



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

ז אלול תשע"ו – שופטים – 10th September 2016 - Volume 9 - Issue 7

## News This Week

### Keep Us Up To Date

Have you moved house recently? if so please email us your new address so we can keep in touch [office@ohryerushalayim.org.uk](mailto:office@ohryerushalayim.org.uk).

### Haven't Got A Prayer?

Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities . . . (Devarim 16:18)

Elul Zman. Once upon a time these two words alone were enough to make Jews shake in their boots. Everyone felt Yom HaDin breathing down their backs ever since Tisha B'Av was over. The beginning of Elul meant, however, that Rosh Hashanah was just around the corner. The King and His Heavenly Tribunal were approaching, and with it, Divine judgment. Once upon a time that meant something, or at least a lot more than it means to many today.

Part of the problem in recent generations is that we have had it quite good. Most of us have not experienced much Divine retribution, at least not in any obvious way. There is a lot of suffering in the world and specifically within the Jewish nation. Most of it though is viewed as being either "natural" or as the result of "hester panim," the hiding of G-d's Face. It is not seen as the result of direct involvement of G-d in someone's life.

In many respects, people just go through the motions on the High Holidays. We know it is a serious time and we respect the holidays. We understand that they entail many hours in shul and even fasting. I'm just not sure how much the average Jew believes though that what he or she does on these days makes that much of a difference to the quality or safety of their lives.

The same can be said for prayer in general.

One might have thought that prayer lost its importance for many in more recent times. As the Talmud points out, the generations have been moving spiritually "backward" as history moves materially forward. There are more atheists today than ever before.

After all, the mishnah speaks about "Chasidei Rishonim," pious individuals from the time of the Second Temple who used spend one hour preparing for prayer, one hour praying, and one hour "coming down" from prayer. That meant nine hours a day devoted to prayer, prompting the Talmud to ask when they had time to learn Torah or take care of their livelihood.

Nevertheless, the Talmud also writes: One of the rabbis said to Rav Bibi bar Abaye, and some say Rav Bibi said to Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: "What does, 'When vileness is exalted amongst men' (Tehillim 12:9), mean?"

He answered him: "These are the things that stand at the height of the world and people disgrace." (Brochos 6b). Like prayer, which ascends to Above. (Rashi)

Thus, already in the time of the Talmud prayer had lost its seriousness. It's a problem. It's a problem because of the implication, which is that many people don't really believe in tefillah. They may accept it as an obligation, but not much more. If they did, given to Whom tefillah is directed and what it is supposed to do, they would treat

it differently. MUCH differently. The following story is an example of the same idea.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm making a suggestion."

"I can see you're making a suggestion. You're putting a paper into the Suggestion Box. I'm asking why?"

"You think that no one reads the suggestions people make?"

"I think that there is a paper shredder on the inside of the box. This box is here to give workers the impression that their opinions count and will be taken into consideration. It's purely therapeutic."

"Don't be so cynical."

"Cynical? When was the last time you saw any real change around here, or any of your suggestions being implemented?"

"Change takes time."

"Around here, it takes forever!"

"Well, I believe that all the suggestions in this box are read by someone, and make a difference somewhere."

"You're entitled to your own delusional beliefs."

"I certainly am! Anyhow, we should get moving to the staff meeting. It's almost 10 o'clock." The company had over 600 staff members and employees, and all of them showed up for the mandatory meeting. Rumor had it that the CEO himself was going to speak, a rare occasion. Sure enough, he entered the room through a different door and went right for the microphone.

Waiting until everyone was seated and quiet, he began with a quick discussion about the company's growth and future plans. He then paused for a moment, and scanned the entire crowd before him. Everyone could see he had something important to say, but no one knew what. Finally he spoke. "You may or may not have noticed an addition to our lobby a couple of months ago, a suggestion box."

The two employees turned to look at each other, one with an expression of wonder and the other with a look of, "I told you so." They turned back to the CEO to hear the rest.

"This was our way of giving you, the worker, a say in how our company

## The Week Ahead

### שבת פרשת שופטים

1st Mincha / Candle Lighting	6.05pm / Not before 6.17pm
2nd Mincha / Candle Lighting	7.23pm / No later than 7.23pm
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.49am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	7.21pm
Rov's Shiur Hilchos Ellul / Y.N.	Following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	8.26pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.15pm
Late Maariv	10.00pm

works. We wanted you to know that we care upstairs about what you think and feel down here. I personally looked at every note put into the box. In fact I was so impressed with how seriously some of you took our gesture, that I decided to give bonuses to those who took the time to make their suggestions, and to put the names of these people on a list for possible promotions. I think it is a reward well deserved, and it should encourage others to do the same in the future.”

After the meeting had long been over, the one who had earlier defended his participation in the Suggestion Box Program caught the one had questioned him putting his own note into the box. When their eyes caught each other, the latter didn't even wait for the comment and said, “Hey, after finding out that this makes a difference to the company and my paycheck, why wouldn't I make my own suggestions!”

This is the problem with prayer. We “drop” it into a “box” but have little or no idea what happens to it after that. Where do our prayers go? Does G-d even pay attention to them? Do they really change anything for the better? Our “CEO” hasn't called a meeting to explain the difference our tefillah makes to the “company” and to our “salary.” If He would, then we would really believe.

If He did, then we would really pray.

Until then, it seems as if many haven't got a prayer, at least not in the ultimate sense of the idea.

