

THE KIDS ON YESHIVA LANE ARE DIFFERENT

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 # 472, Tefilin Shel Rosh. Good Shabbos!

The Kids On Yeshiva Lane Are Different

In this week's parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And all the nations of the earth shall see that the Name of the L-rd is called upon you, and they will be in awe of you" [Devarim 28:10]. The Talmud [Brochos 6a] says that this verse refers to the Tefillin we place on our heads. This explanation, however, is Drush [a homiletic exegesis].

There are many levels on which the Torah can be expounded. There is the Peshat [simple meaning]. There is what is alluded to through Remez [oblique hints]. There is the Drush. Finally, there is the Sod [mystical interpretation].

What is the simple interpretation of our verse? The Vilna Gaon explains that the simple interpretation of this pasuk is that when a Jew truly acts in accordance with the Torah's guidelines for life, the nations of the world will notice that this is a different type of person -- a Godly person -- and will be in awe of him. As radical as this idea sounds, this -- the Gaon says -- is the simple interpretation of this pasuk.

Recently, we hired a new cleaning lady. We live on Yeshiva Lane, on the campus of Ner Israel Rabbinical College, along with many other families who are part of the Yeshiva. So, she drove up to Yeshiva Lane on a Thursday morning in the middle of the summer. As always, "bli ayin hora," there were a multitude of young children playing in the streets. She observed them playing for the length of time it took her to take her supplies out of the car and bring them into the house. She noticed how they were playing and how they were talking to each other. Unsolicited, she told my wife, "You know, the kids around here are different. The way they play, the way they talk -- it is so beautiful. I am so worried about my children and the influences that they face on the street. You have such a secluded and protected life style here. It is beautiful!"

We who live there know that the kids of Yeshiva Lane are very sweet. But they are not necessarily

such 'tzadikim' [pious individuals]. They are certainly not necessarily all young Chafetz Chaims and Sarah Schneirers running around Yeshiva Lane. Kids will be kids. It often seems as if there is one long baseball game that starts on Memorial Day and lasts until Rosh HaShanah. They ride their bikes around. They do all the things that kids do.

For this woman to notice right away, from just casual observation, that "the kids are different here" is very striking. This is the meaning of the pasuk, "And all the nations of the earth shall see that the Name of the L-rd is called upon you, and they will be in awe of you".

When Jews act like they are supposed to act, this will be readily apparent to all the nations and this will be our defense.

Eisav's defense is through the sword [Bereishis 27:40]. Yishmael's defense is through battle with his hands [Bereishis 16:12]. What is the defense of a Jew? What is our defense? Our defense -- at least in the ideal future world -- is the defense spelled out in the pasuk in this week's parsha: "And all the nation's of the earth shall see that the Name of the L-rd is called upon you, and they will be in awe of you".

There will be recognition that "these people are different"; "these people are worthy"; "we are not going to start up with these people".

Clearly, we have not yet merited this level. Perhaps during the glory days of the first Beis HaMikdash in the time of King Shlomo, we merited this level. Certainly since the destruction and the ensuing exile we are far removed from that level. However, in the ideal future time, when someone will want to know "what is the defense of the Jewish nation?" the answer will be that "they will see the Name of the L-rd upon you". They will see that these people are different and they will treat them differently.

A Kohen Is A Kohen? -----

This week's parsha contains the narration of the procedure of bringing one's first fruits to Jerusalem. The pasuk says, "And you shall come to the Kohen who will be in those days and you shall say to him..." [Devarim 26:3]. Rashi comments on the words "who will be in those days" as follows: "You have none but the Kohen in your days as he is."

There is a similar Rashi in Parshas Shoftim. The pasuk there states that a person will come to the judge "who will be in those days" [Devarim 17:9]. Rashi comments "you have none but the judge in your days". One is not allowed to say "Why should I go to the judge of my generation when he does not hold a candle to the judges of previous generations".

The Ramban asks a question on Rashi. I can understand, argues the Ramban, that when it comes to seek out judicial or halachic rulings one might have a tendency to question the credentials of the judge or posek who will be offering the ruling. One might say, "who is he compared to the Torah scholars of the previous generations?" Many of us remember Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l. Many of us

even still remember Rav Henkin. Some people even remember Rav Chaim Ozer. These were the great halachic rulers of the previous generation. In going before a contemporary posek, inevitably someone who remembers the aforementioned Torah giants may have misgivings about the authority and authenticity of the rulings he may receive from the contemporary halachic decisor. To counteract such a tendency, the Torah tells us that we must go to the judge who is around in these days.

But, the Ramban argues, a Kohen is a Kohen. If his father was a Kohen, he is a Kohen. If the person's last name is Cohen, nobody will ask any questions. Why did the Torah need to specify "the Kohen of your generation?" Why would I have thought anything else? It should not make any difference if he is an ignorant Kohen or a scholarly Kohen. A Kohen is a Kohen and he can accept Bikkurim [First Fruits]. So what is Rashi saying? Who cares, that he does not match up to the Kohanim of the earlier generations?

