



PO Box 1076 Jerusalem 91009 * Tel. 972-2-628-4101

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Friedfertig

RavAviner-subscribe@yahoo.com

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Does Ehud Olmert Deserve it?

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced yesterday that he has prostate cancer, we present what Rav Aviner said in the yeshiva today.

Question: Is it permissible to say, "The Prime Minister is sick. He deserves it, because of what he has done and plans to do?"

Answer: Of course not. It is forbidden because of three reasons, each of which is sufficient on its own.

A. How do you know why he is sick? You know the secrets of the Master of the Universe. How do you know that it happened because of this or that reason? Don't you know that there are bad people and sometimes good things happen to them, and there are good people and sometimes bad things happen to them? There are even people who deserve to be punished, but their punishment is suspended because of their good deeds. Even the woman who is a Sotah (suspected of adultery and drinks the bitter waters to verify her status), and she is found to be guilty, the Mishnah says that sometimes her heavenly punishment is suspended – a month, a year or even more – on account on her merits (Sotah 3.4). If so, the entire trial of the Sotah is not worthwhile!? It is worthwhile, but we need to understand that the punishment is not always immediate. The Gemara in Sanhedrin says that if someone is deserving of capital punishment, but the Sanhedrin no longer exists, the punishment is not canceled and he will still be punished by Heaven (Sanhedrin 37b). The

Tosafot asks, how can the Gemara say such a thing, we do not see this in reality? Answer: Merit can suspend the punishment (ibid. d.h. miyom). Even Nebuchadnezzar had one merit which suspended his punishment for twelve years (Tosafot, Sotah 20b d.h. yesh zechut). You therefore do not know the secrets of Hashem. If there is a prophet, he hears what is said behind the curtain. You are not a prophet. You see good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people. Hashem mixes up the cards to ensure free choice.

B. It is forbidden to cause anguish to another person with words (hona'at devarim). The Gemara in Baba Metzia says that if someone is suffering, do not say, "You deserve it," like Iyov's friends did to him (Baba Metzia 58b). This hurts and pains another person. It is forbidden to cause another person distress and, all the more so, it is forbidden to insult the Prime Minister whose honor is spread throughout Klal Yisrael (the entirety of Israel). Aviha, King of Yehudah, insulted Yeravam ben Nevat, King of Israel, and he was punished. Aviha said that he worshipped idols and he therefore died (see Yerushalmi Yevamot 16:15, Bereshit Rabbah 65:20 and Vayikra Rabbah 33:5). Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, discusses this in Le-Netivot Yisrael (vol. 2, #98). It is true that there is a mitzvah to rebuke, but it has to be done with wisdom. This is not the way.

C. People who make comments like this think that they will help the Nation of Israel to repent. "You see, he did this and look what happened to him." This is repentance out of fear. A movie came out which said that anyone who had any part in the expulsion from Gush Katif is or will be punished. It has been explained over and over during the last one hundred years that this generation will not repent out of fear. This generation will only repent out of love. This is all explained by our Master, Rav Kook, in "Ma'amar Ha-Dor." There is even a responsum in Shut Mishpat Cohain in which someone wrote to Rav Kook that people were saying that there was a plague and people died on account of the "Heter Mechirah" (Jewish land in Israel sold to a non-Jew during the Shemittah year – the seventh year). Rav Kook said, "This is the way that you convince people, by scaring people? This will not work. They will repent out of love, not fear." If ten settlers say that the Prime Minister is sick because of this or that reason, people will be scared? People won't be scared. Some say that people came to Israel because of the fear of pogroms in Russia. This is not true. The people who fled only out of fear of the pogroms went west – to England and America. 97% of the people who came to Israel did so not simply to flee the pogroms, but because they wanted the Land of Israel. Every house, every settlement, every road, every plant, every soldier, everything here has been built out of the love of the Land of Israel.

It is therefore forbidden to say that he deserves this sickness. A. You're not a prophet. B. It is forbidden to distress another person. C. We do not help people repent out of fear, but only out of love.