YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL**

**Religious Insecurity and its Cures**

Translated by Gila Weinberg

We all are familiar with the beraita in Torat Kohanim:

"Love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18) -

Rabbi Akiva said: This is a great principle of the Torah.

Ben Azai said: "This is the book of the generations of man" (Bereishit 5:1) is a greater principle than that.

In his book Netivot Olam (Netiv Ahavat Ha-Re'a), the Maharal of Prague brings an addition to this midrash, cited by the "Perush Ha-Kotev le-sefer Ein Ya'akov:"

Ben Zoma says: We have found a more inclusive verse, and it is, "Shema Yisrael."

Ben Nanas says: We have found a more inclusive verse, and it is, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Shimon Ben Pazi says: We have found a more inclusive verse and it is, "The first lamb you shall sacrifice in the morning and the second lamb you shall sacrifice in the evening" (Shemot 29:39).

Rabbi Ploni stood up and said: The halakha is in accordance with Ben Pazi, as it is written, "As all that I display to you, the structure of the Mishkan."

What does the topic of two lambs have to do with the greatest principle of the Torah? The Maharal explains:

A person who worships God consistently proves that he is a servant of God.

Stability and consistency are a great principle in the Jewish system of education. "One lamb in the morning, one lamb in the evening" - "the daily sacrifices according to their order." These represent perpetual and regular service. If this educational principle is relevant in untroubled times, how much more so in our day.

We live in trying times. Scarcely a week passes without a terrorist attack. We must ask ourselves how we ought to behave in these days. What can we, simple citizens, frequenters of the Beit Midrash, do? The answer can be found in stability, in consistency, in continuity, as the verse describes, "The first lamb you shall sacrifice in the morning and the second lamb you shall sacrifice in the evening." This is a vital message for our brethren in the Diaspora as well. Despite all the turmoil around us, our religious lives must continue to function with regularity and constancy.

This verse can illuminate the spiritual questions we face today as well. Iam not a sociologist; my words express my gut feelings. I have not done research, nor have I given out questionnaires or drawn diagrams. A few months ago I received a book written by Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, a graduate of our Yeshiva who now serves as rosh yeshiva of the yeshivat hesder in Petach Tikva. His book is entitled, The Public Domain: Responsa Given on the Internet Regarding Faith, Halakha and Contemporary Questions. I wish to relate to the phenomenon, not the book.

The back cover of the book reads as follows: "Over the course of the last year Rabbi Yuval Cherlow has responded to thousands of questions over the Internet on an array of subjects." Thousands of questions! In his introduction, he notes that in one year alone he was asked close to three thousand questions. He informs us that there are approximately thirty thousand internet responsa given by rabbis affiliated with the Religious Zionist camp. Lately, we read, he responds "only" to thirty questions a day.

While this phenomenon does express a thirst for Torah, it also reveals a much deeper problem. I understand that it is technically easy to "ask" on the Internet, and it can even be done anonymously. Yes, there are simple questions and unnecessary ones; there are ingenious questions and "klutz kashes." However all these questions share a common denominator: they strive to know the position of the Torah regarding this or that phenomenon. Everything revolves around the lifestyle of the Torah observant Jew.

It appears to me that a suppressed and previously hidden problem is surfacing now. These questions demonstrate that the Torah observant community has lost its confidence in its way of life, its faith, its values. Therefore it turns to rabbis. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous when it involves parents who have lost their own confidence and worry about their children's Torah observance. This doubt becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In recent decades Religious Zionism had done great deeds. We have built the land, expanded its settlement, etc. However, all this great work was accompanied by confidence and faith in our path. The confidence of the Religious Zionist camp was so great that there were some who heard the drumbeat of redemption. We were awed by our country's military and economical prowess. We came close to worship of our own mastery.

Now the difficulties have begun to surface, and doubt has begun to filter into the world of Religious Zionism. The youth rush to follow those who "have answers for every question." One of the graduates of our yeshiva came to me with his son, who proudly informed me that in his yeshiva there is an answer for every question. In our yeshiva I inform the students upon their arrival that we do not have an answer for every question. We must sometimes live with questions. The prophets too lived with questions.

This change has given rise to other phenomena never seen before in the Religious Zionist community. Young men wear knitted kippot, long sidelocks, sockless sandals and untucked shirts - true "Chassidim." It is as if they are proclaiming, "I am religious. Even if my kippa flies off in the wind, my long sidelocks will pull me and bind me to the religious camp." Long sidelocks and tzitzit that dangle at one's knees have no halakhic-religious meaning; however, they grant a certain security and express a certain type of religiosity or ultra-orthodoxy.

