

## פ' שמות תשפ"ה

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### SHOVEVIM

We are now in the beginning of the *Shovevim* period, a period set aside for repentance. Just as our ancestors in Egypt emerged from the gates of impurity during this period, culminating in the giving of the Torah, so too in every generation during the *Shovevim* period, when we read the *parshios* relating the Exodus from Egypt and *matan Torah*, the ability to emerge from the gates of impurity and enter the gates of holiness is reawakened.

It is incumbent on everyone to utilize the potential of this period to the utmost, since "time is short and much needs to be accomplished."

Everyone should be careful to strengthen themselves in relevant areas, and to set up fences protecting us from the impurity of the Internet and the damage caused by digital devices, the ultimate contemporary manifestation of impurity, and to not only flee from actual impurity, but to also avoid that which we are not required to according to the strict letter of the law. The more fences we set up, the better.

Many communities have designated one Shabbos during the *Shovevim* period to speaking words of *chizuk* on this topic, and this is very encouraging and important.

The late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel *zt"l* said that in our generation, where the environment is permeated with impurity and heresy, the Almighty accepts our cries that we want to return to Him more than in previous generations, and even if we have not fulfilled all the formal requirements of repentance that were expected of previous generations. He expounded the *possuk* in this week's *parsha* (3:9) accordingly: "And now, the outcry of the *Bnei Yisroel* has reached Me (and I have also seen the oppression to which the Egyptians are subjecting them)" as follows: "And now", in the darkness of exile and the impurity of Egypt, "the outcry of the *Bnei Yisroel* has reached Me," even if you only cry to Me, and ask for mercy due to repentance for your sins, I will hear and accept your repentance, because in the darkness of exile, Hashem also accepts a form of repentance which is not the "superior repentance" that includes the measures expected of former generations.

The main thing is to regret the past, and to make resolutions for the future. If we do that, the Almighty will be pleased with us and accept our repentance, even without the measures required in generations, which were not stained by so much impurity.

Many people fast on Thursdays during the *Shovevim* period, but the main thing is to also accept the yoke of Torah, and everyone, especially *bnei Torah*, should be learning Torah diligently and minimizing physical pleasures during this period.

The disciples of the *Arizal* would be very careful during the *Shovevim* period about saying *brochos* with concentration, and this is a very effective tool for improvement during this period.

Everyone should do what he can to strength his Torah learning and prayer, and to recite *brochos* with concentration. However, if Hashem sees that a person is lazy and does not agree to make an effort, then he does not obtain Divine assistance. Only if a person makes an opening the size of the point of a needle, will Hashem make an opening for him the size of the entrance of a hall.

Everyone has the power to achieve great things and great deeds, and it is only the *Soton* who incites us, trying to convince a person that anyway nothing will become of him, whereas in

reality everyone can grow greatly in Torah. Rav Sternbuch knows that when one of the most prominent *gedolim* of the previous generation was young, no one imagined that he would eventually become a *gedol hador*. However, he labored greatly in Torah, eventually becoming extremely great, a true Torah giant. This is a lesson for everyone, demonstrating how a person can truly flourish and become a Torah giant, if only he truly labors in Torah.

Unfortunately, there are those who exhibit misplaced humility, telling themselves, 'What am I already?', convincing themselves that they do not possess the power to become great in Torah. It is a fact that anyone with this attitude will remain “humble”, but a fool at the same time. The truth is that one must be “humble and wise”. Along with humility one must yearn for more and more Torah, and to toil in it. That way one merits Divine help to become great.

### **SHNAYIM MIKRO**

*And these [Ve'eile] are the names of the Bnei Yisroel (1:1)*

The *Baal Haturim* takes the word *Ve'eile* as an acronym for “a person who sings *shnayim Mikro v'echod Targum* in a pleasant voice will live for many years”. The source of this is the *gemoro* in *Brochos* 8b that someone who completes the *parsha* with the public will live a long life.

*Shnayim Mikro v'echod Targum* is a complete obligation *miderabbonon* (*O.C.* 285:1), and it is worthy to also learn Rashi's commentary (285:2). However, in practice, this mitzvah is often disparaged. People either ignore it altogether, or read the *pessukim* perfunctorily, without attempting to concentrate on and delve into the meaning of the words.

During World War II, Rav Mosche Schneider insisted on his students performing this mitzvah, explaining that since it was a recipe for long life, it was surely also a recipe to be saved from death, which everyone feared during that time. (He also insisted upon being careful about reciting 100 *brochos* every day, another recipe for being saved from plague, and other forms of death).

