

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאמנים ולא נעלתים לבלתם להפרי בריותי אתם ... (כו-טז)

In Communist Russia, organized religion was illegal and deemed the “opiate of the masses.” In fact, not very many things were organized in the old Soviet Union. People went hungry and provisions were hard to come by. A simple explanation of how Communism operated was provided by **R’ Yisroel Zev Gustman zt”l**, as follows: “*Alles iz nisht meiner, und nisht deiner* (Everything is not mine and it is not yours).” In the end, no one ends up with anything.

This social order was applied in Lithuania soon after the Russian occupation in 1939. In the capital of Vilna, hundreds of thousands of Jews were made to feel the unwelcome embrace of Communism. Whatever was needed was either unavailable or in short supply. This was the case with warm boots, which were unavailable as the winter approached. A delegation of citizens approached the Russian Commissar of Vilna with a desperate plea that he somehow obtain boots for the city residents before the bitter cold of the Lithuanian winter was upon them. The Commissar answered them confidently. “Do not worry yourselves about this matter,” he said. “The Soviet Socialist Republic, led by its great and kind father (Stalin), provides for the people!” The Commissar was as good as his word. Within a relatively short period, by Soviet command-and-control economic standards, a locomotive arrived at the Vilna Central Train Station, pulling boxcars filled with boots.

But as fate would have it, there turned out to be a glitch: Upon unloading the boxcars, it became apparent that the train was filled with left boots only! Somehow the right boots were missing! What was to be done with thousands of left boots? This circumstance was duly explained to the Commissar, who was dumfounded and incredulous. “Impossible!” he said dismissively, “It cannot be!” But it was. No one among the Soviets had any idea what had happened. There were various theories, culminating in one question: Were there other boxcars somewhere out there, filled with right boots? It was thought that this was indeed what had happened. In the vast network of Soviet railway traffic between the loading of the boots and Vilna, somehow the boxcars containing the right boots had been misdirected. But if so, where were the missing boxcars?

At the time, R’ Gustman was serving as a *dayan* (judge) on the *Vilna Beis Din*, and he described the boot problem to an ailing **R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzenski zt”l**, Chief Rabbi of Vilna, and the *Posek Hador*. R’ Chaim Ozer was at first amused, but then he began to pore over railway maps in detail, going over the junctions and interchanges in an effort to figure out how the train had traveled. Finally, he pointed to a particular junction on the map and said that the boxcars were there. He instructed R’ Gustman to go to the Commissar and inform him, in R’ Chaim Ozer’s name, of the location of the boxcars.

R’ Gustman was aware of the short fuse of the Soviet authorities, and the possibility he would be treated as a suspect or saboteur and imprisoned, or worse. But he possessed *emunas chachamim* in R’ Chaim Ozer to trust his statement - whether it was a deduction based on logic or *Ruach HaKodesh* - and he proceeded to the Commissar without hesitation.

The Commissar received him with all the contempt of a Communist for a “superstitious person” from the reactionary class of religious clerics. When R’ Gustman told him that the Chief Rabbi of Vilna believes he has located the missing boxcar, the Commissar laughed at what he called the “wild guesses” of an old rabbi who could not possibly know about the complexities of Soviet railway transportation. But R’ Gustman stood his ground, and the Commissar eventually listened.

“We will send word there to inquire about the missing boxcars,” he said mockingly. “But know this: If you are wrong, you will be taken out and shot for wasting our precious time with mystical nonsense during wartime, and by doing so attempting to make a mockery of Soviet power.” Shortly thereafter, the Commissar received a telegram - and wonder of wonders! - the boxcars were exactly where R’ Chaim Ozer had indicated they would be, marked with the words, “Destination Vilna.”

As a result, many of the freezing residents of Vilna received both right and left boots. From that point on, the Soviet Commissar held R’ Chaim Ozer and R’ Gustman in high esteem, for the rabbis had divined what even Soviet Power had failed to reveal, and that made them bona fide prophets. This proved to be useful to R’ Gustman in the war years to come.

אשר בחר בנביאים טובים ...

גרים יבאו ויאמרו אך שקר נחלו אבותינו ... (ירמיהו כו-יב)

Once again, in his compassionate, caring, yet esoteric way, *Yirmiyahu HaNavi* blends the tragic decline of the Jewish Nation with the love that *Hashem* has for *Klal Yisroel*, no matter the circumstance. **R’ Yosef Duchas zt”l (Bais Yosef Lehava)** writes that *Chazal* detail how the *Torah* was offered to other nations before it was given to the Jews. Each nation was given the chance to receive the *Torah* but declined for a specific reason. *Edom* refused because they wouldn’t be able to stop killing. *Yishmael* refused on grounds that they were unable to curb their immorality, etc. Interestingly, the common denominator between them was that their reasons

for refusal were all commandments they are required to follow, even as gentiles. How then can they use them as reasons to not accept the *Torah*? They must keep them anyway.

The *Torah* is vast with many different components to it and could very easily become intimidating, which was the colossal mistake of gentile nations. They wrongfully assumed that there is a concept of all or nothing, and if they transgressed one commandment, the Lord would turn His back on them. Truthfully, all one really needs to do is try his best, and as long as he tries, the outcome doesn’t matter. As an extremely important *mitzvah*, a Jew must study the *Torah* as much as he can, however he is not measured by his results. Rather, a person is measured by his toil and hard work.

