

פ' וארא תשפ"ה

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INAUGURATION

Rav Sternbuch noted last week that anyone who puts their hope in the new American President is delaying the coming of Moshiach. The redemption will only come about once we have internalized the fact that our only hope for salvation is from Hashem, not from any natural causes. Moreover, we have to anticipate and expect the redemption, and not merely hope for it to materialize.

ARMY

Rav Sternbuch met Rav Malkiel Kotler last week, and they spoke about the army issue. Rav Sternbuch said that the situation is difficult. Who would have dreamt that we would reach the situation we currently find ourselves in? They would like to acculturate us completely into their way of life, and have us abandon our religion. The more that we let them interfere with our way of life, the more they actually will. If we let them interfere, we will lose our Divine protection.

We have to make it clear to them that they are not our guardians. If we remain firm, we will succeed, but if we seek “compromises”, we will fail. In any case, they will not be satisfied with “compromises”, and therefore we have to tell them unequivocally that we do not agree to be recruited, and are not embarrassed of it.

Weaker boys who do not have their parents’ backing, must be instilled with pride and encouraged to resist the army’s threats or enticements. Even boys who are not learning are not allowed to join the army. The only language they speak there is that of obscenity. If we fulfil Hashem’s will, we will merit *siyata dishmaya*.

CLAIM AGAINST MOSHE

“G-d spoke to Moshe, and He said to him, “I am Hashem” (6:2)

Rashi says that Hashem called Moshe to account for having spoken harshly by saying, “Why have You harmed this people?”

Although *tzaddikim* throughout the generations have always asked Hashem to have mercy on His nation and minimize their suffering, the claim against Moshe was his use of the phrase “Why have You harmed this people”, which implied that Hashem was doing something bad to the nation, whereas, in truth, even difficult decrees against them are for their benefit. Had Moshe not used such language, it would have been considered a righteous deed on his part to ask Hashem to arouse His mercy for the nation so that they should not suffer so much.

During the Holocaust Rav Sternbuch recalls hearing about a holy person who was suffering in the camps and said the following: “Master of the Universe, I believe that everything You do is for the good, ‘Hashem is righteous in all His ways and loving in all His works’, but I implore You, please do not continue to leave us in a situation where we find it difficult to understand Your conduct. Either make our intellect comply with Your conduct by giving us the intelligence to comprehend why all these decrees are for our benefit, or do the opposite, and make Your conduct comply with our intellect by conducting Yourself for our good and benefit based on our simple understanding, even though we do not, G-d forbid, think ill of Your conduct”.

LIMITED INTELLECT

“G-d (Elokim) spoke to Moshe, and He said to him, “I am Hashem” (6:2)

Why does the *possuk* start with *elokim*, which symbolizes the attribute of justice, and end with *yud-ke-vok-ke*, which symbolizes the attribute of mercy?

The attribute of justice is essentially also based on mercy, because Hashem is complete mercy and nothing, including severe punishments, emanates from him, which is not merciful. The Chofetz Chaim

expounded the *passuk*, “Do not evil and good proceed from the mouth of the Most High?” (*Eicho* 3:38), that only good stems from Hashem, even if we, with our limited intellect, do not always understand it. This may be compared to a woman who washes her baby son, and the son cries because he does not understand that it is for his good.

In this *possuk*, Hashem is telling Moshe that the *middas hadin* symbolized by *elokim*, stems from “I am Hashem,” from the mercies of Hashem. The *possuk* “*shema Yisroel*” may be understood in the same vein, namely that there are two attributes of Hashem in the world – *Hashem* - mercy and *elokeinu* - justice, but they all stem from *Hashem echod* - there is no distinction between them, because both originate from the same source of Hashem’s mercies.

Just like an animal's intellect is limited, and Hashem did not grant it the ability to understand the nature of the food it needs for its sustenance, so too did the Creator not provide human beings with the possibility of understanding the nature of His conduct in this world. We do not need to understand all the intricacies of Hashem's conduct any more than the animal needs to understand the nature of the food it needs for its very existence.

