

קת, Dr. Ellie Bennett's birthday parsha. We're recording this in the midst of the ongoing war between ארץ ישראל and Iran, ימה שמם. Specifically today when I'm recording is the day after the massive bombing America carried out against Iran, and we're all deeply grateful to הקדוש ברוך הוא for that. We have to have הכרת הטוב to the הקדוש ברוך הוא for such a נס. So in that context, with so many נפלאות and ניסים going on, this דבר תורה will be all the more relevant.

In פרשת הקת, which is the פרשה of the פרשה אדומה and טומאה וטהרה, there's a famous pasuk (19:14): זאת דברי תורה that talk about how a person who is learning Torah has to immerse himself to the point he's willing to die for it, that you should be willing to be ימות באהל to learn Torah.

However, the sefer פלאות התורה, written by a very חשובע Yid named Zev Wolf Zicherman from Boro Park, has a completely different take on this pasuk. As we know, there are שבעים פנים לתורה, every single dot in the Torah has multiple פירושים. He brings from the ספר מהרי"ל. (You've heard of the מהרי"ל. When you're looking in משנה ברורה, you'll see the מהרי"ל quoted many times. Rabbi Oelbaum has pointed out to us that the מהרי"ל is a פוסק for the דורות, for all generations.) The מהרי"ל brings down a הלכה which, interestingly, we don't follow nowadays, but it's still worthwhile to mention: פעם אחת - once upon a time, אובה, the son of the Duke of Heidelberg, a goyish minister or prince who happened to be a big איש, passed away. A member of the ציבור, of the קהילה said, צר לי על מיתתו - His pain pains me.

So the רב told him, and the מהרי"ל is quoting this, even if it would be a יהודי כשר and a תלמיד חכם גדול, you should not say that phrase. Why? Because it looks as if you are having a טענה against מידת הדין. Instead, it would be preferable to say, יש הזק גדול במיתתו - there has been a tremendous loss with his passing.

However, the יעב"ץ is חולק on the מהרי"ל, and he says he forgot a plain pasuk. When דוד המלך heard about the death of יהונתן, his beloved childhood friend, he said (שמואל ב א' כ"ו) צר לי עליך אחי יהונתן. Not only that, it's brought down when the נודע ביהודה was being אייבשיץ מספיד רבי יהונתן, he said, צר לי עליך, מספיד רבי יהונתן אייבשיץ נודע ביהודה. So, it seems that the phrase can be appropriate, depending on the depth of the pain and sincerity, according to these פוסקים.

Mentioning this debate, the פלאות התורה brings down a fascinating sidebar, which is relevant to us. He writes that his father would often quote the משנה in Pirkei Avos that discusses the נסים that happened in the המקדש. One of those miracles was שאליו בירושלים - No one ever said it was uncomfortable for them to sleep over in ירושלים. What does that mean? What is what is the import of these fairly simple words? That a person never ever said, צר לי המקום. And he says here a fabulous פשט.

When there was חסדי הבורא בחוש, when the המקדש בית המקדש was standing, people could see the עולם הזה in every aspect of our life. Every matter, every action, every molecule - they saw that everything was infused with חסד. Even during difficult times, they could see the good and say, ברוך השם. As the pasuk says in Eichah (3:38) - מפי עליין לא תצא הרעות - nothing bad ever truly comes from Hashem. When the המקדש stood, כלל ישראל saw this clarity. Living in ארץ ישראל and ירושלים, they had the זכות to see that everything, every דבר, was only טוב וחסד. So no one ever said, "צר לי המקום" - meaning Hashem, who is המקום. No one ever said Hashem caused them pain, because they recognized כל מה דעביד - Every single thing that Hashem does is for the good.

I saw the following story, shown to me by my daughter Sorolle Idels, and I want to share it with you because it highlights how central Torah is to us. The story goes as follows. In the supermarket down the block from my house, a kollel man was standing in line with a shopping cart overflowing with groceries, easily worth 1500 shekels or more. Behind him in line stood a high ranking IDF officer. That sight, an



army officer and a kollel man standing side-by-side, is not unusual in our neighborhood, which is the home of the IDF Central Command and several Iron Dome installations. Out of the blue, the officer turned to the kollel man and said, "I'd like to pay for all your groceries". The kollel man, taken aback, asked, "Why would you want to do that"? The officer's answer was nothing short of astonishing.

"I was recently overseeing the deployment of the Iron Dome in Ukraine", he explained. "Once everything was set up, I came back to Israel. I was told that the success rate there was around 50%, nothing close to what we see here. In Israel, the Iron Dome intercepts over 95% of incoming rockets. I had to understand why. So I was sent back to Ukraine to investigate." He paused. "There was no technical explanation. The equipment was the same. The system was the same, but it just wasn't performing the same." Then looking the kollel man in the eyes, he continued, "and that's when it hit me. The difference isn't just in the technology. There's something else at play here. One of the reasons the Iron Dome works so well in Israel is because of the spiritual protection, the Torah learning, the תפילות, the זכויות of people. So I wanted to thank you in my own way for your role in helping to protect עם ישראל."

That's what it means, אָדָם כִּי יָמוּת בְּאַהֶל, If a person's willing to put in his maximum כוחות into לימוד התורה, מעשה מצות, all of the מידות that הקדוש ברוך הוא instills in us, that will be our greatest protection, our greatest זכות. And in the זכות of all of these מצות, may כלל ישראל be safe, have a גאולה שלמה. May each and every member of all of ישראל, including all of my family, be safe and sound. הקדוש ברוך הוא should extend his hand over all of us. That's the real Iron Dome - יד הגדולה's הקדוש ברוך הוא.

