

מה השם אלוקיך שואל מעמך

What Should our Response Be to the Tragedies?

It Blazed Around Him and He Did Not Pay Attention

Klal Yisrael experienced a number of tragedies lately — in Meron on Lag B'Omer, and right afterward everything in Gaza, Covid-19, which is *baruch Hashem* over in Eretz Yisrael, but is still active in Chutz LaAretz, and then what happened on Shavuos in Karlin. Tragedies and calamities, *Rachmana litzlan*.

Chazal say (*Yevamos* 63a), “The world is struck with calamity solely for Klal Yisrael.” That is, when there are world tragedies, not in Eretz Yisrael, and not affecting Klal Yisrael, it is solely for Klal Yisrael. We learned this from the following *pesukim* (*Tzefaniah* 3:6,7), “I cut down nations; their towers have become desolate, I have destroyed their streets... I said, ‘Surely you will fear Me, you will accept *mussar*.’” That is, the whole purpose of world calamities is “you will fear Me” — that there should be *yiras Shamayim* when people realize *yeish din v'yeish dayan*, “there is judgment and there is a Judge.” It's for Klal Yisrael.

But sometimes the calamities affect Klal Yisrael directly, and another *pasuk* describes this situation (*Yeshayahu* 42:25): “And it blazed all around him and he did not know and it burned within him and he did not pay attention.” At first, there are calamities “going around,” and he doesn't know — the person acts as if he doesn't know about the calamities. But then, “it burns within him” — we are struck with tragedies and calamities in our own circles *Rachmana litzlan*, and we still don't take it to heart, we still don't think about why it happened. This is human nature.

More Is Expected of Bnei Torah

It is our obligation to pay attention and take heed, as the *pasuk* says (*Eichah* 3:40), “Let us search out our ways,” we have to understand what the *t'viah*, the claim, is about, who is guilty, who are the *shogegim*, unintentional sinners, and who are the *meizidim*, intentional sinners. Of course, the *t'viah* is much stronger against those who sin intentionally.

It's well known from Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* (*Yoreh Deiah* 2:28) that people who aren't *bnei Torah* are considered *tinokos sh'nishbo* because they never received a Torah education, no one ever taught them. From their youth, the education they received was completely different and they have no idea what *emunah* is, what Shema Yisrael is. There are those who really don't know, they are *mamash tinokos she'nishbu*, and all the sins they commit are unintentional. (Of course, even one who sins accidentally is required to bring a *korban chatas*, and needs a *tikkun* and a *kapparah*.) But *bnei Torah* who are *osek baTorah* know what is required of them.

Yeshivos have *mussar sedarim*, and all the *mussar sefarim*, like *Shaarei Teshuvah* and *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Orchos Tzaddikim*, and *Chovos HaLevavos* give a person a lot of *emunah*, and much information about what is considered a sin, and what are “duties of the heart.” These matters are not *middas chassidus*, “extras,” they are “duties,” obligations, mitzvos that are connected to our hearts. The Torah requires us to exhibit these behaviors; our hearts are obligated to react in certain ways. There are many *madreigos* in these matters, and when a person is *osek* in them, he will advance.

However, we must utilize *mussar seder* properly and learn *mussar* as we should. What will be if we don't treat the *seder* with the proper seriousness and come late, or even if we do learn, but fail to think about how to implement what we learned? The Vilna Gaon writes in *Iggeres HaGra* that it's not enough to learn *mussar*; rather, a person must think afterward: What about me? Is this how I am behaving? How's my behavior? Not too many people spend time on these kinds of thoughts, and that's why we are lacking in fulfilling the duties of our hearts.

Now, certainly anyone who is *osek baTorah* all day and also learns *mussar sefarim*, is held more accountable, because they know and understand what their obligations in this world are. Therefore, the *t'viah* on them is stronger, and they need *chizuk*.

Friday and Shabbos: Use the Time Wisely

There are specific times that need strengthening. It's not a secret that some of the *tzibbur* slacks off at certain times. Of course, there are those who don't, and they use those times well, only it's not like that for everyone. Bnei Torah have three daily *sedarim*: morning, afternoon and night *seder*, but sometimes there is a slacking off, and this requires *chizuk*, strengthening.

