

To the esteemed members of our holy congregation, who should live long,

In these times, the *soton* has found an awful way to impede *Bnei Yisroel* from service of the Creator, may *Hashem* save us. We, who are believers the sons of believers, must endure this adversity and strengthen ourselves to serve *HaKodosh Boruch Hu* with more intensity in these days. The reward is commensurate with the difficulty.

It is written in our holy *Torah*, “These are the *mitzvos* that a person should perform and live through them”. From this, *Chazal* expounded that one should live through them and not die through them. Although *Shabbos* observance is consequential enough that if a person transgresses and intentionally performs an *av melacha* he is punished by stoning, may *Hashem* save us, nevertheless in a situation which is possibly life-threatening it is permitted and obligatory to transgress the *Shabbos* in order to save life. It is certainly so regarding missing *tefilla be’tzibbur*, that due to the possibility of danger to our self and others it is incumbent upon us to refrain from *davening be’tzibbur*, and such is the will of the *Boreh yisbarach*.

Even though the decision to close the Agudah and other places of *tefilla* and *Torah* was a very difficult one, in that since the *Beis Hamedrash* of the Agudah was founded in Baltimore we have not missed any *tefillah* for forty years with G-d’s help, and it has caused me and the whole *tzibbur* tremendous heartbreak to stop *tefilla be’tzibbur* and also *Torah* in groups, which are *Yisroel’s* strength. Nevertheless, I did so, but only with the consult and leadership of a *godol Yisroel* of the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah*, and it is a *mitzva* to listen to the words of *chachomim*.

If we are unable to go to the *Bais Hamedrash* to study the holy *Torah* due to the possibility of danger, that is called doing the will of *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*. However, the danger does not stop us from the *mitzva* of *davening* or learning. On the contrary it is a *mitzva* and obligation to daven alone with more intensity and more *kavana* and to learn with a partner or listen to a *shiur* by phone without meeting.

There is certainly a demand for improvement being made from us in heaven, but it is difficult to know what that demand is. Even though we have many merits, nevertheless, if *HaKodosh Boruch Hu* has a demand against us due to some improper behavior that we have committed, that allows this hardship to come on us. I have heard in the name of the *Sar H’Torah HaRav HaGaon Ha’godol HaRav* Chaim Kanievsky *shlit”a* that this phenomenon that every person is separated from his friend can be found in the *Torah* regarding the *metzora*, as it says “He shall dwell alone, outside the camp is his dwelling”. *Rashi* explains that since his *loshon horah* separated between a husband and wife and between a man and his friend, so too is he separated. It therefore seems that *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* is demanding that we improve ourselves both regarding *loshon horah* and regarding improper interpersonal relationships which result in hatred and division, and that everyone should be trustworthy and forgiving in money matters and other issues.

It is found in the *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 81a) that the prophets and leaders of the generation did not know which sin caused the *churban*, as it says in *Yirmiyohu* (9:11) “Who is the man who is wise and understands this”, and the *Gemara* there states that this matter was asked to the sages and

the prophets and they could not explain why the *churban* happened until *HaKodosh Boruch Hu* Himself explained it. And the conclusion of the *Gemara*, according to *Rabbeinu Yonah* as brought by the *Ran*, is that even though all of *klal Yisroel* were engaged in *Torah* and *mitzvos* nevertheless the *Torah* was not valued enough in their eyes, and they were not learning it *lishma* as they should have been. We see that even if we are keeping the *mitzvos*, if we are not keeping them as they should be kept, that can bring *churban* upon us, *chas ve'sholom*.

In Tehillim (79) it says, "A song of Asaf. *Elokim*, nations have come in your domain and defiled your holy sanctuary, they have turned *Yerushalayim* into rubble". *Rashi* there writes, and it is also found in Kiddushin (31b), that there is difficulty here. Why is this a "song"? It should have said a "lament of Asaf", as it describes the *churban* of the *Beis HaMikdash* and *Yerushalayim*. It is because He vented his anger on sticks and stones and did not vent his anger on flesh and blood. The same is true in our circumstance, that He vented his anger on the *shuls* and houses of study which are a miniature *Beis HaMikdash*, and they stand empty without *Torah* and *tefillah* in order to spare us, and He did not vent his anger on flesh and blood. We must thank Him for this and say to *HaKodosh Boruch Hu* – *shehechiyonu ve'kiymonu ve'higiyonu la'zman ha'zeh*.

A person should not be clever and pray with a *minyán* against the pronouncement of the *Vaad Ha'Rabbonim*, and one who breaches the fence [will get bitten] etc., *chas ve'sholom*". They forbade not only *minyanim* in *shul* but also *minyanim* in any place, and their reason and rationale was for the good of the *tzibbur* and for the good of each and every one, in order to guard their lives and to guard them from all afflictions and illnesses, and to prevent the epidemic from affecting us, *chas ve'sholom*. In a life-threatening situation one cannot rely on probability. As much as possible, there needs to be certainty that there is no possibility of danger, may *Hashem* save us. May *Hashem* in his abundant mercy lift this decree from us, which is very painful to every God-fearing Jew, even though it seems that this is G-d's will that we pray separately.

Just as it is forbidden to eat on *Yom Kippur* and there is a *koreis* prohibition, but a sick person with a life-threatening condition is forbidden to fast and on the contrary has a *mitzva* and obligation to eat, and recites a *bracha* on his food, even though he would prefer to be able to fulfil the *mitzva* of fasting, so too is it in our situation.

Practically, the prophet *Yeshayahu* (26:20) writes "Go my nation into your rooms and close your doors behind you and wait for a brief moment until the anger passes". It should be His will that the conclusion of that topic should apply to us, "And you will be gathered one by one *Bnai Yisroel* and it will be on that day that the great *shofar* will blow and those who are lost in the land Ashur will come and those who are cast in the land of Egypt and will bow down to Hashem on the holy mountain in *Yerushalayim*" with the coming of the *goel tzedek* speedily in our days, *amen*.

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