

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Sholom Ahron Ehrenfeld

Life in an Imperfect World

A man once approached Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l, frustrated with the school his children were attending. He listed his complaints: the rebbeim weren't teaching effectively, the learning wasn't clear, bullying was common, and bad middos were being learned. He wanted to pull his children out of the school and asked Reb Yaakov for advice.

"All of your points are valid," Reb Yaakov said. "They're real concerns. But in today's generation, we don't have the luxury of perfect solutions. If you take your children out of this system and isolate them, they may end up lost altogether. They need to grow up within the framework of society, even with its flaws."

This idea of living within reality, even when it's far from ideal, appears in another well-known story. Reb Isser Zalman Meltzer once felt overwhelmed by his role as a rav. He wrote a long list of reasons why he wanted to resign and brought it to his mentor, Reb Chaim Brisker, for approval. Reb Chaim read through the list and replied, "Everything you've written is true. Each reason is enough to justify stepping down. But a rav doesn't leave his rabbanus. That's simply not our way."

We live in an imperfect world, and sometimes we can't fix everything. Instead, we have to navigate the reality we're given and find ways to stay grounded while be-

longing to the community around us. As the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 2:40) reminds us, as human beings, we are social creatures and are intended to remain affixed to a community. At every point in life, the question becomes how we can make matters work given the circumstances.

Reb Nachman of Breslov was wont to share parables that speak to this very struggle of living in an imperfect society. His stories are especially relevant today, as different groups within the Jewish world have become more isolated from one another, each with its own philosophies and systems.

In one parable, a king had a dream that the upcoming wheat harvest would drive everyone who ate it insane. He told his advisor, "We can save enough wheat for just the two of us and remain sane while the rest of the world loses its mind."

The advisor replied, "If we're the only sane ones, we'll seem insane to everyone else. Instead, let's eat the wheat like everyone else, but we'll wear a mark to remind ourselves that we're not really thinking clearly. That way, if the chance comes to return to sanity, we'll remember what normal truly is."

Sometimes we have to adapt to the norms of society, even if we know they aren't ideal. By staying aware of what's flawed, we can avoid fully losing ourselves and be ready to improve things when the opportunity arises.

Another story tells of a prince who believed he was a chicken. He stripped

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Sholom Ahron Ehrenfeld

Life in an Imperfect World

Mr. Charlie Harary

Pain Into Purpose

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Never Be Embarrassed

DEDICATIONS

L'iluy Nishmat

R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel Pinchos

Manish ben Esther

Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov

Bechor ben Rivkah

Shlomo Zalman ben
R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi

Esther bat
haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l

Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber

Miriam bat Yeshayahu

Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim

R' Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchak

L'refuah Sheleima

Deena bat Shoshana

Chaya Raizel bat Dena

Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva

Reuven ben Rochel

off his clothing, crawled under the table, and began pecking at crumbs like a bird. His family was mortified, but a wise man offered to help.

The wise man joined the prince under the table and acted like a chicken too. Gradually, he introduced changes—putting on clothes, standing up, and behaving more human—all while telling the prince, “You can still be a chicken and do these things.” Eventually, the prince returned to normal behavior, even as he still thought of himself as a chicken.

Sometimes you can’t directly challenge someone’s mindset. Instead, you guide them gently toward bet-

ter behavior while allowing them to hold onto their beliefs.

The well-known story of the emperor with no clothes also illustrates this tension. Afraid of being seen as foolish, everyone praised his imaginary garments, until a child finally cried out, “The emperor has no clothes!”

People often go along with what’s expected, even when they know something isn’t right. Fear of standing out can keep us silent, even when we see the truth.

In today’s Jewish world, many people feel caught between the structures of their communities and their own personal needs. As one Rosh Yeshiva said, “Institutions, by their nature, ar-

en’t built for individuals. But every person must belong to an institution.”

For those who feel out of place, the challenge is to find ways to stay true to themselves while living within the system. But as Reb Nachman’s parables underscore, even when we can’t change our circumstances, we can maintain clarity and a sense of what’s right. We can live within the system while staying aware and ready to make changes if the opportunity arises.

