

ISSUE #132

ו' סיון תשפ"ו
22/5/26



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

חג השבועות

אָנִי חוֹמָה וְשָׂדֵי כְּמִגְדָּלוֹת. (שיר השירים ח, י) אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: "אָנִי חוֹמָה" - זוֹ תוֹרָה. "וְשָׂדֵי כְּמִגְדָּלוֹת" - אֵלֶּיךָ תִּלְמִידֵי
חֻקֵּימִים. (פסחים פז. ב"ב ז:)

I am a wall, and my bosom is like towers! (Shir Hashirim 8:10) R' Yochanan said: "I am a wall" – refers to the Torah; "my bosom is like towers" – refers to Torah scholars. (Pesachim 87a; Bava Basra 7b)

In the introduction to the *Levush Mordechai (Bava Metzia)*, R' Moshe Mordechai Epstein *zatzal* offers an interesting insight regarding the term *חוֹמָה*, meaning "wall," in the context of Torah. He explains (see *Arachin* 33b) that for a city to be considered an *חוֹמָה*, a *walled city*, the wall must be built before the city itself. If a city is established first and only later encircled by a wall, it does not halachically qualify as a "walled city" regarding various *halachos*.

He elaborates on the reasoning behind this distinction. When the founders of a city construct a wall from the very beginning, it signifies their belief that this enclosure is essential for the city's fortification; they cannot imagine the city existing even briefly without it. In contrast, if a barrier is erected after the city has already been built, it suggests that the city could survive and function without the wall, viewing it merely as an additional layer of protection. Therefore, a wall must be constructed before the city for it to be considered a "walled city" in *halachic* terms.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains that there is additional significance in the order of building the wall. When city planners are constructing a wall, they are not constrained by anything; the wall establishes the boundaries of the city, and its specific characteristics govern its construction. However, when a wall is built after the city has been established, the wall must conform to the city's existing layout. The design and features of the wall are therefore limited to what is suitable and compatible with the city.

These two distinctions are also relevant when considering the Torah as a "wall". As Chazal teach (*Sotah* 21a): *תוֹרָה מְגַנָּת וּמְצַלָּה*, *Torah shields and protects*. Just as a wall protects a city's inhabitants, the Torah safeguards its students and those who adhere to its *mitzvos* and teachings. Accordingly, just as in *halachah*, there are guidelines for when a wall grants a city the status of an *חוֹמָה*; likewise, these same factors determine when the Torah acts as a protective wall. The "wall" of the Torah must be established from the very beginning, rather than added afterwards, as will be explained.

An individual must recognise that without the Torah, he is spiritually and physically vulnerable and exposed to harmful influences. Without the protection the Torah provides, one cannot sustain oneself for any length of time. Therefore, the ideals of the Torah should be a person's top priority, taking precedence over all other considerations.

Moreover, as mentioned, when a wall is built as an afterthought, it is limited by what existed before it and cannot exist in its ideal state. Similarly, if a person first shapes his lifestyle and only later incorporates Torah, his spiritual growth is significantly compromised, as it merely fits into what came before.

In summary, for Torah to offer us protection like a "wall," we must build that "wall" first. Our primary focus in how we live our lives should be the Torah, and we should not allow anything else to diminish its

influence. We must shape our lives around the teachings of the Torah, rather than, *chas veshalom*, trying to adapt the Torah to fit our lifestyles.

This lesson, of Torah only protecting those who align themselves with it, can be found in Megillas Rus, which is read on Shavuos. We learn about Naomi's decision to return to Eretz Yisroel, and how both Orpah and Ruth initially wished to accompany her. They were willing to abandon their wealth and status, recognising that their path to a meaningful life and joining the Jewish nation involved following the impoverished Naomi. However, when Naomi explained the sacrifices and hardships they would face, their resolve was tested. She outlined how unlikely it was for her to bear more children and how their marital status would not be universally accepted, making it improbable for them to remarry in the future. Upon hearing this, Orpah's determination wavered, and she kissed her mother-in-law and bid her farewell.

The *possuk* continues with Naomi addressing Rus: הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתְּךָ אֶל עַמָּהּ וְאֶל אֱלֹהֶיהָ, שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבִמְתְּךָ, "Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people **and to her god**; go follow your sister-in-law." This remark is surprising, as Orpah had only decided to return to her people. What made Orpah revert so quickly to idolatry? The Midrash explains that by returning to her people, she also returned to her gods.

The Rosh Yeshiva clarifies that this illustrates a deeper lesson. When Orpah realised that adopting a Torah way of life would impede her chances of marriage, she chose to return to her people instead of accepting a compromised lifestyle. This decision highlighted her lack of commitment to prioritising the Torah. Consequently, she lost her protection and soon fell back into her previous idolatrous ways.

This concept is also found in the beginning of the Megillah, which describes the rapid spiritual decline of Avimelech and his family. How did the family of a prominent figure like Avimelech end up marrying Moabites, ultimately resulting in the untimely deaths of Machlon and Kilyon? Chazal teach that Avimelech could not tolerate the constant requests for help from the poor, which led him to leave Eretz Yisroel. This decision reflected a lack of commitment to living according to the ideals of the Torah, even during challenging times. Choosing a more comfortable lifestyle instead of prioritising spiritual wellbeing contributed to their downfall. As a result, Avimelech and his family lost the protective influence of the Torah and became vulnerable to a severely compromised existence.

The Rosh Yeshiva explains the continuation of Chazal's metaphor comparing Talmidei Chachomim to towers. He explains that the walls of a city alone cannot adequately protect its inhabitants, since an enemy might breach the walls and enter through an opening. Therefore, it is essential to have towers that can observe and safeguard against any opposing forces. In a similar way, we need Talmidei Chachomim to guide us, ensuring that the integrity of the Torah is maintained and protected. As Rabbeinu Yonah teaches (*Sh. Teshuvah* 3:148): without those who study Torah and teach its laws, Klal Yisrael would be at significant risk from outside influences, and the Torah could be forgotten forever.

This Shavuos, as we renew our commitment to the Torah, let us strive to internalise this essential lesson: the Torah must be our top priority. Our lives and choices should revolve around it, making it impossible for us to go without it. By doing so, may we merit the great protection the Torah offers, both spiritually and physically, especially during these trying times!

גוט יום טוב!

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל עה"ת and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.