

NOW I UNDERSTAND

Ever since the beginning of this horrible war, I've poured out my heart to G-d – as I'm sure so many Jews have – and asked Him to destroy our enemies and finally bring us the ultimate redemption. Especially when hearing about the unspeakable atrocities that our enemies perpetrated against us and the outright lies that they and their international supporters spread about us, I find myself turning to God, over and over again, and saying something along these lines: “Ribbono Shel Olam! I know we're not perfect and that we have a lot to improve, but look how evil they are! Are we not deserving of Your love and compassion at least on the basis of a simple comparison between us and them? And if we're not worthy, please remember the kindness of our Patriarchs and bring a redeemer to their descendants (us) for Your sake, with love” (as we say at the beginning of the *Amidah*, three times a day).

And to be very honest, I really thought I had a good point. I therefore had a hard time understanding why HaShem is seemingly ignoring our pleas and our plight and withholding the redemption. Don't get me wrong, I did not lose faith in HaShem, *chas ve'shalom*. I know that in the long run we are nothing compared to Him and that only He sees the full picture. Nevertheless, based on my feeble understanding, it boggled my mind why HaShem would not answer our prayers.

...Until this past Motzai Shabbat. It was then that I finally, and painfully, understood.

A little background: Almost twenty-five years ago, I had the incredible privilege of translating (from Hebrew to English) one of the most powerful and important works of Torah written in the last century – *Eim HaBanim Semeichah*, by HaRav Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal *Hy”d*. For those who are unfamiliar, Rav Teichtal was a recognized *gadol* in pre-war Europe – a communal rav, rosh yeshiva, and posek. He was also vehemently anti-Zionist. All that changed, however, when the Holocaust began and his idyllic existence was shattered, together with that of millions of other Jews. Searching for an answer as to why HaShem was doing this to His people, Rav Teichtal came to the (highly unpopular, I may add) conclusion that it was because we had gotten too comfortable in *galut* and neglected our historical obligation to return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Over the course of less than a year – while hiding from the Nazis, and often with no books at his disposal – Rav Teichtal wrote a monumental work, which he entitled *Eim HaBanim Semeichah*, explaining the reasons and sources for his metamorphosis and providing his suggestions of how to remedy the situation. Suffice it to say that it is almost impossible to read the *sefer* without being profoundly affected by it.

A few years ago, my youngest son, Elisha, read the *sefer* and also fell in love with it. Being inclined towards the history of *gedolim*, he soon began researching the life story of Rav Teichtal, and eventually put out a small pamphlet on this unique individual.

Back to the present: Late last week, Elisha called me all excited. He had seen an advertisement for a Melave Malka that was to be held on Saturday night in Ashdod to mark the yahrtzeit of Rav Teichtal *zt”l*, which falls out on the tenth of Shvat. Would I like to join him (and give him a ride, of course) was his question. I gladly agreed.

The event was being sponsored by an organization called *Kedushat Tzion*, a 100% Chareidi organization, which believes in the sanctity of the Land of Israel even in our times and encourages religious Jews to make *aliyah* and live in the Land, all in accordance with the strictures of the Torah. In addition to sponsoring various events throughout the year, they publish weekly Torah-pamphlets and other literature on the importance of this *mitzvah*.

When we arrived at the hall where the event was being held, there was a bit of a tumult outside but we didn't really understand what was going on, so we stepped right inside. There were around 20 people sitting around waiting for things to start, most of them wearing distinctly Chareidi garb. Among them were a few younger yeshiva boys, around 18 years old, whom we assumed were there for the event. Suddenly, police officers barged in and forcibly removed these young men. Someone explained to us that there were extremists outside who wanted to protest the event, and some of them had slipped inside. With that, we thought the trouble was over, and the organizers encouraged us to wash and begin eating.

