Fascinating Insights

ג' סיון תשפ"א May 14, 2021

פרשת במדבר 9th year, edition 385

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לעילוי נשמת שמואל אביגדור בן יצחק מאיר

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<u>Unexpected Excitement</u>

Many people expect situations to turn out a certain way and therefore may not appreciate the outcome. The father of a newborn baby girl once asked R' Shach if he should make a Kidush. R' Shach's reply was if you finally had a baby after 8 years of waiting, you surely would make a Kidush. So now that Hashem saved you from all that pain, shouldn't you make a Kidush?!

Here is a story contrary to the one just mentioned. A person that went to visit an elderly man in a nursing home asked the man how he feels when he wakes up in the morning. The old man replied, "surprised!" The visitor took that as a life lesson: Don't take life for granted.

A Baal Teshuva named Dov who once worked in an orphanage in Sri Lanka observed that the orphans there were happier than most of his friends back in England because they appreciated every little thing. His friends constantly felt they needed a better car, bigger house and the like. They thought that the more you have, the happier you'll be. These orphans generally would share one pencil for every five children. One time, Dov bought each child a pencil. The feeling each child had was indescribable, as they each felt they were handed an enormous sum of money!

¹ There is an expression, "Life is full of 'Give and Take': Give thanks and Take nothing for granted!"

In late March 2020, just before Pesach, R' Boruch Rabinowitz related what two of his sons asked during the onset of the coronavirus: What would zaide—R' Akiva Eiger Schlussel² (1927-2011)—say about what we are living through (the coronavirus where tens of thousands died and hundreds of thousands were infected) such as the closing of schools, shuls, stores and staying in our homes? R' Rabinowitz's wife contemplated and said this is what her father would say: You are restricted where to go and how many people could congregate but you can stay at home and be in your own bed. No bunker, ghetto or sleeping with animals in a barn. You can go to sleep tonight and expect yourself and your family to be in the same place in the morning. In regards to food: You have enough food in your homes for weeks to survive. You have a Costco! You don't have to ration a few grains of barley per person daily. You have water. I can't believe it! Fresh water without limit and you don't have to boil it first. You go into a bathroom and flush and don't need to use a pail in a corner with other people around. You can go outside to get food and there is food to be gotten. You can go outside to get food without fear of being shot if you're discovered. You can take a shower or bath with soap and shampoo along with warm water. You have Tallis and Tefillin and you can Daven as long and as loud as you want without having to be afraid of being discovered by the Nazis who would shoot you. You can gather on your own porches and sing Kabbalas Shabbos. You can have a Shabbos Seuda with real chicken soup and not a little salt and water leaving the rest to the imagination. Real fresh fish on Shabbos! Chulent! Challa: Soft and chewy bread and not hard moldy coarse bread. You can get more than one slice in a day without needing to hide it from other people looking to steal every extra morsel... Heat: You can feel your fingers and toes when you wake up each morning. You have air conditioning in your homes and you therefore don't suffer from the heat and the stench. You have shoes without holes and more than one pair! You have Sefarim to learn from, and all types of Sefarim so that you can be locked up for weeks and months and you won't die of boredom. You have access to Shiurim via the internet, phone³ and computer. You have access to the outside world and at least know there is an outside world. You can know what's happening out there. You can be in touch with family and check in to see how they are doing and never think that you are from the last ones alive. If you need medicine, you can get them from a pharmacy. You plan on making a seder with real wine and Matza and you have a choice of Matza—Regular, whole wheat, spelt and oat. You have enough kzaisim for whatever Shiur you desire—Chazon Ish, R' Chaim Naeh—and enough for each person. You have Maror prechecked and enough for each person. You

 $^{^{\}rm 2}$ His grandfather, R' Dovid Schlussel was the Rosh Av Beis Din of the Minchas Elazar's Beis Din in Munkatch before the Holocaust.

³ The first phone book came to be in February 1878 and it was nothing other than a sheet of cardboard with 50 names of those who had a telephone.

have chicken as well as meat. Vegetables also, and not moldy potatoes. Potato peels with something inside! You have wine—dry, semi-dry and sweet. And four cups for each person. And you have Mevushal, non-Mevushal in addition to the choice of wines by region, country and taste. You have showers, baths, Sefarim, Shiurim. You have family, food, water, bathrooms, pillows and blankets.4 You have each other. You are not living with fear of being shot at a moment's notice. You have all the above and you're complaining. You know what zaide would have said! My dear pure children, there is nothing to complain about. Even when it's painful—people dying and getting sick from the coronavirus including Talmidei Chachamim, Rabbanim, Jews, all ages and genders—but realize what you have. Bed, food, heating, bath, shower, Sefarim, Shiurim, Jewish people, nice neighborhood, being alive, medicines, Pesach Seder, fresh air and not worried that enemies will shoot you when you step outside the door.⁵

Torah Totality

Rashi⁶ tells us that both the written and oral Torah were given to Moshe at Sinai. The Midrash⁷ relates that even what the Neviim would prophesize, as well as the original Torah thoughts of the sages that arose in each generation, was received at Sinai.

