



Esh Kodesh: Finding God in the Midst of Suffering

Class I

Rabbi Dani Passow – passow@hadar.org

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1) January 3, 1943 ("the evening before the second day of the week of Parashat Va-Era, 27 Tevet, 5703")

Cover letter of bundle of books found in large, buried container on site of the Warsaw ghetto

ATTENTION!!! Blessed is God. I have the honor of requesting the esteemed individual or institution that finds my enclosed writings *Hakhsharat Ha-Avreichim, Mavo Ha-She'arim*, (from *Hovat Ha-Avreikhim*), *Tsav ve-Zeruz*, Torah Insights on the weekly readings for the years 5700, 5701 and 5702, to please exert themselves to send them to the Land of Israel to the following address: Rabbi Yeshaya Shapira, Tel Aviv, Palestine. Please also send the enclosed letter. When the Blessed One will show mercy, and I and the remaining Jews survive the war, please return all materials to me or to the Warsaw Rabbinate for Kalonymus, and may God have mercy upon us, the remnant of Israel in every place, and rescue us, and sustain us, and save us in the blink of an eye. With deep, heartfelt gratitude, Kalonymus

2) Will, written to Yeshaya Shapira (brother of Kalonymus)

Please also print in every work ... that I urge every single Jew to study my books, and the merit of my holy ancestors will stand by every student and his family, now and forever....May God have mercy upon us.



1. Lineage and Early Life

- **Elite Hasidic Ancestry:**

- Born in 1889 in Grodzisk, Poland, the descendant of the most prestigious Polish Hasidic dynasties.
- His lineage included
 - Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk (d. 1787).
 - The Seer (Chozeh) of Lublin (d. 1815).
 - The Kozienicer Maggid (d. 1814).

- **Early Life:**

- Father, Rabbi Elimelekh of Grodzisk (author of *Imrei Elimelekh*), died when Kalonymus was only three years old.
- Raised and tutored by his uncle, Rabbi Yerachmiel Moshe Hapstein.
- At age 15, married Rachel Chayah Miriam Hapstein
 - She was learned, known to edit his works.

2. Educational Vision and Pre-War Career

- **Founding of Daas Moshe:**

- 1923-founded the *Daas Moshe* Yeshiva in Warsaw.
- Grew to be one of the largest Hasidic yeshivas in the Warsaw area.

- **Master Pedagogue:**

- Focused on the spiritual and moral development of the young.
- His most famous work published in his lifetime was *Chovat HaTalmidim* (The Students' Responsibility, 1932), which served as a handbook for education

- **Other Works published posthumously:**

- Wrote a sequence of educational guides for different life stages:
 - *Hakhsharat HaAvrekhim*: For young married men
 - *Bnei Machshava Tova*: For elite spiritual development
 - *Mevo HaShearim*: An advanced work for scholars
 - *Tzav V'ziruz* (Command and Exhort): personal diary
 - *Derekh HaMelekh* (The Way of the King): pre-war sermons



3. The "Years of Wrath" and Personal Tragedy

- **Successive Losses (Sept–Oct 1939):**

- Elimelekh Ben-Zion, was injured in an aerial attack and later died of his wounds.
- His daughter-in-law, Gittel, and his sister-in-law, Channah Hapstein, were killed by a bomb while visiting his son in the hospital.
- His mother died just a few weeks later.

- **Leadership in the Ghetto:**

- His home was located within what became the Warsaw Ghetto
- Turned his residence into a study center providing both material and spiritual support

4. The Discovery of the "Holy Fire"

- **Burial and Discovery**

- Just before the Ghetto's final destruction, the Rebbe buried his manuscripts—including the wartime sermons—in metal milk cans.
- A cover letter titled "AUFMERKZAM!!!" (ATTENTION!!!) requested that the finder forward the works to his brother, Rabbi Isaiah Shapira, in Tel Aviv.
- The cans were found by a Polish construction worker in December 1950
- They were eventually taken to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and later published as *Esh Kodesh* (original title was “*Derashot mi-shenot ha-za'am*” – “Sermons From the Years of Rage”)
- Contains ~100 sermons delivered between Rosh Hashanah 5700 (September 14-15, 1939) and Shabbat Hazon of 5702 (July 18, 1942), the eve of the deportations to the death camp Treblinka.
- One of only two book-length rabbinic sermons recovered from the war.
 - The other: Collected Sermons of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Unsderfer



3) Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread joyfully, and drink your wine goodheartedly, as God has already accepted your actions	3) קהלת ט:ז לך אֲכַל בִּשְׂמִיחָה לַחֲמֹךְ וְשִׂתֵּה כְּלֵב-טוֹב יִיגַד כִּי כָבֹד רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ:
4) Ecclesiastes Rabbah 9:7 Rabbi Mona of Shaab and Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin in the name of Rabbi Levi interpreted the verse as regarding Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. This is analogous to a province that owed taxes to the king. The king dispatched a tax collector from the treasury to collect it. [When he was] at a distance of ten mil, the prominent leaders of the province emerged and lauded him, and he forgave one-third for them. At a distance of five mil, the middling ones emerged and lauded him, and he forgave one-third for them. When he neared [and was right outside the province], men, women, and children emerged to greet him, and he forgave it in its entirety. He said, 'What is past is past, from here onward is a new account.' So too, on the day before Rosh HaShana, the prominent leaders of the generation fast and the Holy One blessed be He absolves them of one-third of their transgressions, as it is stated: "Yet forgiveness is with You, so You will be feared" (Psalms 130:4). Rabbi Aḥa said: Forgiveness is primed for you from Rosh HaShana, "so You will be feared" – so Your fear will be on Your creations. Those days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, individuals fast, and the Holy One blessed be He absolves them of another third of their transgressions. On Yom Kippur, all of them fast, and the Holy One blessed be He absolves them of another third of their transgressions. When men, women, and children fast, the Holy One blessed be He forgives them for everything and says: 'What is past is past, and the new account is from here onward.' A Divine Voice emerges and says to them: "Go, eat your bread joyfully" – your prayer has already been heard.	4) קהלת רבה ט:ז רבי מונא דשאב ורבי יהושע דסיכנין בשם רבי לוי פתר קרייא בראש השנה וביום הכפורים, משל למדינה שהיתה חייבת ליפסין למלך, שלח המלך גבאי טימיון לגבותה, ברחוק עשרה מילין יצאו גדולי המדינה וקלסוהו והתיר להם שליש, ברחוק חמשה מילין יצאו הבינונים וקלסוהו והתיר להם שליש, כשקרב יצאו לקראתו אנשים ונשים וטף וקלסוהו ומחל להם את הכל, אמר לון מה דאזל אזל, מן הכא ולהלן הוא חושבנא. כך ערב ראש השנה גדולי הדור מתענין, הקדוש ברוך הוא מתיר להם שליש מעונותיהם, שגאמר (תהלים קל, ד): כי עמך הסליחה למען תורא. אמר רבי אחא מראש השנה סליחה מתקנת לך, למען תורא, שתהא יראתך על בריותיך, ואותן הימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים, היחידים מתענין והקדוש ברוך הוא מתיר להם עוד שליש מעונותיהם, וביום הכפורים מתענין כלן והקדוש ברוך הוא מתיר להם עוד שליש מעונותיהם, עד שמתענין אנשים ונשים וטף מחל להם הקדוש ברוך הוא את הכל, ואומר מה דאזל אזל מן הכא ולהלן הוא חושבנא. יצתה בת קול ואמרת להם: לך אכל בשמחה לחמך, כבד נשמעה תפלתכם
5) Esh Kodesh, Rosh Hashanah 5700 (1939) In distress I called on God; God answered me and brought me relief"; "Hear my plea; Do not shut Your ear to my groan, to my cry." ...	5) אש קודש, שנת ת"ש, ראש השנה מן המיצר קראתי י"ה ענני במרחב י"ה; קולי שמעת אל תעלם אזנך



