

PLEASE TAKE THE GOLD AND SILVER!

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape 178, Tefillin and Long Hair. Good Shabbos!

PLEASE Take the Gold and Silver

In this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu is told by G-d, "Please speak into the ears of the people and a man shall ask from his neighbor and a women shall ask from her neighbor utensils of silver and gold" [Shemos 11:2]. Rash"i (based on the Talmud in Brochos ga) quotes a very famous Chaza"l that G-d asked Moshe using the word "nah" -- I request of you -- "PLEASE ask the people to request these silver and golden vessels".

The Beis Yisroel, authored by the Gerrer Rebbe, raises an interesting question. We understand why it is necessary to use the word "Please" if we are asking someone to perform a difficult task. But when has it ever been necessary to ask someone to "Please go take money"? People line up to take money! They do not need to be convinced to ask for it. Why over here did G-d need to stress "Please take the gold and silver"?

The answer is that Klal Yisroel [The Jews] knew that there is something very difficult about taking money. This was the first encounter that the newly freed slaves had with the age-old problem of money. They instinctively knew that the challenge which wealth poses is a tremendous temptation. The Gerrer Rebbe explains that G-d had to say, "PLEASE take the money" because the Jews knew that this gift was fraught with danger.

The Gerrer Rebbe also explains that this is also why G-d specifically used the word "v'Yish-alu" (they should borrow). G-d felt that if the Jews viewed material possessions in this world as some type of a borrowed item, they would be much better off.

A person can rent a car. It may have all the luxuries -- bucket seats; AM/FM radio, etc., all of the options. But a person's excitement about such a car will be muted by the fact that the car is rented. In a day or two the car will be returned. That, the pasuk [verse] tells us, is how a person should approach materialism -- as something that has been "borrowed", as something that a person should

not get too "carried away" about.

Rav Elye Sveye, shlit"a, once commented on the pasukim [verses] in Ha'Azinu which describe the history of the Jewish people [Devorim Chapter 32]. Rash"i describes the times in history when we were subject to this tremendous affluence. But then the pasuk says, "Israel waxed fat and rebelled...." [32:15]. The Seforno interprets "You, my dear Nation, you who understand the Torah, you have turned towards physical pleasures -- towards materialism and affluence. This has caused you to turn away. The pasuk then continues, "And G-d will see and be provoked..." [32:19]. What will be their end? The pasukim [32:20-26] describe the punishment that would befall them. The Seforno summarizes the pasukim as follows: "What was the antidote for a people that did not know how to cope with affluence? The antidote was Galus [Exile]."

Rav Elye explained that we have had many long and bitter Exiles -- 2,500 years of Exile. However, there was a common thread throughout the Exile. That common thread was poverty. There have been pockets of affluence and there have been individual Jews that have had wealth. But the overriding common denominator of all Exiles was poverty, trying to eke out a living. You can look at pictures of pre-world war Europe and see how the Jews lived. You can go to museums and see the poverty that the Jews had to endure. It is not coincidental. This is the answer of Exile. This is how G-d wanted to correct us, because we didn't know how to cope with wealth.

Rav Elye posed a powerful question: Here we are in America, which Reb Chaim Volozhin predicted would be the last stop before the coming of the Messiah. This is the last Exile, but we find something that is totally out of character with our other Exile experiences -- we are wealthy in America. Some may be a little more rich and some a little less rich, but any poverty that exists is relative poverty. Do we hear of people giving shoes to their children for Pesach, as if receiving shoes were a big deal?

Why is the Exile of America different? Is it not essential for Galus to include poverty?

Rav Elye suggested as follows: It must be that the last destruction -- the Holocaust in Europe -- must have been the final atonement for the sin of 'And Israel waxed fat'. We have served our time. We have paid our dues. We have finally received kapparah [atonement] for the sin of spiritual rebellion resulting from wealth. And now once again we can have affluence and luxury and material wealth. This is our second chance.

The Exile of America is our opportunity to experience wealth again and see if we will not stumble to its temptation. It is as if G-d told us, "Fine, you blew it once, but I will give you another chance." This is the challenge of the American Exile. To have "houses filled with all good things", to have "and Israel waxed fat", to have bountiful income and beautiful homes and beautiful cars -- but not to rebel. To deal with it the right way!

We have paid a terrible price. Now is the time to look back and say, "We won't do it again!" We will accept "VaYishman Yeshurun", but we will not rebel or stumble from that wealth, rather we will use those blessing to spread Torah and to increase the honor of Heaven.

Glossary

Kapparah -- Atonement

VaYishma Yehshurun -- And Yeshurun (Israel) waxed fat

Sources and Personalities

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105); France.

Gerrer Rebbe -- Rav Yisroel Altar (1892-1981); Poland, Israel.

Seforno -- Rav Ovadiah Seforno (1470-1550); Italy.

Rav Elye Sveye -- Contemporary Rosh Yeshiva (Yeshiva Dean), Philadelphia.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#178). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Tefillin and Long Hair. . The other halachic portions for Parshas Bo from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

- Tape # 040 - Amirah L'Akum: The "Shabbos Goy"
- Tape # 083 - The Burning Issue of Smoking.
- Tape # 131 - Sephardic vs. Ashkenazic Pronunciation: Is There a Correct Way?
- Tape # 224 - Kiddush Levanah
- Tape # 268 - The Consequence of Dropping Tefillin or a Sefer Torah
- Tape # 314 - The Prohibition of Living in Egypt
- Tape # 358 - Mezzuzah - What is a Door?

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

Yad Yechiel Institute

PO Box 511

Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511

Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through your local Hebrew book store or from Project Genesis, 1-410-654-1799.
