

Our Identity

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President Donald Trump returned from a highly publicized and triumphant visit to three Arab capitals, bringing with him promises of over \$1 trillion in investments in the United States and elated by the royal treatment he received. It was, by many accounts, one of the most financially successful diplomatic trips ever undertaken by a U.S. president. Yet, unsurprisingly, his opponents offered little acknowledgment or credit.

Critics were quick to seize on certain aspects of the trip, notably his cordial remarks about the Qatari leader, widely recognized as a major supporter of Hamas. Others pointed to perceived diplomatic nuances throughout the visit that they deemed troubling for Israel. Despite these concerns, Trump reiterated his commitment to strengthening the Abraham Accords, which solidified peace agreements between Israel and four leading Arab nations.

In a notable meeting with a former Syrian militant turned political leader, Trump expressed his desire for Syria to pursue peace with Israel. Repeatedly in interviews, he emphasized his administration's collaboration with Israel and voiced his admiration for Prime Minister Netanyahu. Still, detractors continued to raise alarms, suggesting that the president was drifting from his previously staunch pro-Israel stance.

Though there is no indication that Trump's support for Israel has diminished, the controversy serves as a reminder of the ancient truth: "Lev melochim vesorim b'Yad Hashem—the hearts of kings and rulers are in the hands of Hashem." Speculation and commentary cannot alter what will determine the future of this critical alliance.

Meanwhile, Israel continues its protracted campaign in Gaza, now nearing the two-year mark, with the stated goal of eradicating Hamas. Though much of the group's leadership has been eliminated and significant caches of weapons and infrastructure have been destroyed, Hamas continues to fight on. A renewed and intensified Israeli military operation was launched last week, echoing earlier vows that this time they will not relent until Hamas is dismantled and all hostages are returned.

Israel's military campaign in Lebanon succeeded in weakening Hezbollah and contributed to the eventual fall of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. Yet threats persist. In Yemen, the Houthi rebels, despite sustained losses, still possess the capability to launch ballistic missiles toward Israel. One recent missile aimed at an Israeli airport miraculously missed its target by mere feet, narrowly averting what could have been a major catastrophe.

Terrorism within Israel itself, though underreported internationally, continues. Just last week, an expectant mother en route to the hospital was murdered in a terror attack. Her newborn fights for his life.

Across the globe, Israel faces a chorus of condemnation. Many nations issue hollow diplomatic reprimands while offering tacit support for Hamas and its allies. Meanwhile, thousands continue to

march through the streets of Western cities, shouting anti-Semitic slogans, fueling a climate of hostility and moral inversion.

We look from afar and wonder what we can do. What can we do to help those who fear for their safety? What can we do to make the world a better place and bring about positive change?

The answers are not found in the conventional or social media, nor in interpersonal conversations that take place between well-intentioned people.

The answers are in this week's parsha of Bechukosai. In it, Hakadosh Boruch Hu simply lays out for us how we can live happy, successful, and blessed lives, and how peace can reign in the Land of Israel.

The posuk states quite simply, "Im bechukosai teileichu v'es mitzvosai tishmeru va'asisem osam." If you will follow the chukim and mitzvos of the Torah, you will be blessed.

You wonder what you can do to bring peace to Israel. You wonder what you can do to help alleviate the fear and privation that people there face daily. The Torah in this week's parsha promises that if you follow Hashem's commandments, "vishavtem lovetach b'artzechem... venosati shalom ba'aretz ushechavtem v'ein macharid... v'cherev lo saavor b'artzechem – you will live safely in your land, there will be peace in the land, and you will sleep with no fear."

Everything that is happening today is clearly prescribed in this parsha. The history of the Jewish people is all in Parshas Bechukosai. When we were good, life was good. And when the people sinned and strayed, then what the pesukim say will happen (26:14–44) happened.

Most everyone is familiar with the words of Rashi on the opening posuk of the parsha. His words are so often repeated in shmuessen and drashos that they have become marching orders to generations of bnei Torah of all ages. But it's always good to review them.

