

מוקדש לע"נ האשה גאלדא רבקה
בת ר' עזרא אניספעלד ע"ה
יארצ"ט ב'ח' מנחם אב * תנצב"ה
By the Anisfeld Family

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

נקם נקמת בני ישראל מאת המדינים אחר תאכה אל עמך (לא-ב)

The Torah commands us (*Vayikra 19-18*), “*You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people.*” The laws of *nekama*, revenge, however, have no bearing on the Jewish Nation defending themselves against enemies who mean to harm and persecute them, or their battle against the forces of evil perpetrated against them. In our *parsha*, Moshe is commanded to “*take revenge against the Midyanim and destroy them.*” The Torah repeats this commandment twice, here and again when Moshe conveyed it to the Jewish people. The Nation attacked Midyan for having led them into the sins of adultery and idolatry of *Baal Peor*. This revenge, as in the campaign against Midyan, was a means to reverse the infractions against *Hashem*, His chosen nation and the desecration of His Name.

The LaGuardia children, Fiorello and Gemma, were born in New York City to a Jewish mother, Irene Luzzato Coen, who had been raised in a Jewish home in Trieste, Italy. Their maternal grandmother was a member of the Luzzatto family, a prominent Italian Jewish family active in the Italian unification effort and the rabbinical college in Padua. Fiorello LaGuardia successfully ran for mayor of the city of New York in 1933. Once in office, he became an unrelenting critic of Germany and the Nazi regime. Before taking office, LaGuardia called Hitler a “perverted maniac” and a “brown-shirted fanatic,” and warned anyone who would listen that, “Part of (Hitler’s) program is the complete annihilation of the Jews in Germany.”

In July 1935, an incident occurred which revealed that, while the American government maintained a Treaty of Friendship with Germany (the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship, signed in 1925), Mayor LaGuardia did not. Paul Kress, a German citizen living in New York City, applied for a masseur’s license. Under the Treaty, Mr. Kress’ licensing should have been a simple matter - Germany and America recognized each others’ professional licenses. Nonetheless, LaGuardia refused to issue the license. Why? He explained that, “Treaties are based on reciprocity,” and, La Guardia added, “it is well known that American citizens of the Jewish faith have been discriminated against in Germany. That being the case, I cannot see how the German Government can insist upon alleged rights contained in the treaty on which they now rely.”

Denouncements by German American groups didn’t change LaGuardia’s mind, even when they said they would see to it that German-Americans didn’t vote for him. Denouncements in German newspapers full of vitriol and attacking LaGuardia had absolutely no effect on the man. And the Jewish community? They were warmed by a Mayor who they saw standing up for their European co-religionists, because they were Jews and because it was the right thing to do.

In November 1935, in order to underscore his continued support of the boycott of German exports, LaGuardia made sure that 500 tons of German steel ordered for a Triborough underpass in Queens, was cancelled. Many people came to city hall to complain and LaGuardia’s excuse was simply, “I am responsible for the safety of the city’s inhabitants, and German steel, in my learned opinion, is quite unsafe.” A domestic replacement for the imported steel was found.

Meanwhile, doubtless, one of the sharpest (and funniest) things Mayor LaGuardia did during this period of his political life, or perhaps, in all his political life, was the manner in which he dealt with the New York City German Consulate’s request for protection from those unhappy with the German government’s activities. The Nazis were mistreating so many in Europe, that many Americans were prepared to do it right back to them here in the U.S.A. After conferring with his Police Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine, Mayor LaGuardia dispatched forty Jewish policemen, headed by Captain Max Finkelstein, president of the *Shomrim* society (the Jewish fraternal organization for policemen) to ensure German protection.

The Mayor said it was simply “a matter of routine,” but he smiled as he relished the delicious situation he had created. The move cheered beleaguered Jews and infuriated the Nazis, who compared LaGuardia to a gorilla. All this was very serious business, though. For it was also during this period that LaGuardia received a .22 caliber cartridge in the mail, with a note saying, “You will get this if you continue to attack the German Nazi party.” The signature was a crayoned Nazi swastika.

אשר בחר בנביאים טובים ...

כי שתיים רעות עשה עמי אתי עיבו ...לחצוב להם בארות (ירמיה ב-ג)

As the *Churban* loomed ahead, the Jewish Nation’s spirituality steadily declined. *Hashem* sent *Yirmiyahu* to rebuke and instruct the people to do *Teshuva*. All attempts failed and *Hashem* lamented that, “*two evils My people have committed: they have forsaken Me in order to dig for themselves cisterns.*” Was it not bad enough that *Klal Yisroel* committed the first evil of abandoning *Hashem*? Why was it necessary to add what their loyalty was exchanged for?

Rabbeinu Bechaye זי”ל (Chovos Halevovos) explains that repentance is dependent on 7 points - the first of which is that one must clearly recognize the shamefulness of his deed. A

person has no way to show remorse if he himself does not deem his actions bad. In truth, the purpose and essence of life is to serve *Hashem*; therefore, without a doubt, abandoning *Hashem* and His *Torah* is definitely the worst thing one can do.