Just for context, I had attended a much larger event sponsored by *Kedushat Tzion* this past Yom Yerushalayim (28 Iyar), marking the miraculous victory of the Six Day War, held in Jerusalem's International Convention Center (*Binyanei HaUma*). There too, extremist elements protested outside, but they were held in check by the Israeli police. Therefore, I assumed the same would be true of this event.

Around ten minutes after the first intruders were escorted out, we heard loud banging on the walls, and all of a sudden, dozens of yeshiva boys poured in singing well-know anti-Zionist songs, totally interrupting the event. As if that wasn't enough, they grabbed the microphone from the dais and started overturning the tables, together with all the food. Tempers flared, and some of the participants began shoving the intruders, which of course led to further violence. Ironically, my son heard one of the young men say, "The rosh yeshiva said no violence." Then, the lights went out, and we were stuck there listening to their "fervent" singing and watching our event, for which we had traveled 45 minutes to attend, go up in smoke, so to speak.

Finally, someone said that we should get out of there because the police were coming and they might use tear gas. We exited and were shocked to see hundreds of yeshiva bochurim standing opposite the entrance being held back by around twenty police officers. Before we could escape towards my car, a projectile came flying towards me and skimmed my head. It wasn't hard – probably an egg or the like – but it still caused a shiver to race down my spine.

As we were making our getaway, one of the event's organizers was also trying to "escape." A tall man in his sixties or seventies, he was wearing a long black frock and a tall shtreimel atop his head. A number of the yeshiva boys "escorted" him on his way, and then one of them took a big swing and knocked his shtreimel right off his head. A "beautiful" way to end a "beautiful" evening!

While we were sitting in the hall with no electricity, two thoughts kept racing through my mind: 1) How many of these boys actually read Rav Teichtal's book and can explain why they disagree with his opinion? 2) Now I understand why Mashiach is not here yet!

Rav Teichtal already foresaw the first issue and wrote: "I must make it quite clear that my words are intended for those Jews who wish to arrive at the absolute truth by way of halachic debate and dialogue... Those who have a predisposition on this matter will not see the truth and will not concede to our words. **All the evidence in the world will not affect them, for they are smitten with blindness, and their inner biases cause them to deny even things that are as clear as day**" (p. 48). Elsewhere, he writes, "I am sure that if the Jewish masses, and even the Torah scholars, would be aware of everything I cited in this book, no small-minded individual would say that it is forbidden to preach publicly or hear a sermon on the topic of settling and building the Land..." (p. 368).

Regarding my second thought, I could not help thinking about a Rashi in *Parashat Shemot*. Shortly after killing the Egyptian taskmaster, Moshe Rabbeinu came upon two Jews (Datan and Aviram, according to *Chazal*) who were fighting, and he rebuked them. They responded by saying, *Who made you a man, a ruler and a judge, over us? Are you saying to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?* (*Shemot* 2:14). Upon hearing

this, Moshe became frightened and said, *Alas, the matter has become known* (ibid.). After presenting the simple meaning of the verse, Rashi quotes a Midrashic interpretation: “[Moshe] became worried by the fact that he saw within Israel wicked informers. ‘Perhaps, based on this,’ he said, **‘they are not worthy to be redeemed.’** ...[Now] **I understand** something about which I have been astounded. In what way did the Jews sin more than the [other] seventy nations, to the point that they are subjugated with hard labor? But **[now] I see that they deserve it.**”

I am not saying that I and my fellow religious Zionists (or any other branch of Judaism) are perfect and have nothing upon which to improve. We all need to work on ourselves. But there was just something very disturbing about what I witnessed that night, something that has the potential (to say the least) to forestall the ultimate redemption. We are all familiar with Chazal’s determination that baseless hatred caused the destruction of the Second Temple and is tantamount to the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery and murder, which caused the first destruction (*Yoma* 9b). But it is the Netziv of Volozhin’s formulation of this teaching that so clearly describes what happened in that hall in Ashdod.