Rav Sternbuch recalls that when the Brisker Rov was told that some *yeshiva bochurim* were not particular about *Shnayim Mikro v'echod Targum* he was very surprised, wondering why people were not interested in meriting a long life. He added that a promise by *Chazal* is not equivalent to a check, but to “cash”, and who thinks that they can do without such a promise?

### **LOST GEDOLIM**

*“And these are the names of the Bnei Yisroel ...” (1:1). Rashi: Although [Hashem] counted them in their lifetime by their names, He counted them again after their death, to let us know how precious they are, because they were likened to the stars*

There are billions of stars, and yet not even one was created without a purpose. Each star has its own unique function, as it says in the *pessuk* quoted in the above Rashi: “*Who takes out their host by number; all of them He calls by name*”. Similarly, although there are millions of Jews in the world, and a person might think, “What difference does it make to Hashem if I learn or *daven*?”, in reality each *neshomo* has come to the world in order to complete its unique specific task, and Hashem has therefore endowed each *neshomo* with the powers necessary to fulfil that purpose, and each person is obliged to serve Hashem with those specific abilities.

Rav Dessler noted that the main danger facing a *ben Torah* is when the *yetzer horo* does its utmost to attempt to convince him that he cannot become a big *talmid chochom*. He added that we lose many *bnei Torah* who could have flourished into Torah giants but remain unaware of their capabilities, and therefore did not invest enough efforts to turn into *gedolei Torah*.

## PARENTS AND CHILDREN

*With Yaakov, each man and his household came (1:1)*

Children are usually close to their fathers only when they are young. Once they marry and set up families of their own they become more detached from their home. Not so Yaakov's sons. Each household came "with Yaakov". He continued to remain the pivotal focus of their lives.

We take pride in our parents and forefathers, strive to emulate them, and endeavor to reach the elevated levels attained by previous generations. Most of the rest of the world, by contrast, believes that civilization progresses with time. It is only natural for someone who believes himself to be descended from apes to have nothing but contempt for former generations.

## PROTESTING INJUSTICE

*"Let us deal shrewdly with them" (1:10)*

Chazal tell us (*Soto* 11a) that Bilam who advised Paroh to kill the Jews was punished by death at the sword, whereas Iyov, who kept quiet, was punished by having to endure terrible suffering. Why did his mere silence warrant such a severe punishment?

This teaches us what a serious sin it is to hear about plans to commit mass murder and remain silent and indifferent as if this were a matter of no concern to him. They say in the name of the Brisker Rov that Iyov was punished measure for measure: he kept quiet thinking that protesting would not help anyway, in return for which he suffered afflictions which made him cry out, even though he knew that his cries would not alleviate his suffering, to teach him that he should have protested, regardless of the chances of his protests being effective.

When a fellow Jew is suffering spiritually or materially, and we are able to protest, but do not care enough to do so, being concerned solely with ourselves and those closest to us, we must realize that this is a serious transgression. Similarly, when decrees are enacted, or actions performed, which endanger our spiritual or material welfare we are duty-bound to at least cry out and object to such measures, in order to show that we care. Even if our protests are not crowned with success, we will at least have done our bit.

## MAKING TORAH SWEET

*"And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with clay [chomer] and with bricks [levenim]" (1:14)*

The Zohar interprets these words to refer to Torah learning: "*chomer*" refers to *kal vachomer*, "*levenim*" to clarifying [*libun*] *halocho*. This Zohar seems surprising. Firstly, what is the connection between Torah learning and the Egyptian exile? Secondly, surely there is nothing sweeter than Torah learning, so why would it be connected to our bitter lives in Egypt?

Rav Chaim Vital says in the name of the Arizal (*Sha'ar Hamitzvos p. Voeschanon*) that the source of questions and lack of clarity that bother a person when learning the holy Torah are his sins, especially the *pgam habris*, which create impure "husks" (*klipos*) separating him from his Creator. By toiling intensely in Torah a person breaks these husks, thereby meriting to attain a deep and very clear understanding of what he is learning.

Hence, the Zohar does not mean that the learning itself entails anything bitter, G-d forbid, but rather to convey the point that the reason a person has to toil so much in order to attain clarity in his learning is because the impurity of Egypt, being the impurity of immorality and of the *pgam habris*, has attached itself to us, and due to the bitterness of this impurity we are unable to attain simple clarity from the Torah, and have to invest much effort to obtain it.

