

פ' ויגש תשפ"ה

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RAV STERNBUCH'S ADDRESS ON THE SECOND NIGHT OF CHANUKA

Chazal used the wording, "Who performed miracles for our fathers in those days at this time," in *al hanisim*, to convey the message that the miracles were not only for "those days", thousands of years ago, but they are also relevant for "this time", in every generation. Just as in those days, the Hasmoneans exercised self-sacrifice and went to war, and only by virtue of their self-sacrifice, did they merit divine assistance, over and above natural processes, so too "at this time", in every generation, must we exhibit self-dedication in the face of decrees enacted by the enemies of the Torah.

The Greeks only "defiled" the oils, they did not "consume" them completely. And so it is in every generation: the wicked know that they will not succeed in detaching us completely from the Torah, and therefore they employ ruses to "defile" the Torah and mix the holy with the profane. However, their real goal is to eventually divorce us from the Torah entirely, like the Greeks attempted to in their time. In our time too, we see that our erring brethren seek to interfere with our education, and strive to acculturate us into their sinful lifestyle, claiming to have our good at heart. We must use self-dedication not to allow them to make any changes, like the Hasmoneans at the time, who gave their lives for the sake of the oils' purity, because any change can eventually lead to complete devastation. The Menorah required "pure olive oil", completely devoid of any mixtures. That is the only way to preserve our holy Torah.

Rav Sternbuch heard Rav Elchonon Wasserman explaining why on Purim fasts and prayers were decreed, but we did not go out to fight Homon, whereas on Chanukah we went out to war against the Greeks. He explained that Homon's decrees related to the physical arena: "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews". This decree was clearly a Divine one, to arouse us to repentance, and therefore we fasted and prayed to Hashem, but did not go out to war. The Greeks, on the other hand, enacted decrees on our souls, to turn the nation away from religion. This called for self-sacrifice specifically, and therefore we went out to war with self-dedication. In our times too, we are obligated to resist any attempts to interfere with our way of life, and not to reach any compromise with them regarding their anti-religious decrees.

RAV STERNBUCH'S ADDRESSES MEMBERS OF SHAAREI ZION, FLATBUSH

People say the Torah is old news, history. We are not interested in history. We want to know how to live today, we are not interested in "stories" about what rabbis and Jews hundreds of years ago ordered us to do. Every rule has an exception and, thank God, there are people who are not prepared to accept that we have no right talk about the Torah. We say that the Torah is a *Toras Chaim*. When you are *mechadesh divrei Torah* more and more, you see how deep the Torah is, more than a human being can fathom. Every time someone makes a new *chidush*, it is as if he has never learnt the material before. The Torah is like a bottomless pit. Every time you delve into it, you unearth new levels of depth.

Who would believe that we have in America important *baalei batim* who understand the *zechus* they have to support Torah, and how the Torah is supporting us? Hashem created the world because of the Torah, the Torah grants us life *בה עץ חיים* *היא למחזיקים בה*, we live in this world, in the afterlife, and in *techiyas hamesim* in the merit of Torah.

Those who support Torah are giving life. However, the problem is that they must themselves be alive. If they think that it is only history, or something that happened many years ago, then they are lost. But if they say that we must learn more and more, because the more we learn, the more we see

that we have not yet really started to understand, then all is well. The Torah is endless. *Gedolei Yisroel* started off in a cheder and progressed more and more, eventually turning into the leaders of *Klal Yisroel* and representing the Almighty in this world.

Our main duty is to be happy. Not as people think, that observant Jews have to be pitied for living a life of restrictions and stringencies. We live our lives as we want, voluntarily and happily, without lusts. Thank God, there are groups, including the group here, who are not prepared to accept the doctrine that religion is restrictive, that it belongs to history, and that Torah learning is not important. *Baalei Batim* do not realize how important Torah is, and that every minute you learn Torah you are keeping a mitzvah. A *daf* of *gemoro* is supposed to take about 200 minutes. If a mitzvah is not so difficult, then the reward is not so great. Rewards are related to the amount of effort you put into them. Every person has his own struggles. Sometimes a person's wife does not want him to learn, she wants him to make more money, and bring more luxuries into their home. She must have more faith, and not imagine that she will always have so much money. Sometimes, people can be left with nothing. People must do one thing only: to have *bitochon* and *emuna*. *Bitochon* means that everything is good, only we do not understand what good is, but eventually we will understand it. If we would understand it better now, there would be no purpose to our existence: everyone would have complete faith, and there would be no free choice. Therefore, Hashem has hidden the reward which awaits us.