If we would understand everything, there would be no free choice: we would all be completely righteous. As it is, Hashem closes the door, so to speak, to our complete understanding.

The *mekubolim* say that the souls of people who suffer a cruel death and die al *kiddush Hashem* are shown their fate before they come to this world. At first, they ask not to be sent to this world, but then Hashem shows them the special place set aside for them in the afterlife, and then they willingly descend to this world. This is one example of how short-sighted our limited outlook is, since we are missing too many details, which will only be revealed in the future.

Similarly, the *rishonim* (eg *Ritvo Ta’anis* 30b together with *Radvaz*, Part II, Resp. 839) note that the souls of those people who died in *golus* expecting the redemption, but instead experienced suffering, are rewarded by being resurrected in the first *techias hamesim* and witnessing the joy of the nation and the construction of the *Beis Hamikdosh*.

RABBIS’ RULINGS DETERMINE EVENTS

“*They did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of breath and because of hard labor*” (6:9)

The wording of this *possuk* implies that Hashem judged the Jews favorably because of their situation. The Chofetz Chaim once complained about the lack of faith amongst his contemporaries. Rav Naftoli Trop, who was present, responded by citing the above *possuk*. He argued that if in the case of our forefathers, even though they knew that the exile would not last more than 400 years, Hashem still took their terrible situation into account, and judged them favorably, how much more so in our generation, when we are so far removed from their level, and the travails of our exile have been increasing for 2000 years, and we see no end to it, will Hashem surely judge us favorably, since our faith has become weakened due to “*shortness of breath and hard labor*”.

The Chofetz Chaim was very pleased with this response, and told Rav Naftoli that his words are undoubtedly now ascending to the *kise hakovod* creating a favorable judgement for the Jews, because the Heavenly Tribunal takes into account favorable judgements of the Jewish nation in this world. [Even though the two situations may be distinguished, because our forefathers in Egypt were living in the period prior to *matan Torah*, and we, living in the period after *matan Torah*, are able to become sanctified and attain levels close to that of the ministering angels. Nevertheless, since Rav Naftoli Trop uttered words judging the Jewish nation favorably, they ascend heavenwards, creating a favorable judgement].

Rav Y.D. Soloveichik (son of the Brisker Rov) told Rav Sternbuch that shortly after the *gedolim* had convened at the Third Knessiah Gedolah in Marienbad in 5697 (1937) to discuss the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisroel* under the Peel Commission’s Partition Plan, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin came to visit the Brisker Rov, and the latter probed Rav Sorotzkin about the results of the meeting. At first, Rav Sorotzkin tried to evade giving a clear answer, but the Brisker Rov would not relent, and insisted on knowing what the majority of the *gedolim* had decided. At that point, Rav Sorotzkin asked the Brisker Rov why he was so interested in this. After all, the nations in any case do not take the opinions of the rabbis into account.

The Brisker Rov replied that in Heaven decisions are made based on what the *gedolim* decide in this world. To prove this, he cited the *gemoro* in Sanhedrin 26a that when Sancheriv laid siege to Yerushalayim Shevna maintained that they should make peace with the enemy, whereas Chizkiyohu did not want to surrender. When Chizkiyohu heard about this, he was worried that Hashem would uphold Shevna's position, since the latter had a majority who sided with him, and Hashem would therefore agree with their opinion. However, Yeshayohu told him not to assume that Shevna's majority of people can counterbalance his opinion, because what the wicked maintain has no validity against what the righteous think. Their opinion is not taken into consideration in Hashem's decision, since they are wicked.

Similarly, concluded the Brisker Rov, Hashem disregards the nations, as well as the Zionists, and what they think, but if a majority of *gedolim* agreed to the establishment of a State, I am worried that in Heaven a ruling will be pronounced agreeing with their opinion.

ZEH KENEGED ZEH

"The sorcerers of Egypt also did likewise with their magic art" (7:11)

The *chartumim* managed to turn a stick into a snake and water into blood using *kishuf*. We do not encounter the ability to perform such actions either before or after this generation of *yetzias mitzrayim*. How was it possible?