In speaking of Matan Torah, it says וידבר ה'...ראים זולתי קול ויגד לכם את בריתו אשר צוה אתכם לעשות עשרת הדברים ויכתבם על שני לחות אבנים ואתי צוה... Hashem spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form, only a sound. He told you of His covenant that He commanded you to observe, the Ten Declarations, and He inscribed them on two stone Tablets. Hashem commanded me... 8 Let us take these words apart and see how all of Torah is hinted to here:

- 1) The end letters of את ברתו אשר spell תורה.
- 2) If we do a nine-letter skip with הדברי<u>ם</u> ויכתבם על משנה אבנים ואתי א<u>ש</u>ני לחות אבנים ואתי צו<u>ה</u>. we come to the word משנה.
- 3) The end letters of קול ויגד לכם את בריתו spell תלמוד. If we go back two words and take the end letters of ראים זולתי, we have תלמודים (plural), referring to תלמוד בבלי and בבלי.
- 9 באים and כתובים are also hinted here. אבנים is comprised of the same letters as ויכתבם while ויכתבם rearranged spells כתובים.

⁴ The Chida (in his sefer Maagal Tov, p. 23) writes about how painful one of his travels were, which took place from the 16^{th} to the 18^{th} of Av. The wagon he rode in, which was pulled by eight horses, was big and laden with merchandise. Most of this journey was on a path of pebbles and rocks which made the trip constantly noisy and unpleasant. The wagon was pulled with great difficulty. Most of the journey he was in pain and had a tremendous headache. Then he writes that when he arrived at his destination which was Worms, Germany, he had a terrible toothache which caused him immense pain, which made him unable to stand, sit or lav down.

5) צשרת הדברים, in addition to referring to the Ten Commandments, also refers to the עשר ספירות (divine manifestations). In fact, if we add up the numerical value of עשרת הדברים when it is spelled out (That is עין, שין, ריש, יוד, ממ (תו, הא, דלת, בית, ריש, יוד, ממ,) we come to a total of 2,868. כתר, חכמה, בינה, חסד, גבורה, תפארת, נצח, This is the same as עשר ספירות The) הוד, יסוד, מלכות).

So, it hints to all parts of Torah, as they were all given at Sinai.

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Facing Your Face

We are instructed to receive everyone בסבר פנים יפות, with a pleasant facial expression.¹⁰ R' Avraham Grodzinski¹¹ (1883-1944) spent two years perfecting the attribute of "greeting every individual with a pleasant facial countenance." People would later attest to the extent he instilled this principle into his character. Even in the most horrific times in the Kovno Ghetto during the Holocaust, his pleasant facial expression concealed his internal grief.

When R' Shlomo Hoffman (1922-2013) was young and learning in the Slabodka yeshiva he had a learning session with R' Isaac Sher (1875-1952) in his house. He once entered the house and R' Sher asked him why he was sad. Unaware of how somber his expression was, he responded that he wasn't sad. R' Sher told him, "you must have not looked in a mirror recently because if you did, you would be embarrassed to go out in to the street with such an expression on your face. If you knew how you looked, you wouldn't dare enter my house with such a look on your face." For a long while after that encounter, R' Sher demanded that Shlomo wear a smile on his face whenever he entered his house. R' Sher assigned him several exercises to get him accustomed to smiling. One time he told him, "You are like a pit in the public thoroughfare. You cause damage to everyone around you with that glum expression on your face."

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

⁵ There is a saying, "Imagine you wake up today, only with the things you thanked Hashem for yesterday."

⁶ Vayikra 26:46.

⁷ Shemos Rabba 28:6. Also, Midrash Tanchuma, Yisro 11. The Gra once said that there are many Mesachtos on מדות, character traits, like Mesachta Anava, Mesachta Bitachon and the like but they were lost (Hamaor Hagadol, p. 843).

Devarim 4:12-14.

⁹ This is how it is spelled in Shmuel 1, 10:10 among many other places.

¹⁰ Avos 1:15. Someone once said, "Cheerfulness is contagious, but don't wait to catch it from others. Be a carrier!"

¹¹ His father, R' Yitzchak, who was a leader of the Warsaw Jewish community, established and supported a Yeshiva in Warsaw, to which the Chafetz Chaim commented that R' Yitzchak saved Jewish education in Warsaw. In the house of R' Yitzchak, tens of poor people on a daily basis partook in meals. In 1899, R' Avraham Grodzinski enrolled in the Slabodka Yeshiva, under the leadership of the Alter of Slabodka [of whom he became the primary student of], after short periods in the Yeshivos in Radin and Lomza. Later, he became the Mashgiach Ruchani [spiritual supervisor] of the Slabodka Yeshiva in Lithuania. He was the father-in-law of R' Chaim Kreisworth and of R' Shlomo Wolbe, as well as the brother-in-law of R' Yaakov Kamenetzky. He and four of his children were killed in the Holocaust while his other four survived. His talks of Mussar are in his Sefer Toras Avraham.