This is one of the problems of living on this side of history, as the parshah intimates. The Talmud says that a person does not sin until a spirit of insanity enters him (Sotah 3a). After all, who in their right mind would sin against G-d, given Who He is, what He can do, not to mention where we would like to go after death: the World-to-Come? Yet people do sin, even those who try to live according to the Torah. Yom Kippur is not only for the lowest elements of society. It is for every Jew, those who try to be good and those who do not. As Shlomo HaMelech said, “For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Koheles 7:20).

Thus, judges alone are not enough. We have to appoint enforcers as well to make sure that the decisions of the judges are followed. Not only do people not take sin seriously, they do not take those who have judged them seriously either. Only the fear of punishment in this world keeps them in line.

In fact, it is only the fear of harm that keeps most people in line, as the expression, “There are no atheists in a foxhole” implies. Simply, it states that people can believe anything they want, and will, until they have to confront the possibility of paying for their beliefs. When that happens, all of a sudden the doubts that made them side with atheism now make them side with G-d when they start to wonder if they might be about to meet Him—face-to-face.

This brings us back to Elul Zman as the preparation for Rosh Hashanah. It represents, in a way, a proverbial foxhole. It is the time for a person to get real with life, real with the idea that he has to answer for his belief and the life he has led. It is THE time of year that we feel the Presence of the CEO of Creation, and find the inspiration to pray as if it truly counts.

## **Listening to the Words of the Rabbis**

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand (Torah.org)**

The Torah teaches “You shall come to the Kohanim, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days; and you shall inquire and they will tell you the word of judgment. You shall do according to the word that they will tell you, from that place that Hashem will choose, and you shall be careful to do according to everything that they will teach you.” [Devarim 17:9-10] The Torah here strongly warns future generations to follow the words of the Sages of their respective eras. We are exhorted “...You shall not turn from the word that they will tell you, right or left.” [Devarim 17:11]. We must listen to them in all situations.

There is an interesting dispute between the Vilna Gaon and earlier authorities as to whether or not the rulings of the rabbis of earlier generations apply for all future generations:

A Mishna teaches: “Three beverages are prohibited if they are left uncovered (for fear a poisonous snake left some venom in the liquid while drinking therefrom): water, wine, and milk” [Mishnayos Terumos 8:4]. The Shulchan Aruch [Yoreh Deah 116:1] rules that nowadays when poisonous snakes are not found amongst us, this fear of drinking exposed liquids does not apply and it is permitted to drink uncovered beverages. This is an exception to the rule. Usually rabbinic decrees are immutable, however here the Shulchan Aruch itself rules that the law does not apply today because we do not have poisonous snakes in our vicinities.

The Vilna Gaon, however, was particular NOT to drink uncovered water! In spite of what the Shulchan Aruch ruled and in spite of what earlier authorities (Tosfos in Tractate Beizah) had ruled, he was not prepared to say that the Mishnaic ruling was no longer in effect. The Gaon felt that when the Sages stated a prohibition – even when they told us a reason and the reason no longer applies – many times there were additional hidden reasons for the laws the Sages introduced.

This same issue comes up in Chapter 19 of Tractate Shabbos [Rav Eliezer d'Milah]. The Talmud mentions that after a circumcision, the mohel is supposed to do “metziza” [sucking] to extract residual blood from the place of the wound, for the health and safety of the child. There are those who suggest that today the medical facts have changed and therefore the practice of “metziza” mentioned in the Talmud no longer needs to be done today because the concerns of the Gemara – swelling or whatever it was – no longer apply today.

When analyzing this discussion, we mentioned the idea that many times the words of the Sages have various reasons behind them. Some of the reasons are mystical and based on Kabbalistic ideas. Even though the practical reason may no longer apply, the mystical reason may still exist. Therefore, the Gaon argued that even though based on “revealed Torah” (Toras haNigleh) the prohibition against drinking uncovered beverages was because of poisonous snakes and we no longer have poisonous snakes however the words of the Sages are so profound and so deep with so much behind them that we may not understand. That is why the Gaon was not prepared to say they have become inapplicable.

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Bei Chiyah. The Talmud teaches [Eiruvin 47a] that the halacha follows Rav Meir in his decrees (b'gezeiros). Even though we do not pasken like Rav Meir regarding halachos (for example – in a machlokes between Rav Meir and Rav Yehudah we follow Rav Yehudah's opinion), but if Rav Meir promulgated a gezeira [decree], we follow his ruling. What is the reason for this dichotomy?

The Bei Chiyah answers that early in Tractate Eiruvin [13b] we learn “Rav Acha bar Chanina taught: It is revealed and known before the One who spoke and the world came into existence [i.e. – G-d] that there was no one in Rav Meir's generation who was his peer. Why then did they not establish the halacha in accordance with his opinion? It is because his companions could not follow the depth of his analysis (she'lo yachlu chaveirov l'amod al sof da'ato).” He was so great that his friends did not grasp his “lomdus” [Talmudic analysis]. They could not grasp his arguments.

Since they did not grasp Rav Meir's logic, they argued with him. There is a rule in halacha that when the many argue with an individual the majority opinion prevails. However, this dynamic only applied to his halachos. We accept his decrees (gezeiros) because we do not need to know the reasons. They are edicts. Rav Meir has his reasons for these edicts and we accept them even if we do not understand them. Halacha must be logical. It needs to work. It must emerge from the consensus of the group of scholars. A decree is an edict, which does not need to be logical.

The lesson in this to all of us is that perhaps there are times when we do not understand the depth of the words of the Sages. There are things we learn in the Talmud that do not make sense to us. Nonetheless, we need to have this abiding faith in the words of the Sages. This was the attitude of the Gaon. G-d willing, if we listen to the words of Chazal, no harm will come our way.