During periods of *hester ponim* (Hashem hiding His face from us, as it were) our challenge is to see through the veneer of nature, and recognize that Hashem runs it. But when revealed miracles are prevalent, and exceptional holy individuals such as Moshe and Aharon are in our midst, Hashem grants great powers to the forces of *tumoh* in order to maintain the required balance of free choice. We can then either choose to be misled by such forces, or contemplate the actions and writings of the righteous individuals of the generation, who explain the difference between the forces of holiness and those of *tumoh*, whose only goals are to fulfill the desires of their hearts.

The Rambam writes in his commentary on the Mishna that there are no *shedim* (loosely translated as "demons"), and the Vilna Gaon takes him to task for that statement, arguing that the accursed philosophy which he studied misled him, but Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky says in *Emes Lyaakov* that the Rambam's statement is correct with respect to his generation, and all the more so with regard to succeeding generations.

In the time of *Chazal* when miracles were still commonplace, and the forces of *kedusho* were still strong, *shedim* did indeed exist - and the Rambam did not wish to deny that - because the forces of *kedusho* had to be counterbalanced by corresponding forces of *tumoh*, but in the Rambam's time the *hester ponim* was already so strong that there was no longer any need for such forces. However, various contemporary sects alleged that they made use of such forces, in an attempt to destroy our faith. The Rambam was fighting against those attempts.

In our generation too, when the forces of immorality are rampant, setting new records of *tumah*, Hashem, in His great mercy, has arranged an unprecedented explosion of Torah learning around the world in the decades following the Holocaust to counterbalance those forces of *tumah* with corresponding forces of *kedushah*.

The *medrash (Bamidbor Rabbo 15:12)* says that Hashem chose the tribe of Levi to serve Him, because they dedicated themselves to Torah when the rest of the nation in Egypt was slack in this regard. Rav Moshe Schneider derived from this that those individuals throughout the generations who cleave to Hashem and his Torah, even in difficult periods, when many abandon Torah or are negligent in their obligations, will receive the special reward set aside for *shevet Levi*. Happy is their lot.

THE POWER OF ONE PERSON

And the frogs came up. (8:2). Rashi: It was one frog, and they hit it, and it split into many swarms of frogs (Rashi, ibid)

When a dog barks, others join in. Here too, the croaking of one frog was enough to trigger off a whole cacophony of discordant noises in Egypt. Just like one frog can arouse countless others, so too, are

people able to arouse others to shout senseless things together with them. Hitler, for example, one unknown painter, single-handedly used his rabble-rousing drivel to brainwash a supposedly cultured and sophisticated nation. Similarly, even one *epikores* can potentially wreak havoc, and we should not take any of them lightly.

The same principle applies for the good too. Both the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon, each in his own way, and independently, had a revolutionary impact on Jewish life for all future generations.

Although Hashem clearly guides historical phenomena, there is always room for free choice, even on the national level. Each one of us has the power to influence countless others, and affect the course of history for all eternity.

HEARING WHAT WE PRAY

“And Moshe and Aharon went away from Paroh, and Moshe cried out to Hashem concerning the frogs that He had brought upon Paroh” (8:8)

By the other plagues it says that Moshe “beseeched” [*“Vaye’oser”*] Hashem, so why does it say here in the case of the plague of frogs, that Moshe “cried out” [*“Vayizak”*]? The *Sifsei Chachomim* (on *possuk* 6) explains that since a person who prays has to hear his prayer, Moshe had to shout, so that his voice would be louder than the noise emanating from the frogs.

Although the *Beis Yosef* (O.C. s. 101) says that in the opinion of the Zohar one should only move one’s lips during *Shmone Esrei* without his prayers being audible even to himself, the *Shulchan Oruch* (O.C. 101:2) rules that “a person should verbalize his *Shmone Esrei* prayer in a whisper so that it is audible to himself”. Moreover, according to the Vilna Gaon (*ibid*) even in the opinion of the Zohar one should *lechatchila* make one’s prayer audible to himself, and, if he does not, he has not fulfilled his obligation *lechatchila*.