For example, there's Erev Shabbos — Friday. On Friday people are busy getting ready for Shabbos, and since they're busy with Shabbos preparations, they aren't so careful about learning Torah. Of course, there are those who are careful, and right after Minchah Gedolah they get ready for Shabbos, shower, put on their Shabbos clothes, and sit down to learn. But there aren't too many people who do this, and some of the *tzibbur* just ends up wasting Erev Shabbos.

Then comes Shabbos itself. On Friday night we must have a *seudah* with *zemiros*, but after the *seudah*, there is still time to learn, especially during the long winter nights. During the summer months it is hard. And then on Shabbos morning, there's another *seudah* and *oneg Shabbos*. But there should be a time limit and there should be time to learn after the *seudah*. This is also a specific time that's wasted. Friday and Shabbos are days that aren't used as they should be for *esek haTorah*.

Using Night Seder Properly

Night *seder* during the week is another time that can use *chizuk*. It should be that *bachurim* go to sleep right after *seder*. If they don't, they should keep learning. But to use that time to speak *devarim beteilim*? While it is necessary to speak a little, "*mi'ut sichah*," like the Gra says, what is the measure of "*mi'ut*," a little? Only *mi'ut*, just a little bit, no more than a little bit.

Some *bachurim* say Krias Shema right away night *seder*, and then go straight to their rooms to sleep. But not everyone. So this is another example of time that is wasted, times of *bittul Torah*, and we need *chizuk*, we need to correct our behavior!

One area specifically that requires *chizuk* is the *mussar seder*. *Mussar* educates a person and reminds him of his duties in this world, how to act, how to mold his behavior according to the *mussar sefarim*. We've mentioned many times that even family men who learn a few minutes of *mussar* a day see that it has an influence on the entire household. It changes the atmosphere to be more pleasant, and gives them a happy life. A person who conducts his life according to the *sifrei mussar*, will have a happy life. *Ashrecha baOlam hazeh!* And Chazal say in *Avos* (6:4) that a person has a happy life in this world by leading a Torah life.

The Way of Torah: Minimizing Pleasures

So what is a Torah life? Eating bread with salt, and drinking measured water, and sleeping on the ground, and living a life of privation, yet still toiling in Torah. We've just mentioned four materialistic challenges: food, drink, sleep, and general affliction besides. Yet still toiling in Torah seems to be a fifth challenge, and one who experiences all these challenges is "*Ashrecha baOlam hazeh*," fortunate in this world. This type of lifestyle is the happiest one. That's the reality!

We've learned from this that a person needs minimal physical pleasure — whatever is really necessary, but no more. The *tzibbur* isn't aware of this; **they want more and more pleasure, food that tastes better and better. There are so many levels in pleasures, in beverages, there are so many things that are simply unhealthy, but they are pleasurable, and people seek out the pleasure even if it's not healthy. But our life has to be led "b'mi'ut taanug," minimizing pleasure.**

This is one of the 48 acquisitions of Torah; this is the way of Torah! If a person toils in Torah with minimal pleasures, then he will be happy and fortunate in this world.

Of course, the obligation differs from person to person — each person according to his abilities. Some people cannot sit and learn all day long, but each person is obligated to do as much as he can, to utilize his time and learn at every free moment. In his *sefer Toras HaBayis*, the Chafetz Chaim delineates how a person who doesn't learn Torah full time can arrange his day and have a very pleasant schedule that includes *esek haTorah*.

The Hashpa'ah of Tefillah and Learning Mussar

As we mentioned, *mussar seder* needs *chizuk*. It has an influence on your entire day, your behavior will be pleasant, and you will have a happy life.

For the past few generations, *yeshivos* have had a *mussar seder*. The Chafetz Chaim wrote (*Beis Yisrael* chap. 9) that nowadays [in his days] everyone agrees unequivocally that *mussar* also needs a set seder. In the previous generations, however, it was not so. Although the *Rishonim* wrote *mussar sefarim*, they didn't have a set time for learning *mussar*.

I heard that the Alter of Kelm explained this as follows: **For the *Rishonim*, every tefillah was like a mussar seder!** When they davened, they recited their *tefillos* just like the *Shulchan Aruch* instructs (*Orach Chaim* 98:1): with *hispashtus hagashmiyus*, nullification of one's physical senses. It's well known that when the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav *zt"l* davened *Shemoneh Esrei*, it was as they lost their sense of hearing; they didn't hear when people spoke to them. A *tefillah* on this level is surely like *mussar*, and this happened three times a day.

