

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Chayah *bas* Avrohom *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Chafetz Chaim and the World Wars **PARSHAS VAYISHLACH 5776**

Sukkos 1931. At the end of the *davening* – as reported by his disciple, the Torah sage R’ Elchanan Wasserman – the Chafetz Chaim called for the attention of the assembled. “I am not exaggerating to you,” he announced. “A time of great peril is imminent. I am not speaking of mere economic travails; our very lives, and those of our wives and children, are in grave danger!”

It seems that the Chafetz Chaim had some premonition of the tragic events that were to come. Such is related, as well, in the compilation of the Chafetz Chaim’s teachings, arranged by his son, R’ Aryeh Leib. He quotes from the account of R’ Pesach Porodovsky, who attended the Chafetz Chaim in his final years:

“Before the German presidential elections, in which the candidates were Hindenberg and Hitler, my colleague Nosson Brezer and I approached (the Chafetz Chaim)... to request that he pray on behalf of our Jewish brethren in Germany... Nosson relayed the need for Divine mercy to prevent Hitler’s victory. The Chafetz Chaim answered: ‘May Hashem ensure that whatever evil he wants to perpetrate should be visited back on his own head.’

“But after a moment, (the Chafetz Chaim) began to weep. In an undertone, he uttered the following: ‘Master of the Universe – what can I say to You? You must do as You see fit – but please see to it that Your great Name not suffer desecration!’”

Straight From the Source

The above represent more manifestations of the phenomenon we discussed recently (*parshas Toldos*) regarding the prophetic powers of the sages. In fact, in many respects, their clear vision even surpasses that of the prophets; as Chazal tell us: **הַחֶזֶק עֲדִיף מִנְבִּיא** – “A sage is superior to a prophet” (*Bava Basra 12a*).

Further insight into the nature of this uncanny ability can be gleaned from the Mishnah in *Avos (6:1)*, which lists the numerous qualities accrued to a genuine Torah scholar:

כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה לְשִׁמָּה, זוֹכֵה לְדַבְרֵי הַרְבֵּה... וְנִהְיֶה מְמַנּוּ עֲצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה בִּינָה וְגִבּוֹרָה. שְׁנַאֲמַר לִי עֲצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה אֲנִי בִּינָה לִי גִבּוֹרָה... וּמַגְלִין לוֹ רְזֵי תּוֹרָה...

“Whoever learns Torah for its own sake, merits many things... And they enjoy from him counsel, wisdom, understanding, and strength. As it states (*Mishlei 8:14*): ‘To me (the Torah) there is counsel and wisdom; I embody understanding and possess strength.’ ...And the Torah’s secrets are revealed to him...”

This appears to be the source of the sage's perceptive faculties: they come from the Torah itself. In his commentary to the Mishnah, the *Medrash Shmuel* makes this point, drawing specifically from the verse quoted therein. The Torah itself proclaims: "I am wisdom"; and this pristine wisdom devolves onto its most faithful adherents.

No Need for Lots

In the case of the Chafetz Chaim, we find that much of his apparent clairvoyance came straight from the Torah itself. R' Shach relates an episode along the lines of the above accounts, but this time involving World War I. While that conflict did not present the same form and extent of the tragedies that rained down upon the Jewish people in the Second World War, it nevertheless contained its own share of massive upheavals. Thus, at the time, the Chafetz Chaim's yeshivah in Radin had to grapple with the threat posed by the war, whose battlefield was drawing ever closer. If they remained in place, they could find themselves in the crosshairs of the combatants (who likewise needed little pretext to vent their bloodlust on the Jewish population). By moving into the interior of the continent, they might be spared from the immediate battle. But the area was a great unknown; where would they obtain sufficient subsistence to survive?

R' Hirsh Levinson, the Chafetz Chaim's saintly son-in-law, decided to utilize the "Goral HaGra" (the Vilna Gaon's lottery) for guidance. This was a procedure which, when properly employed, would point to a particular Biblical verse; that verse would contain a message that addressed the supplicant's dilemma.

After following the procedure, R' Hirsh went to the Chafetz Chaim to report. Before he was able to relate his findings, however, the Chafetz Chaim shared his reluctance about using this method. "R' Hirsh," he said to his son-in-law, "why is it necessary for us to use this measure? We can derive the answer to our dilemma on our own, by simply looking in the Torah."

The Chafetz Chaim proceeded to explain by referring to this week's *parshah*. Ya'akov was travelling with a large camp consisting of his sizeable family and all of his possessions; and now his brother Esav was approaching with a formidable force. The *passuk* outlines the steps Ya'akov took to confront the imminent danger: וַיִּחַץ אֶת-הַעָם אֲשֶׁר-אִתּוֹ... לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹתַי – "And he split up the company that was with him... into two camps" (*Bereishis 32:8*).

"We should do the same," the Chafetz Chaim concluded, "and split up the *yeshivah* for the duration of the conflict. Half should remain here in Radin, and half should move far away from the battlefield."

For his part, R' Hirsh – who, as of yet, had not reported on the outcome of his efforts – stood stupefied. For the verse that the Chafetz Chaim had cited was the exact same one revealed by the Goral HaGra.

But when he relayed this amazing fact to his father-in-law, the Chafetz Chaim reacted with relative equanimity. "Why should we 'bother' Hashem to reveal these matters through supernatural means, when we could simply discover the solution ourselves? All we have to do is look in the Torah, which contains all of the answers and guidance we could possibly need!"

(All narratives related above were culled from either Kol Kisvei Chafetz Chaim Hashaleim [compiled by the Chafetz Chaim's son, R' Aryeh Leib], or the compilation Chafetz Chaim Hachadash [Al HaTorah], Parshas Vayishlach).