Many have the custom nowadays to recite *Shmone Esrei* in such a manner that their words are not audible even to themselves. They apparently rely on the Zohar brought by the *Beis Yosef*. However, this conduct is questionable, since, as stated, both the *mechaber* and the Vilna Gaon rule that one’s words have to be audible to himself, and one need only be careful that they should not be so loud as to be capable of being heard by others.

WHEN TO BE HUMBLE

“And Hashem said to Moshe, “Arise early in the morning and stand [hisyatzev] before Paroh, behold, he is going out to the water, and you shall say to him, ‘So said Hashem, “Let My people go out and serve Me.” (8:16)

“*Hisyatzev*” means “stand forcefully and with determination”. Why was it necessary to warn Moshe *Rabbenu* to stand in this manner before Paroh? Moshe was by nature very humble, and therefore needed a special warning to convey Hashem’s message to Paroh dauntlessly and forcefully.

Similarly, it says (*Devorim* 31:7), *And Moshe called Yehoshua and said to him in the presence of all Yisroel, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the land which Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall apportion it to them as an inheritance.* Moshe found it necessary to encourage Yehoshua upon appointing him to lead the nation because he knew that Yehoshua was very humble (see *Targum Yonoson* on *Bamidbor* 13:16), and he was worried that this quality would be a liability, now that he was to become the leader of the nation. He therefore warned him to be strong and courageous, and that even though it is worthy to be modest in private, before the nation he had to act forcefully, as befitted its leader, even though this went against his nature.

DEFECTIVE VIEWS

“So that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the earth” (8:18)

We mention *yetzias mitzrayim* twice a day in *kerias shema*, and also in *Kiddush* on Shabbos and *Yom Tov*, in order to reinforce our belief in *hashgocho pratis*, and constantly remind ourselves that there is no such thing as nature, that Hashem guides all events through direct and individual Divine providence.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz would say that the main type of heresy prevalent nowadays is when people imagine that life events, such as making a living, are dependent on natural causes. Chazal tell us that “Sustenance is as difficult as splitting the Red Sea” (*Pesochim* 118a). Chazal specifically chose the example of *parnosso*, which seems to be totally dependent on seemingly natural causes and human effort, in order to bring home the point that even this area of human activity is no less miraculous than the splitting of the *yam suf*. Just like that event was clearly miraculous, so is a person’s *parnosso* completely dependent on what the Cause of all Causes has decreed for him. Bringing about *kriyas yam suf* was a no more difficult feat for Hashem than taking care of a person’s sustenance, because for Hashem there is no difference between miracles and nature.

Unfortunately, it is prevalent for even the most religious people to hold false and heretical views by attributing all events to natural causes. It is likely that someone with such views is guilty of idol worship, and the Chazon Ish was particular about *yayin nesech* not only with regard to Shabbos desecrators, but also with regard to people with defective views.

The main purpose of all the *mitzvos* is to attain *emunah* and *bitochon*. This area is also the main test for a person in this world. Hashem created a person in such a way that he is always missing basic requirements. When he is young, he is missing a wife, and needs to ask Hashem to help him find his helpmate. After that, he prays to Hashem for marital harmony, for a living, and to have holy offspring. At every stage of a person’s life, he is tested to see whether he sets his eyes to Hashem for help.

Someone once told the Brisker Rov excitedly about the possibility of making long-distance telephone conversations to distant places all over the world, an innovation at the time. The *rov* responded that he himself was amazed at the fact that this person was standing in front of him, and he could hear him. This was no less a wonder than that of the telephone. Even though people become more impressed by innovations, having senses that function properly is no less a miraculous feat than any modern invention. The Brisker Rov was fortunate enough to have attained the level of palpably feeling that there was no such thing as nature, and that everything is determined by Divine decree, as noted by the Ramban at the end of *parshas Bo*.

IMMORALITY IN THE FINAL GENERATION

“And I will make a redemption between My people and your people” (8:19) Rashi: *Which will set apart My people from your people.*

The Baal Haturim on this *possuk* cites a tradition connecting this *possuk* to one in *Tehilim* (111:9): “He has sent redemption to His people, He has commanded His covenant for ever”. What is the connection between these two *pessukim*?