God created the entire universe so that it should fear Him, as Scripture states, "And God has made it, so that they should fear Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Even forgiveness exists so that we might have the fear of Him. For when a person is stained by sins, because of which he is made to suffer powerful and bitter torments (God spare us!) it is difficult to have the true fear of God, which is standing in awe of His greatness and the glory of His excellence. Fear in essence is awe of the greatness of God. Every Jewish soul feels this, each person according to his ability. Thus, whereas one person might feel within himself the fear of the greatness and holiness of God, and tremble with the thought, Heaven forbid, of sinning against God, another person might merely feel the fear of punishment which is also its own form of fear of the greatness of God....

(However) this is only when the soul of a Jewish person is standing (i.e., intact and sustained); then it is able to sense the closeness of God to him and to fear His awe, may He be blessed. **But when a person is soiled with sins and crushed by sufferings, Heaven forbid, to the point that his entire being lies prostrate and fallen, such that he no longer even senses himself or his soul—then it is difficult for him to be stirred by the awe of God and to fear the splendor of His majesty. ...**

A parable: A prince is held captive among wanton people who torment him, when he suddenly senses that the king is close by. He begins to shriek bitterly, "save me, my father! Save me, my king!" He cries because he senses that the king is near. The intensification of his plaintive cries is an indication of the king's greater proximity. So too when a Jew is broken-hearted, whether over his own troubles, the suffering of his loved ones, or for Jewry as a whole, is a sign that he senses the revelation of the sovereignty of Heaven. All this, however, is dependent on the intensification of his fear of the Blessed One, and his repentant desire to coronate the Blessed One as his King.

לרוחתי לשועתי

...

את כל העולם ברא הקב"ה כדי לירא
מלפניו, כמשה"כ והאלקים עשה
שיראו מלפניו, ואף הסליחה הוא
שנירא מלפניו, כי כשהאיש מלוכלך
בחטאים ובשביל זה מתיסר ביסורים
קשים ומרים ר"ל, קשה שירא מד'
יראה אמיתית מגדלותו ית' ומהדר
גאונו,

כי עיקר היראה היא מגדלות ד' שכל
נפש ישראלי מרגשת, כ"א לפי ערכה,
ואז יש איש שגם מדגיש בקרבו את
היראה לירא מגדלות קדושתו ית', וגם
מזדעזע מלחטא ח"ו נגדו, ויש איש
שבקרבו מרגיש יראת העונש, אשר
גם היא יראה מגדלות ד'
וזה הוא רק בשעה שנפשו של איש...
הישראלי עומדת (קיימת), אז יכולה
להרגיש את קרבת אלקים אשר אלי'
וליראה את יראתו ית', משא"כ
כשמלוכלך האיש בחטאים ומדוכא
ביסורים ר"ל עד שכלו רובץ ונופל
שאף א"ע ונפשו אינו מרגיש אז קשה
שיתרגש ביראת ד' ויפחד מהדר גאונו

....

משל לבן מלך שנשבה בין פוחזים
ורקים שמענים אותו, והרגיש פתאום
שהמלך קרוב אליו, התחיל לצעוק
בקולות מרים מאוד הושיעני אבי,
הושיעני מלכי, מפני שהרגיש שהמלך
בא עתה אל מקום הקרוב לו, נמצא
שצעקתו היתירה סימן התגלות המלך
הוא, גם תוספת שבירת לבו של
ישראל על צרותיו, צרות אוהביו וצרות
כלל ישראל סימן של הרגשת התגלות
מלכות שמים הוא, אבל זה הכל אם
בעיקר, יראתו אליו ית' התחזקה,
ותשוקתו להמליך אותו ית' נתגברה



6) Esh Kodesh, Yom Kippur 5700 (1939)

The holy book Arvei Nahal, Parshat Masai (Rabbi David Shlomo Eibeschuetz) discusses an oral tradition from a responsum from the Maharam, (Rabbi Meir ben Barukh of Rottenberg, 1220-1293.) stating that a person who is martyred does not feel any pain whatsoever.