For anyone struggling to balance individuality with the need to belong, there is hope that even in a flawed world, we can find a path forward.

Mr. Charlie Harary

Pain Into Purpose

There are truly no words to capture the depth of what we as the Jewish people have been experiencing for over a year now. A mix of confusion and fear. Worry and anxiety. Questions, hopes, dreams, prayers, all swirling together. And the question looms: What do we do? How do we move forward?

I want to share a concept with you.

The Torah speaks extensively about the ger—the stranger, the convert. Over and over, it emphasizes the responsibility to care for them, to avoid oppressing them, to ensure their well-being. Among these directives, there is one particular Pasuk that offers profound insight. It says: “You shall not oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” At first glance, it seems almost unnecessary to explain why we shouldn’t oppress a stranger. Isn’t it obvious? Shouldn’t basic decency suffice? Why does the Torah need to re-

mind us that we were once strangers?

This is no redundancy. The Torah is revealing a fundamental truth about human nature. Without that reminder—without being told, “Remember, you know this pain firsthand”—there’s a risk we might rationalize, justify, or even overlook the plight of the vulnerable. The Torah demands more than awareness; it demands action borne of personal connection. It’s not enough to avoid harming the ger. We must feel their burden because we’ve carried it ourselves.

This leads to an important distinction: the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is feeling for someone; empathy is feeling with them. Imagine someone carrying a heavy burden. Sympathy allows you to look at them with concern and offer comforting words. Empathy means stepping beside them, putting your shoulder beneath the weight, and helping carry it. Empathy requires imagination, perspective, and effort. It demands that we ask ourselves, “What would I feel if I were in their

place?”

Right now, the Jewish people are at war. For many of us, this is unprecedented. While those living in Israel are on the front lines, others—those of us far away—might ask, “What can we do?” The instinctive response is to feel sympathy: “Are you okay? How can I help? I feel terrible.” Sympathy is good, but the Torah calls us to something deeper. We must feel with them.

Take a moment to imagine: What would it feel like if it were your husband, your son, your wife, your parent heading into battle? What would it feel like if your loved ones were crammed into bomb shelters, facing the terrifying unknown? If you live in Israel, but not in the areas directly impacted, consider those who are. And if you live outside Israel, step into their reality, even briefly. When you reach out, don’t merely express pity—express solidarity. “I am with you. I feel your pain.”

This war is not theirs alone; it is ours. The Jewish nation is extraordinary. Stories abound of Israelis—citizens of every walk of life—rushing home to defend their country. Reservists have

left behind businesses, careers, and families to join the fight. Fathers and mothers are kissing their children goodbye, not for a routine trip, but to head into battle. Children are reciting Tehillim for their parents. It's a heart-wrenching reality, but it's also a testament to their courage and dedication.

We must understand that this is not a war confined to borders or geography. This is a battle for the Jewish people. And as much as we rely on our soldiers, tanks, and technology, we know that Jewish wars are won by faith, not force. As the Pasuk reminds us: "Hinei lo yanum v'lo yishan shomer Yisroel—Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

So, what do you do? You pray. For some of us, it's learning. For others, it's acts of kindness. Sometimes, it's mending fractured relationships. Perhaps there's a lingering disagreement with someone that, in the grand scheme of things, feels trivial. One of the barriers to achieving Divine protection is the lack of achdus, unity. By reconciling with your spouse, a friend or a neighbor, even if you're thousands of miles from the conflict, you might generate merit that reaches a soldier standing at the border.

Maybe you could dig a little deeper into your pockets and contribute more to ensure someone has the supplies or food they desperately need. Or perhaps, when you wake up in the morning and are tempted to return to your normal routine—because there are no sirens on your streets—you make a conscious decision, "I will not resume life as usual until they can." You don't have to be entirely okay

while others aren't. Allow yourself a glimpse, even just a taste, of what it might feel like to be in Israel, or on the front lines, right now.

And remind yourself daily of what it must feel like to be in battle—by entering a battle of your own. Being in battle doesn't mean spending all day questioning G-d or compulsively refreshing your browser for the latest updates. Being in battle means asking yourself, "What is my role? What is my station in this army?"

