

Fascinating INSIGHTS

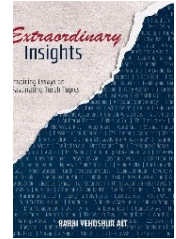
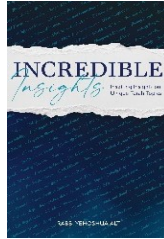
ה' שבט תשפ"ב

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Gentle Jew

We say in Shacharis on Monday and Thursday אחינו כל בית ישראל הנתונים בצרה ובשביה...המקום ירחם עליהם ויוציאם מצרה לרוחה, our brothers, the entire family of Israel who are in distress and captivity... Hashem should have mercy on them and remove them from distress to relief. This formula seems problematic as why does it say כל בית ישראל, if not all Jews are in distress and captivity? The answer is that when a slight number of Jews are in trouble, we feel their pain as if we were all in that situation.

In 1898, there was a fire in the town of Brisk that caused mass destruction. R' Chaim Brisker (1853-1918) did what he could to put those families affected by the fire back on their feet. Additionally, for the period after the fire, he didn't sleep in his house but on the floor of the corridor of the shul. When his family pleaded with him to sleep in his bed in the house, he said, "How can I sleep on a bed in my house when many Jews don't have a roof to their house?"

One of Migdal Ohr's supporters had a son-in-law Uri Friedman who ran a shipping business out of Nigeria. The Nigerian government owed him millions of dollars and wasn't getting around to paying him for his services, which now caused him to be on the brink of bankruptcy. A few days before Rosh Hashana, Uri met R' Grossman at an event somewhere in Israel. Uri told R' Grossman the situation and asked that he daven for him. Since Uri knew

the Nigerian president's chief of staff, R' Grossman told Uri to tell the chief of staff that you know a holy man who lives in the Holy Land that wants to come and give him a blessing. Shortly after Rosh Hashana Uri called R' Grossman telling him that he received a message that the president of Nigeria was very interested in meeting the holy man from the Holy Land. Soon after, they departed on a private plane headed to Nigeria. In the airport in Nigeria, they were met by 15 military officers and then were led to their waiting limousine which was escorted by police until they reached the palace. For the next hour and a half, the ministers and members of the government each received personal blessings from R' Grossman. Then he was escorted to an exquisite room where he sat beside the president. After some conversation, R' Grossman gave the Nigerian president a special gift. The president was so touched that he rose from his throne-like chair and sat on the floor before R' Grossman, folding his legs beneath him and laying his head on R' Grossman's knees. "Please bless me holy man," he beseeched. R' Grossman put his hands on the president's head and gave him a blessing. R' Grossman then said to the president the man he came with, Uri, helps him with his holy work in Israel. "I've heard he's dealing with some sort of challenge here in Nigeria. I am therefore requesting that if there is anything you can do to help him, please do so." The president said he'll do everything in his power.¹ After a heartfelt goodbye, they were on their return flight to Israel. Two weeks later Uri

¹ The Targum (Esther 2:5) comments on איש יהודי, a Jewish man: someone who davens for his people. So how much do we care about others? Do we daven for them?

received the full sum he was owed by the Nigerian² government.³

Someone was once pushing R' Dovid Soloveitchik to accept a certain student into yeshiva. R' Dovid said that the boy can learn in the Beis Midrash but cannot be accepted to the yeshiva. The man asked incredulously if he can learn in the Beis Midrash, why can't he join the yeshiva. R' Dovid told him that he davens and cries for the success of each boy in the yeshiva. "But now that I have reached the quota of what I can handle, I cannot daven even for one more boy."

Alternate Altar

In 1925 there was an interesting exchange of letters between R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848-1932), chief rabbi of Yerushalayim, and R' Shimon Sofer⁴ (1850-1944), the rav of Erlau, Hungary, about the possibility of reinstating the mizbeach ("Altar") on the Har Habayis ("Temple Mount") in order to allow karbonos ("sacrifices") to be offered even in the absence of the Beis Hamikdash. R' Shimon Sofer wrote: "Since Hashem has given us favor in the eyes of the rulers of Eretz Yisrael who allow us to conduct our matters entirely in accordance with the Torah, perhaps it is now the time to consider erecting the mizbeach on the Har Habayis and offer karbonos on it as was done at the beginning of the second Beis Hamikdash when karbonos were brought before the Beis Hamikdash had been rebuilt.⁵ It is also stated in Yerushalmi that the Beis Hamikdash will initially be built with only the minimum of a mizbeach on which to offer

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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 three books including the recently released *Extraordinary Insights*, in addition to being the host of *The Fascinating Insights Podcast*. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, 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.

