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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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Halachah Berurah – Your Gemara

[Be-Ahavah U-B-Emunah – Parashat Chayei Sarah 5769

-Translated by Rafael Blumberg]

“Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches: ‘They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the L-rd, and shall not find it’ (Amos 8:12). Clear halachah and clear teaching shall not be found in one place” (Shabbat 138-139). Thank G-d, we had Torah – “Heaven forbid that the Torah should ever be lacking to Israel” (ibid.) – but it was not clear. Then our master Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook proclaimed: “The time has come for the Torah to be clear. The end of days is nearing! Our nation is rising to rebirth, and the Torah, as well, shall rise to rebirth, with the help of the finest Torah scholars. The Jewish People are making a renewed appearance in Eretz Yisrael, and the Torah of Eretz Yisrael must make a renewed appearance as well.” And what is “the Torah of Eretz Yisrael”? The answer to that is lengthy and profound (see Orot HaTorah, Chapter 13). One of the traits of Eretz Yisrael is the integration of all the spheres of the Torah (ibid. 13:4; 13:7). The Torah has different spheres. All of them are holy and pure, only that sometimes they seem to be pulling in different directions.

Inter alia, study of the poskim [the authorities on Jewish law] has become removed from study of the Talmud. Rav Kook dealt with this theme in a lecture he gave before a group of Torah scholars at Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, setting before them the missions of Torah creativity awaiting their treatment. The lecture was then presented in an article entitled “Hartza’at Ha-Rav” [The Rav’s Lecture]. Whether one learns gemara or halachah, it is not

entirely clear to one how the halachah emerges from the gemara it is based on. Obviously, I am not talking about the great luminaries of the generation, for whom everything is perfectly clear, but about the sensitive student who views the contact between the gemara and the halachah as weak. This hurts his study, whether he is learning gemara or halachah. One side of the problem was solved by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary, "Biur HaGra". This spiritual giant, the greatest genius in many generations, made it clear how all the halachah flows out of the ancient sources of the gemara and rishonim [medieval scholars]. Along came Rav Kook and completed the other side through his commentary Halachah Berurah, in which he laid out, regarding every Talmudic theme, what is the halachah that emerges from it. Even though, ostensibly, this involved nothing more than the task of copying the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, etc., it still required profound wisdom. It involved making a difficult decision of what to quote from the halachah, of what to associate with a particular Talmudic text, without any extraneous addition. Sometimes, it was necessary to add sources from elsewhere in order to complete the content and clarity. This work, which, as stated, required both profound wisdom and arduous labor, was performed by Rav Kook himself, and he invested heavy toil in it. He likened himself to the pioneers who came to Eretz Yisrael with professions, but who were not averse to working with their hands to build Eretz Yisrael, due to their love for it. He was doing the same, out of his love for the Torah of Eretz Yisrael. Yet this was just half of the task, with the other half being "Berur Halachah", i.e., clarifying all the opinions of the Poskim, as far as how they correspond to the different opinions in the Talmud and how they arrive at their halachic conclusions, and in accordance with which decision-making principles. Rav Kook outlined the general pathway to that integrative process in that same article, "Hartza'at Ha-Rrav", and as was his approach, he, himself, presented an example of this work so as to show others toiling along his path what to do (quoted at the end of the new addition of Pesachim).

Tractate Beitza came out first in 5700-5701, produced by Torah scholars who had merited his instruction. After that the finest students of the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva toiled hard on this project, and they have already produced twenty-one volumes out of thirty-five planned. Obviously, this project was inaugurated in accordance with the behest, blessing and prodding of our master, Tzvi Yehuda Kook, and he called it "the building up of the Torah for future generations". It should be noted that Rav Tzvi Yehuda was opposed to the concept of a "Kollel" in the sense of its being an established program aimed at a particular goal, such as creating Rabbinic court judges, rabbis or halachic authorities. Rather, he said, when someone gets married, he should continue to learn, with the goal being to produce Torah scholars. The only exception he approved of was the Halachah Berurah Institute, founded

in 5730, to which he directed the elite of his Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva, and its students were also supported by a higher stipend – since those students had already left the stage of learning per se, entering the world of hard work.

We therefore call upon the hundreds of thousands of Rav Tzvi Yehuda's students to do two things:

1. Learn gemara with Halachah Berurah and Berur Halachah. Every yeshiva student should purchase this gemara and learn it. Parenthetically, the external appearance has also been raised to the level of the finest there is. We are students of Rav Tzvi Yehuda, and if he held that this how we should learn, then just as everything else he taught us was true and was Torah, so was this. Obviously, we respect all the rabbis of all the streams, with all the methods of learning, and we learn their words. It should be noted that Halachah Berurah and Berur Halachah are not meant to replace all the rabbis, and certainly do not replace the conventional yeshiva learning which has thrived down through the generations, but only as a way of adding depth. This is no mean addition. Apart from the value, per se, of linking the gemara to the halachah, it further exalts the conventional yeshiva learning itself. Whichever other rabbis we may have learned from, our master is Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, and his creations transcend all the rest. As stated, we will continue also to learn from other sefarim of great luminaries, but Halachah Berurah and Berur Halachah are our greatest source of pride, and our pride is pure and full of humility.
2. Contribute funds to the Halachah Berurah Institute. Obviously, we respect and love all yeshivot and all Torah productions and we contribute to them, yet let us not forget that the poor of one's own city take precedence. Before you contribute to any other Torah cause, first contribute to the place from which you draw your own Torah, in other words, Yeshiva Mercaz Harav, mother of all the yeshivot that are faithful to the spirit of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, and mother of many great Torah scholars and their disciples and their disciples' disciples.

And as a rule, before contributing to Chareidi (Ultra Orthodox) yeshivot, contribute to Zionist yeshivot, and I say this for three reasons. 1) The Chareidi public does not contribute to Zionist yeshivot, so we have a moral obligation to contribute specifically to Zionist yeshivot. Otherwise, who will support them? 2) My previous comment about the poor of your own city taking precedent. It is not more ethical to help everyone else at the expense of the well from which you yourself drank. Your gift is not just a donation to students from our beit midrash toiling in Torah, thereby spreading the light of Torah throughout the world, but also a contribution to making the Torah luminescence shine with greater intensity,

through the linking of different world and their influencing one another. Therefore, dear fellow Jew who imbibes from the spirit of our great masters, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook and his son Rav Tzvi Yehuda, contribute to Halachah Berurah, and certainly you should contribute to yourself and learn it.