The Ramchal teaches that Hashem rules over a vast kingdom, a world where everyone has a specific role, a unique responsibility to fulfill. Right now, there are those who clearly know their job—they are the ones standing on the front lines, prepared to defend our people with unwavering resolve. But do we know our jobs? It might not be as apparent, but the responsibility is just as real.

Perhaps my role is to deepen my ruchniyus (spirituality). Maybe it's to increase my acts of kindness, to pray with more kavanah (concentration), or to study Torah with renewed dedication. My role could be to fortify unity within the Jewish people, to give tzedakah, or to advocate for the dignity and survival of our nation. Whatever the task may be, the question is, "Am I stepping up to fulfill it?"

Let me share an insight about how to identify your role and growth area. If you've done even a little introspection, you likely already know, deep down, where you can grow. That area of growth—whether in spirituality, kindness, prayer, learning, giving, or your relationships with your spouse or children or friends—will probably feel a bit uncomfortable. And that's the key.

Think of it like going to the gym. When the trainer increases the weight by just 1%, your muscles grow stronger through that slight discomfort. The same applies to your spiritual growth. If you give yourself a moment of honest reflection, you'll recognize that "1%" of discomfort you've been avoiding—the phone call you've been hesitating to make, the prayer you've been delaying, the chavrusa (study partner) you've been skipping, or the act of tzedakah you've been putting off.

Now imagine enlisting in that "1%" and committing to it—not when it's convenient, not when you're in the mood, but consistently. That small step forward, taken despite the discomfort, becomes your contribution. It's your enlistment in the spiritual army.

During times like these, that 1% isn't just for you; it's for the merit of the Jewish people. It's for those on the front lines, for the families displaced, and for the unity of our nation. By embracing that small act of growth, you're not just strengthening yourself—you're standing in solidarity with Am Yisrael, making a tangible difference in the spiritual realm.

Do not watch from the sidelines. Step up. Remember, as the Beis Ha-Levi teaches, the battles of Klal Yisrael are not won through might, but through faith. "Hashem li lo ira ma ya'aseh li adam—Hashem is with me; I shall not fear. What can man do to me?" We must channel our pain into purpose, our fears into faith.

Let us unite in prayer, in action, and in hope. May we merit to see salvation, blessings, and comfort speedily in our days.



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Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Never Be Embarrassed

As Jews, our identity is sacred. We should never feel the need to hide or diminish who we are. Our kippah is not just a piece of fabric; it's a crown, a constant reminder of our connection to Hashem. Our tallit and tefillin are the same. They are badges of honor, symbols of our daily commitment to prayer, mitzvot, and a life of purpose.

There's no place for embarrassment or hesitation when it comes to living out our lives as Jews openly. Wherever you are, put them on with pride. Whether in a quiet corner or the most public of spaces, remember that your Judaism is not something to conceal, but something to celebrate.

Look around. Have you ever seen a Muslim unroll a prayer mat in the middle of a busy street to pray? There's no busha, no shame or hesitation. They stand firm in their devotion, regardless of where they are or who is watching.

This is something we can learn from them. We, too, should carry ourselves with confidence and pride in our service to Hashem. There's no need to feel self-conscious about fulfilling mitzvot. On the contrary, liv-

ing as a proud Jew is a merit and an inspiration to others.

So, wear your kippah boldly. Wrap your tefillin confidently. Put on your tallit with joy. Because every mitzvah you perform and every symbol you display proclaims, "I am a Jew, and I am proud."

Think about Avraham Avinu's life. The Torah describes Eliezer, Avraham's servant, as carrying, "Kol tuv adonav beyado—All the good of his master in his hands." On a basic level, this means Eliezer had documentation that declared Yitzchak the heir to Avraham's wealth. But the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:8) reveals that Avraham even muzzled his animals when they grazed, to ensure they would not eat from someone else's field. On this note, the Midrash compares Avraham's camels to the famous donkey of R' Pinchas ben Yair.