Conversely, by rectifying the *pgam habris* one's learning can become illuminated with wonderful clarity. The current *shovevim* period is a time of great mercy and *es rotzon* for *teshuva* and spiritual elevation, and especially for rectifying the *pgam habris*. *Bnei Torah* should be learning with great *hasmodo*. Rav Shlomo Wolbe related in the name of great students of Rav Yerucham Levovitz that during the *shovevim* period Rav Yerucham would learn for hours on end, without interruption and with tremendous self-control, only going to sleep when he was completely devoid of any more strength.

Everybody knows himself which specific areas he needs to rectify. If Hashem sees that a person puts in a special effort during this time of year, He will surely forgive him for his misdeeds.

## MOTHER'S ROLE

*And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one who was named Shifrah, and the second who was named Pua (1:15)*

Rashi says that Yocheved was called Shifrah because she beautified [*meshaperes*] the newborn infant, and Miriam was called Pua because she cried (*po'oh*) and talked and cooed to the newborn infant, as women do who soothe a crying infant. Rav Shmuel Rozovsky points out that even though Yocheved and Miriam both had *ruach hakodesh*, the names they are given in the Torah are not associated with their superior spiritual status, but rather with their care and concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the babies in their care. This is because a woman's entire purpose and essence is to take care of children, rather than the attainment of other qualities. In fact, it was specifically because of their conduct towards the children that they became sanctified and attained *ruach hakodesh*, since the way to become sanctified is by performing *mitzvos*, as it says, "and you shall perform My commandments, and become holy to your G-d" (*Bamidbor* 15:40).

However, Yocheved and Miriam are praised and were rewarded not just for having cared for the babies, but primarily because they did so with fear of heaven, as it says, "*It took place when the midwives feared Hashem that He made houses for them* (1:21). Rav Elya Lopian noted that this *possuk* implies that had they performed the same worthy deeds not out of *yiras Shomayim*, they would not have received the same great rewards (*Kehunah*, *Leviyah*, and *malchus* — see *Rashi*, *ibid.*).

When women take care of their children's material and spiritual needs, they should not do so merely out of a natural maternal instinct, as is the way of the nations, but rather in conjunction with fear of Heaven, and with the realization that they are giving pleasure to Hashem by fulfilling their task in this world of building a Torah home, and enabling their husbands to learn.

## RAV SCHNEIDER'S ACCOUNTS TO THE HEAVENLY TRIBUNAL

Clearly, then, *yiras shomayim* is the main quality a person should be striving to achieve.

Rav Moshe Schneider used to take walks in London every day in a park or forest for health reasons, and Rav Sternbuch would sometimes accompany him. Rav Sternbuch recalls that Rav Schneider would talk to Hashem whilst walking. He would imagine Hashem asking him about

his actions on the Day of Judgment, and what he would answer about every item. Due to his fear of Divine Judgment, Rav Schneider would go through his actions and submit an account of them.

Sometimes he would say, “*Ribbono shel Olam*, if You will ask me why I did not do enough for the children in the town, most of whom do not receive a proper Jewish education, I will reply that I opened a *cheder* in this town in addition to a Yeshiva, and since the burden of the Yeshiva is on my shoulders I feel that I cannot do any more”.

He would continue this imaginary dialogue and deliberate whether Hashem would hold him to account for not having done more. Eventually he would conclude that he was acting to the best of his abilities, and Hashem would surely not expect more from him.

Rav Schneider presumably learnt this conduct from his *rov*, the Chofetz Chaim, who famously made an account of his actions on a daily basis, preparing himself throughout his life for the Day of Judgment. These great figures serve as models as to how to conduct public as well as private activities with *yiras shomayim* and fear of the *Yom Hadin*.

## EXPECTING HASHEM’S SALVATION

“*And his sister stood herself at a distance to see what would happen to him*” (2:4).

*Chazal* say that because she waited here, Miriam was rewarded by having the whole nation wait for her when she became a *meztora’as* after she spoke negatively about Moshe Rabbeinu. On the face of it, she did little more than satisfy her natural curiosity to see what would transpire with her baby brother, so why did this act deserve such a great reward?

The first thing we will be asked when being judged is whether we expected (*tzipisa*) the redemption. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky noted that it does not say “*kivisa leyeshuah*,” because every believing Jew *hopes* for the redemption. The question we will be asked is whether we expected 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 *bechol yom sheyavo*.

