



## A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

### מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

### תשעה באב

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים. (תהלים קכו, א)

*A song of the ascents, when Hashem will return the captivity of Zion we will be like dreamers. (Tehillim 126:1)*

In Tehillim (126), Dovid HaMelech prophesied an event that was destined to occur long after his death. This *perek* of Tehillim is written as if it were spoken by those who were exiled in Bavel when they merited the miraculous Geulah of returning to Eretz Yisroel. After 70 years of exile, the people returned from captivity, and it felt like a dream.

The Meforshim offer two interpretations for the phrase הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים, *we will be like dreamers*. One interpretation suggests that when the joyous return to Zion finally occurs, memories of past oppression during the exile will swiftly fade away, as if they were merely a bad dream. Alternatively, this phrase can be understood as the splendour and wonder of the return to Zion will seem like an impossible dream that has come true.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* presents an alternative interpretation of the *possuk* based on a Gemara. The Gemara (*Taanis* 23a) recounts how the renowned *tzaddik*, Choni HaMe'agel, was perplexed by this *possuk*, questioning how a person could sleep for 70 years. His difficulty in comprehension indicates that he must have understood the *possuk* differently than the Meforshim, since, according to the above explanations, the *possuk* does not refer to sleeping or dreaming for the duration of 70 years. Choni, however, understood the *possuk* to mean that when the Geulah arrives, they will come to the realisation that for the 70 years of *golus*, they had been in a dream-like state, unaware of the happenings around them. Had they been "awake" and conscious of the kindness and greatness of Hashem, they surely would have repented sooner and would not have needed the full 70 years of *golus*. Choni was astonished at the idea that a person could live 70 years - an average lifespan – as if asleep, failing to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities of life to fulfil their purpose of serving Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon elaborates on Choni's puzzlement by referencing another Gemara. The Gemara (*Berachos* 3a) states that the night consists of three watches, and citing the *possuk* (*Yirmiyah* 25:30): ה' מִמְרוֹם יִשָּׁאֵג וּמִמַּעוֹן קִדְּשׁוֹ יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ, שָׁאֵג יִשָּׁאֵג עַל כְּהֹוֹ: Hashem will roar from on High, and from His Holy abode will send forth His Voice, He will roar and roar over His lodging, teaches that Hashem sits and roars like a lion at the termination of each watch. The Gemara provides signs for these heavenly watches; the first watch, a donkey brays; the second, dogs howl; the third (close to daybreak), an infant nurses from its mother, and a woman speaks with her husband. The Gemara then elaborates on the subject of Hashem's "roaring": Hashem roars and says, "Woe to the children because of whose sins I destroyed My Temple, burned My Sanctuary, and exiled them among the nations of the world."

The Gaon explains that while these signs act as physical cues for the moments described, their selection also contains profound lessons. He writes that the night symbolises Olam Hazeh, referred to by Chazal as night (*Bava Metzia* 83b). The Gemara here discusses three stages of life: עֲלִיָּה, *elevation*; עֲמִידָה, *standing*; and יְרִידָה, *descent*. The days of עֲלִיָּה represent a person's youth, during

which physical abilities are developing and individuals are preoccupied with satisfying their physical desires. This period is symbolised by the braying of a donkey, which represents the pursuit of desire. Next is the stage of עֲמִידָה, when life stabilises and a person is focused on acquiring wealth and prestige. This is represented by the howl of a dog, which constantly barks for food, indicating a relentless sense of dissatisfaction (cf. *Yeshayah* 56:11).

Finally, there are the days of יְרִידָה, when, as a person ages, they begin to perceive a decline in their physical abilities. At that stage, one is expected to renounce bad behaviours and return to Hashem and His Torah. This transition is symbolised by a child nursing from its mother, as reflected in the *possuk*, וְאַל תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ, *and do not forsake the teaching of your mother (Mishlei 1:8)*. Additionally, a wife speaking to her husband represents the physical (the woman) returning to the *neshamah* (the husband) through the speech of Torah. At all three stages in life, Hashem waits for individuals to choose the right path and rectify their wrongdoings, which have led to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. After each period passes without improvement, Hashem cries out and mourns the lost opportunity to restore us to our land and rebuild the Beis HaMikdash.

The Gaon explains that Choni's confusion arose from this last stage. Typically, even if a person has not lived their younger years with an awareness of Hashem, as they age, they come to recognise the purpose of existence and draw closer to Hashem. However, in this case, the 70 years of *golus* - representing 70 years of life – illustrated the idea of living an entire life in ignorance of Hashem's will. For someone to be close to death and still not return to Hashem was a concept that Choni found incredibly difficult to comprehend.

The Gaon elaborates on the esoteric and mysterious continuation of Choni's story. After interacting with a person planting a carob tree, Choni fell asleep for 70 years, with no one aware of his slumber. In summary, the Gaon explains that this sleep symbolises being deeply immersed in a foolish life driven by desire, where a person is dominated by the *yetser horah* and unable to escape its grip. This was the profound message conveyed to Choni: How is it possible for a person to live a life that ignores Hashem's will and the mission of man? When someone becomes consumed by earthly desires, they become entangled in the web of the *yetser horah*.

The Rosh Yeshiva concludes that the loss of focus is rooted in a lack of *cheshek* for Torah. The Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) states that the cause of the Churban was the failure to say Birkas HaTorah. This indicates that, although the people committed significant sins, those actions were merely the result of a deeper issue. The Zohar explains that they were missing the *berachah* of וְהֵעָרַב נָא, which represents a lack of appreciation for the delight and joy found in learning Torah. Because they did not value the enjoyment of Torah study, the people sought pleasure elsewhere. Engaged in the pursuit of worldly desires, wealth, and honour, they lived their lives in a state of dream and distraction, losing sight of man's true mission in life.

Let us strive to ensure that our lives are not merely a "dreamlike" existence, but rather focused on our purpose and goal in life. To safeguard this, we should find enjoyment and satisfaction in Torah, as it will prevent us from seeking fulfilment in other places. May we be *zoche* to recognise our true objective in life, which is to serve and connect with Hashem. This recognition will ultimately lead to the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash HaShelishi *bimherah veyameinu!*

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