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מכתב התחזקות (ט)

On the fourteenth of Iyar falls Pesach Sheini, this year, the lessons of Pesach Sheini have for us an added dimension, from which we can derive a big chizuk. It is already over seven weeks that we have been unable to daven with a minyan, or learn in the Beis Hamedrash, and people are missing the כה הציבור. The Torah tells us, that when Klall Yisroel were about to offer up the Korban Pesach, some individuals had become טמא, because they had buried a מת מצוה. They approached Moshe Rabbeinu and asked למה נגרע, why should we lose out and not be allowed to bring the Korban Pesach?

The Chasam Sofer zt"l poses the following question. It is difficult to understand their reasoning, why did they feel they were losing out? We have a rule עוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה a person who is busy with one mitzva is exempt from another mitzva. Instead of bringing the Korban Pesach, they had been busy with another very great mitzva, that of burying a מת מצוה (or carrying the Oron of Yosef Hazaddik) so why did they feel they had lost out?

The Chasam Sofer points out that those Yidden specifically mentioned that they were upset that they had been denied the right to offer up the korban **בני ישראל** "In its appointed time **amongst Bnei Yisroel**".

It's true that they had been busy with a very great and important mitzva, but it was a mitzva done in seclusion (ביחידות) by a few individuals. As a result, they felt that they had been deprived of partaking in the public mitzvah (מצוה בציבור) of Korban Pesach which was being performed by all of Klall Yisroel together.



Indeed, Chazal have taught us, “One cannot compare a mitzva in which many participate, to a mitzva which is only done by individuals” Thus the reward for a mitzva performed together with others, is far greater than the reward of a mitzva which is done (ביחידות) in private as an individual. Therefore, they felt that they had lost out by not being together with the rest of Klall Yisroel and not able to be בתוך בני ישראל.

How then did the bringing of Pesach Sheini which was only brought (ביחידות) by a few individuals, compensate and act as a replacement for their being left out of the public bringing of the Korban Pesach? This is the chiddush that Pesach Sheini teaches us. When a person wants to perform a mitzva and was prevented from doing so, he receives a reward as if he had fulfilled the mitzva. When a person fulfilled a mitzva in seclusion (ביחידות), and was prevented from performing the mitzvah with a tzibbur of Yidden, he will also get the reward (sechar) as he had performed the mitzva בציבור together with all of Klall Yisroel. The private offering of Pesach Sheini has the reward and the status of a korban which was offered in the presence of the whole of Klall Yisroel.

We have also been unable to daven with a minyan because we were עוסק במצוה in guarding our health. Pesach Sheini teaches us that we will receive the full reward as if we davened with a minyan.

The words of the Chasam Sofer are also a chizuk for us, in the approach to Lag Be'Omer. Every year, many tens/hundreds of thousands of Yidden כן ירבו travel to Meron to be present at the Hadloka and daven at the kever of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

The Boyaner Rebbe shlita lights the main Hadloka, fulfilling a tradition that dates over five hundred years, and is already mentioned in a letter written by Rabbeinu Ovadiah MiBartenurah in the year 1489:

”On the 18th of Iyar the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, people come from all the surrounding areas and they kindle large fires, besides the Ner Tomid that they light. Many childless women have a salvation and many ill people are healed through the neder and nedova that they promise to the place.” The Sdei Chemed writes: We heard that our teacher



the Beis Yosef, and other gedolim of his period, would travel to Meron to rejoice and partake in the yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai”.

The first Sadigerer Rebbe explained the significance of this hadloka. “Not every neshoma is fortunate enough to be able to have an aliyah by itself, but on Lag BeOmer when the hadlakah is lit and Rabbi Shimon’s neshoma soars ever higher, he elevates the neshomos of many thousands of other Yidden with him as well”.

Those who were unable to travel to Meron, would gather together in their local beis hamedrash and celebrate with a seudah and singing and dancing. This year however, the roads to Meron have fallen silent and people are unable to go, confined to their houses. For many people, being in Meron on Lag Be’Omer, is one of the highlights of the year, and not to be missed under any circumstances.

