

פ' ויצא תשפ"ד

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RAV STERNBUCH ADDRESSES YESHIVAS MIR

At an address in Yeshivas Mir on Tuesday this week Rav Sternbuch emphasized that only someone who is conversant in the whole of Shas is considered to be a *talmid chochom*, and he praised the yeshiva for hosting *kollelim* that learn the entire *Shas*. Every father is obligated to do his utmost to ensure that his son knows the entire Torah.

Rav Sternbuch exhorted *bochurim* and *avrechim* to take a positive pride in their Torah learning and to rejoice in the fact that Hashem takes pleasure in their dedication to Torah, which provides “fuel” for the upper worlds, and in the realization that in the merit of Torah studied with sanctity below, the Almighty showers us with an abundance of mercy.

Some people are degrading the Torah by feeling inferior to those fighting on the front. If the general public has claims against us in this regard, we have even more claims against them, because if everybody would keep the Torah, we would not have any security problems, and if the entire nation would learn Torah, we would be the beneficiaries of boundless divine mercy. If they knew how much our Torah learning protects them, they would beg us (as some in fact do) to persevere with our Torah and prayers.

Rav Sternbuch exhorted his audience during these troubled times, in particular, to value every minute of Torah learning, to focus on their prayers, and to work on not only hoping for, but expecting, Moshiach’s imminent arrival.

AVODA ZORO

Rav Yisroel Salanter is widely reputed to have said¹ that if someone is slack in his learning in a Lithuanian town, a Jew in Paris or Berlin is more likely to take the final step towards apostasy. For example, if a rabbi learns ten hours a day, a professional three hours a day, a working man one hour a day, a simple Jew is at least particular about his prayers, those further removed from religion at least come to synagogue on *Shabossos* and *Yomim Tovim*, and the Parisian at least on *Rosh Hashono* and Yom Kippur, then if the rabbi starts learning less, this will have a ripple effect on everybody, with the result that the Parisian Jew will be left with nothing, causing him to abandon religion altogether². Of course, if everybody’s Torah learning and prayers improve in quantity and quality that would have the opposite salubrious effect on his fellow Jews.

In general, all Jews are mutually responsible for each other³: both a person’s *mitzvos* and his sins have an effect on every fellow Jew. It has been suggested that maybe the reason there was an *avoda zoro* idol at the party in the South at which hundreds were killed is because *we* were slack about Indian hair in wigs. It may also be added that anyone who places his trust in any person, force or any of Hashem’s creations, rather than in Hashem

¹ I am not aware of an original written source for this statement, but it may be noted that Rav Yisroel lived in both Paris and Berlin during different periods of his life, and must have been well acquainted with the Jews’ spiritual situations in those towns.

² This example is taken from Rav Yitzchok Weinstein, *Imrei Binoh*, 5725, pg. 77

³ *Shavuos* 39b, Sanhedrin 27b, *Sotoh* 37b.

Himself, for his personal security, or for any other aspect of his life, is also guilty of some degree of *avoda zoro*, as is someone who honors the wicked⁴, and someone who is prone to anger⁵. By improving ourselves in these areas, we could be benefiting not only ourselves, but also the entire nation.

SHABBOS

Presumably on account of this principle of mutual responsibility, the Brisker Rov noted that the reason the non-observant are more particular about keeping Yom Kippur than about keeping Shabbos, even though the desecration of Shabbos is a more severe matter than the not observing Yom Kippur⁶, is that *we* are extremely careful about Yom Kippur and in awe of it. Our reaction to Yom Kippur has a positive effect on the attitude of our erring brethren. If our reaction to witnessing *chillul Shabbos* would be as intense as our reaction to seeing someone eat on Yom Kippur, and if we would feel the sanctity of Shabbos as much as we should, and behave on Shabbos accordingly, then the non-observant would also be more likely to keep Shabbos.

In addition to the fact that Shabbos-observant settlements in the South were saved from the *Simchas Torah* atrocities, some in inexplicable ways, stories have been surfacing over the past few weeks about Jews who were saved because they had recently decided to start keeping Shabbos. Even more remarkable are the accounts from hitherto completely non-observant people, who resolved there and then that they would start keeping Shabbos if they would survive the shootings etc. going on around them, and were miraculously saved. Moreover, the demand for Arachim seminars and speakers all over the country has reached a peak since the outbreak of this war. As we said last week, by engaging in outreach work and encouraging others to keep Shabbos and give their children a Torah education, this can cause a complete revolution and expedite the coming of Moshiach.

