



RABBI NETANEL ELYASHIV

HEAD OF BINYAN HATORAH PUBLISHING HOUSE AND BEIT MIDRASH
AUTHOR, TEACHER AND WORLD MIZRACHI SPEAKER

Special Guest Dvar Torah

Breaking Out of the Straits

“From between the straits a people is redeemed, through teachers armed with spiritual strength, who have no need for a rod of severity.” (Rav Kook)

Klal Yisrael always has two parallel viewpoints. One is rooted in the present, viewing and analyzing current affairs, while the other is rooted in eternity, guiding us to live our lives based on an internal, spiritual stream of consciousness.

The first viewpoint currently leads us to focus on what's going on in the Straits of Hormuz, while the other leads us to contemplate entirely different straits. In the first chapter of *Eicha* we will sadly read about the harsh fate of our ancient kingdom: “All her pursuers overtook her within the straits”.

What is the meaning of these straits we lament being caught in?

Some commentators understand it to mean

that we were trapped between the borders of hostile nations, whereas the Midrash (*Eicha Rabba* 1:29) perceives it as a trap in time, between the two harsh dates of 17th of Tammuz and Tisha b'Av.

One commentary is based on geography, the second is based on time. These can both be perceived as external explanations, whereas our faith system teaches us to always look deeper, and attempt to reach an internal, spiritual understanding, that can be seen as the source for all of the external circumstances of our defeats and failures.

When attempting to pinpoint the internal reason for each *churban*, our sages deduced that in the era of the First Temple it was mainly due to the breaching of our covenant with *Hashem*, while in the era of the Second Temple the source of our downfall was primarily the breaching of our covenant with one another.

The geopolitical circumstances have changed dramatically since the destruction of our ancient temples and commonwealths, but our internal, spiritual weaknesses, though significantly refined in the course of our prolonged exile, still need to be corrected.

We have witnessed and partaken in many stages of our redemption, we thank *Hashem* for them every day, and especially on days such as *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim*, but when this time of year comes around, between the straits, we concentrate on what is still missing, on the failings that are still awaiting redemption. We ask ourselves: how can we break out of these straits? What might

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uplift us to the point where we will be able to break the barriers, correct past failures and finally be completely redeemed?

An answer to this question was offered by our great teacher, Rabbi A.I. HaKohen Kook. Rav Kook famously established the still-existing Merkaz-HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, but back when he was the Rabbi of Jaffa and the *moshavot*, he established a Yeshiva there as well. Every year that institution would publish a calendar, and Rav Kook would contribute a short yet profound saying about the essence of each month. In the 1913-1914 (5674) edition of the calendar, he penned, regarding this time of the year:

“From between the straits a people is redeemed, through teachers armed with spiritual strength, who have no need for a rod of severity.”

Rav Kook is apparently referring to the *halacha* quoted in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 551:18), prohibiting teachers from even mildly striking their students (as was accepted in the past) during the period of *bein-ha'mitsarim*. Rav Kook is implying here that when physical force is used in education, it is a sign of spiritual weakness in the educator. Where there is true greatness, where there is spiritual strength, there is no need of coercion and force.

Rav Kook always taught that better than

fighting one's ideological foe is to try to understand what grains of truth might be on his side, and incorporate them in our own, Torah-based, ideology. Instead of focusing on the negative sides of other parts of *Am Yisrael* and battling them, we should elevate ourselves to a higher realm, in which our own *emunah* and ideology will be so complete and so pure, that it will win over our adversaries primarily using love and trust. When the teachers of the nation are armed with spiritual strength, there is no need for the rod of severity, which always exacts a heavy toll of inner discord and resentment.

Rav Kook himself expressed this vision most powerfully (*Orot HaKodesh* vol. 3 p. 323):

“And if we were destroyed, and the world was destroyed with us, through baseless hatred (sinat-chinam) — we shall return to being built, and the world shall be built with us, through baseless love (ahavat-chinam).”

May we utilize this time of year to grow spiritually, to arm ourselves with true spiritual strength. May we find the ability to lay down the rod of severity, and replace it with greatness and *ahavat-chinam*. May we find the way to speak to the rock instead of striking it, may we pave the way to true *nechama*. May we return to being built, and the world shall be built with us. ■



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