



SICHA – YUD-TEB KISLEV 5744

*Free Translation**

The task of the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, was, as recorded in Tanna D'vei Eliahu, to "gird their waist with iron chains." In order to prepare themselves for a long journey, a journey fraught with hardships; such a journey that a regular belt would be shredded through the travails of the journey, so they needed to "tie their clothes with a belt made of iron chains."

And they had to travel: They did not wait until the people would come to ask of the Sanhedrin how to behave, but rather they had to go to the people —they had to go to those young in knowledge and even to those young in years.

This could be considered self-sacrifice:

When these rabbis are in their chamber in the Temple, they have the authority of the High Court. When they are traveling around the cities of Israel, however, outside of their assigned chamber, they do not have the authority of the Sanhedrin, and they cannot rule on any situations as a Sanhedrin. The authority is in power only when they are adjacent to "My altar," in the Temple, as the ruling is.

Nevertheless, they are told that they should abandon their standing as Sanhedrin, by leaving their assigned chamber, and leaving the city of Jerusalem. They can no longer rule on capital cases, and other issues of the Sanhedrin. Why? In order to educate those who are "children" in knowledge, or children in age, so that they should not need to come to the Sanhedrin to "know the actions that they should do, and those that they may not do."

These travels of the Sanhedrin can be considered self-sacrifice. Actually, it is self-sacrifice in a very real and practical way.

We find this actual sacrifice of self by our Rebbes as well. We saw it by my father-in-law, the Rebbe: He put his own life in very real danger in order to spread Judaism through emissaries, building Jewish schools and Mikvehs, in addition to his own activities regarding the study of Torah.

The same was true of the other Rebbes, his predecessors.

We find a special emphasis on self-sacrifice by the Alter Rebbe.

*) Taken from the Subtitles that appear on the screen



פרשת וישב

He learned and taught both the revealed and the hidden Torah, as we see from the Code of Jewish Law, which he began writing even before he became Rebbe, while he was still studying in the Maggid's Court, as recorded in the introduction to the work. He also taught how to serve God, especially in the book of Tanya, which explains how serving God is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it," through loving and fearing God, as discussed many times.

In addition to all of that, there was another novelty: He himself would read the Torah for the congregation. Regarding different measurements in Jewish law, the Alter Rebbe's brother writes in a letter, he himself measured the measures referred to as a "barley grain" and the various coins, in order to ascertain Halachic measurements. Regarding the method of Kosher slaughter, the Alter Rebbe himself gathered the ritual slaughterers, and showed them how it should be done, what should be done, how they must be careful, etc. etc.

Then there is the famous story: Once on Shabbat, or possibly on Yom Kippur —there are several versions of the story— in middle of the prayers, the Alter Rebbe removed his Tallit and went to the edge of the city. A woman who lived there had recently given birth and her entire family had gone to the synagogue, leaving her alone. The Alter Rebbe had sensed that she needed help. So he himself went —he removed his Tallit— and performed all of the chores that are permitted on Yom Kippur only in a life-threatening situation, in order to help this woman.

[When I heard this story from my father-in-law, the Rebbe, he added that there was a time when Chassidim would not relate this story. He knew, however, that I would not contain myself, and sooner or later I would make a big deal about it.

I think I have told the story before, but if at that time it was without a "tumult," now I am repeating it with a "tumult."]

The Alter Rebbe prayed in a synagogue filled with people who could have gone instead.

True, "it is incumbent upon the greatest person" present to desecrate the holiday to save a life. But still, we are talking about the Alter Rebbe: We know how intense the Alter Rebbe's prayers were in general, and especially on Yom Kippur which is the holiest day, a day of prayer for the entire year!

So, although it is "a Mitzvah for the greatest," how could the Alter Rebbe have sensed, during his prayers on Yom Kippur, that at the edge of town there was a woman who had recently given birth?

He was in the middle of praying!



פרשת זישב

The Alter Rebbe needed no explanation that during prayer one must “know before Whom you stand”; he explained it to others! Especially as the Tzemach Tzedek explains that the Alter Rebbe’s prayers were in a manner of “Who is for me in the heavens, when I wanted none beside You on earth.” He wanted nothing at all –not even the higher and lower levels of the Garden of Eden. “I want nothing else than you, God, alone.” And he would pray with extreme devotion.

But in the middle of his prayers, on Yom Kippur, in a holy place, he still sensed that at the edge of town there was a birthing mother who needed his help—physically!

Then we were told this story, because, as explained, it is a practical lesson for each of us:

One can think, “I am busy with lofty matters.” This is not a mistake due to self-love; he is in fact engaged with heavenly matters! But it is impossible to think that he is higher than the Alter Rebbe, as he was engaged in prayer, on Yom Kippur, in the synagogue! With all of a person’s self-love and self-esteem, I don’t believe that anyone would think like that.

That is why we are told this story:

We are being told: “You do not compare to the Alter Rebbe. Even when you are involved in lofty matters you do not compare to the Alter Rebbe. Why did this story —this life lesson—reach you? Says the Ba’al Shem Tov: It was by Divine Providence; so that you should learn a lesson, on your level, and in your situation, how you too should to act!”