On *Erev Shabbos-Sukkos*, eight days before the events of *Simchas Torah*, Rav Sternbuch gave an impromptu speech in English (there is a video recording of it and extracts were transcribed in the *parsha* sheet of *P. Bereishis*). He said then that the year we are in is very fraught with danger, and it seems that what we should be focusing on is Shabbos, the *os* (covenant) between us and the Creator.

Instead of waiting for further calamities, G-d forbid, we should be taking our cue from the Brisker Rov, and expediting the burgeoning process of Shabbos observance amongst the general population by reinforcing our own Shabbos observance, and learning, reviewing and teaching others *hilchos* Shabbos.

We should also be focusing on enhancing our Shabbos experience. We could take a minute or two every Shabbos to think about this *os* between us and the Creator. We could

⁴ Tosefta *Avoda Zoro* 6, 16.

⁵ Zohar 1, 27a, and see also Shabbos 105b.

⁶ Unlike someone who does not observe Yom Kippur, Shabbos desecrations are capital punishments executed by *Beis Din*. Moreover, a public Shabbos desecration is considered to be the equivalent of serving idols.

also resolve not to talk about any mundane topics, at least not on the *Shabbos* table. There are halachic guidelines about forbidden speech. Some matters are forbidden to be spoken about at any time, some only on *Shabbos*. Happy is the lot of the person who can limit his speech completely to *divrei Torah*, quizzes for the children, or happy stories imparting important messages on this holiest day, and, of course, *zemiros*, especially during the current long winter evenings. That way he will not only automatically avoid sins relating to speech, which are probably the most prevalent sins, but by sanctifying his mouth he will also merit absorbing the sanctity of *Shabbos*, and carrying it through to the entire week.

It is a worthwhile investment to study books explaining the sanctity and messages of *Shabbos* and what the *Shabbos* covenant entails, because by internalizing those concepts one will no longer feel any urge to speak, or even think, about worldly matters, many of which in any case make one feel sorrow, which is forbidden on *Shabbos*, and rather utilize the potential of this holiest day to the utmost for Torah learning and imparting our values to our children, and through them, to all future generations.

“If the Jews would have kept the first *Shabbos*, no nation would rule over them... if the Jews would keep two *Shabbos*s properly, they would be redeemed immediately” (*Shabbos* 118b).

SHIDDUCHIM

And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and he went to Choron (28:10)

The *medrash* says here that Yaakov felt despair because he came empty-handed. Unlike Eliezer, who came with ten camels etc. in his possession, he came with nothing in his hands, not even one nose ring or a bracelet. Yaakov recited “From where shall my help come? My help comes from Hashem Who made heaven and earth” (*Tehilim* 121:2). Nowadays too, those who have children in *shidduchim* and do not have “even one nose ring or bracelet” in their possession must not despair. Even though according to the natural state of affairs, their situation seems difficult, if they trust in Hashem wholeheartedly, they will merit salvation. The Vilna Gaon says that one should not put too much human effort into finding a spouse, since these matters depend mainly on prayer and faith. One often sees highly sought-after boys or girls who spend a lot of time looking for *shidduchim*, whereas those who are considered mediocre find an outstanding *shidduch* quickly. This phenomenon, and others, demonstrate the futility of excessive *hishtadlus* in this area.

Rav Menachem Azarya of Panu writes that someone who recites *Tehilim* 121 at the end of each *amido* before stepping back three times will merit a worthy spouse, because when one recites that chapter one internalizes the fact that salvation comes only from Hashem, and by virtue of one’s *emunah* and *bitochon* one merits finding one’s *zivvug* (divinely ordained marriage partner).