The story goes that robbers once stole R' Pinchas ben Yair's donkey. For three days, the donkey refused to eat the stolen food offered by the robbers. Frustrated, the robbers returned the donkey, as it was of no use to them. When the donkey brayed outside Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's house, he immediately instructed his household to feed it, knowing it must have

eaten nothing during those three days.

This raises an intriguing question. If R' Pinchas ben Yair's donkey had the moral clarity to refuse stolen food, surely the camels of Avraham Avinu—who was spiritually greater—would have done the same without needing muzzles!




The Midrash explains the difference. While Avraham's camels would not have eaten stolen food, he still muzzled them. Why? Because someone observing the camels grazing might assume they were eating from another's field, creating a misconception. Avraham was not only concerned with his own righteousness or his animals' conduct, but also with the potential influence on others. He avoided anything that might lead to misunderstanding or missteps in others' behavior.

Avraham Avinu is a paragon of Jewish thought and behavior. If we are careful in maintaining material honesty and avoiding even the perception of wrongdoing, how much more so should we be vigilant and proud in our spiritual lives.

So wear your Magen David. Wrap your tallit and tefillin with pride. And let your actions reflect the values of our ancestors, who took care not only to uphold their own righteousness, but inspire and elevate.

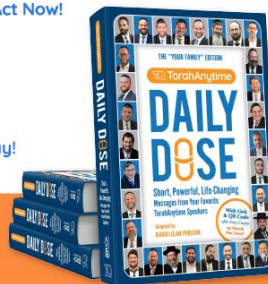
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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 29 Cheshvan)

תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)

שמות חיילים פצועים לרפואה שלמה

אביתר מנחם חיים בן זהבה
אברהם מרדכי בן יעל
אהרן בן שרה הנדל
אופק בו אלינור
אורי אברהם בן הדסה
אייל אליעזר בן חנה
אלון בן מרים
אלחנן יאיר בן דבורה
אליה בן רות
אלישע יהודה בן רות
אלעד בן שרית
אמיר בן אלה
בנימין בן ריינה
בנימין יצחק בן שרה
בר בן נורית
גלעד איתי בן אפרת
דוד בן זיוה
הראל בן חנה
חיים מרדכי בן שרה איטה
טל גרשון בן שרה
יאיר יונה בן דרורה צפורה מלכה
יהודה אהרון בן מרים אסתר
יהונתן יאשיהו בן כרמית
יהונתן יוסף בן שירה
יואל בן אילה
יוחאי יהודה בן סיגל חוה
ירין אליהו בן סיגל
כפיר חיים בן מירה מרים
מיכאל בן פריידל
מישל בת אנג'ליקה
מנחם דוד חי בן מרים
משה אהרן בן לאה בילא
משה צבי בן עירית
מתן בן דבורה
ניר בן אורנה
עדי מנחם בן מורן מירה
עודד אפרים בן ויויאן
עוז חי בן סמדר
עידן בן טובה
עמיחי בן סיגלית רחל
עמית יהונתן בן מאיה
רואי בן עופרה
רון בן אבישג
רון בן שרון
רועי חיים בן מירב
תום שאול בן דניאל
תומר בן צפורה
איתן אשר בן דבורה
נועם אברהם בן עטרה שלומית

אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)

אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
אגם בת מירב (ברג)
אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי)
אוהד בן קרן (יהלומי)
אור בן גאולה (לוי)
איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
אלון בן עידית (אהל)
אליה בן סיגלית (כהן)
אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי)
אלכסנדר ששה בן ילנה לאה (טרופנוב)
אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי)
ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)
אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
אריאל בן שירי (ביבס)
בר אברהם בן גיוליה (קופרשטיין)
גד משה בן שרה (מוזס)
גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)
גלי בן טליה (ברמן)
דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
דורון בת סימונה שרה (שטיינברכר)
דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבע)
זיו בן טליה (ברמן)
טל בן ניצה (שוהם קורנגולד)
יאיר בן רות אידית (הורן)
יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)
יצחק בן אנטה חנה (אלגרט)
יצחק בן דבורה (עידן)
ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס)
כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)
לירי בת שירה (אלבג)
מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)
מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)
מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)
נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)
נעמה בת איילת (לוי)
עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)
עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)
עומר בן שלי (שם טוב)
עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה)
עופר בן כוכבה (קלדרון)
עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)
קית' שמואל בן גלדיס חוה (סיגל)
קרינה בת אירנה (ארייב)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)
רומי בת מירב (גונן)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)
שגיא בן נעמית (חן דקל)
שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס)
שלמה בן מרסל (מנצור)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 29 Cheshvan)

