

פ' כי תצא תשפ"ד

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, Gaavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email ravsternbuchtorah@gmail.com

WAKING UP

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d delivers it into your hands and you carry them away captive (21:10)

Rav Moshe Schneider would expound this *possuk* as follows: *When you go out to battle*, only if you engage in combat tactics against the evil inclination, and resolve to fight it every morning from the moment you get up, only then will *Hashem deliver it into your hands*, but if you do not do your part, Hashem will not assist you to overcome it.

Rav Schneider would bring this explanation almost every week, and would note that if a person does not fulfil his duty to fight against the evil inclination, even if he prays a lot to Hashem to overcome the *yetzer horo*, he will not succeed. He continuously emphasized that the evil inclination waits for a person when he wakes up, immediately inciting him to stay in bed. If a person does not commence his battle against the *yetzer* straight away, it will vanquish him. He will be late for *davening* and forced to pray quickly.

Rav Schneider would cry a lot during *Elul*, learning *musar* with trepidation. Every so often he would come to the yeshiva in the middle of *seder* shouting and crying that we had not yet done enough *teshuva* during this period.

Rav Sternbuch's father (R. Osher) would learn Rambam *Hilchos Teshuva* with his sons on the *Shabbos* table during *Elul*, and after he passed away, his widow continued this custom. (Incidentally, when R. Osher's mother heard about his *petira* at the age of 42 leaving behind 9 children aged between 3 and 14, her immediate reaction was to bewail the fact that she had not *davened Unesane Tokef* and the other *tefilos* of the previous *yomi noro'im* with enough fervor, and that if she would have prayed more fervently she could have averted this decree).

Rav Sternbuch's mother told him that in Minsk the *meshamesh* would wake up people early in the morning during *Elul* to the tune of *kumu le'avodas haboreh*, and they would get up without delay. It would seem that they were particular about this during *Elul*, because getting up to serve the Creator is a fundamental component of *avodas Hashem*, since someone who gets up with *zerizus* will act with *zerizus* the entire day.

The *meshamesh* of the late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, told Rav Sternbuch that many times the Rebbe would be up all night, or fall asleep in a chair, but during *Elul* the Rebbe asked him to let him sleep even for a few moments so that he could fulfil the *din* in *Shulchan Oruch* to "get up" ("*lokum*") for *selichos*, which is a big *tikkun*, and "getting up" means waking up from sleep. He asked to be woken up to the call of "*Selichos, Selichos*".

UNITY

Rav Meir Shapira explained that when the Jewish nation is united it can win the battle against the *yetzer horo*, but when there is disunity, people forget about their task to fight the evil inclination because they invest all their energy into *machlokes* (especially when a person imagines that he is acting for the sake of Heaven in order to fight the wicked).

Hence, *when you go forth to battle* ("you" being in the singular), only when there is unity between yourselves, only then will *Hashem your G-d deliver it into your hands*, only then will you be successful in your struggle against the evil inclination.

LEARNING FROM THE YETZER HORO

And you see among the captives an attractive woman and you desire her, you may take [her] for yourself as a wife (21:11)

Even after having vanquished the *yetzer horo* (“and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hands, and you take his captives”) it still does not despair but rather starts a new front trying to entice its victim with the *eshes yefas toar*. Chazal compare the *yetzer horo* to a fly. Even after a person has driven it away, it comes back time and again.

We should learn from the tactics employed by the *yetzer horo* in our own *avodas Hashem*. Just like it is not impressed by “defeats”, so too should we not become disheartened by setbacks, but rather make new resolutions, even if we did not stick with previous ones in previous years, and always be on the lookout for new techniques to fight the evil inclination.

During World War II when Britain was under siege, a military leader told his soldiers three rules for winning the war. Firstly, they had to fight valiantly and be willing to risk their lives, since the whole future of the nation depended on them. Secondly, they had to be willing to give up the comforts they were used to and agree to endure the difficulties of war. Thirdly, they had to understand the enemy and his tactics, and only then could they engage him in battle and defeat him.

Applying these principles to the struggle against the evil inclination, we can suggest the following. Firstly, we have to understand that without waging a complete war against it, we do not stand a chance of vanquishing it. Secondly, in order to defeat it, we have to be willing to give up a lot of pleasures. Thirdly, we have to understand the nature of the enemy and that it has many tactics in its armor to topple us. Moreover, it is also capable of donning the clothes of a *talmid chochom*, and so we have to beware of that possibility too.

KOSHER WORKPLACES

Those who were forced to go out to war were faced with great moral temptations for which they were not responsible, and had no way of avoiding. Therefore, the Torah permitted what is forbidden in other circumstances in order to prevent the righteous from stumbling in sin. However, in normal circumstances we have to avoid and run away from being exposed to the possibility of any immoral behavior, just like *Yosef Hatzadik* did, when he ran away from Potifar’s house.

