



Ohr Yerushalayim News

י"ז תשע"ו – ואתחנן – 20th August 2016 - Volume 9 - Issue 4

News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to the Rov & Rebbetzen on the occasion of the Bas Mitzvah of two granddaughters in London.

Support the Minyanim

As we're now in holiday time, a reminder to all those in town to please support the Shul Minyanim.

Childish

Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

And you shall teach them to your sons . . . (Devarim 6:7)

We find, in this week's parshah, the first paragraph of the "Shema," in which we are commanded to serve G-d with all our hearts, our lives, and all our property. We are also commanded to know Torah well enough to correctly teach it to our children, the next link in a Torah chain of tradition reaching all the way back in time to Moshe Rabbeinu and G-d at Har Sinai.

Most societies know the importance of education. Education is freedom. Ignorance is enslavement. Where societies largely differ is in content of education, and when to teach what and for how long. It is a significant difference however, because it is what determines the quality of society and the people who comprise it.

Even the Hebrew word for "education," which is "chinuch," says much. It comes from the word "chanukah," which means "dedication." Education requires dedication because that is what it teaches: dedication.

Dedication to what? Exactly. Whereas education around the world might focus primarily on teaching professional skills, chinuch teaches what in life is worthy of dedication. Time is precious and resources are valuable, and they should not be squandered on insignificant things in one's life.

Thus, Torah education inculcates the meaning of life from a very early age. While other young children the same age might simply be learning technical skills, Torah-raised children learn about morality on a level they can understand. By the time secular children are exercising new found freedoms to feed newly felt desires, cheder children are learning about self-control for a higher cause.

The difference in educational emphasis is made clearer from the following:

Rav Hamnuna said: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children, as it says, 'Pour out [G-d's wrath] because of the children in the street' (Yirmiyahu 6:11)." (Shabbos 119b)

It is hard to imagine that child education could be so important that G-d would destroy His holy city of Jerusalem for it. This is what the Talmud says, however. It even says more:

The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children. Rav Papa said to Abaye, "What about mine and yours?" [He answered,] "Breath in which there is sin is not like breath in which there is no sin." (Shabbos 119b)

This is an interesting point to make. Even though the same words of Torah are spoken by people who know and understand them more

deeply, they mean less to the world's survival than do the words of children learning Torah. Their purity makes such a difference.

How much of difference? The Talmud continues:

Resh Lakish also said in the name of Rebi Yehudah HaNasi: "School children may not be made to neglect [their studies] even for the building of the Temple." (Shabbos 119b)

This is a remarkable concept with an important implication. There is very little that pushes off the building of the Temple, one such exception being Shabbos. The Temple is the House of G-d on earth, the crowning achievement of mankind. The Final Redemption requires it, and yet, the chinuch of children is too important to expedite its construction. What does this say about the importance of chinuch?

It says the same thing about Shabbos as well. Even though some of the Mishkan service required the Jewish people to break Shabbos to perform, Shabbos was not broken for the construction of the Mishkan. Why break something that results in the very thing that you are building to accomplish: the residing of the Shechinah.

This is what the Temple is. It is the focal point of Creation because it is where G-d has designated that His Divine Presence should most be sensed. Miracles happened there as a matter of daily routine because that is what they were. The Temple existed on earth, but it was a portal to another spiritual dimension. It was where Heaven and earth literally overlapped.

The same is true of Shabbos. It is the day on which G-d rested from hiding Himself in Creation. It is the day He designated for man to be able to sense His Presence with a minimal amount of effort. All man need to do is rest, as explained in this week's parshah:

Six days may you work, and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Shabbos to G-d, your G-d. You shall perform no labor, neither you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your ox, your donkey, any of your livestock, nor the stranger who is within your cities, in order that your manservant and your maidservant may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that G-d, your G-d took you out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. Therefore, G-d, your G-d,

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת ואתחנן

1st Mincha / Candle Lighting
2nd Mincha / Candle Lighting
Shacharis

סוף זמן ק"ש

1st Mincha
2nd Mincha
3rd Mincha
Shuir by Josh Shields
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos

Sunday

Mon / Thurs

Tues / Wed / Fri

Mincha & Maariv

Late Maariv

שבת נחמו

6.45pm / Not before 6.58pm

7.20pm / 7.31pm-7.45pm

9.00am

9.34am

2.00pm

6.00pm

8.15pm

Following

9.20pm

7.15am / 8.20am

6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am

6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am

7.45pm

10.00pm

commanded you to observe the day of Shabbos. (Devarim 5:13-15) The rest, from mundane activities of the everyday world, has to be total. Sensing the Shechinah takes spiritual focus. Without it, it is a profanation for the Shechinah to reside in the lower world. Shabbos is supposed to be such a level of focus. The Temple was such a level of focus.

What about cheder children? This is easy for me to personally answer. Though I know more than the average child in cheder (at least the early levels), and I understand more deeply what prayer is about, and what is supposed to happen during it, my focus is a combination of things that belong and things that do not belong. I am a product of the world in which I live, and it seems to “own” parts of my brain.

I am always amazed how, even during times of intense concentration, memories can flash through my head and distract me. I did not willingly conjure them up and they were certainly unwanted. Most of the time I cannot even figure out what triggered them.

It turns out that this is the way the brain naturally works. Things just get thrown from place to place in our heads. Sometimes it happens so subtly that we are not even aware of it. Prayer is not one of those times because we try to focus on G-d and remain focused on Him.

It is a lot worse if I have worries and pressures. At such times, no matter how much I try to concentrate, my mind jumps around and I can have advanced several blessings without even remembering how I got there. It can be very disconcerting.

