



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת שמות תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Shemos

WHY WORRY?

One of the hallmarks of the Novardok system of *mussar* (ethical teachings) is the emphasis placed on *bitachon* (total reliance on Hashem). A prototype of this tradition was R' Gershon Liebman, a true bastion of faith in the face of adversity. (He eventually went on to become the Rosh Yeshivah of the Novardok Yeshivah of France.)

R' Gershon was able to retain a sincerely positive demeanor. This was in stark contrast to basically everyone around him, who spent literally every waking moment wallowing in abject misery, devoid of any trace of joy.

His achievement was particularly remarkable given the circumstances of those times: R' Gershon "resided" in a Nazi concentration camp. Even in the shadow of the valley of death, R' Gershon's mood was not affected.

How was this possible? To people like you and me, it may seem like a superhuman feat. But by contemplating Hashem's methods in directing His world, we can begin to understand how R' Gershon's attitude was completely logical. And this week's *parshah* provides a perfect example.

UNLIKELY SAVIOR

Depicting the familiar narrative, R' Boruch Sorotzkin (*Habinah V'haberachah, Shemos 4:3*) demonstrates the perfect irony involved in these events:

Upon receiving word from his astrologers that a child will be born to redeem the enslaved Jews, Pharaoh is determined to crush their prospect for freedom from the start. And so the most powerful man in the country – if not the entire world – at that time is pitted against the weakest possible element:

Pharaoh declares all-out war against an unborn baby.

With the lives of his subjects at the mercy of his whims, Pharaoh instructs the midwives to murder any boys born to a Jewish mother. Although this plan fails, Pharaoh is undeterred; he renews his campaign with vigor and viciousness. All Jewish babies are to be cast into the Nile. In an effort to preempt even the slightest possibility that the redeemer will survive, this decree becomes extended to the Egyptians as well: *all* newborn boys are slated for execution. With his sheer power and his army of officials and lackeys, there was no way any mother could defy Pharaoh's command and protect her child.

Although the birth of Moshe initially went undetected, the chances for his survival seemed grim, at best. Unable to hide him any longer from the vigilance of Pharaoh's henchmen, his mother, Yocheved, is forced to abandon him to his "fate." He is placed in a receptacle to float on the river, in the (seemingly) vain hope that somehow he will make it.

Yet, that is exactly what happens. Moshe is found by a kind-hearted lady, who decides to spare his life. And she is actually none other than the daughter of Pharaoh himself!

Pharaoh had mobilized all of his forces and people in a campaign against a single baby. Yet it was Hashem's Will that this baby survive and thrive. And, as it "turned out," who fulfilled – against all odds – the Will of Hashem? Pharaoh! The redeemer of the Jewish people was sheltered and raised in the very palace of his absolute worst enemy, the one who was dedicated to his destruction.

לזכר נשמת ר' ישראל בנימין ב"ר יחיאל מאיר קאטנער ע"ה
יום היארצייט - כ"א טבת

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

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As R' Sorotzkin concludes, this chain of events points to the simple yet inescapable fact that "No wisdom or design or plan can succeed against Hashem's Will" (*Mishlei 21:30*). No matter how much it appears that the deck is completely stacked against a person, no harm can befall him if Hashem does not decree so.

Of course, a person is not sanctioned to *willingly* place himself in a dangerous situation. When unprovoked threats appear, however, a person, in truth, need not fear. Even if all of the armies of the world were to march against him, if Hashem does not will it, he will not be touched.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The extent to which a Jew is enjoined to place his reliance on the Almighty is demonstrated by the section in the Torah that describes the wars Yisrael must wage against their enemies. There, the Torah (*Devarim 20:3-4*) instructs the combatants:

"Let your heart not be faint; do not feel fear, nor terror, nor discouragement before them. For Hashem, your G-d is accompanying you, to fight for you against your enemies..."

Expounding on this passage, the Mishnah in Sotah (8:1) makes clear that the Jewish soldiers are encouraged and expected to withstand the temptation to be flustered by even the most apparently terrifying sights and sounds of the battlefield:

אל ירד לבבכם, מפני צהלת סוסים וצחצוח חרבנות. אל תיראו, מפני הגפת תריסין ושפעת הקלגסין. אל תחפזו, מקול קרנות. אל תערצו, מפני קול צנחות. כי ה' אלהיכם ההלך עמכם, הן באין בנצחונן של בשר ודם, ואתם באים בנצחונן של מקום.

