



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Executive Director, Camp HASC

Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

## Speak to Hashem

Rav Yitzchak Zilber, zt'l, legendary champion of Russian Jewry, was a humble *talmid chacham* and teacher whose incredible self sacrifice and dedication inspired and strengthened generations of Jews. Having been imprisoned in gulags of the former Soviet Union, he escaped to Tashkent and later arrived in Eretz Yisrael, where he continued his efforts in teaching Torah around the clock. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt'l, referred to him as “one of the *Lamed Vav Tzadikim*”, one of the hidden righteous people whose presence supports the entire world. Thousands of Russian *olim* to the Holy Land sought his counsel and Torah instruction.

One of Rav Zilber's early students shared an anecdote and memory of the first time he went to the *Kotel haMaaravi* to daven. He felt incredibly privileged to walk among a group of new immigrants accompanied by their *rav*, after years of yearning to make *aliyah* and live in Eretz Yisrael; he had finally made it!

When they first saw the Holy Wall, they shed a tear of awe, and then, kissing the holy stones, they felt the sweetness of homecoming. When a *Mincha minyan*

commenced, they happily joined. But within a few seconds, instead of feeling inspired and connected, the student began to feel unsettled and frustrated, and tense in his stomach. “This is my first time here,” he whispered to his Rav during the chazan's repetition. “And everyone around me is davening beautifully, with all their hearts, but I have no idea how to join them! Everything is moving so fast and I can barely even read Hebrew!”

Rav Yitzchok placed his arm around his student's shoulder, and spoke into his ear: “I hear, I hear! There isn't much I can do for you other than this....” The rav turned his body around to face the Kotel, and continued: “Whatever is in your heart — joy, pain, confusion, heart-brokenness, feelings of distance — tell Him about it! Speak to Hashem! Tell the *Ribbono Shel Olam* your story, in your own words, at your own pace.”

Our *sedra* contains the *pesukim* recited when bringing *bikurim*, first fruits, to the Beis haMikdash. One is to stand before Hashem in gratitude and tell Him the story of our journey that brought one to this moment. One describes the beginning of our people, our exile and redemption from Mitzrayim; one recounts the long and difficult road to “the Land flowing with milk and honey”, and to Yerushalayim. This recital is a ‘*vidui*’ of sorts, a

‘confession’ and acknowledgement of the past, and symbolically presenting to Hashem everything in one’s mind and heart. Through reflecting on the story, one is to appreciate the process, including the challenges, complaints and hardships along the way. This moving section of our *parshah* is included as part of the Haggadah liturgy, forming an essential element of Seder Night: “My father was a fugitive Aramean....”

Finally, one acknowledges the ‘fruits’ of his labor, effort and faith, and recognizes that everything really comes from Hashem:

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְכָל־הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וּלְבֵיתְךָ

“You shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem has given you and your household”

(26:11).

Honoring the travails of exile, struggle and process as part of our redemption story enhances the sweetness of our deliverance and the abundance we have been given. And presenting to Hashem our personal spiritual narrative in such a beautiful way cultivates a deeper sense of connection and closeness to the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Even our exiles and challenges were for the good; we finally made it!

Later on, our *sedra* lists the numerous blessings promised as a reward for following Hashem’s will and living a life of Torah. Among them:

בְּרוּךְ טַנְאָךְ וּמִשְׁאַרְתְּךָ

Blessed will be your *tana*, ‘basket’, and your kneading bowl (28:5)

While visiting the holy *tzion* of Reb

Shayaleh, zy’a, in Kerestir, Hungary, my wife and I had a wonderful conversation over coffee and *kokosh* cake with Rav Buxbaum, the generous inn-keeper and *mashgiach*. During this *shmues*, he shared the following teaching in the name of the *tzadik* Rebbe Mordechai of Nadvorna.

Every day we bring all sorts of *taanot*, complaints, before Hashem. Some of them we bring out into the open and present them to Him in a *tana*, ‘basket’. Other complaints we hold inside, leaving them unspoken, kneading them over and over, tying knots inside the ‘kneading bowl’ of our stomach. Thus, the Torah blesses us: בְּרוּךְ טַנְאָךְ - ‘May your *ta’anot* be blessed and resolved through presenting them to Me so beautifully and openly. And may וּמִשְׁאַרְתְּךָ, even the lumps of dough, the challenges that you are still laboring on in your inner ‘kneading bowl’ be blessed and smoothed out — by turning to me and speaking to Me about them!”

Let us take the opportunities we have to turn to Hashem and confess our gratitude and our gripes — and share with Him everything that is on our mind, in our heart and even deep down in our stomach. And may be blessed to arrive in Yerushalayim with the fruits of our labor to rejoice in all the good Hashem has granted us! ■

*Gemach for Chatan and Kalla:*

**Meals for wedding and Sheva Brachot at cost**

Eida Hachareidis Hechsher

**Tel: 052-633-1744**

**gadgadood@gmail.com**