The people of that generation were righteous and pious, and they studied Torah diligently. However, they were far from upright in their societal behavior. Thus, since they hated one another for no reason, **they suspected anyone who acted contrary to their understanding of religious devotion of being a Sadducee and a heretic.** This led to wanton murder and all forms of evil, until the Temple was destroyed... HaKadosh Baruch Hu is upright, and **He cannot tolerate such “tzaddikim”**... He despises when people act in a crooked manner, **even if they do so for the sake of Heaven...** (*Ha’amek Davar*, introduction to *BeReishit*)

(As an aside, my son and I learned this very teaching of the Netziv just a few hours earlier, on Shabbat afternoon, when we were studying a different book that I translated. This would prove to be only one example of *Hashgachah Pratit* that occurred that evening. See below.)

To be clear, I wasn’t afraid that these hooligans would physically assault me (as long as I refrained from stooping to their level and employing violence). The only emotion I felt (and still feel) was/is extreme sadness. It was so sad to me that there are people like that in my nation – people who can’t live and let live, people who can’t respect other legitimate Torah opinions, people who can’t let those who revere a certain rabbi mark the anniversary of his death, simply because they disagree with his views (without having ever studied his work).

It was especially disheartening to see this happen in the midst of the current war. Baruch HaShem, so many Jews – of all stripes and colors – have come together in such heartwarming unity ever since Simchat Torah. Apparently, they understand that despite our vast differences, we are all one family, brothers and sisters who truly care about one another, especially during trying times. Or maybe they realize that our only hope is to join together and show HaShem that we have learned the lesson of the Second Temple era. Unfortunately, though, I was rudely awakened to the fact that we still have a long way to go.

On our way home from Ashdod, I asked my son to read me my daily chapter of the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* (I was driving, and I knew it would be too late to learn it when I got home). We were both astounded when we read the following lines (this is example number two of *Hashgachah Pratit*):

All families are presumed to be of acceptable lineage, and one is permitted to marry one of their members *le’chatchillah* (unconditionally). Nevertheless, if you see two families constantly quarreling with each other, or if you see a family that is always involved in strife and disputes, or **if you see a person who frequently quarrels with everyone and is very brazen – we suspect [their lineage], and it is proper to distance oneself from them, for these are disqualifying characteristics...**

Similarly, anyone who is brazen and cruel, despising other people and failing to perform acts of kindness for them – we strongly suspect that he is a Gibeonite. **For the signs of the holy nation of Israel are [that they are] shy, merciful, and kind.** And with regard to the Gibeonites, it says, "The Gibeonites are not of the Jewish people" (II Shmuel 21:2), for they acted brazenly and would not be appeased... (*Hilchot Isurei Bi'ah* 19:17)

(By the way, this may be the source for Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson's recent comment that he has his doubts about the Jewishness of the Neturei Karta.)

Why did I decide to write this piece? Is it just a way for me to vent my frustrations? Is it a form of therapy for the (minor) trauma I experienced that night? Maybe to some degree, but the real reason I wrote this is to make the Torah world aware of the *nega* that is in its midst and urge its members to do all that they can to purge themselves of this stain.

I am sure that the vast majority of the Chareidi world strongly disagrees with, and is even repulsed by, the malicious antics of this fringe group (which I was told is called the *Peleg HaYerushalmi*). Even as we were leaving Ashdod that night, several local residents expressed their disgust at what had happened. So why doesn't the Chareidi establishment do something about it? I assume there are two main reasons:

1) They think that everyone knows that they (the true *chareidim le'dvar HaShem*) have nothing to do with these extremists, and that they do not represent true Torah Judaism. If only that were true! Unfortunately, when incidents like this are reported in the news, the general population (including many religious Jews) see only black and white and don't know how to differentiate between the various subgroups. Especially when they do not hear clear and unequivocal condemnations from the *Gedolei Yisrael*, they conclude that the Chareidi leadership condones such behavior.