I hear of yeshivot Hesder where the students don tefillin for Mincha prayers as well. Tefillin add holiness. Halakhically, this practice is not arrogant or otherwise inappropriate; in fact, the opposite is true. But I belong to a different generation. I have been fortunate enough to pray with some of our Gedolim: with Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, with Rabbi Yitzchak Weiss (author of Minchat Yitzchak), with Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer and with Rabbi Aharon Kotler, and I never saw any of them recite Mincha wearing tefillin. No one would have considered wearing tefillin for Mincha when the Gedolim did not. Thirty years ago I was told by Rabbi Bergman, the son-in-law of Rav Schach and a close disciple of the Chazon Ish, that he once decided to build a sukka according to all the specifications of the Chazon Ish: a sukka without any nails. On the eve of Sukkot, he suddenly thought: How can I have a "mehudar" sukka when my grandfather did not? He immediately took some nails and nailed them into the sukka.

Our generation has lost faith in its predecessors and wants to "start from scratch." Suddenly, all kinds of new customs are being rediscovered in the Mishna Berura. A student of mine, who serves as a Ram in one of the Hesder Yeshivot recently told me, "When I see students who wear tefillin for Mincha, I know that there are other students who skip Mincha entirely…"

Kohelet (5:9) proclaims, "The lover of silver will never be satiated of silver, and he who loves desirously will have no pleasure; all this is vanity." The midrash on this verse says that the lover of mitzvot will never be satiated of mitzvot, and those who pine for mitzvot will have no pleasure. For we all know how many mitzvot Moshe Rabbenu fulfilled and how he sought and desired mizvot. Yet if there is no continuity across the generations, what purpose is there to the struggle? Only when Moshe fulfilled a mitzva which was established for generations to come – "and then Moshe designated three cities [as cities of refuge]" - was he satisfied.

The Maggid of Dubno relates a parable to explain the verse, "And you have not called upon Me, Ya'akov, for you are weary of Me, Yisrael" (Yeshayahu 43:22). A Jew traveled to a big city on business. When he reached the train station, he gave his small suitcase to a local porter and asked him to bring it to his hotel. A short while later the porter arrived at the hotel, exhausted, dragging a large heavy suitcase. "What have you done?" shouts the Jew, "this is not my suitcase! My suitcase was light!" This is the meaning of "And you have not called Me, Ya'akov, for you are weary of Me, Yisrael" - if you are weary, that is a sign that this is not my Torah.

The Torah is no less relevant in our generation than it was in the previous generation, but when all kind of "additions" are added to it, then "you are weary of me, Yisrael."

In Mussar Ha-kodesh, Rav Kook writes:

There are people whom God makes upright, whose personalities are tranquil, who are guided on a direct path, and inner peace is their lot. If they expend effort upon Torah, piety and wisdom, they will achieve great heights; however, in any case they are straightforward, good and trustworthy people. It is the fate of these people to be involved in the practical world and the practical branches of wisdom. Their moral side supports itself, at attention and at rest, and while they may not ascend to great heights, they will never fall to the lowest depths.

However, there is a second type who know no rest. These people are continually caught between rising to the very heavens and descending to the lowest abyss. They must improve their spiritual personalities daily. When they discover the path which is right for them, they will rise to great heights, but if they leave their path, they may fall far indeed. They must constantly involve themselves in Torah, worship, piety and holy feelings.

Over the generations, we sometimes find generations whose character is of the first type, who are of a peaceful disposition, of an even temperament, and their education is a worthy example for those few who possess an even temperament. There are also generations whose temperament vacillates, whose spiritual nourishment must be constant and regular. In fact, we find that a certain segment of the generation has a peaceful character, while another segment has a changeable personality. And the leaders who are concerned with the good of the entire community must take note how to educate the generation with regard to each segment within it.

I believe that the "changeability" of our day stems from insecurity. Yet whoever believes that he can heal the ills of our generation through the songs of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, through merely intensifying the emotions, is mistaken. This is a pain reliever. Its effect is temporary. Enthusiasm is momentary. People will always need a new thrill. This is not a value which lasts. Torah study, on the other hand, is a value which remains with us long after we close the book.

To heal our generation we need stability. We must present two important messages. First, the Torah has not lost an iota of its charm; it is as relevant as ever. The problem lies not in the Torah but in what we have added to it. Second, pain relievers are not enough. We must return to the path of arduous study; we must toil and invest in the acquisition of knowledge. Only if we remember these two values and work towards their achievement, will we be able to ascend the path which leads to the House of God.

(This sicha was delivered on Chanuka 5763 [2002].)

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