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Emancipation

Nearly two centuries after his *petira*, the great leader of world Jewry, Rav Moshe Sofer, “the Chasam Sofer” remains a paradigm of how impactful a Rav and Rosh Yeshiva can be. The Chasam Sofer remains a beloved authority not only of Hungarian and Ashkenazic Jewry, but as a most influential Gadol whose perspective and opinions continues to shape the entire Jewish world until today. The extraordinary personality, Torah genius, wisdom and compassion of the Chasam Sofer remain a *ner tamid*, an eternal light in our world.

“The Emancipation”, the process in which European Jews were recognized as full citizens and granted equal rights, included efforts within the community to integrate into their host countries. After generations of being excluded from many facets of life, culture, politics and the economy, Jews were ecstatic at the opportunity to be fully accepted by their neighbors and governments.

As the Hungarian Parliament deliberated the fate of its country’s Jews, representatives brought an optimistic report to the Chasam Sofer. They asked the Rav to publicly acknowledge the officials working toward Emancipation, and to share a celebratory update with the Jewish community.

The Jews of Pressberg were gathered together, and their beloved Rav rose to address them. However, some of the community leaders were taken aback when the Chasam Sofer appeared downcast. He struggled to begin his address, and when finally composed himself, he spoke with a voice filled with seriousness and pain. He shared a tale of an only son of a beloved king who rebelled against his father. Effort after effort toward reconciliation failed, and brokenhearted, the king ultimately banished his son to a faraway part of the kingdom.

Years of distance and alienation passed, and the son began to adopt the coarse way of life and degenerate values of those among whom he lived. Over time, having shed the trappings of royalty, he had become one of them, disconnected from his roots, virtually unrecognizable.

One day, a royal delegation arrived with a message from his father, the king. He regretted the harsh punishment and yearned to make amends. “We have come at your father’s behest to see to it that your needs are met and to assist you in building a proper home here for you.”

The exiled prince was crushed and burst into tears: “I have always held on to the hope that my father would one day summon me back to the palace... that he would miss me and invite me back home. But now that my father wants me to settle down and be comfortable far, far away

from him, it is clear that he has given up on me returning.”

The Chasam Sofer’s voice reached a crescendo: “Ribbono shel Olam! אי להם לבנים! ונגלו מעל שולחן אביהם! Woe to the children who have been exiled, distanced from their father’s table! What have we done to be banished from the king’s palace for so long?”

When the Chasam Sofer had finished his ‘*drasha*’, the Rav led the Jews of Pressburg in a heartfelt prayer to forego the temporary comfortability within exile, and begged the *Ribbono shel Olam* to return His children home to His palace, instead.

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Our sedra enumerates the forty two journeys that Klal Yisrael made throughout their sojourn in the Desert. For far too long we have suffered the degradation of exile, being out of place, wandering as foreigners and outsiders, persecuted and dispersed among the nations who seek to destroy us.

We have also experienced a very different manifestation of exile: one in which we are welcomed to enjoy ‘emancipation’ and a ‘seat at the table’, living comfortably from the largesse and fleshpots of the Diaspora. Self-aware Jews, knowledgeable of history and sensitive to the spiritual reality of life, understand the futility of trying to put

down roots in the shifting sands of *galus*.

These days of *Bein haMeitzarim* are an opportune time to recalibrate our spiritual orientation by focusing on who we are, where we aspire to be, and where we truly belong. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to consider a moving Torah commentary of the 18th Century *tzadik* and *gaon*, Rebbe Chaim ben Attar, the *Ohr haChayim* ha-kadosh (Behar 25:25):

“...הגאולה תהיה בהעיר לבות בני אדם ויאמר להם הטוב לכם כי תשבו חוץ גולים מעל שלחן אביכם ומה יערב לכם החיים בעולם זולת החברה העליונה אשר הייתם סמוכים סביב לשלחן אביכם הוא אלהי עולם ב”ה לעד, וימאים בעיניו תאוות הנדמים ויעירם בחשק הרוחני גם נרגש לבעל נפש כל חי עד אשר יטיבו מעשיהם, ובזה יגאל ה’ ממכרו, ועל זה עתידין ליתן את הדין כל אדוני הארץ גדולי ישראל ומהם יבקש ה’ עלבון הבית העלוב:

“Redemption will occur when the righteous succeed in awakening the hearts of their contemporaries by convincing them that it is really not in their best interest to spend their time exiled from the table of their Father in Heaven. The righteous have to convince the average Jew that what he considers success in his world is illusory if bought at the expense of forfeiting his respective eternity in a better world. In the future, all Torah scholars who have failed in their efforts to convince their peers to adopt a Torah-true lifestyle, etc. will have to render an account before the highest tribunal. Hashem will hold those Torah scholars responsible for the continued disgrace suffered by the Holy Temple....”

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May we be counted among those students of Torah who strive toward fulfilling Hashem’s will in the right way — and in the right place: together with our loving Father and King, in His palace, the *Beis haMikdash*. ■

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