However, when a Yid yearns to do a mitzvah and feels למה נגרע and he wants to be "בכנופיא" together with all other Yidden at the hadloka, Rabbi Shimon accepts him as if he was there. This is the lesson of Pesach Sheini, that the yearning of a יחיד an individual, who longs to keep a mitzvah בצבור with other Yidden, it is as if he has done so.

This point is highlighted by the following two stories. For many decades, Reb Osher Zelig and his brother Reb Velvel Sofer never missed a Shavous being with their Rebbe, the first Chortkover Rebbe zt”l. One year however, Reb Velvel was unable to go, something occurred that simply made his trip impossible. Reb Velvel wrote a letter to his brother telling him what had happened, and asked him to at least mention to the Rebbe how upset he was not to be there.

After yom tov was over, Reb Osher Zelig was granted an audience with the Rebbe. He told the Rebbe how upset his brother was not to have spent yom tov with the Rebbe. ‘**Your brother was here for Shavous,**’ the Rebbe told him. ‘**We even drank le’chaim together!**’ Reb Osher Zelig wondered greatly at the Rebbe’s words but didn’t dare ask for an explanation. After he left the Rebbe’s room he asked the elder chassidim, but they were just as puzzled.



When Reb Osher Zelig met his brother and told him the Rebbe's words, Reb Velvel wasn't surprised. 'It's true,' Reb Velvel exclaimed. 'We did drink le'chaim together. Let me explain what I mean.'

The first day of yom tov at the hour when the Rebbe normally starts the tish, I was sitting at home with a heavy heart. To miss being at the Rebbe's tish was a bitter pill to swallow. Whilst I was engrossed in my thoughts, I dozed off in my chair for a few moments and I started to dream. In my dream I found myself in Chortkov standing at the Rebbe's tish.

Everything was crystal clear just like in real life. I didn't receive any wine with which to drink le'chaim, but the Rebbe noticed and commanded the gabbai to pour for me a cup. I drank le'chaim and reached out to touch the Rebbe's hand. As I touched his fingers a slight smile lit up his face. My joy was indescribable, not just in the dream, but also when I woke up a few seconds later. I was positive that through his heavenly influence, the Rebbe had felt my sorrow and wished me le'chaim!"

A similar story is related about the first Boyaner Rebbe zt"l. A chossid who used to be a regular visitor to the Boyaner Rebbe wasn't in Boyan for over seven years due to various problems that prevented him going. When the Yid finally travelled to Boyan, he apologised for his absence, saying it had been a long time since his previous visit. "I know," the Rebbe told him. "It's already been three years since you were last here."

The Yid was puzzled by the Rebbe's words, but didn't dare ask for an explanation. Instead he asked the Rebbe's son, Reb Menachem Nuchem, for an explanation. "If my father said that you were here three years ago, he must have had a reason," Reb Menachem Nuchem told him. "Perhaps you intended to come and then in the end you didn't make it," Reb Menachem Nuchem asked him.

The Yid suddenly remembered and answered, "So it was! Three years ago I decided to come to the Rebbe and I made all the necessary preparations to come. I was already at the train station waiting for the train to leave to Boyan, when I was suddenly forced to turn back and cancel the trip." "You should know," Reb Menachem Nuchem told him, "As soon as



someone prepares himself to come to my father, my father takes him on his shoulders, **and it is as if that Yid is already here.**”

Indeed, we find an allusion to this concept, in regards to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, as Chazal tell us (פסחים נא:) “One can rely on Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in his presence and even not in his presence”. “כדי הוא רבי שמעון בן יוחאי לסמוך עליו בפניו ושלא בפניו”.

The power of Rabbi Shimon to intercede of behalf of others, is not affected by the fact that we can't travel to Meron to daven at his kever. If a Yid wants to come and was prevented, it is as if he was there.