² Once, while R' Meir Shapiro was collecting money for Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he knocked on a wealthy person's door. He answered the door frustrated explaining that he was napping and now he awoke to a request for money. R' Shapiro responded that in Birchas Hashachar we answer amen to each of the brachos except for the last bracha which concludes המעביר שנה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי, Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelid. However, we do answer amen to this bracha when we finish the succeeding paragraph with the words הגומל ואתה ישראל ("Who bestows kindness that are beneficent to His people Israel"). This is to teach us that it was worth it for you to awaken once you perform kindness. Otherwise, you can continue to sleep.

³ R' Yitzchak Vorka commented on הערב עד הכהן הכהן עד הערב, the Kohen shall remain contaminated until evening (Bamidbar 19:7), which it says by the Parah Aduma, that the essence of the Parah Aduma—purifying those who are spiritually impure—is the concept of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, love your fellow like yourself (Vayikra 19:18). His grandson, R' Mendel of Vorka, explained that this is because the priest who was involved in the purification process himself became impure by the same process that purified the person who came to him. Giving up something yourself in order to help another is the ultimate love for one's fellow man. When one truly loves another, one feels pleasure in all the sacrifices made for him.

⁴ He was one of 10 children born to R' Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, known as the Ksav Sofer. In the early 1870s, he lived both

karbonos...⁶ If Yerushalayim rabbanim will jointly request permission from the British authorities in this matter, it will undoubtedly be granted. Money is not an issue because all Jews will gladly contribute... The actual halachos about the sacrifice procedures and kohanim can be discussed by the sages of Eretz Yisrael and decided by the majority... "

R' Yosef Chaim responded in a letter: "I am afraid that you have been misinformed regarding the goodwill of the government towards allowing us to conduct our affairs in complete accordance with the Torah. I will relate a small incident that illustrates the true state of affairs. When the Jewish High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, came here several years ago, I sent him a letter requesting that we be allowed to post a sign on the road leading to the Har Habayis to warn Jews of the Torah's prohibition against entering the Har Habayis in our present state of *tumah*, ritual contamination. Many are unaware of this law and as a result transgress an *isur kares* (violation punishable by spiritual excision). I explained the severity of the prohibition to the commissioner but he declined this request because such a sign would offend irreligious Jews. Besides, the Temple area has been in the possession of the Arabs for quite some time, and even false rumors alleging that Jews were attempting to seize control of the area from them have in the past provoked Arab hatred against us. If Jews would openly acknowledge such intentions, terrible consequences, G-d forbid, would result. Consequently, we must await Hashem's salvation and daven that He send us Moshiach and we will rejoice in His salvation speedily and in our days..."

in Uman and Kiev, where he became known as a brilliant Torah scholar. Despite his young age, he was offered the position of Chief Rabbi of Kiev, an offer he demurred. Thereafter, he lived some two years in Krakow, in the company of his uncle, also named R' Shimon Sofer (author of the *Michtav Sofer*). Around 1875, he returned to Pressburg and married his cousin, with whom he had 13 children. He led the Jewish community in Erlau for some 64 years. In his old age, when he lost his eyesight, one of his students would read aloud the gemara with Rashi and Tosafos to him. R' Sofer would correct the boy whenever he made a mistake, as he possessed an exceptional memory. In June, 1944, the Germans deported R' Sofer and his entire community—some 3,000 Jews to Auschwitz. They arrived on June 2 (the 21st of Sivan), and were gassed a few hours later. R' Sofer was 94 at the time of his death. He authored a sefer of responsa called *Hisorerus Teshuva* and *Shir Maon* on the Torah. He was able to pay for the publication of these works only with the help of his wife, who sold all her jewelry to cover the printing costs. From his three wives, R' Sofer had 15 children, 8 of which were killed in the Holocaust.

⁵ Ezra 3:2-6.

⁶ R' Shimon Sofer then refers R' Yosef Chaim to the comments of Tosafos Yom Tov to the Mishna in Maaser Sheini 5:2. He also mentions the exchange concerning this matter between his ancestors—R' Akiva Eiger and the Chassam Sofer—as recorded in *Shu"t Chassam Sofer*, Yoreh Deah 236, and the views of other authorities cited in his own work *Hisorerus Teshuva* 4:29.