



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת חיי שרה תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Chayei Sarah

HOW TO RESPOND TO A CRISIS

The Mishnah in Berachos (9:3) shows us what *not* to do in the event of a crisis (Heaven forbid):

הצוּעֵק לְשַׁעֲבֵר, הָרִי זֹ תִפְלֵת שְׂוֹא. כִּי־צַד... הָיָה בָּא
בְּדַרְךְ וְשָׁמַע קוֹל צְוֹחָה בְּעִיר, וְאָמַר, יְהִי רַצוֹן שְׁלֵא
יְהִי אֱלוֹי בְּנֵי בֵיתִי, הָרִי זֹ תִפְלֵת שְׂוֹא.

“If someone *davens* after the fact, his prayer is in vain. An example: A person arriving from a journey hears a cry of despair emanating from the city. If he were to respond by praying, ‘May it be Your Will that this cry did not emanate from my household,’ his prayer is for naught.”

The Mishnah does not intend to be harsh; rather, it stresses the importance of dealing with the reality. The time to *daven* is *before* a calamity occurs, in order to avert it. In the Mishnah’s scenario, whatever has transpired, has already happened. As such, praying that it change is unwarranted (*Bartenura*).

What *is* the proper response? The Gemara (*Ibid.* 60a) records how Hillel reacted to such a situation. Hearing a cry upon his return, he remained calm. “I am certain that this cry did not come from my family,” he declared. Hillel epitomized the fulfillment of the verse in Tehillim (112:17): “He will not fear from bad tidings, for he confidently relies on Hashem.”

While Hillel didn’t pray in vain, his reaction does appear puzzling. While *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem is a vital attribute, there is no guarantee that a person will be spared from all difficulties. *Bitachon* is characterized as a firm belief that whatever Hashem decrees for an individual is intrinsically in his best interests, whether or not he can readily perceive the benefit. How, then, could Hillel be so certain –

before even entering the city – that the cry did not come from his household?

CLOSE CALL

The Midrash (*Yalkut, Yeshayah, 473*) attributes the following verse to Eliezer, Avraham’s servant:

“Who amongst you... walks in the darkness and has no light? Let him trust in... Hashem” (*Yeshayah 50:10*).

Eliezer was charged with a daunting task: to travel to another land and find the perfect wife for Yitzchak. While every *shidduch* is important, this one was particularly monumental. Eliezer had to find the proper candidate to be the mother of the entire Jewish nation. This match was consequential for all of Klal Yisrael, for all generations.

Despite the enormity and difficulty of his mission, he placed his reliance on Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And the Jewish people of today and all times are testimony to the results.

R’ Chatzkel Levenstein (*Ohr Yechezkel, Emunah, 13-18*) comments on the apparent redundancy of the aforementioned verse (“Walks in darkness... without light”). The *possuk* is revealing the extent to which an individual must retain hope. “Darkness” refers to the difficult situation in which a person finds himself. Regarding the potential avenues for salvation, “He has no light” – there does not appear to be any way out. Yet, despite the fact that logically speaking he does not perceive any light at the end of the tunnel, there is a prescription for deliverance. “Let him (nevertheless) trust in Hashem.” Since “Nothing is unfeasible for Hashem” (*Bereishis 18:14*), there is never any reason to give up.

“Even if a sharpened sword rests on the condemned man’s neck, he still should not despair” (*Berachos*

Dedicated in loving memory of
מרת גיטל בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ע"ה
by her son, R' Sholom Chayim Schneider, Brooklyn, NY

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit
of משה בן דוד ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no
relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

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CHAYIM**

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10a). As far as Hashem is concerned, it doesn't matter how promising the prospects for a "happy ending" appear. He can do anything; and if He decides that a salvation is in order, He will provide it – even at the final second.

Perhaps this was Hillel's calculation as well. He had surely mastered the art of *bitachon* and inculcated it in his family. He was fully confident, then, that if a calamity threatened (Heaven forbid), his family members would hold out until the end. Whatever Hashem decreed would be carried out; if for whatever reason, a calamity was ordained, then it would come no matter what. And if He decreed that they should be saved, then nothing could prevent their salvation. As long as a breath of life still remained, the possibility of salvation still existed in their minds. Knowing this, the family of Hillel would retain their *bitachon* until the end, no matter how desperate the situation appeared. If a scream escaped, it must not be coming from his house.

THEY JUMPED THE GUN

One of the ironies of the Polish government was its scrupulous adherence to a law requiring the local clergy to recite confession with a condemned prisoner. They could trump up charges to unfairly liquidate an "undesirable," but they would halt the execution until confession was recited.

Toward the end of WWI, a Jew from Brisk was convicted of espionage and sentenced to death. Before carrying out the verdict, however, the officials brought him to Brisk so that the Brisker Rav could say *vidui* with the condemned Jew.

The Brisker Rav, for his part, had no intention whatsoever of being party to the murder of a fellow Jew. Taking on the government was a dangerous piece of business, but the Brisker Rav held steadfast. When the authorities came to summon him, he was in the middle of *davening*, so the officials had to wait. But this *Shemoneh Esrei* continued for some time – after two hours, the Rav was still "in the middle of *davening*." At this point, it was clear that the Brisker Rav wasn't budging, and the officials were low on patience.

With the tension mounting, the congregants became increasingly worried about the safety of their Rav, as well as their own safety. They couldn't understand the point in delaying the inevitable. Unfortunately, they did not share the Brisker Rav's view, as he continued to hope for a miracle despite the grim outlook of the situation. And so the *gabbaim* devised a plan. Pointing to one of the elderly members of the congregation, they told the officials that he was a "substitute rabbi" and could perform the *vidui* in place of the Brisker Rav.

This satisfied the officers. They immediately went out, had the *vidui* recited, and proceeded with the planned execution. The Rav was devastated when he learned what had happened.

A few minutes later, a messenger from Warsaw arrived, bearing an urgent notice. Apparently, the conviction was a mistake and had just been overturned (*B'mechitzasam 253-4*).

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