With the help of the Almighty, we will witness miracles. In recent times, we endured a period worse than any in human history, during the Holocaust, when people were tortured and murdered without mercy. The Nazis were sure that the Jewish nation would be obliterated and forgotten about, not a fly would remember them. And yet, thank God, here you are, you are the "flies" which he thought would be burnt and forgotten about. All the time we have new *Yeshivos*. You should have *brocho* and success. Hashem should help that we should merit the *geula shleima* speedily.

ETERNAL COVENANT

Then Yosef said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they drew closer. And he said, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Egypt (44:3). Rashi: He called them with a soft voice and pleadingly and showed them that he was circumcised

Why was the fact that Yosef was circumcised proof that he was their brother, seeing that the Egyptians also circumcised themselves (see Rashi on 41:54)?

The proof was not the actual circumcision, but rather the fact that he was not embarrassed to show that he was circumcised, unlike the Egyptians who were embarrassed of it. They had asked Paroh to annul Yosef's decree that they had to be circumcised (see Rashi *ibid*) since they considered it to be a defect. The Jew, on the other hand, is proud of the sign of the covenant, which connects him to Hashem.

Bris milo is an eternal sign engraved on our bodies, and every father should tell his sons from an early age that Hashem has made a covenant with us through the *bris milo*, and we have to do our utmost to refrain from sinning.

PRAYING AT GRAVES

"It will come to pass, when he sees that the boy is gone, he will die" (44:31)

Yehudah's argument was that even if Binyomin had sinned, his father did not deserve to be punished, it being a general principle that Hashem does not punish a person if this causes suffering to others such as his family members, unless they also deserve to be punished. For this reason, Rav Elya 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, Hashem affords him special protection from misfortune, so that those who benefit from his activities will not suffer.

Similarly, the *Sde Chemed* (in *Hilchos Rosh Hashono*) says that it is customary to visit graves and pray to Hashem that the deceased should be made aware of one's troubles. Since this makes the

deceased upset, and they do not deserve to suffer, that itself can be reason for canceling a decree. It is considered a *segulo* in order to get a deceased to become aware that someone has come to his grave, and to get him to take action in favor of the supplicant, to undertake immediately upon coming to the grave to donate a certain amount to charity and say: "I hereby donate to charity *leiluy nishmas* the *tzadik* or family member". If the visitor does so, there are certain *neshomos* which notify the deceased that someone has come to his grave and tell him about the contents of the prayers. (See also *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* Vol. 2 sections 64 and 65).

NOT EMBARRASSED TO PERFORM HASHEM'S WILL

And Yosef could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, "Take everyone away from me" (45:1). Rashi: He could not bear that Egyptians would stand beside him and hear his brothers being embarrassed when he would make himself known to them.

If Yosef would have revealed himself publicly, it would have become known that he had hidden his identity from his brothers, and defamed them claiming that they were spies, so why was he only worried about embarrassing his brothers, and not about embarrassing himself?

Yosef's actions were dictated solely by *daas Torah*, and he knew that it had been Hashem's will for him to have behaved in that manner towards his brothers (so that their dreams would be fulfilled, and not out of revenge, *chas vesholom*: see Ramban on 42:9). Therefore, he was not at all embarrassed of his own behavior, and would have been completely indifferent to be considered strange or cruel by the non-Jews around him. His sole consideration was to fulfil his duties towards Hashem. His brothers, on the other hand, would be embarrassed for having sold him when they did not need to according to the truth, and he therefore asked everyone to leave the room to save them from being embarrassed.

TEACHING CHUMASH AND NACH

And he said, "I am your brother Yosef whom you sold into Egypt. (45:4)

The Or Hachaim *hakodosh* explains that Yosef wanted to tell his brothers that he loved them completely like a brother, and that they had no reason to be afraid of him. That is what he meant when he said "I am Yosef your brother", I am acting towards you in a filial manner as if nothing had happened. He also added "your brother Yosef whom you sold into Egypt", to show that even while the sale itself was going on, he did not stop loving them like a brother.

The Maharal adds that Yosef knew that the tribes had not sold him out of bad intentions in order to harm him, but they rather thought that it was the will of Hashem that he be sold as a slave. They had sold him without any personal hatred, and so there was no reason for him to hate them.

Similarly, the commentators explain that Yosef did not send a message to his father to tell him that he was Viceroy of Egypt, because he knew that it was Hashem's will that his father should not know about it.