And even so, the Brisker Rav learned *Mesillas Yesharim* every day. People saw him learning a chapter a day. So even though his davening was *b'hispashtus hagashmiyus*, learning *Mesillas Yesharim* apparently also influenced him. Learning *Mesillas Yesharim* certainly attributed to the high *madreigah* he attained!

If this is how they acted, what about us? We surely need *chizuk*, and Rashi (*Berachos* 32) writes that

chizuk must be constant, and with all one's strength.

We've already mentioned the Chazon Ish's *madreigah* of *yiras Shamayim*. Sometimes he was in a condition of *pikuach nefesh* and he had to eat or drink immediately. And sometimes he felt that if he'd make a *berachah*, he'd faint due to his great level of *yiras Shamayim*. That too was *pikuach nefesh*, so he had no choice but to eat without a *berachah*. It was simply *pikuach nefesh*.

Rav Baruch Ber *zt"l* did not learn *mussar* — there was a *mussar seder* in his *yeshivah*, but he didn't learn *mussar* personally. It's told about him that he once learned *mussar*, and did not sleep that entire night. His *yiras Shamayim* was so acute, so strong, that if he learned *mussar*, he just couldn't sleep. Since that was the case, it was *assur* for him to learn any more.

But we need *chizuk* in *yiras Shamayim*, and we must learn *mussar*. *Bachurim* in *yeshivos* have their set *mussar seder* of a half-hour, but married men need to make their own time to learn. If a person has a set seder in *mussar*, even just for a few minutes a day, it has an influence and gives the learner and his family a very pleasant feeling.

Torah and Tefillah Should Be Joyful

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*siman aleph*) writes that a person must grieve over the *Churban Beis HaMikdash* every day, and not forget about the *Churban*. Indeed, the *Gemara* and *Chazal* tell us (*Taanis* 30, for example) that one may not take his mind off the *Churban*. The *Mishnah Berurah* writes that despite all the pain we feel over the *Churban*, "Torah learning and *tefillah* should be performed with joy." When a person is not learning or davening, he should be pained over the *churban*, but when he learns, he must be happy! This *middah* is of the 48 acquisitions of Torah: *b'simchah* and *sameach b'chelko*.

Davening also must be with joy, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 19), citing from the *Midrash*: When you pray, your heart should be happy that you are praying in front of a King Who is unparalleled, that you can speak before such a King, and the King wants to hear you. This is a reason for great joy. Now, this is also *yirah*, that you are standing and speaking with the King, but it is *yiras Shamayim* with joy!

This is the path of Torah: with joy. This is the way to have success in Torah.

Some of the other ways Torah is acquired is “with fear and trepidation.” This too adds to success in Torah, and this is something that not everyone is aware of.

Learning What You Like to Learn

This is applicable to everyone. In the morning *sefer* in *yeshivos* the learning is *b'iyun*, but not everyone is cut out to learn *b'iyun*, to figure out the *svaros* of the Gemara, of Rashi, Tosfos and the Rishonim and Acharonim, to understand the *svaros* and not get confused. It's very hard, and only a minority — not the entire *tzibbur* — can do so successfully.

Most of the *tzibbur* needs to learn more simply, because when a person delves too deeply and tries to do more than he can, he wastes his time and doesn't use it properly. People who can learn in depth learn at a slower pace and delve deeply, but

most of the *tzibbur* has to cover more ground. There are ways to do so, and there are solutions. This is something that must be changed — morning *sefer* has to be used properly by learning in a way that is congruent with each person's nature.

There are many things that need *chizuk*, and when *bonei Torah* are *mechazek* themselves, it has an influence on the entire *tzibbur*. *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh la'zeh* (*Sanhedrin* 27b). Additionally, each person brings merit to others, as Chazal say regarding the *arba minim* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12): “Let these come and bring atonement for those.” **The entire *tzibbur* gains *zechuyos* due to the *baalei madreigah*, the people on a high *madreigah*.**

B'ezras Hashem, may each one of us succeed in becoming a *baal madreigah* as he should. The *Mesillas Yesharim* and the *Chovos HaLevavos* both say that it's attainable! *B'siyatta d'Shemaya* may we all merit *hatzlachah* in whatever we need!

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גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
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