RUCHNIYUS DEPENDS ON US

And he went toward Choron. (28:10)

Rashi (on *possuk* 17, based on *Chullin* 91b) notes that when Yaakov passed the site of the *Beis HaMikdosh* on the way to Choron, Hashem did not detain him there because if it had not entered Yaakov's mind to pray in the place where his fathers prayed then, why should Hashem detain him? Only once he reached Choron did Yaakov say, "Is it possible that I passed the place where my fathers prayed without my having prayed there?" He then decided to go back, and he returned as far as Beis El, at which stage he had a *kefitzas haderech* (the ground "shrank" for him to allow him to reach his destination very quickly.) On the way to Choron, Yaakov did not even think about going to pray at the site of the *Beis HaMikdosh*. Therefore, there was no reason for Hashem to have assisted him by detaining him in some manner in order to encourage him to pray there. It was only when Yaakov resolved to go back, and took the first steps towards realizing his intention, that he received immediate Divine assistance in the form of *kefitzas haderech*.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman said that in material matters we must have *bitochon* (trust in Hashem), but when it comes to spiritual matters, *bitochon* does not help. In *ruchniyus*, the level of *siyatta d'Shmaya* (Divine assistance) that we merit is dependent on the amount of effort we put into Torah, prayer, and *tikkun hamiddos* (working on improving our character traits). The reverse holds true in the area of *gashmiyus*: the more we minimize the amount of time, effort, and money that we invest in material affairs, and place our trust exclusively in Hashem, the more will He repay us with Divine assistance, leaving us free to invest all our energy in spiritual matters, which reap eternal returns.

YESHIVA AND KOLLEL MINYONIM

And he arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set (28:11)

The *gemoro* (*Chullin* 91b) says that when Yaakov arrived in Choron he said, "Is it possible that I have passed the place where my forefathers prayed, and I did not pray there?" In other words, initially, when Yaakov passed Har Hamoriya he did not pray there. What was his reasoning at the outset, and why did he change his mind subsequently?

The Tchebiner Rov explained that initially Yaakov thought that since he was in the middle of travelling to the *Beis Hamedrash* of Shem and Eiver it would not be proper to delay and lose Torah learning time in the yeshiva, and he therefore did not stop to pray. Subsequently, however, he changed his mind and decided that since prayer is an essential requirement for Torah he should delay his journey and pray. Torah is not like other forms of wisdom. Since it is divine, it requires divine assistance to attain it, and such assistance can only be obtained through prayer. Therefore, since his forefathers made great efforts to pray at this place, prayers there must have the quality of being accepted, and he decided that it would be worthwhile to retrace the entire journey in order to pray there and obtain the key to Torah, which is prayer.

Every day in *ahavo rabbo* we pray, "For our fathers' sake, who trusted in You, and whom You taught the statutes of life, Be also gracious to us and teach us". In other words, our ancestors did not rely on their intellect or talents to understand Torah, but they "trusted in You". They knew that it is not possible to attain the wisdom of Torah through natural means,

and therefore trusted Hashem to provide them with the divine assistance to understand Torah, and in that merit they indeed became privileged to be taught the statutes of life. And we go on to pray, “Be also gracious to us and teach us etc”. Since we also rely on Hashem, like our ancestors, Hashem enlightens our eyes with His Torah.

This teaches us that yeshiva *bochurim* should be praying in the yeshiva, because their success in Torah depends on prayer, and *davening* in the yeshiva cannot be compared to prayer with working people who are busy going to work and may hurry their prayers. The *mashgiach* of Ponovezh, Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, bemoaned the lack of *minyoneim* in *kollelim*. He felt that since prayer is the key to success in Torah, this area of praying properly could not be neglected, and so he would ask *avreichim* to *daven* in the yeshiva, since yeshiva *davening* is of a different quality. Similarly, when Rav Dessler opened the Gateshead *kollel*, he insisted that it would include a *Beis Medrash* for *davening*, since Torah and prayer are inextricably linked.

Rav Sternbuch’s Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Schneider, would reiterate during almost every talk in the Yeshiva that yeshiva *bochurim* are not university students studying the wisdom of Torah. The yeshiva is rather a place to grow in Torah and pure fear of heaven, and in order to achieve those goals one has to both learn and *daven* in the *yeshiva*. When a *bochur* would come late to *davening*, even if he was a big *lamdan*, Rav Schneider would rebuke him by calling him a “student”, since the Torah had not affected his behavior and way of life. On one occasion, during a talk, he said to the *bochurim*, “I need yeshiva *bochurim*, and have no need whatsoever for students. Should the situation arise that the people learning here will become students, I will close the yeshiva immediately”. *B”H*, this never happened, but, on the contrary, the *bochurim* absorbed Torah and *yiras shomayim*, and they or their children became disseminators of Torah and fear of Heaven.

HALOCHO PARAMOUNT

And Yaakov awakened from his sleep, and he said, "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it." (28:16). Rashi: For had I known, I would not have slept in such a holy place.