The late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel, explained that Bilom in his prophecy saw that the main test for the Jewish nation at the end of days will be immorality. That generation will be extremely dissolute, and all sorts of *tumah* will be widespread to contaminate the nation. Indeed, the Internet has had this effect to an unprecedented extent in Jewish homes.

Bilom foresaw the generation at the end of days, and understood from this that the strongest weapon to incur Divine wrath against the Jewish nation are those forces of *tumah*. Hence, he advised Bolok that instead of waiting for the end of days, he should subject the nation to the test of immorality here and now by causing them to sin with the Midianite women.

Based on this, the Baal Haturim is telling us that in order to merit redemption it is necessary to preserve the covenant of the *bris*, which sets us apart and keeps us distinct from the Egyptians and their spiritual descendants, physically and morally.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Will we sacrifice the deity of the Egyptians before their eyes, and they will not stone us? (8:22)

The commentators (*Ramban, Chezkuni, Kli Yokor* and others) explain that the Egyptians worshipped the lamb because it was their *mazal*.

It may also be suggested that according to their professed philosophy they were concerned for animal welfare, with the lamb symbolizing a defenseless weak animal for which they felt great mercy. The *possuk* makes it clear that if the Jews would have slaughtered their idol, “desecrating” the “holy” lamb, they would have been stoned to death.

In more recent times, we witnessed another nation, which advocated kindness and mercy towards animals, and fought strongly against cruelty to animals, but eventually committed the worst acts of cruelty in history, against Jews. When Rav Yerucham Levowitz was in Berlin once, and saw a German kissing his dog, he said “In this place they will end up killing people”, citing the *possuk*, “Those who sacrifice men, kiss calves” (*Hoshea* 12:2). The Nazis outlawed *shechita* on the grounds of supposed animal cruelty, but eventually ended up slaughtering millions of Jews with unprecedented cruelty.

100 BROCHOS

He who feared the word of Hashem (9:20)

Rav Dessler said that since Hashem warned us, “And if, despite this, you still do not listen to Me, still treating Me as happenstance, I will treat you with a fury of happenstance” (*Vayikro* 26: 27-28), we have to be very careful about reciting *brochos* properly and not by “chance”, because that exposes ourselves to the danger of Hashem treating us in a “chance” manner.

Reciting 100 *brochos* is a recipe for obtaining *yiras shomayim*. It says, “What does Hashem your G-d require of you?” and Chazal say (*Menochos* 43b), “Do not read “what” (*mah*) but rather *meah* (100)”, and this is followed by “except to fear Him” (*Devorim* 10:12). Thus, reciting 100 *brochos* results in fear of Heaven.

This is an example of a “light precept” which does not involve much effort, but which people tend to disparage. According to some *poskim* it is an obligation *mide’oraiso*. On *Shabbos* there are 13 *brochos* missing (see *Mishna Bruro* 46:14), and yet many people are not careful about completing the mandatory 100 *brochos* by eating fruit or other sweet things (see *Menochos* 43a). The Rambam (*Tefila* 7:17 as interpreted by the Brisker Rov) says that one has to count each *brocho on Shabbos* to keep a check on whether 100 blessings have been made.

The *mekubolim* too explain that it is a wonderful *segula* to undertake to recite 100 *brochos* every day, including *Shabbos*, as we find with *Dovid Hamelech* in whose time 100 people were dying every day, and the plague stopped when he instituted that 100 *brochos* a day should be recited. Similarly, someone who becomes accustomed to fulfill this obligation will surely experience wonders.

The reason for this is that the purpose of this practice is to enable us to say 100 times in the course of every day: “Blessed are you Hashem our G-d...”, so that we will constantly remember that Hashem watches over us and all our actions and are dependent on Him, and someone who is closely connected to Hashem and cleaves to Him, attributing everything only to Him, merits *yeshu’os* that defy nature. It goes without saying that the greater the concentration with which each *brocho* is recited, the greater the effect of the *segulo* to be saved from misfortune.

The students of the Arizal stated that during the *Shovevim* period one should be especially careful about reciting 100 *brochos* with a proper degree of concentration.