The posuk states, "Im bechukosai teileichu v'es mitzvosai tishmeru va'asisem osam." The Toras Kohanim states on the words "Im bechukosai teileichu" that "Melameid sheHakadosh Boruch Hu misaveh sheyihyu Yisroel ameilim baTorah..." From here we see that Hashem desires for the Jewish people to be ameil in Torah.

How does the Toras Kohanim derive this lesson from the words "Im bechukosai teileichu," which appear to indicate that Hashem wants us to follow His chukim? The posuk says nothing about studying Torah.

Apparently, this question was troubling Rashi, leading him to quote a different message from the Toras Kohanim: I would think that the words "Im bechukosai teileichu" refer to their literal meaning—namely, observing the commandments known as chukim. But if that is the case, why does the Torah then repeat itself and say "v'es mitzvosai tishmeru," referring once again to mitzvah observance?

Therefore, he writes those immortal words that “Im bechukosai teileichu” doesn’t only mean that we will be blessed if we follow the chukim. Rather, they contain another message: “shetihyu ameilim baTorah,” that you shall toil in Torah. Those who toil in Torah will be blessed.

When we study Torah, we are connecting with Hashem. We study His word, and it affects us. It affects our neshamos and the way we conduct ourselves. We become better people and more attached to our purpose in life, strengthening our very being.

Shetihyu ameilim baTorah is the hymn of our yeshivos and kollelim, islands of intense limud haTorah that produce exalted people.

The person who sits at his shtender struggling to grasp a Tosafos, lost in a world inhabited by him and Hashem, is who we aim to emulate.

And it is thanks to him, and thousands more like him, that the world exists.

I recently came across a story that portrays the potency of Torah and the zechus of those who study and support it.

There was a kollel yungerman who learned b’hasmodah rabbah for many years and developed into an outstanding talmid chochom. His wife took care of all the needs of the family so that he was able to learn, unencumbered by anything that would interrupt his limud haTorah.

She felt unwell and visited a doctor, who sent her for a series of tests. A short time later, her husband received an urgent call from the doctor. “I need you to come to my office immediately, without your wife,” the doctor said.

When he arrived at the office, the doctor told him that his wife was seriously ill and inoperable. The illness had progressed and was in its late stages. Treatments would not be effective. He said that they could operate and give her treatments, but that would not save her life. “She has, at maximum, two to three months left to live, so I suggest that instead of her suffering from the pain and hardship of the treatments, which will not help her anyway, she should be left alone to die peacefully.”

Shaken by the prognosis, the husband and wife were not about to give up. They sent the results of the tests to other doctors and medical institutions, but nobody gave them any hope, and nobody wanted to engage in the losing proposition of treating her.

The yungerman went to see his rebbi, the renowned rosh yeshiva, Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, to discuss the matter with him. After sobbing together with his talmid, Rav Shmuel told him that he would give him a brocha and Hashem would help.

The husband implored his rebbi once more. He spoke of his wife, not just as a partner, but as the quiet soul behind every line of Torah he had learned. She carried every burden so he need not carry any, tending to his and the family’s needs with love and devotion, asking for nothing, so he could learn without pause and without worry.

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum thought for a while and then said, "If this is truly the case, you have no need to worry. Hashem will help you and everything will turn out fine."

The husband returned home and told his wife what the rosh yeshiva said, and they breathed a little easier.

Some time passed, and then came an unexpected call from a doctor representing one of the hospitals they had reached out to. He told them that the hospital was preparing to test an experimental treatment, something never tried before, and something that, after what followed, would never be tried again. He said that the chances of the treatment being effective were very slim and that it was likely to kill some of the patients they tried it on, so they were reaching out to terminal patients who had no other medical hope of survival.

The trial included twenty patients. Eighteen of them died during the trial. Two of the patients survived the treatments. One of them was the yungerman's wife.

For weeks following the treatments, she was in a bad state, barely hanging on to life. But after three months, she began improving, until she totally recovered. She has remained healthy since then.