Similarly, Miriam waited with the conviction that the *yeshuah* would come for her brother. She did not know exactly how, but she harbored no doubts that he would be saved, and merely waited to see what form the salvation would take.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how following the conclusion of the Second World War, after millions of Jews had been killed, including many *gedolim*, and Torah centers decimated, many people despaired of the future of the Torah community, declaring that the glorious past of Torah and *chassidus* had vanished for good. However, Rav Kahaneman stated with confidence, “G-d forbid to think this way, and we will surely witness Hashem’s salvation and the rebirth of Torah around the world. The question is only how this will take place, but the salvation will surely come”. Indeed, thanks to the efforts invested by Rav Kahaneman himself, by the Chazon Ish, Rav Ahaon Kotler and others, Torah Jewry enjoyed a miraculous rejuvenation during the decades following the Holocaust.

## BLOOD DONATIONS

“*Shall I go and call for you a wet nurse from the Hebrew women*” (2:7) Rashi: *This teaches us that she had taken him around to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he did not nurse, because he was destined to speak with the Shechina*

The Remo (*Yoreh Deah* 81:7) rules that a baby should not nurse from an *akum*, since her milk contaminates the heart and creates a bad nature in the child. The source of this ruling is the Rashi quoted above. However, this seems difficult to understand. Why should all babies, who, unlike Moshe, are not destined to speak with the *Shechina*, be subject to the same ruling?

Rav Shach is said to have answered that in truth every Jew is indeed destined to speak with the *Shechina* whenever he prays, as the *Shulchan Oruch* rules: when praying *Shmone Esre*, a person has to feel as if he is standing in front of the *Shechina* in the *Kodesh Hakodoshim*. Accordingly, one must be very careful to concentrate on what one is saying. Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky explained that every Jew should emphasize to his son that he has the ability to emulate Moshe *Rabbenu*, who spoke with the *Shechina*.

Be that as it may, based on the above *Remo*, Rav Sternbuch notes that it would appear that one should not accept blood donations from *akum*, because milk originates from blood (see *Bechoros 6b*), and so if it is forbidden to nurse from an *akum*, how much more so should one not accept blood (which is the source of milk) from them when one is able to obtain blood from Jewish donors.

When Rav Sternbuch was a *rov* in South Africa, he made an agreement with the hospital in Johannesburg that members of his community would donate blood for all the residents of the city, but part of the blood would be set aside for members of the *kehilla*. That way they could obtain blood from Jews. When the late Rebbetzen was sick and needed a blood transfusion, she asked to be given only blood from Jews.

## NOTHING LIKE THE PRESENT

*“Because the place upon which you stand is holy soil” (3:5)*

A person should not say to himself, “when I will be in that place which has better material and spiritual conditions, or when a certain propitious time will arrive, I will start to delve in Torah, concentrate more on my prayers” and so on, because a person has to be aware that the place upon which he *currently* stands is holy soil, because in any place and at any time a Jew can become sanctified, and he should not postpone his duty by even one day.

If thoughts of postponement enter one’s mind, one can be sure that they stem from the evil inclination, which is eager to postpone the realization of a person’s good intentions from day to day. Therefore, when the next opportunity arises, instead of making yet another postponement, a person should remember that he is standing on holy soil in the present, and wherever he is situated.

## TWO VISIONS

*“And Hashem said, “I have surely [ro’oh ro’isi] seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt” (3:7)*

The *medrash* says, “It does not say ‘I have seen’, but rather ‘I have surely seen’. Hashem said to Moshe, ‘you see with one vision, but I see with two visions’”.

Moshe viewed events with the human eye, according to which Jews were suffering terribly, but Hashem looked not only at the present but also at the future, and He knew that for all the suffering the nation was currently enduring they would partake of enormous treasure houses in the Eternal Life. Hence, Hashem was telling Moshe: “I have seen all their difficulties, and I have also seen the benefits stemming from those difficulties for them in the future, and now the time has come to redeem them from Egypt”.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how during the Holocaust Rav Moshe Schneider would say, “We see bodies being burnt, but Hashem sees not only the body but also the soul, and He knows that these events are for the benefit of those souls, so that they may find their rectification, and ascend to the Upper World in order to enjoy the Divine Presence in the special place reserved for those who have died whilst sanctifying the Divine Name.

### **“AT-RISK” BOYS SEVEN DECADES AGO**

*“And He said, “Throw it to the ground,” and he cast it to the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moshe fled from before it. And Hashem said to Moshe, “Stretch forth your hand and take hold of its tail.” And Moshe stretched forth his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand” (4:3-4)*

Rav Zeidel Siemiatycki (Rav Moshe Schneider’s son-in-law and *Maggid Shiur* in his Yeshivah in London) interpreted this *possuk* with regard to a Rosh Yeshiva’s duty to take care of his students. When a *bochur* is “thrown to the ground” without any support, his spiritual situation deteriorates, and he becomes like a “snake”, until eventually one has to flee from him. Therefore, one has to stretch out one’s hand and take hold of the *bochur*’s “tail” by giving him support and encouragement, and drawing him closer to Torah. That way he will become “a staff in his hand”. He will become a “staff of G-d” and start climbing the rungs of Torah and *yiroh*.