Those who send their sons or daughters to workplaces where they interact with secular or non-Jewish colleagues are doing them a great disservice, no matter how big the salary which they come home with. Even the ordinary conversation of such colleagues is full of coarse language and any contact with them is extremely harmful, especially on an everyday basis.

FRIENDS

If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not obey his father or his mother (21:18)

Parents do not fulfil their duties merely by sending their child to a good educational institution. They also have to make sure that the child does not befriend children who could be a bad influence over them. Hence, parents are obligated to investigate who their sons and daughters associate with in order to prevent harmful friendships at the outset, before it is too late. It should be noted that sometimes children who incite others come from good families, and therefore nothing can be taken for granted.

DISPARAGING PARENTS

The above *possuk* implies that the main claim against the *ben sorer u’moreh* is that he did not listen to his parents, rather than his overeating. This is because someone who discards the yoke of the obligation to obey his parents will also discard the divine yoke, and someone living a wanton lifestyle is already moving in that direction.

Irreligious forces argue that the younger generation is wiser than its parents. The Zionists' main goal when they came to *Eretz Yisroel* was to attempt to sever the link between the generations, by telling youngsters that their parents were old-fashioned and *galuti* (influenced by the diaspora). This made it easier for them to indoctrinate youngsters with their philosophies. Many decades ago Rav Sternbuch's mother was on a visit to *Eretz Yisroel*, when two boys passed her, and one of them said to the other "My father is a donkey". Mrs. Sternbuch was deeply shocked, and commented that the Zionists were indeed succeeding in taking many youngsters away from the Torah path by encouraging them to disparage their parents, and that was the first stage to discarding religion too.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRANSGRESSORS

If a man has a wayward (sorer) and rebellious (more) son

Sorer may be taken as referring to his own conduct and *more* to the incitement of others. Young people who discard the divine yoke are accustomed to encourage others to do the same in order to calm their conscience and convince themselves that they are no worse than their contemporaries.

In our contacts with the nonreligious, our main obligation to fight them is when they come out publicly with anti-religious doctrines and disseminate them. In such a situation we are obligated to fight them completely, as it says with regard to the *mesis*, "You shall not pity him, nor spare him", but as long as they are only harming themselves with their conduct, although we must endeavor to cause them to change their ways where possible, we are not obligated to fight them completely.

DOMESTIC HARMONY

Then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him. (21:19)

The *gemoro* says that if the father comes without the mother, their son does not acquire the status of a *ben sorer u'moreh*. This is because if the father is not accompanied by his wife for such a crucial matter, it is probably because they are not on good terms, and therefore the son's immoral behavior must be attributed to the unsettling environment in his home, and is not his fault.

Harmony between parents is an important component in the education of children. Children should not be exposed to or even sense any disagreements causing tension between their parents. Disagreements that do arise should be settled amicably, and parents who argue in front of their children are committing a grave sin.

When it comes to *shidduchim*, one should find out about whether the parents of the person one is looking into have a bad relationship, because if that is the case, such a *shidduch* should be avoided, unless it can be established that the child in question has not been influenced by this state of affairs.

In any case, someone who grew up in such an environment cannot be subjected to the death penalty in the expectation of future wrongdoing because he is not responsible for the cause of his current behavior, namely his parents' lack of harmony. Moreover, that cause may disappear, and, in its wake, his unacceptable behavior.

The *Yerushalmi* says that the *halochos* of the *ben sorer u'moreh* do not apply in Yerushalayim. The commentators are puzzled about the reason for this. It may be due to the fact that the atmosphere in Yerushalayim in the time of the Beis HaMikdash was so suffused with purity and holiness that if someone still committed transgressions and gave in to the pull of his desires, there must have been something fundamentally wrong with the education he received at home. There must have been lack of domestic harmony or some other serious educational problem, which the son cannot be blamed for. Moreover, in this situation, too, it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that the son will commit more serious transgressions in the future, because the intense local spiritual environment may have a restorative effect on the child in the long term.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

On the topic of domestic harmony, Rav Sternbuch recalls his mother telling him how immediately after their marriage, his father told her that he would decide matters related to *ruchniyus* and he would leave all *gashmiyus*-related matters completely up to her. She responded that she hoped that her

gashmiyus would only be for the purpose of *ruchniyus*, in which case he would anyway be the one to decide all matters.

CRUEL TO BE KIND

Then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him. (21:19)

The parents themselves have to take their son for the purpose of being sentenced for the serious punishment of *sekila*. How could the holy Torah whose ways are those of pleasantness, command them to do this?