Thus, as pure as I would like to be, I am a mixture of good and not-so-good. As innocent as I'd like to think I am, the truth, life took that away a long time ago. Now my life is a matter of ongoing war against the yetzer hara, of attack and counterattack, with good days and not-so-good days.

People wonder if G-d listens to their prayers. They want to know why He doesn't always give them what they requested. But that's only because they think that talking to G-d is like talking to a flesh-and-blood father, who may not be so pure himself.

Wrong, very wrong. G-d is so incredibly spiritually pure that we would burn up from humiliation just being in His Presence. Imagine bringing a gift to someone whose relationship you cherish, but wrapped in filthy rags. Don't you just cringe at the idea?

I can't speak for everyone, and shouldn't even for most people. I really can only say for myself. When I stand before G-d to pray, how pure am I? When I pray, how spiritually-refined is what I send Heavenward? How much profane “matter” is mixed in with what I hope to penetrate the holiest of spiritual realms? Should I really be so surprised when it comes back, “Return to Sender”?

It is what it is, and hopefully if I try hard enough, G-d will accept my prayers and learning. But sinless children have a huge advantage over me. Their starting point is one of purity, even if they do not yet fully understand what they are saying. This counts for such more than we know or appreciate.

In this respect, cheder children are similar to both Shabbos and the Temple. Their purity makes them fitting for the residing of the Divine Presence. The longer they maintain this purity, the longer this remains the reality. This is when children grow up to become tzaddikim, and have the power to balance out evil in the world. It is this that gives their prayers the power to work on behalf of the nation with success.

A Humble Plea

Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz (Torah.org)

Parshas Vaeschanan begins with Moshe Rabbeinu imploring Hashem to reverse His decree and allow Moshe to enter Eretz Yisroel.

In his first commentary in this week's parsha, Rashi takes note of the word that Moshe used to describe his prayer – vaeschanan' (and I implored [Hashem]). Rashi, quoting the Sifrei, points out that chanun' is one of the ten expressions used in Tanach to denote prayer. However, it is not one that is used often, and it would be fair to question why Moshe did not use a more common terminology for prayer – such as tefilah.

Rashi offers a profound analysis for the reason that Moshe selected the word chanun'. He explains that Moshe, the most self-effacing of all

men (see Bamidbar 12:3), did not wish to mention his considerable merits when pleading his case, but rather resorted to a humble plea – as if he was requesting an undeserved favor of Hashem. Rashi notes that Moshe learned this most effective form of prayer directly from Hashem during their encounter following the incident of the Golden Calf (see Shmos 33:12-23). Moshe had asked Hashem for a deep understanding of His ways – to “see His face.” Hashem responded by informing Moshe that no human can fully comprehend Hashem during his or her lifetime and his request was denied. Hashem did share with Moshe that he would be permitted to understand His ways on some level, to “see the back of Hashem”. During that discussion (Shmos 33:19), Hashem informed Moshe “Vchanosi es asher achon (I will show favor/have mercy when I chose to show favor/have mercy). Our chachamim (sages) explain that this cryptic comment refers to the fact that Hashem often grants the requests of people who may be unworthy – when they pray to Him in the form of chaninia'; this type of humble, undeserving request. (See Brachos 7a).

Rashi draws on this information to explain the word usage of Moshe when he implored Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel. Rather than relying on his own merits and engaging in a dialogue with Hashem about his worthiness to entering The Promised Land, Moshe chose to use the chanina' prayer and plead with Hashem as if he was undeserving of having his tefilos answered on his own merit.

Once we see that Moshe internalized the lesson of the effectiveness of a chaninia' prayer, a question arises. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu not utilize this powerful form of prayer when he begged Hashem for mercy on behalf of the Bnei Yisroel after the sin of the meraglim (spies)?

When Hashem informed Moshe of His desire to punish the Jews for mourning the negative reports of the spies, Moshe did not use the chanina' prayer when he successfully defended K'lal Yisroel. If fact, it seems that he did not daven on their behalf at all, but rather informed Hashem of the negative impact that killing the Jews in the desert would have on the nations of the world. Even if Moshe felt that the Jews were undeserving of forgiveness on their own behalf, why did he not unleash the power of a chanina' prayer at that critical time?

I would suggest that the highest level of the chaninah' prayer that Rashi referred to does not apply to an undeserving individual. This powerful tefilah is unleashed when a righteous person who does have zechusim (merits) humbly ignores them when davening to Hashem. When a tzadik presents his requests in the tone of an undeserving human being, Hashem's mercy is aroused and he grants his or her request immediately.

This may explain the phrase used by Hashem to introduce this concept of chaninah' to Moshe – “Vchanosi es asher achon (I will show favor/have mercy when I chose to show favor/have mercy). Note that Hashem implies that not all who seek chaninah' will receive it. This would be in line with this concept that chaninah' is effective only when utilized by righteous individuals. Rashi's words in the first pasuk of this week's parsha seem to support this view. Rashi says that tzadikim, who do have merits, do not mention them when praying to Hashem.

This would explain the two diverse approaches to Moshe's prayers. At the time of the sin of the spies, Moshe realized that chaninah' would not be effective since the Jews were undeserving of forgiveness and would not withstand the scrutiny of Hashem's middas hadin. He therefore defended Klal Yisroel to the best of his ability without the chaninah' prayer.

When praying on his own behalf, however, Moshe chose to use the chaninah' prayer, ignoring his myriad merits and offering his humble prayer to Hashem. This may explain a possible reason for Hashem's request of Moshe that he cut short his chaninah' (Devarim 3:26, see Rashi, others) and refrain from continuing his request to enter Eretz Yisroel. Perhaps Moshe's chaninah' prayer was so powerful that it was about to be answered. Hashem therefore informed Moshe that it was not part of His master plan to have Moshe do so – and requested that he not continue with this chaninah' prayer.