This is a good example of how *chumash Bereishis*, and especially the *parshios* of *Vayeshev*, *Mikeitz* and *Vayigash*, which deal with the sale of Yosef, should be taught. Each and every action of Yosef and his holy brothers was made solely for the sake of Heaven, and was not intermingled with any other intention *chas vesholom*. We have no notion of the greatness of the holy forefathers, whose every decision and conduct stemmed solely from the desire to give pleasure to Hashem.

Rav Moshe Schneider spoke out strongly against those who taught *Tenach* as if it were a storybook, and interpret the events surrounding Yosef and his brothers, or those of Dovid and Shoul, as if they were some secular tale. He therefore only permitted *Tenach* to be taught to children by G-d-fearing *talmidei chachomim* who conveyed Torah in its sanctity based on commentators such as *Rashi*, *Redak* and *Malbim*.

The Vilna Gaon already said that the *chamisho chumshei Torah* are like a "globe". Each little dot on the globe represents an entire nation. Similarly, the entire Torah and *Tenach* are holy of holies.

Each letter, and each dot, allude to an infinite number of messages, which we cannot even begin to fathom, as it says, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restoring the soul".

STORIES OR TORAH

On a related note, Rav Sternbuch recalls that Rav Moshe Schneider would often relate stories of *tzaddikim*. Dayan Abramsky, on the other hand, was opposed to this, arguing that only through Torah learning can one attain fear of Heaven, and our obligations is to learn Torah, not to relate stories. Rav Schneider responded that the holy Torah contains a complete section, *chumash Bereishis*, which is full of factual descriptions and a treasure house of moral teachings. Dayan Abramsky rejected this response, claiming that this was no proof, because *chumash Bereishis* is full of halachic teachings, and the factual aspects contained therein are not only there to teach moral lessons, but also to convey fundamental halachic rulings. However, Rav Schneider did not change his mind, and continued relating stories to strengthen fear of Heaven, such as many incidents about his *rov*, the Chofetz Chaim, and other *gedolim*.

BENEFIT OF SUFFERING

And now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that Hashem sent me before you. (45:5)

How could Yosef comfort his brothers by linking his sale to the subsequent preservation of life? At the time they threw him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions and sold him as a slave. What justification or comfort could there be in the fact that he was now the source of their sustenance?

Yosef had to undergo severe spiritual trials in Egypt, the source of *tumoh*, and needed a lot of *siyata dishamaya* and fortitude to overcome them. He attributed his success in overcoming those trials to the experiences he had to endure from the time of his sale to slavery onwards. Hashem is close to the broken hearted and it was only due to those hardships, which were successfully endured by Yosef, that Hashem assisted Yosef by granting him exceptional powers and *siyata dishamaya* to overcome the trials posed by his situation in Egypt.

It therefore turns out that there was indeed a direct connection between his sale into slavery and his subsequent ascent to power in Egypt, because were it not for the suffering he had endured after the sale, he would not have enjoyed exceptional *siyata dishamaya* during his trials in Egypt, and consequently would not have become a Viceroy, and would not have been able to arrange for his brothers' sustenance during the time of famine.

IMMERSED IN TORAH

"He said to them, "Do not be troubled along the way" (45:24); Rashi: "Do not become involved in halachic discussion lest the road become a menace to you"

Anyone else in the tribes' situation would most likely have discussed the latest astonishing developments of the discovery of Yosef all the way home, but Yosef knew his brothers and their great love of Torah, and that they would not waste their time with stories, but only talk (it says *al tisasku* – do not delve) in learning. That was why he had to warn them of the perils on the road.

The Brisker Rov expressed amazement at the righteousness of the tribes, but added that if we appreciated the great sanctity of our forefathers, we would not be so surprised, because they were totally immersed in Torah, and learnt from Yaakov *Ovinu* not to divert their minds from it at all.

The Brisker Rov's brother-in-law, Rav Hirsch Glickson would stay with Rav Sternbuch's parents in London before the War, and Rav Sternbuch recalls how he would utter *divrei Torah* each moment. He knew the whole of *mishnayos* by heart, and did not walk four *amos* without Torah. Even when he was dealing with other matters, talking with other people, he would mutter *mishnayos be'al pe* in order not to lose even one moment of Torah learning.

There were about 15 houses separating Rav Schneider's Yeshiva from the dining room. Rav Schneider would sometimes stand on the pavement and encourage his students to talk in learning on the way to the dining room and not waste their time. He told them about a *godol* who made a point of wearing shoes without laces in order to save the *bitul Torah* involved in tying up his shoes every day. Those moments saved accumulate during one's lifetime to significant chunks of time.

During a time of war, when many of our brethren are in danger, we have a special duty to utilize every moment of the day for Torah and *chesed*, which protect the entire Jewish population and prevent many misfortunes.

