

WAITING, HOPING, PRAYING

RAV KANIEVSKI'S GUIDANCE FOLLOWING THE YESHIVA BOYS KIDNAPPING

Parshas Chukas

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The Jewish people in time of peril always ran to the Tzadikei Hador (righteous of the generation) for direction and prayer. The Talmud relates of a child lost in deep waters. Horrified family hurried to Reb Chanina ben Dosa. The child came out alive and well (Bovo Kama 50a). Our generation, our poverty stricken generation, does not have Tzadikim of that caliber, yet is still blessed with Lamed Vov (36) outstanding Torah personalities, a must in every generation for survival's sake (Sukah 45b). Rav Chaim Kanievsky, the Steipler's son, nephew and disciple of the Chazon Ish, revered in the Torah world, was asked what can be done to merit Heavenly protection for the kidnapped boys. He replied, 1) to add more time in Torah learning; 2) ladies' licht benchen before Shabbos to take place ten minutes earlier than usual.

Rav Kanievsky is known to respond with brief statements even to major questions, requiring reflection of his responses: these two efforts on the part of religious Jewry, suggested by Rav Kanievsky are not unrelated. In fact they are profoundly interrelated, two aspects of the same תכלית (aim). The power of Torah study as a means to bring blessings of peace and success is known to anyone who tasted the GESHMAK of a page of Talmud or the Heavenly aroma of commentaries on Chumash. Tehilim mentions it numerous times, then, as a dessert, Chapter 119 dwells on the theme, with captivating assertions, in the alphabetical order of the twenty-two letters of the Alef Bais. The chapter quotes eight love expressions for Torah, learning it, observing it, for each of the Alef Bais, totaling one hundred seventy-six pronouncements.

The Bnei Yesoschor in his Derech Pikudecho depicts three aspects in every Mitzvah: thought, spoken word, and deed, מחשבה דיבור ומעשה. The mitzvah of Torah study obviously contains thought and speech, but wherein is the deed? It is in the "power" of the word. כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו "The strength of His DEEDS He declared to His nation..." (Tehilim 111:6). This is the goal in Torah study; "fear of Hashem is the beginning (ultimatum) of wisdom" (ibid

10). מגיד דבריו ליעקב...לא עשה כן לכל גוי. "He relates His WORD to Jacob... He did not DO so to any nation" (ibid 147:19,20). Certainly is "writing" thoughts on Torah considered a deed (see Reb Akiva Eiger, response 31). It is surely in the realm of כח מעשיו (the strength of His deeds), enduring for the generations to come. It is the power to sustain us and redeem us. חלקי בארץ החיים... הוציאה ממסגר. "My portion in the land of the living". (This, says Seforno, refers to the houses of prayer and Torah study.) "Release my soul from confinement" (Tehilim 142:6,8). Rav Kanievsky, herein, teaches us to recite Tehilim meaningfully. More Torah, additional study, possesses the capacity of release from confinement.

Delving into the second terse request of Rav Kanievsky to help the kidnapped boys, what is the purpose of candle lighting erev Shabbos ten minutes earlier? The housewife is given the privilege of licht benchen, rather than her husband for good reasons. It is the heart rending tears that only a mother (or mother to be) can shed during those precious moments, the עת רצון, opportune time, following the Bracha for candle lighting in honor of approaching time of Shabbos. It took this writer's growing to adult years to understand why mother of blessed memory always had wet hands when we kids kissed her hands following licht benchen, saying good Shabbos. Her face fully covered by those hands (as required by Halacha, to block the candles sight until after reciting the Bracha) the flowing tears were unnoticed. Her tears tear into the heart even now, many decades later. Especially so now, mindful that she is the great-grandmother of one of the kidnapped boys, והושיעה לבן אמתך "and save the son of your handmaid" (Tehilim 66:16). What were the tearful supplications about? That these kids surrounding her grow up G-d fearing, Torah observing Jews, that the boys study Torah assiduously and become scholarly. The Talmud advocates this principle, and mother would not waste those priceless moments: "Said Rav Huna, One who habitually practices the lighting of the candles [for Shabbos and for Chanuka (Rashi)] will possess scholarly sons" (Shabbos 23b).