INJURED SOLDIERS

Evyatar Menachem Chaim ben Zehava
Avraham Mordechai ben Yael
Aharon ben Sarah Hendel
Ofek ben Elinor
Ori Avraham ben Hadassah
Eyal Eliezer ben Chana
Alon ben Miriam
Elchanan Yair ben Devorah
Eliya ben Ravit
Elisha Yehudah ben Rut
Elad ben Sarit
Amir ben Ella
Binyamin ben Reina
Binyamin Yitzchak ben Sarah
Bar ben Nurit
Gilad Itai ben Efrat
David ben Ziva
Harel ben Chana
Chaim Mordechai ben Sarah Itta
Tal Gershon ben Sarah
Yair Yonah ben Drora Tzipporah Malka
Yehuda Aharon ben Miriam Esther
Yehonatan Yoshiyahu ben Carmit
Yehonatan Yosef ben Shira
Yoel ben Ayala
Yochai Yehudah ben Sigal Chava
Yarin Eliyahu ben Sigal
Kfir Chaim ben Mira Miriam
Michael ben Freidel
Michelle bat Angelika
Menachem David Chai ben Miriam
Moshe Aharon ben Leah Beila
Moshe Tzi ben Irit
Matan ben Devorah
Nir ben Orna
Adi Menachem ben Moran Mira
Oded Efraim ben Vivian
Oz Chai ben Smadar
Idan ben Tova
Amichai ben Sigalit Rachel
Amit Yehonatan ben Maya
Roi ben Ofra
Ron ben Avishag
Ron ben Sharon
Roi Chaim ben Meirav
Tom Shaul ben Danielle
Tomer ben Tzipporah
Eitan Asher ben Devora
Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit

Avinatan ben Ditzza Tirtza (Ohr)
Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Agam bat Meirav (Berger)
Ohad ben Esther (Ben-Ami)
Ohad ben Keren (Yahalomi)
Ohr ben Geula (Levi)
Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Eliya ben Sigalit (Cohen)
Eliyahu ben Chana (Sharabi)
Alexander Sasha ben Yelena Leah
(Tropanov)
Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Emily Tehilla bat Amanda Francis
(Damari)
Arbel bat Yael (Yehud)
Ariel ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)
Ariel ben Shiri (Bibas)
Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)
Gad Moshe ben Sarah (Mozes)
Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)
Gali ben Talya (Berman)
David ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)
Doron bat Simona Sarah (Steinbrecher)
Daniella bat Orli (Gilboa)
Ziv ben Talya (Berman)
Tal ben Nitza (Shoham-Corngold)
Yair ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)
Yitzchak ben Aneta Chana (Elgarat)
Yarden ben Penina (Bibas)
Kfir ben Shiri (Bibas)
Liri bat Shira (Elbag)
Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)
Matan ben Anat (Angrest)
Matan ben Yardena Einav (Tzangauker)
Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)
Naama bat Ayelet (Levi)
Oded ben Bilhah (Lifschitz)
Omer ben Niva (Venkrat)
Omer ben Shelly (Shemtov)
Omer Maxim ben Orna Esther (Neutra)
Ofer ben Cochava (Kalderon)
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)
Yitzchak ben Devorah (Idan)
Kieth Shmuel ben Gladis Chava (Segal)
Karina bat Irena (Ariav)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Brasalevsky)
Romi bat Meirav (Gonen)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)
Sagi ben Naamit (Chen-Dekel)
Shiri bat Margit (Bibas)
Shlomo ben Marcelle (Mansour)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)