Upon further reflection we realize that someone who lives an animalistic existence is not considered to be alive at all. For such a person it is better to die, as *Chazal* say, “Let him die innocent rather than die guilty”, so that he will not deteriorate further.

Accordingly, we find that even though the character trait which characterized him was *middas hachessed* Avrohom *Ovinu* banished his own son from his house, knowing that the whole future of the Jewish nation depended on it, as it says, “for in Yitzchok shall your progeny be called” (*Bereishis* 21:12). This seemingly cruel act was actually a merciful one, since it was designed to preserve the future of the Jewish nation for all eternity.

Rav Elya Lopian related the incident where a boy, an only child son who had been born to his parents after 15 years, was snatched to be enlisted into the Russian army, and was killed while being snatched. No one agreed to tell his mother about the terrible tragedy, until the local Rabbi volunteered. He told her, “Your son has been snatched and taken to the army”. She burst out crying and said, “His whole life is not worthwhile if he is going to live like a *goy*. Let him die as a Jew rather than continuing to live like a *goy*”. Upon which the rabbi told that her that son had in fact been killed while being snatched, and he asked her to prepare herself for his funeral. At the funeral she cried and said, “I thank the Almighty for having granted me a son to be his custodian. You have given him to me in order to keep him Jewish, and I am returning my son to you, who is yours”. Those attending were much moved, and deeply impressed by the fortitude displayed by a Jewish mother who did not lose her faith even in such tragic circumstances.

Rav Sternbuch recalls the time at the beginning of World War II when Hitler *ym”sh* was threatening to invade England, and many expected that he would indeed do so. Everyone was worrying about what would happen, when the British government announced the possibility of evacuating people to Canada or America on government-chartered boats. Rav Sternbuch’s mother was deliberating whether she should be sending her sons on one of these boats to live with non-Jews or to leave them in London. Mrs Sternbuch, who was a widow, decided to consult with her father, Rav Shlomo Zalman Pines from Switzerland. She sent him a telegram, and he replied: “Better that they die as Jews than giving them over to live with non-Jews in Canada”. Despite promptings from relatives and the potential danger of leaving her children in England, Mrs. Sternbuch courageously followed her father’s advice. Subsequently, the boat that was due to take the Sternbuch children to Canada was bombed by the Germans, leaving no survivors on board.

DRAWING CLOSE THE FAR AND THE NEAR

Says the *Chasam Sofer* (on 22:1-2): “*You shall not see your brother's ox or sheep straying, and ignore them...*”: do not watch your fellow Jew who has gone astray from the path of Torah and ignore him, giving up hope of his ever repenting but rather *...if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him*, even if he has become so estranged that he shows no signs of anything Jewish, nevertheless *you shall bring it [him] into your house...* and draw him close, *until your brother seeks it out*, until he looks for you asking you to help him by teaching him how to repent *whereupon you shall return it to him*: help him to return to his Father in Heaven.

In a similar vein, Rav Zeidel Siemiatycki (son-in-law of Rav Moshe Schneider and *Maggid Shiur* in his yeshivah in London) interpreted the *pessukim* in *Shemos* 4:3-4 as follows: *And he cast it to the ground* – if you throw a boy to the ground with no support *and it became a serpent* – he will become a corrupt snake which one has to keep away from, but if *he stretched forth his hand and grasped it* – if you offer support to a *bochur* he *will become a staff in his hand* – he will become a divine staff and climb the rungs of Torah and *yiroh*.

DOING OUR BIT

You shall pick up [the load] with him. (22:4)

Chazal say that if the owner stays in the background and instructs other people to help him, they are not obliged to do so. Only once he has done his utmost himself and sees that he cannot manage on his own, is there a *mitzvah* to help him. The Chofetz Chaim says that the same applies to *ruchniyus*. If we ask Hashem to help us with various requests related to *ruchniyus*, He will only assist us if we, for our part, do whatever we can to succeed, and do not simply rely on our prayers or on Hashem's assistance.

OFFERING HELP WITHOUT BEING ASKED

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of Hashem... because they did not meet (kidmu) you with bread and water on the way, when you left Egypt (23:5)

“*Lo kidmu*” implies that the criticism raised against them was not only that they did not give the Jews bread and water, but also that they did not anticipate them by offering bread and water without being asked for it.

If someone knows of another person's hardship he should go first to offer his assistance instead of waiting for his friend to ask him for help. By saving his friend the embarrassment of asking for help, his reward is increased manifold.

Nowadays many *bnei Torah* are suffering from financial straits. Fortunate is he who does not wait to be asked for help, but rather offers his assistance on his own initiative.