When the yungerman returned to his rebbi to share with him the news of his wife's recovery, Rav Shmuel said to him, "Now I will tell you what I did when you left after telling me about your wife and her prognosis.

"When you went out, I locked the door and opened the Gemara that sat on the table before me. On the page that I opened to, the Gemara cited Abaye and Rava. I looked at the Gemara and said to them, 'Since I was 16–17 years old, I have been studying your Torah and toiling over your teachings. I never asked you for anything and will never again, but now I will ask you for something. There is this person who is areingeton in studying your Torah day and night, and has been for decades. All of his learning is the zechus of his wife, who is totally devoted to enabling him to learn day and night. I am asking you, therefore, to do what you can to help her.'"

Torah is not merely a study. It is a bond between Heaven and earth, a force that bends the natural order when held with purity and devotion.

Just as the posuk promises, we see the power of ameilus baTorah, of those who sacrifice for it quietly behind the scenes. The pages of the Gemara absorb not just the words of the one who learns, but the whispered prayers, the missed meals, and the silent burdens borne by those who support that learning.

A wife gave everything, allowing her husband to be a yungerman who learns without pause. Her merit was so pure, so intertwined with the holiness of Torah, that even when medicine gave up, the zechus of Torah pulled through for her.

We learn of a rebbi, a giant in Torah, whose tears spoke louder than science, whose plea was not made to anyone else but to Abaye and Rava, the eternal voices of Torah.

And we learn that the Torah responds. It remembers those who toil in it, who sacrifice for it, and who stand by those who do.

We learn that while the world may see test results, percentages, and probabilities, Hashem sees mesirus nefesh and hears heartfelt tefillos.

And we learn that when a Jew opens a Gemara with tears in his eyes and faith in his heart, he is never alone. He is connected to Hashem and to the Tannaim and Amoraim in a deeper way than he can imagine. The world was created for Yisroel and for Torah, and when we learn Torah, we are fulfilling our mission and sustaining the world.

It is tragic that the leaders and the majority of the people in Israel do not appreciate this fact.

At a time when Israel desperately needs zechuyos to persevere in its existential battle against the forces of evil, the left's deep-seated hostility toward Torah blinds them to the lessons of Jewish history. Just a few generations ago, ehrliche Yidden gave everything they had to observe mitzvos and study Torah, despite hardship and persecution. Now, their descendants, driven by leftist, secularist ideology, are waging a campaign against the very foundation of that endurance: Torah and those who dedicate their lives to it.

This is happening even as the country faces more enemies than it can manage and the European nations are lining up to recognize a Palestinian state.

One might expect introspection at such a moment. One might expect leaders to pause and ask: Why is the world turning against us? Why are there steady reports that the American administration is drifting away from us? Why do rockets still fall and soldiers still die? Why does internal terror persist? Where can we turn for a solution?

The answer is not hidden. It is written clearly in this week's parsha. Study Torah. Support those who do. And Hashem will support you, fighting your physical and diplomatic battles on your behalf.

The message is open to all, waiting to be embraced.

A core part of being a religious, believing Jew is recognizing the centrality of Torah.

For as long as Jews have existed, Torah has been our identity, our mission, and our lifeblood. Those who strayed from it became detached from the Jewish people, their spiritual legacy fading with time. It is tragic that the leadership of the Jewish state has drifted so far from its roots that it now seeks to marginalize Torah by imprisoning, impoverishing, and otherwise punishing those who renounce materialism to devote themselves fully to its study.

And yet, despite their best efforts, yeshivos and kollelim are thriving. Organizations like Lev L'Achim, Shuvu, Oorah, and others are bringing more Jews back to Torah than ever before.

The answer lies before us. We must strengthen our own learning, introduce Torah to others, and cling ever more tightly to the eternal source of our nation's strength. We must do more to support Torah and its causes.

In doing so, we will merit the brachos promised to those who uphold Torah, we will help bring peace to our land, and we will hasten the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our day.