Those precious moments, Rav Kanievsky feels, could be prolonged, by lighting ten minutes earlier, to spend more time in zealous, passionate plea. What's ten extra minutes? For whom? For one's beloved children, for joy in

Torah learning, which, as above, means Heavenly protection. **כי רגע באפו חיים** (Tehilim 30:6) His anger endures only a moment, but His **רצון** (especially during **עת רצון** as above) is **חיים**, long, joyous life.

The above lines are crucial in understanding a critical event of our Parsha.

In our Sidra we learn that during the forty years on their journey in the Midbar, the Israelites were supplied with water miraculously in the zechus (merit) of Miriam. As they reached the month of Nisan of the fortieth year, Miriam died, and there was no water (Bamidbar 20:1). We learn from the juxtaposition of her death and the lack of water, that all these forty years journeying in the midbar the water was supplied miraculously in the merit of Miriam (Rashi ibid). According to the Talmud the water reappeared after a few days, in the zechus, merit of Moshe and Aaron. The Maharsho wonders since the merit of Moshe and Aaron was enough to provide water as it reappeared a few days after it ceased, why did the water flow cease for several days. It could have continued uninterrupted in the merit of Moshe and Aaron. Expounds the Maharsho, the temporary interruption of the water flow was essential in order for all to acknowledge the fact that until now the water was supplied in the merit of Miriam.

The gravity of this deprivation should not be underestimated. Several million people, including many children, bereft of water for several days is most distressing, painful. Yet, according to Maharsho it was worthwhile in order for all to feel profoundly that until now, while Miriam was alive, it was in her merit that Hashem provided water on parched land.

BEAIR, well, for drink receives an extra measure of appreciation, as the Torah in our Sidra records a special SHIRA, called SHIRAS HABEAIR (21:17,20), song of the well.

This joyous feeling is mixed, however, with the sad new decree against Moshe and Aaron's entry into the land. For as the Israelites found themselves suddenly without water, after the death of Miriam (ibid), Moshe was told to take the rod and gather the Israelites, V'DIBARTEM, and speak, in front of the rock, and the water will come forth from the rock and quench their thirst. Instead of speaking unto the rock, Moshe smote it with the rod. For this he

and Aaron were deprived of the privilege to enter and bring the Israelites into the Holy Land (20:7-12).

The divine plan was that the water, which is the most basic need for the sustenance of life, would now come as a result of the study of Torah. Moshe was told to speak in front of the rock... Though V'DIBARTEM may refer to either prayer or Torah study (Netziv ibid.), the term is more applicable towards study of Torah: "Study with them a Perek in front of the rock" (Yalkut Chukas 764; see Ohr Hachayim who insists that the intent was to study Torah at the rock). This was to impress upon the mind, for all time, what power is hidden in Torah study, and what powerful method it is in gaining the Al-mighty's grace.

Moshe was therefore, to take the rod, but not to use it. This was vital and imperative as the Israelites were readying to enter the Land. Failing to perform this mission as prescribed, Moshe and Aaron were meted out retribution not to enter the Land, measure for measure.

"LOCHAIN" (therefore) you will not bring this Congregation to the Land..." (20:12). The word "LOCHAIN" is a form of an oath (Rashi ibid). An oath is the most serious insistence on the sincerity of the "word". Indicative in this oath is the real reason they could not enter the Land. It was the lack of the "Torah word" which is the life breath of the Land.

The question that must be addressed: why was Moshe to take the rod, since it is the Torah study, the "Vedibartem" in front of the rock, that is the crux upon which the success depends, entering the Land, why take the rod?

The obvious answer is fundamental and crucial in our era, when Israel in the land of Israel and its right to the land, is challenged by threatening enemies. As Yaakov Avinu called Torah study (and prayer) "my sword and my bow" (quoted above), the rod not being used is symbolic of the power of Torah frightening the enemy of Israelite might (the rod) to the point that it is not even needed for use.

Let's hope that following the guidance of Rav Kanievsky, and our prayers of such vast numbers with the many Tzadikim, that without waging war (the rod) the kidnapped boys will be returned home safely.