The author of Arvei Nahal explains that this is because the martyr is set ablaze with such an intense desire to be martyred for sanctifying the Divine Name that he elevates all his senses to the world of pure intellect, such that his entire being is clothed in intellect, and all his senses, sensations, and physicality are stripped from him. Thus he feels only pleasure. This is also the case with all the trials that a Jew endures—the trials are indeed difficult, and God should have mercy and remove them from us. When a person elevates them to the level of intellect, however, understanding them as a means to purge his sins and to purify himself to draw closer to God, then the more strongly he attaches himself to this thought, the lighter the difficulties become, and easier for him to bear.

8) אש קודש, שנת ת"ש, יום כיפור

בספה"ק ערבי נחל פ' מסעי מביא בשם תשובת מוהר"ם ז"ל שקבלה איש מפי איש, שהנהרג על קדושת השם ית' אינו מרגיש יסורים כלל, ואומר הע"נ הטעם שכיון שמתלהב בחשק נמרץ שיהרג על קדושת שמו ית' הוא מעלה את כל חושיו וכר' אל עולם המחשבה עד שמתלבש כולו במחשבה, ובטלו חושיו והרגשותיו וגשמיותו נתפשט מעליו לכן אינו מרגיש רק תענוג וכו' ע"ש. וכן הוא גם בשאר יסורים שאיש הישראלי סובל, קשים הם היסורים, וד' ירחם ויסיר אותם מאתנו, אבל כשהאיש מעלה במחשבתו שהוא כדי למרק את חטאיו ולטהר אותו כדי שיוכל להתקרב לד', אז במדה שמתעמק ומתקשר יותר במחשבה זו, יותר קושי היסורים נעשים קלים ויותר נוח לו לסבול אותם,

7) To Heal the Soul: The Spiritual Journal of a Chasidic (Translated by Yehoshua Starret) pp 133-134

Now I sit still and silent. The intensity of pain is beyond bearing—I am broken beyond repair. After receiving God's gracious gift, our dear and beloved son, a sincere and outstanding Torah scholar, wise and straightforward, noble and refined, deeply attached to me at the soul level (he would have been ready to sacrifice his life for me), after God saw our dire plight and returned us this dear gift by healing our son from his serious illness, it was decreed in Heaven a harsh decree, a very bitter one, to take him from me in 5700 [1939] at the outbreak of the war. On the 12th of Tishrei [October 7,] during the bombing, he was mortally wounded—he was standing near me. A few days later, on the second day of Sukkot, the 16th of Tishrei [October 11], he returned his pure and holy soul to his Maker. Also at that time, my daughter-in-law, his wife, was killed while standing outside the hospital. That was on the 13th of Tishrei [October 8]. Her name was Gittel, daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Chaim of Balichav. All hope for myself and my soul both in this world and the next was aborted with their premature deaths. And my own future in them through their continued spiritual growth was also destroyed for me. The tragedy is too great to bear—only You, God, can sustain and encourage me with Your wonders. Kindness is Yours, God, and the shame is mine—my own misdeeds have brought this on me. Compassionate Father, You know the heart of a father toward his beloved son. Who besides You knows how broken my heart is, how crushed is my very being? Nevertheless, I now take courage to thank You for this precious gift You gave us. You even added nearly four full years to his life after his



illness. I praise You and extol You for this beloved treasure that You gave us for thirty-one years. How happy I was then—the sun’s rays dimmed in my eyes compared to the pure shine I saw in his face. Please, God, have pity on a poor Jew like me. Have mercy on me, Father and Master! Listen to the petition of my heart, which wallows in pain and sorrow....

Have mercy from now on, God, on each of us and on the Jewish People—grant us only good things from now on. May I myself be included with all my family and friends among the Jewish People to receive Your kindness. Grant us right now the eternal redemption, rebirth of the dead, and a complete physical and spiritual salvation. Amen.