Adapted from Rav Gustman, Artscroll Publications

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מחשבת הלב

CONCEPTS IN AVODAS HALEV FROM THE FAMILY OF R' CHAIM YOSEF KOFMAN ZT”L

ואם לא תשמעו לי ולא תעשו את כל המצות האלה ... איש כי יפלא נדר בערך נפשת לה' וכו' (ובנו) My *Zaida*, the **Baal Machsheves Halev zt”l**, would tell over the **Baal HaTurim** who explains the juxtaposition between the *Tochacha* - the stinging criticism of the Jewish people, and the *parsha* of *Erchin* (valuation of life) - giving to *hekadesh* the fixed value of a human being. He would say that the best way to determine a person’s true self-worth is only after he has undergone tough times and traumatic episodes in his life. After seeing the worst of human suffering, if a human being can pick himself up and elevate himself both in his daily and spiritual life, then he is truly a person with value and self-worth. Thus, after one undergoes the harshness of the *Tochacha*, he can now assess his true self-worth - *Erchin*.

Bearing this concept in mind, it dawned on me another possible explanation of the connection of these two *parshiyos*. The *parsha* of *Erchin* explicitly lists the exact and set value for various age brackets of individuals. The *Tochacha*, the terrible decrees and punishments, that we as a people have gone through, as we know, come as a reminder to do *teshuvah* for our *aveiros*, or as a warning and precaution not to sin further. My *machshava* here is that if we would be fully aware of our self-worth and of the intrinsic value of every *Yid*, no matter what age or stage, we would not sin. A cause for *aveiros* is that we aren’t fully aware of our value. If only we would know just how *chashuv* we are, how much *Hashem* loves each and every one of us, and how much He wants us to succeed, we would never succumb to the *yetzer hara*. The *Torah* is teaching us a lesson, to internalize for ourselves and to impart to our dear children, young and old, that they are priceless and princely and must hold strong. Thus, says the *Torah*, if you learn the *parsha* of *Erchin* - of self-worth, there would be no need for a *Tochacha*.

Yehi ratzon that we should be *zoche* to the “*ונתתי משכני בתוכם*” with the coming of *Moshiach* very soon!

משל למה הדבר דומה

הדיה ערבך הזכר עשרים שקלים והנקבה עשרת שקלים ... (כו-ה) **משל**: The Itamar massacre, was an attack on a Jewish family in the Israeli town of Itamar, that took place on March 11, 2011, in which five members of the Fogel family were murdered in cold blood by ruthless Arab teens. The victims were the father Ehud (Udi) Fogel, mother Ruth Fogel, and three of their six children, Yoav, Elad, and Hadas, the youngest, a three-month-old infant. The settlement of Itamar had been the target of several murderous attacks before these killings, but the shock of this massacre was overwhelming.

During the seven days of *shivah*, the Fogel house was a non-stop sea of humanity as hundreds came to pay their respects. One man, came by every single day but did not go to speak to the mourners; rather, he always seemed to go straight into the kitchen for extended periods of time. For days, nobody noticed, until finally one family member saw

the man walking in with bags full of groceries. Soon it became clear that the man was none other than the rich supermarket magnate, Rami Levy, owner of the *Shivuk HaShikma* chain, which has 27 stores and almost 5000 employees.

Rami himself personally came daily to stock the cupboards and refrigerator in the Fogel home. When one relative thanked him, he said, “You will get used to my face. I have committed myself that every week I will deliver food and stock your home until the youngest orphan turns 18 years old.”

נמשל: The *Torah* speaks about *Erchin*, which is the value of a person in silver coins. And yet, the true value of a person has nothing to do with money whatsoever. One can have all the gold and silver in the world, but his value as a human being lies in how he uses his wealth and contributes to those in need. Whether its helping out after a tragedy or just simply looking out for the plight of another Jew, the true *Erchin* of a person is not what he has - but what he gives to others.

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON THE MIDDAH OF - גשמייות

דרגה יתירה

FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם ונתנה הארץ יכולה ... (כו-ד)

One of the wonderful blessings we are promised by *Hashem* if we will follow in the ways of the *Torah* is that *Hashem* will give us rain - “גשם” - in its proper time. The **Nesivos Shalom** explains that the word “גשמיכם” means, “Your *Gashmiyus* - your physicality.” *Gashmiyus* is a very important thing, but it can also be very dangerous. The trick to successfully utilizing one’s *gashmiyus* is by knowing when it is necessary, and when it is not. When one uses his physicality for the sake of *ruchniyus*, that is truly the greatest blessing. When one allows his *gashmiyus* to overpower his *ruchniyus*, then he has missed the point of why *Hashem* has given him *gashmiyus* in the first place. When a person feels proud of his monetary accomplishments or lives a very lavish lifestyle for the sake of his own pleasure and honor, the *Torah* says, “*וישמן ישרון ויבעט*” - “*He becomes fat and kicks*” - in other words, he is full of his own selfishness and kicks *Hashem* out of his life. This should be the greatest fear of someone who is wealthy. Instead of realizing that *Hashem* is the One who gave him money in order to do His will, he completely follows his *yetzer hara* and allows his money to become his spiritual downfall.

One of the miracles that was prevalent in the tent of *Sarah Imeinu* was “ברכה מצויה בעיסה” - she had a blessing in her dough. One of the definitions of dough is physicality. Dough represents money and dough represents food which is the physical mainstay of mankind. The blessing that Sarah had in her “dough” was the *ruchniyus* she put into her *gashmiyus*! Sarah infused every single thing that she did, whether it was *davening* or eating or cooking, with the blessing of *ruchniyus*. Her mind was always focused on *Hashem* even if her hands were involved in physical activity. This is the greatest blessing of all, and this is the blessing *Hashem* is giving us if we follow in the ways of His *Torah*. We will not get bogged down or sidetracked by the physical activities of life but rather utilize our *gashmiyus* for the purpose of coming closer to *Hashem*.