"'Let your heart not be faint,' from the whinnying of horses and the brandishing of swords. 'Do not feel fear,' from the clashing of shields and the enemies' war cries. 'Nor terror,' from the horn blasts. 'Nor be discouraged,' from the screams (of the wounded). 'For Hashem is accompanying you'; they are relying on the strength of flesh and blood, while you are relying on the power of the Almighty."

This very section is introduced by the following *passuk*: "When you go out to war... and you see horses, chariots, and a greater fighting force than you, do not fear them," (*ibid.*, v. 1). Rabbeinu Yonah is of the opinion that this is an actual, Biblical commandment incumbent on every Jew in a general sense. "When a person sees that danger is upon him, he should recall that Hashem's salvation is near..." (*Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:32*).

While adopting such an attitude may be easier said than done, through consistent effort, it is possible. R' Gershon Liebman was one such model of what can be achieved when a person internalizes the idea that no matter how desperate one's situation appears, Hashem is the One in charge, and, therefore, there is no real need to worry. If Hashem did not decree that harm should befall someone, *no one* will be able to lay a finger on him.

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A DEBT REPAID

The following story is told regarding Rabbi Yosef Chayim Sonnenfeld, the famous rabbi of old Jerusalem. The story occurred while Rabbi Sonnenfeld, then referred to as Chayim, was still a young man in Europe.

While in Pressburg, Chayim once played a role in an amazing story involving kindness. A certain couple in Pressburg operated a successful business and contributed generously to the yeshivah. The wife founded a fund specifically to pay students of the yeshivah to recite Kaddish for people who had died without leaving behind anyone to say the prayer for them.

After many years, the husband died and the business began to decline rapidly. His widow was soon completely bankrupt with no means of support. To make matters worse, her two daughters had reached marriageable age and she did not have a penny with which to make their weddings.

The broken-hearted woman went to the K'sav Sofer (Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer) and told him of her sad plight. She said that as far as her own needs were concerned, she had faith that G-d would provide her with money to support her family and marry off her daughters. She was concerned, however, that the saying of Kaddish, for which she had always paid the students, would be discontinued because she was penniless. She tearfully pleaded with the K'sav Sofer to continue to fund the practice and she promised to repay the money when her situation improved. The K'sav Sofer was greatly moved by this noble woman's request and he readily agreed to do as she had asked.

The woman left the office with a smile on her face. As she walked home, she was startled by the sudden appearance of a very dignified elderly gentleman with

a long white beard, walking slowly across her path. Since the man was a total stranger, she was surprised when he struck up a friendly conversation with her, politely inquiring as to how she was managing financially. When she told him of her sad situation, he asked her how much she needed to marry off her daughters. Bewildered by the entire conversation, the woman delineated the large sum. The man drew out his checkbook, wrote a check for the full amount, and told her that it could be cashed at the local bank. The man suggested, though, that he sign the check in the presence of two witnesses, since the sum was quite large, and the bank might accuse the woman of forging the check.

The two then went to the Pressburg Yeshivah where they asked Chayim and a friend to serve as witnesses. The man signed the check in their presence, gave the boys another slip of paper bearing his signature as an added assurance, and then hurried on his way. Wondering whether the whole incident was a miracle or a cruel hoax, the dazed woman went to the bank and asked that the check be cashed. Seeing how large the sum was, the teller asked her to wait while he spoke with the owner of the bank. The bank owner took one look at the bank check and collapsed in a faint. After being revived, the shaken banker asked that the woman be brought into his office. There, he asked her if she could identify the man who had written the check. The woman answered that she could, and added that there are two students of the yeshivah who had seen the man. The banker withdrew several photographs from a drawer, one of which the woman immediately identified as that of the man who had given her the check. The banker then ordered the teller to give the woman the money.

In a trembling voice the banker said, "The man who gave you the check was my father who has been



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A DEBT REPAID *cont'd*

dead for ten years! Last night, my father appeared to me in a dream and said, 'I want you to know that from the day you departed from the path of Torah and married a gentile woman and stopped saying Kaddish for me, my soul knew no rest. Then a certain woman arranged to have Kaddish said for me by a student of the yeshivah, and my soul finally found peace. Tomorrow, this woman will come to your bank with a check that I am going to give her to cover the wedding expenses for her two daughters.' "When I awoke this morning, I was shaken by my

dream. I told it to my wife, who calmed me and assured me that it was pure nonsense. But when the woman presented the check, the dream came true before my eyes."

The banker returned to the path of Torah, becoming a complete ba'al teshuvah (repentant sinner). His wife became a sincere convert, and together they raised a fine religious family.

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