2) They think that the *Peleg* and other such groups are simply too powerful and violent, so it's not worth starting up with them. I hope this is not the case, because if so, we are in deep trouble. What happened to *לא תגורו מפני איש*? Plus, no one is suggesting that we actually "fight" them. Rather, we need to confront them with *seichel* (as I will explain shortly).

In my humble opinion, such groups must be utterly ostracized from the rest of Charedi society. That means that the true *Gedolei HaTorah* must state unequivocally that these people act contrary to *Daas Torah* and are therefore excommunicated. No one should be allowed to do business with them, socialize with them, give them *aliyot* in shul, or (and especially) support their institutions and send children to their schools. It will be difficult in the beginning, but I believe that their numbers will diminish significantly over time when people realize that the true *Gedolim* are against them.

I am not suggesting that these measures be taken against everyone who attends their yeshivot or associates with them in some way or another. I am mainly speaking about the institutions themselves and their leaders, especially the "spiritual" ones. Let me explain. The 18- or 19-year-old *bochurim* that I saw that night looked like typical yeshiva boys, who are generally very courteous, kind, and well-behaved. And I am sure they were like that before they entered the "Peleg" yeshiva system, where they were utterly brainwashed into thinking that assaulting other Jews who do not act in accordance with your standards is not only not sinful but a big *mitzvah*.

How do I know this? Because my son, or I, or basically anyone I know, would simply not have been able to do what they did that night. I can't even imagine walking into a room where fellow Jews are gathered peacefully to eat a Melave Malka, share divrei Torah, and commemorate the life of a *gadol beYisrael*, and then shouting at them, overturning their tables, and leaving them in the dark. I would not be able to bring

myself to do anything remotely akin to those things, even if I strongly disagreed with the participant's *hashkafah* (and trust me, I have serious issues with several worldviews out there). My natural inhibitions and basic decency would never allow me to stoop to that level. The only explanation as to how they did it is that they were completely brainwashed by their "rabbanim" into thinking that such acts are pleasing to God (*Rachmana litzlan*).

Think about it: Their *rosh yeshiva* instructed them not to use violence, as I mentioned above. Now, would anyone in their right mind consider what I described above as non-violent? True, they did not come in and start beating people up, but they physically and forcefully ruined our event. And please tell me, how can anyone who knows anything about *halachah* rationalize causing monetary damage to someone because his *hashkafah* does not find favor in your eyes? What possible *heter* is there to destroy food, break tables, steal a microphone, damage a *shtreimel*, and the like? The only explanation is that they were brainwashed into believing that the ends justify the means.

Imagine the following scenario: A yeshiva opens up in a Chareidi neighborhood and attracts many young, impressionable boys. After a while, however, it becomes clear that the yeshiva is teaching *kefirah* (heresy). Would the *Gedolim* simply sit back and let it continue functioning? Of course not! How then can they allow the continued functioning of yeshivas that take in boys with basically good *midot* and turn them into monsters? Aren't *midot* more important than *hashkafot*?

One last thing: I subsequently heard that the main gripe the *Peleg* has against *Kedushat Tzion* is the supposed fact that they encourage ascension to the Temple Mount. That doesn't change a thing. Even if this is true, they have no right to assault them. Besides which, they still spoiled an evening in honor of Rav Teichtal's *yahrtzeit*, and I am sure that was not just a coincidence, for his *hashkafah* is diametrically opposed to theirs. I am also sure that had they read *Eim HaBanim Semeichah*, especially chapter four which focuses on *achdut Yisrael*, they never would have done what they did.

I would, therefore, like to suggest that we start a campaign to convince as many people as possible to learn the *sefer* (maybe we need to offer incentives...). Firstly, it would be the most appropriate response to the extremists' violent protests: you wanted to silence those who disagree with you, we will make sure that more and more religious Jews learn the other side and recognize its validity. Secondly, the more people who learn the holy words of Rav Teichtal (especially chapter four), the less strife and *machloket* will exist within *Klal Yisrael*.

Singed with tears,
Moshe D. Lichtman
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