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz (in his work on Chumash) explains Rashi's view. The key, he says, is the words that the Israelite addresses to the Kohen when he brings his first fruits. The Torah specifies that he say "I declare today to Hashem YOUR G-d..." [Devorim 26:3]. He does not say the declaration is made before Hashem OUR G-d (Elo-keiNU). Rather, he says YOUR G-d (Elo-keCHA). Throughout Tanach, the Torah rarely associates the name of G-d with an individual ("meyachaid shem shomayim aal hayachid").

"I should say YOUR G-d -- on this Kohen who is an ignoramus? Maybe in Biblical times I could speak of 'The G-d of Aharon' or the 'G-d of Pinchas'. But in our times, just because his name is Katz I should say to 'the L-rd YOUR G-d?'"

This is what Rashi is addressing. Do not let such thoughts enter your mind. Go to the Kohen who is there in your days -- as he is -- and declare before him "to Hashem YOUR G-d."

Rav Yeruchem cites support from a Medrash in Koheles Rabbah which discusses the pasuk in Diverei HaYamim [I Chronicles 12:28]: "And Yehoiada the leader of Aharon and with him 3700 (men)". The Medrash asks "Was Yehoiada the leader of Aharon then"? The Medrash says that the homiletic teaching is that if Aharon were alive in that generation, even so, Yehoiada would have been the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. Yehoiada was superior to Aharon (for the needs of that generation). That is the explanation of Rashi's view.

Not Repeating The Mistake of the Souls From Charan -----
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At a wedding I recently attended, I met Rabbi Moshe Whiteman, Dean of the Torah Academy for Girls in Far Rockaway, NY. He told me that while driving to the wedding he was listening to a tape of mine in which I recounted a story from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky. Rabbi Whiteman said, "I would like to tell you the rest of that story."

I had mentioned a story that when Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky was living in Toronto, he was upset with himself that perhaps he was compromising the Torah education of his children by living in Toronto. This was more than fifty years ago, when Toronto did not have the significant Torah school infrastructure that it has today. Therefore, Rav Yaakov decided to move to New York. When he moved to New York, he became the Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath.

Rabbi Whiteman added the following: When Rav Yaakov came to Torah Vodaath he started giving shiur to the class formerly taught by Rav Reuven Grozovsky. The approach to saying a Talmud shiur of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky was as different as day is from night from the approach of Rav Reuven Grozovsky. Rav Reuven used to get involved in intricate pilpul, building great infrastructures of Torah premises and complex logical arguments. It was challenging and stimulating and everybody loved it.

Rav Yaakov took over the class. He had a different approach. It goes without saying that he was a tremendous Gaon in his own right. But his pedagogic approach was one of simplicity and straight-forward interpretation of the Talmud and commentaries. It was not that one was a greater scholar or one was a lesser scholar, it was just a different approach. But Rav Yaakov's lectures did not have the pizzazz of the lectures delivered by Rav Reuven.

Slowly but surely the students started dropping out of Rav Yaakov's shiur. "I heard shiurim from Rav Reuven! I have to come to Rav Yaakov's shiur to hear Gemara, Rashi, and Tosofos?" Slowly but surely the enrollment in the shiur dwindled.

Rav Shraga Feivel Medelovitch called the students into his office and said as follows: I want to ask you boys a question: It states in connection with Avraham Avinu "the souls which he made in Charan" [Bereishis 12:5]. We are told that he converted thousands and thousands of people to monotheism while he was still in Charan. But when the Jewish people went down to Egypt two generations later, their population numbered only 70 souls. What happened to the thousands and thousands of souls that were made in Charan?

Rav Shraga Feivel explained that what had happened was as follows: they had a great teacher named Avraham Avinu. He was a master of kindness. He used to feed people and give them a place to sleep. He was a 'nice guy'. The disciples loved Avraham Avinu. Avraham died. Yitzchak became the leader. Yitzchak had a different approach of Service to G-d. His approach was Fear of G-d, Judgment, an austere type of Service. The people said, "This is the great spiritual role model? This is the leader? This is the 'Gadol'? We remember Avraham Avinu! He was a leader. He was a Gadol. He knew how to take care of his disciples. Yitzchak is not my style. Not for me. This is not the Judaism I knew. They had enough of monotheism."

What happened to them? They lost it all. They did not have a teacher. They did not have a spiritual leader. They did not have a Rabbi. They kept on making comparisons and could not find anyone to measure up to Avraham. So they were left with nothing and they developed into nothing.

He told the students, "You have only the judge who is present in your days. Rav Reuven was Rav

Reuven and Rav Yaakov is Rav Yaakov. Both these and these speak the word of the Living G-d." [Eruvin 13b] He warned them that to discount the new Rebbe because he had a different style than that of the previous teacher was the path of the "souls that Avraham made in Charan". The final chapter of those souls was not a happy chapter. Nothing ever became of them.

For this reason, Rashi needs to stress both in Parshas Shoftim and in Parsas Ki Savo that one must deal with the only judge or kohen that he has -- the ones who are there in his own day.

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