The Rebbe of Ruzhin zt”l was imprisoned in an underground Russian prison. He sat in the dark windowless cell for over a year and a half. Shortly before he was imprisoned, he said: “There are those that think that the power and ability of a tzaddik is dependent on the amount of chassidim that he has. Those who think so are foolish, like those who think that kedushas Shabbos is dependent on a big piece of fish and a white bekeshe (as was worn by the rebbes of the time)! **If they are correct, what did Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai do when he was in the cave and didn't have all of this?!** Obviously, the truth is that Shabbos is not dependent on this, and a tzaddik is also not dependent on this!”

With these words, the Ruzhiner wanted to teach and show his chassidim another lesson, namely, that his holy avoda would continue, even when he was separated from them, sitting in a dark and lonely cell. This lesson we can also derive from Lag Be'Omer. During Rabbi Shimon's incarceration in the cave, he ascended ever higher in his holy avoda. This is what we sing in the song “Bar Yochai” “**שם קנית הודך והדרך**” “In the cave where you were hiding, **there** you attained your greatness and glory”. It was “there”, in the cave that Rabbi Shimon sitting in isolation with his son Rabbi Elozor, climbed to the highest heights.

The gemara tells us (שבת לג:) that when Rabbi Shimon left the cave, and his father in law Rabbi Pinchos Ben Yo'ir saw his poor physical state, he started to cry and said: “Woe is to me that I see you looking like this”, to which Rabbi Shimon replied “Happy are you that you see me



looking like this. It is because of what I have endured that I have attained the level that I am on now”.

The gemara goes on to explain that before Rabbi Shimon had fled to the cave, his father in law would give him twelve answers for every question Rabbi Shimon posed. Now the tables were reversed. Every question that Rabbi Pinchos Ben Yo’ir asked, Rabbi Shimon answered him in twenty four different ways. The suffering that Rabbi Shimon had endured, caused him to grow ever higher in Torah and kedusha.

We have to use our quarantine as a time and opportunity to also climb higher, through the new and different avoda that we have been given. Although we are unable to enter the Beis Hamedrash, and have been exiled to our houses, we can be comforted with the words of Rabbi Shimon who proclaimed (מגילה כט.) “Look how beloved Klall Yisroel is to Hashem, wherever they have been exiled to, the Shechina follows them, and is with them there as well.” Hashem is with Klall Yisroel in every situation, even in one’s own home a person can merit השראת השכינה.

In the brocha of ברוך שאמר that we recite every day, we thank and praise Hashem and we say “ברוך גוזר ומקיים” “Blessed be He who decrees and fulfils His decree”. A gezeira normally denotes something which is harsh and difficult. If so, surely we would prefer that Hashem not make such decrees, and if unfortunately such a decree was made, we would rather beg Hashem to annul the decree. So why are we praising Hashem for making decrees and carrying them out?

The first Sadigerer Rebbe zt”l was imprisoned in a Russian dungeon for over a year under terrible conditions. He was forced to spend many hours standing on his feet in damp and freezing conditions and was denied basic food.

When he was asked how he had managed to survive the ordeal, the Rebbe said: “When a mortal king decrees a punishment on a person, it is possible that the person won’t have the strength to endure the punishment. But when Hashem is גוזר a decree on a person, He gives the person the strength to endure ומקיים that he won’t collapse under the strain. This is what



we mean when we thank Hashem, "ברוך גוזר" whilst at the same time He is "ומקיים" giving the person the endurance that he should manage.

This lesson we can derive from Lag Be'Omer. Hashem decreed that Rabbi Shimon sit in a cave for thirteen long years, but at the same time "ומקיים" Hashem gave him the inner strength to manage, and to rise ever higher from the experience. Similarly, we should all merit that our quarantine should also be for us a period of spiritual growth, to grow and climb higher and higher.

תורתו מגן לנו היא מאירת עינינו ימליץ טוב בעדנו אדוננו בר יוחאי
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