WEDDING EXPENSES

When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the army... he shall remain free for his home for one year and delight his wife, whom he has taken. One shall not take (chovel) the lower or the upper millstone as security [for a loan], because he is taking a life as security (24:5-6)

Rav Moshe Chodosh of Vilna says that by juxtaposing these two *pesukim* the Torah is warning us that when a person gets married he should not waste money on a luxurious wedding, thereby being forced to take out loans, because someone who does this brings harm (*chovel*) on himself, and it is not worthwhile to go into debt for the sake of ephemeral pleasure.

Based on this, it may be added that when a person makes a luxurious *simcha* like wealthy people, he should worry about *ayin horo*, which harms him.

Rav Sternbuch recalls that before his wedding his late father-in-law was worried about *ayin horo*, and Rav Sternbuch went together with him to see the late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, to ask his advice. The latter replied that the *choson* (Rav Sternbuch) should invite two poor people to his wedding meal and serve them their food personally, this being a big *segula* to save oneself from being harmed by the *ayin horo*.

THE MAZAL OF ELUL

When you lend to your neighbor any manner of loan, you shall not enter his home to take his security (Rashi: a loan of no substance) (24:10)

The Chofetz Chaim explains Rashi's enigmatic words on the basis of another Rashi on *Shmos* 22:25. Hashem tells the lender how much he owes Him, since his soul comes up to Him every night, and after presenting an account of its deeds is found to be lacking, and yet Hashem still returns it the following morning day after day. Just like I act towards you with mercy, Hashem tells the lender, so should you have mercy on the borrower, and return his security on a daily basis.

This is what Rashi is referring to in this *possuk* too. All the debts in the world are considered as nothing compared to those which a person owes Hashem for all the mercies that have been bestowed upon him since he was born.

A person who has *parnosso* or other worries weighing him down should tell himself that as serious as they seem, they are of no substance compared to what awaits him in the eternal world, and he would do well to invest his thoughts and energies into how to be saved from those genuine worries.

Elul is the time to think about these matters and to fight the evil inclination by intensifying Torah learning. The *mazal* of Elul, the month of mercy, is the *besulo* (maiden), symbolizing the rejuvenation we aspire to achieve in our lives in preparation for the *yomim noroim*.

AMOLEK

Obliterate the remembrance of Amolek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget (25:19)

Rav Chaim Brisker notes that it does not say "you shall obliterate the descendants of Amolek", but rather, "the remembrance of Amolek", and this refers to anyone who adopts his heretical views and policies. In the final generation - our generation - the power of Amolek increases, just like a flame suddenly becomes more intense before it becomes extinguished altogether.

Rav Moshe Kordovero wrote that Jewish leaders in the final generation will be from Amolek. This too does not refer to descendants of Amolek, but to those who espouse his views.

Unfortunately, secular leaders and politicians here in *Eretz Yisroel*, as well as the judiciary, are infected with hatred of religion. In this respect they resemble Amolek who act out of such hatred with no personal gain. The attempts by secular elements to break the barriers separating us from them, and to integrate us into their way of life, also stem from the hatred of religion burning inside them.

ELUL DECISIVE FOR THE WHOLE YEAR

Elul may be the shortest *zman* of the year, but is crucial in terms of its quality, because it determines the degree of success of a *ben torah* for the entire coming year. If he is successful during *Elul* that is a good *siman* that he will be very successful during the coming year. We should therefore make every effort to change for the better and become rejuvenated during *Elul*, and increase our *hasmodo* as much as possible.

Our erring brethren are seeking to suppress religion in *Eretz Yisroel*. Their main goal is to induce us to emulate them, and we must therefore respond by stubbornly enhancing our *avodas Hashem* and *hasmodo* in Torah. If we do so, Hashem will assist us in being successful during *Elul* and then we will also enjoy a successful year, may it be one filled with blessings.

A *ben Torah's teshuvah* should consist primarily of improving the quality and quantity of his Torah learning, and making resolutions in that regard, including setting aside time to review his study, so that he will not come within the category of someone who sows and does not reap.

In order to become worthy of Hashem's limitless *chesed* which He wishes to shower upon us in *Elul*, we have to engage in *chesed* ourselves. Moreover, Rav Elyah Lopian would say that a person should engage in as many activities as possible that benefit the public, because if his absence would harm others who need him, Hashem affords him special protection from misfortune, so that those who benefit from his activities will not suffer. This advice is especially applicable during the month of *Elul*. For a *yeshiva bochur*, the greatest *chesed* he could do is to come to davening and to *seider* on time, thereby encouraging others to do the same. Such acts of *chesed* arouse great Divine mercy.