CHEERING UP THE DEJECTED

"And they told him, saying, 'Yosef is still alive,' and that he ruled over the entire land of Egypt... and the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived" (45:26-27)

Osher's daughter Serach was rewarded by going straight to *Gan Eden* in her lifetime accompanied by 600,000 angels for telling the news to Yaakov, especially since she did so gently and gradually (*Targum Yonoson* on 46:17 and *Bamidbor* 26:46). In return for reviving Yaakov's spirit, she merited eternal life for her own spirit.

Similarly, anyone who cheers up the dejected, reviving their spirits, receives eternal rewards for their efforts.

FAITH

"I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes" (46:4)

The same Hashem who took us down to Egypt also took us out of it, and gave us the Torah. Life often seems like one big mystery. Why do the righteous suffer? Why do some people suffer from poverty, health problems etc., when less righteous people seem to have less problems? Why were millions of Jews torn away from their religion in Russia, and then 6 million killed in World War II? Why were hundreds of thousands of Jews torn away from their religion in the early days of the state by their coreligionists?

Yosef placed his hands on his eyes. He asked no questions. Instead of becoming embittered at his fate, or bearing a grudge against his brothers, he went out of his way to assure them that everything had turned out for the good and that they should not be upset. Hashem wants us to place our hands on our eyes, and trust that He knows what is best for us, even if we cannot understand it. We will be rewarded for our faith and patience when all the intricacies of the divine plan will be revealed in the future.

YEHUDAH

He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef. (46:28). Rashi: To establish for him a house of study, from which teaching would emanate.

Why did Yaakov send Yehudah ahead to Egypt?

The Ponovezher Rov said that Yehudah was chosen, since he had agreed to act as a guarantor to ensure the safe return of Binyamin. Someone who manages a yeshivah must act with complete dedication like Yehudah, even to the extent of offering personal guarantees to financing entities to ensure that the construction of the yeshivah is completed.

In addition, Yaakov sent Yehudah, who symbolized the kingship of someone who acts through persuasion and not coercion. Yaakov wanted his descendants to love learning and join the yeshivah voluntarily and with enthusiasm.

ACCUMULATING MERITS

"And Yisroel said to Yosef, 'I will die this time, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive' (46:30). Rashi: 'I thought that I would die two deaths, in this world and in the next world, because the Shechinoh had left me, and I thought that Hashem would hold me responsible for your death. Now that you are still alive, I will die but once'."

On Yom Kippur the dead are also judged (that is why we light candles for them). In this judgement, the actions of descendants or students of the deceased are examined to see whether they are following the proper path. *Mitzvos* and good deeds are accounted as a merit for their ancestor or teacher, and the opposite for *aveiros*.

Yaakov feared that Yosef, who had spent so much time in Egypt, the source of immorality and witchcraft, had descended to low spiritual levels, and that after his own death he would have to endure another death as a punishment for his son's sins. Once he actually saw him, he realized from the features of Yosef's face (see the *Or Hachayim*) that he was still the same Yosef, and was therefore overjoyed that he would not have to endure an additional death after his time came.

Those who educate their children properly, or who have disciples who continue their praiseworthy activities after they die, accumulate merits even when they are no longer in this world physically, and are guaranteed a blissful existence in eternity.

FACE MIRRORS SOUL

In this world, only exceptional individuals such as the Arizal can detect a person's spiritual state by examining their face (as Yaakov examined Yosef's face), but in the Afterlife it is evident for all to see. The Chofetz Chaim would dwell on this point, and note that it is worthwhile to repent and amend whatever needs to be amended while one still can, instead of suffering eternal embarrassment in *Olom Habo*, where one can no longer do *teshuvah*.

ENVIRONMENTS

"So that you may dwell in the land of Goshen" (46:34)

Despite their yearning to be with each other after all these years, Yaakov and Yosef decided that it would be best for Yaakov and his descendants to live far away in Goshen as outcasts in the company of shepherds, even though this meant that Yaakov and Yosef would not see each other again until just before Yaakov's death. Yaakov and his sons could easily have lived comfortably in the city next to Yosef, but decided instead to say that they were shepherds, who were hated by the Egyptians. Yaakov reasoned that the only way he could be saved from the *tumoh* of Egypt was by secluding himself in Goshen and learning Torah day and night.

The Rambam talks about the powerful influence of the environment, and we too should not underestimate its pull. The precedent of Yaakov demonstrates how important it is to get our priorities right, and live in the vicinity of religious people, rather than living a life of luxury amongst non-Jews or Jews who do not share our values or lifestyle.