charity removes an evil decree.*” These three “gifts” can actually turn our lives around! How so? Because all 3 are “above nature!” Each one causes a person to leave his “comfort zone” (otherwise known as HABIT) and elevates him to a place of closeness to *Hashem*! **TESHUVAH** is returning to *Hashem*! It is the act of fixing what you did for your own pleasure or honor. It means going against your nature to do the will of *Hashem*. **TEFILLAH** is something that takes us to a different level. Naturally, a person wants to be in control, but when he prays to *Hashem*, he goes against his natural mentality and relinquishes his control. **TZEDAKAH** means charity, but it also refers to any act of kindness and righteousness. When a person gives up his money, his time, his honor or anything else that belongs to HIM for someone else, he is truly going “*L'maala min hateva!*”

This is why we say these words on the Day of Judgment! This is what we must do to remove ourselves from the danger of HABIT! If we raise ourselves up and go against our nature through *teshuva*, *tefilla* and *tzedaka*, *Hashem* will lift us up measure for measure to the great and lofty place of “*Ani Ledodi V'dodi Li*” - a loving relationship with *Hashem*! After all, isn't that our goal?