Nevertheless, if one cannot even understand that his actions are bad, each and every one of his subsequent misdeeds will compound the previous ones even more. By “digging cisterns for themselves” the Jewish people showed that not only did they first abandon *Hashem*, they also lacked a shred of remorse for doing so and *Hashem* therefore set the infamous *Churban* in motion. It’s easy to slip and commit a sin, however, with no remorse, the process of *Teshuva* cannot begin, and a person stands no chance at real repentance.

הקרייתם לכם ערים עיר מקלט תהינה לכם ונס שמה רצח מכה נפש בשנגה ונז' (יה-יא)

“You should establish cities of refuge for yourself into which a fugitive can escape to seek safe haven.” The word “לכם”

- for yourself - is seemingly repetitious. **R’ Shimon Schwab זי”ל** explains based on the *Gemara* in *Makkos (10b)* which extrapolates from *posukim* that *limud haTorah* is “קולט”, it protects, similar to the עיר מקלט. In the same manner that the עיר מקלט saved a person who killed another by accident, the *Torah* protects a person who sinned by accident. The *Torah* shields a person from his own personal “רציחה”. A person, through his *aveiros*, can cause his own spiritual demise. Hence, says the *Torah*, by running to the *Beis Medrash*, to the spiritual safe haven, YOU will be saved (לכם). As *Chazal* tell us regarding the *churban habayis* (ירמיה טז) “ואותי עזבו ואת תורתי לא שמרו”. הלוואי - the powerful rays of purity that emanate from the *Torah* can return us to *Hashem*. The purpose of these cities and *limud haTorah* is for YOUR benefit - לכם.

It’s important to mention the **Aruch Laner** in *Makkos* who says that we find two types of עיר מקלט. The six cities that were exclusively made for this purpose, and the forty-two cities of the *Leviim*, which also had the power to save. The *Gemara* explains that the six cities save whether or not the רוצח walks in for the purpose of its protection. The forty-two only save if he knows their function. Says the *Aruch Laner*, this idea that the *Torah* is קולט is similar to the six cities, even without seeking its protection. A person who is learning *Torah* is saved regardless if he wants to activate the *shmira* of the *Torah* or not.

The *machshava* here is remarkably encouraging. No matter to what spiritual level a person has stooped, becoming immersed in our *Torah* can forever effect a transformation whether intentional or not and can elevate him out of his spiritual morass. Let’s all be *mechazek* ourselves in these summer months and make the last few months, weeks and days of this year count!

משל למח הדבר דומה

וידבר משה אל העם לאחר החלצו מאתכם אנשים לצבא ... (לא-ג)

משל: The **Ponevezher Rav, R’ Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman זי”ל**, was 64 years old when he arrived in Israel, devastated from the Holocaust. He lost his family and his *yeshivah*, but he never lost his will. He told people, “If *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* allowed me to survive the Nazi *Gehinnom*, it was not so that I would retire to an old age home where I would forget about everything; it was so that I would build *Torah*!”

He set his mind to it and began to build. Project after project; institution after institution. *Yeshivos*, orphanages, neighborhoods. He seemingly never slept and was always raising money - whether in Israel or abroad - for another construction project and he was wildly successful!

Rabbi Berel Wein *shlit’a* recounts how he once met the *Ponovezher Rav* and asked him why he was always starting new projects before he finished up the debt from old ones.

The *Rav* told him, “I’m already old, and in *shamayim* all

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS
ON THE MIDDAH OF –

דרכה יתירה

FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF
R’ GUITMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

ארה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאתם (יה-א)

Isn’t it interesting that the *parsha* of *Maasay* always come out during the weeks of *Bein Hametzarim*. **Rashi** tells us that the *Torah* records all the “journeys” of *Klal Yisroel* in the desert, “*to inform us of the kind deeds of the Omnipresent, for although He issued a decree to move them around and make them wander in the desert, you should not say that they were moving about and wandering for all forty years, and they had no rest.*” The **Kozhnutzer Maggid זי”ל** in *sefer avodas Yisroel* points out that there are 21 days of *Bein Hametzarim*. If we count the 21 days plus the 21 nights, we have 42! This corresponds to the 42 journeys of *Am Yisroel*. They are called “מסעות” (journeys) rather than “places” because the *Torah* is teaching us that every place we go too in life, physically or spiritually, must be a travel! It must be an experience that takes us somewhere new. We must pick ourselves up at every station in life and grow from wherever we happen to find ourselves. Specifically at this time, *Bein Hametzarim*, which is the saddest time of the year, we must take the message of the “מסעות” and not stay in a bad place.

These are days when our mood is dampened. The *tzaar HaShechina* is in the air and the days are melancholy in nature. The *Gemara* tells us very clearly, when one enters the month of Av, his *simcha* is diminished. This is natural. The *Koznitzer Maggid* is warning us: Don’t stay in a bad mood for too long. Being depressed leads to being unproductive. We need to keep picking ourselves up and traveling to a place where we can come closer to our destination - which is *kirvas Hashem*.

Even sadness can be a tool for growth, as long as one realizes that it is only part of the journey and not the final destination. 42 days and nights of *Bein Hametzarim* are the 42 “מסעות” of *Klal Yisroel* in the *midbar*. Have a safe and meaningful journey!

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