Rav Sternbuch heard several times from the Brisker Rov how amazed he was by this *possuk*. Even though Yaakov attained a *giluy Shechinah* in his sleep, and with Eisav planning to kill Yaakov, Elifaz having stolen all his money, and being about to encounter Lavan, he received a promise from Hashem in the dream that He would always protect him (“I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go”), Yaakov nevertheless would have been willing to forego all these spiritual and material benefits rather than transgress the *halocho* of desecrating a holy place by sleeping there. This teaches us, concluded the Brisker Rov, that we cannot do “business” with Hashem by committing a forbidden act, even if the potential gains are very appealing. If there is any sin involved, no potential gain is worth it — even apparent spiritual gain.

To prove his point, he cited the *halocho* that if a non-Jew tells a group of Jews, “Give us one of you and we will kill him, and if you don’t, we will kill all of you,” it is forbidden to surrender even one Jew to be killed. Rather, they must allow themselves to all be killed

instead. We see from here that we are not allowed to “do business” with the laws of the Torah. Murder is forbidden, and to transgress for the sake of the “greater good” is prohibited - because in reality, the “greater good” is following Hashem’s Torah in every minute detail.

He also cited the *gemoro* (*Eiruvim* 43b) that Eliyohu is not permitted to come on Shabbos to redeem the nation, since his coming would involve the prohibition of *techumin derabbonon*. Even though a delay in his coming might mean that the redemption will be delayed for a long time, because if the nation sins subsequently for a moment, causing a decline in its spiritual level, they would no longer be entitled to be redeemed, and the redemption would be postponed to an unknown future date. In other words, it is forbidden to transgress even a rabbinic prohibition in order to hasten the redemption.

Similarly, during World War I, when many Jews were being killed, one rabbi told Rav Chaim Brisker that it would all be worth it if it will expedite the coming of Moshiach. Rav Chaim responded that this was not so, and, for example, it is forbidden to deliver Jews to be killed even for the sake of bringing Moshiach, notwithstanding the fact that when he will come we will be privileged to witness Hashem’s honor increasing greatly in the world as well as an immense spiritual reawakening.

We are subject to *halocho*, and according to *halocho* it is forbidden to sacrifice Jews in order to save others, no matter the gain! The laws of the Torah were not given to us to bargain with, and we are not allowed to commit sins in order to reap other supposed gains. The Brisker Rov explained that the *possuk* that Hashem does not accept bribery (*Devorim* 10:17) means that He does not accept bribes of good deeds. In other words, He does not forego strict adherence to *halocho* in return for other merits, because *halocho* is paramount.

PARTNERING WITH HASHEM

“If Hashem will be with me... I will surely tithe to You” (28:20-22)

Seeing that it is obligatory to give *ma’aser kesofim*, why did Yaakov make a condition? Yaakov was saying that he was not giving a tenth from his own belongings, but rather making Hashem his "partner", so that the "*ma’aser*" was merely the equivalent of paying a partner his due. When Rav Sternbuch was in South Africa, there was a very wealthy person who became a *baal teshuva*. He told Rav Sternbuch that now that he was religious Hashem was his partner, but since that was not the case before he became religious, he feels that he does not have to pay *ma’aser kesofim* retroactively for the profits made during that period. Rav Sternbuch responded that he was not sure that he was right, but he was happy to hear that he now feels that Hashem is his partner! (See also *Teshuvos Vehanhogos*, Vol. II, section 483).

HOW TO CRITICIZE

And he said, "The day is yet long; it is not the time to take in the livestock. Water the sheep and go, pasture. (29:7)

Rashi brings the *medrash* that Yaakov saw them lying down, and he thought that they wished to gather the livestock to return home and that they would no longer graze. So he said

to them, "The day is yet long," i.e., if you have been hired for the day, you have not completed the day's work, and if the animals are yours, it is, nevertheless, not the time to take in the livestock. They responded (29:8): "We cannot do that, until all the flocks are gathered together, and they will roll the rock off the mouth of the well, and we shall then water the sheep".

The Ponovezher Rav, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, noted that it seems amazing that the shepherds did not tell Yaakov to stop preaching to them, to mind his own business and leave them alone. After all, he was a stranger, and they were veteran shepherds in the town. Instead, they responded calmly by explaining their actions. Rav Kahaneman said that their reaction was due to the way Yaakov had started the initial conversation with them. He had said: "My brothers, where are you from?" (29:4). Yaakov spoke to them affectionately by addressing them as his "brothers", and since they saw that he did not want to harm them but had their welfare at heart, they spoke to him as he were their friend. That is why they did not get upset at his criticism of their actions.