Rav Siemiatycki set a personal example, and travelled several times to Morocco to bring over children and young men to save them, and bring them closer to Torah, by recruiting them for the yeshiva. He also travelled to Hungary to bring over *bochurim*, and even reached Argentina, where he passed away suddenly.

### **ASKING A TALMID CHOCHOM TO PRAY FOR YOU**

*“He is coming forth toward you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart” (4:14)*

Rav Mordechai Pogromansky said, “Whoever does not share his friend’s sorrow is like an animal, someone who does share his friend’s sorrow is a human being, and someone who feels his sorrow as much as he does, is almost akin to an angel”.

It is said in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that some people request the blessing of a *talmid chochom* and *tzaddik* at random. They receive the blessing, but it is not effective, and they wonder why they do not witness salvation. Rav Shlomo Zalman explained that although the blessing of a *tzaddik* has great potential, a righteous person’s blessing is only effective if he empathizes completely with his fellow Jew’s suffering, and, if he does not, his blessing does not have great force.

The Chasam Sofer (*O. C.*, resp. 166) writes that the only reason that requesting a blessing from a *tzaddik* is not a violation of the prohibition against using intermediaries is that since the *tzaddik* and the nation are like one body, the *tzaddik* being the head, it is permitted for the head to pray for the remaining parts of the same body. According to this, it stands to reason that the *tzaddik* is only entitled to bless or pray for members of the nation if he indeed feels that the entire nation is like one body, and he himself is part of that body, because, if he does not, he is

considered a separate entity from the nation, and would therefore be deemed an “intermediary”, from whom it is forbidden to request blessings.

When *Chazal* say that whoever has a sick person in his house should go to a sage and ask him to pray for him (*Bovo Basro* 116a) that refers specifically to a wise person who feels his fellow Jew’s sorrow as if it is his personal sorrow, as *Chazal* say (*Brochos* 12b): “Whoever prays for his friend must make himself sick because of him”, meaning that he has to feel as if he is sick himself. When he feels that way, the *talmid chochom* is considered to be the same entity as the person whom he is praying for, so that he is considered to be praying for himself. He has the status of the head, and the sick person the status of a leg, to use the Chasam Sofer’s terminology, but they are considered to be one and the same person. In such a situation, the *talmid chochom*’s prayer is indeed preferable to his own, since a person’s “head” is closer to Hashem than his “leg”.

For this reason, some *chassidim* and Sephardim have the custom of giving a *pidyon* (monetary donation) to the Rebbe or *chacham*. As we mentioned last week, since the money is being given so that the *chochom* will act to beseech salvation by virtue of his blessing, he is indeed obligated to do whatever is in his power to achieve that salvation for the person being blessed. If he does not do that, the money in his possession is quasi-theft, because it was given to him for a specific purpose. Consequently, the *tzaddik* will put himself completely into the shoes of the person suffering the misfortune, and pray for him from the bottom of his heart, out of his own private desire that the salvation come about speedily. Therefore, his blessing has great force.

The great leaders of our nation have always borne the burden of the public, and empathized completely with each individual’s misfortunes. Someone told Rav Sternbuch that in pre-war Poland he went to the Imrei Emes and told him that his wife was sick with a chronic disease. The desperate man begged the Rebbe to pray that he should not be widowed, and his nine young children become orphans. The Rebbe replied briefly, “Hashem should send her a *refuah sheleimah*.” The visitor felt this was not enough, and asked the Rebbe tearfully why he did not beseech the Heavens to tear open the Gates of Mercy. The Rebbe replied, “Believe me, your situation hurts me no less than it hurts you.”

## SUFFERING

*“Hashem said to Moshe in Midian, 'Go, return to Egypt, for all the people who sought your life have died'” (4:19). Rashi: Who are they? Doson and Avirom. They were really alive, but they lost their property, and a pauper is considered to be dead*

Rav Sternbuch once heard from Rav Elchonon Wasserman that the *gemoro* cited by Rashi teaches us how to view the way Hashem runs the world. Sometimes a Jew becomes impoverished overnight, and everybody feels very sorry for him, whereas in reality death may have been decreed upon him in Heaven, and Hashem in His mercy has substituted that decree with one of impoverishment. Moreover, as the Vilna Gaon pointed out, suffering in this world wipes out a lot of punishments that would otherwise have to be meted out to us in *olom habo*.