When we need to criticize or rebuke someone, it should be done in a friendly manner, so that when the other person sees that we are fond of him, he will gladly accept our rebuke. However, if we act in a cross manner, our words are likely to fall on deaf ears. It should be added, though, that this principle only applies to those who do not hate religion or engage in anti-religious incitement.

PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT OF THE YESHIVAH

And Yaakov kissed Rochel, and he raised his voice and wept (29:11). Rashi: Eliphaz the son of Eisov had pursued him to kill him at his father's orders; he (Eliphaz) overtook him, but since he had grown up in Yitzchok's lap, he held back his hand. He said to him (Yaakov), "What shall I do about my father's orders?" Yaakov replied, "Take what I have, for a poor man is counted as dead".

This *medrash* cited by Rashi shows the extent to which being in the vicinity of a righteous person and a positive environment can have long-term effects. Even Eliphaz, who was cruel enough to pursue Yaakov and take away all his possessions, absorbed enough fear of heaven from his grandfather Yitzchok in his youth to refrain from murdering his uncle Yaakov.

The Steipler commented that nowadays a young man needs to learn in a yeshivah for two reasons: firstly, in order to escape the harmful environment outside, and secondly, in order to learn and grow in *yiras Shomayim*. Consequently, even if a *bochur* is not learning as well as he could, he must still continue to remain within the safe confines of the yeshivah, thus refraining from being exposed to an undesirable environment.

Rav Moshe Schneider was opposed to boys going to work before marriage, and was even more adamant that they should not attend university. He argued that even if the boy's religious observance would not be affected, the very exposure to the behavior and manner of

speech prevalent in such environments would have a detrimental effect on him. For this reason, he felt a boy should not be thrown out of yeshivah into a street environment, and that those responsible for such an action would be held accountable before the Heavenly Court. Although the main protection afforded by the sanctity of the Torah applies to someone immersed in studying it, just being present in an environment of *bnei Torah* also saves a person from sin, and has a beneficial effect on him. Rav Schneider would say that once a boy has enrolled in the yeshiva, he becomes like a son, and you do not throw your son out to the street to fend for himself. (However, if a boy is having a harmful effect on other *bochurim* that is another matter).

Rav Sternbuch recalls the time when a young sailor from Greece, about twenty years old, somehow found his way to Rav Schneider's yeshivah in London. Once Rav Schneider had ascertained that he was indeed Jewish, he made sure that this young man would be taught *aleph-beis*, *Krias Shema*, *hilchos tefillin*, and other basics of Judaism. Even though the yeshivah was not designed for such people, since Rav Schneider could not find a suitable alternative, the commandment to look after a "lost body and soul" applied to this visitor. Had he not come of his own accord one might have been exempt from helping him out, Rav Schneider reasoned, but since he had fallen into our hands, we are forbidden to send him away from the yeshivah.

WEDDING EXPENSES

And Lovon gathered all the people of the place, and he made a feast (29:22).

The *possuk* emphasizes that Lovon invited *all* the people to the wedding feast. A Jew who was collecting money for his daughter's marriage asked Rav Zalman of Volozhin (brother of Rav Chaim and also a *talmid* of the Vilna Gaon) for a letter of recommendation. He told Rav Zalman that he needed a lot of money to make a grand wedding. Rav Zalman responded that this is the way of Lovon, who made a feast for *all* the people of his town, and if he wanted the young couple to build a decent Jewish home he should follow the example of Boaz, who gathered together ten men for his wedding. He had the merit of being the ancestor of the royal house of Dovid.

Although one should certainly make a respectable *seuda* and feel joy at the privilege of setting up a home in which the *Shechina* dwells, and fulfilling the great mitzvah of a Jewish wedding, which is akin to the consecration of the *Beis Hamikdosh*, it is quite another matter to incur extravagant expenses in order to display one's wealth and receive honor. Doing so only causes harm to the *choson* and *kalla* and their entire future. It focuses one's mind and energy in the wrong direction, and causes *ayin horo*, which is no simple matter. *Gedolei yisroel* throughout the generations have endeavored to enact regulations to limit wedding expenses, and, in our time too, several places have been successful in this matter, which is a very great thing.