



Parashat Sukkot 5772 - #206

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Rabbi Chanan Porat zt"l –

A Torah Scholar Rooted in the Land of Israel

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Sukkot 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Due to the modesty of my dear friend the late Rav Chanan, due to his simple dress and his unaffected behavior, many people did not know that they were dealing with a true Torah scholar - one of the best and brightest to emerge from our yeshiva, Mercaz HaRav. They did not even know that he had received Rabbinic ordination.

Rav Chanan never sought to make the Torah a spade with which to dig. Quite the contrary: inspired by the light of Torah, he made himself into a spade. He immersed himself in a life of productive work on behalf of the Nation of Israel. This noble individual was living fulfillment of our Sages' praise for one who practices what he preaches.

This brave paratrooper was chosen by divine providence to be among the fighters of the Six Day War, and amongst Jerusalem's liberators, thereby publicizing the fact that the Nation's inner holiness is G-d's guarantee that it will survive.

And because the Land of Israel doesn't just have to be conquered, but inhabited as well, HaRav Chanan closed his tome of Talmud and sacrificed himself to become one of those who brought Kibbutz Kfar Etzion back to life. More precisely, he sacrificed his soul.

In other words, he sacrificed his spiritual life, his Torah studies, for the sake of settling the Land of Israel.

Yet he also sacrificed his body and spirit literally. In the Yom Kippur War he was severely wounded on the southern front, and was saved through the grace of G-d. Afterwards he was one of the founders of Gush Emunim and an initiator of the settlements in Judea and Samaria. Yet let us not suppose that only Torah and the Land of Israel interested him. The Jewish People interested him as well, and he was active in the seminars of the "Gesher" organization, which strove to link the two portions of the Nation who, unfortunately, are called "religious" and "secular". I say "unfortunately", because there is certainly no "secular" Jew. Every Jew has a holy soul.

Indeed, Torah, the Land of Israel and the Jewish People do not constitute three separate interests. Rav Chanan liked to relate how once they were deliberating in yeshiva over what is more important – the Torah, the Nation or the Land. They took the question to Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, and he answered with a smile: "We take the holistic approach."

This idea, that all these goals are one, served as a guiding principle for Rav Chanan.

Therefore, even during his extensive public service tenure, Rav Chanan never ceased studying and teaching Torah. It was especially important to him to provide guidance in the quest for attaining complete faith, as in his book, "Et Achai Anochi Mevakesh" [I Am Looking for My Brothers]. There we find the foundations of the deepest, most ethereal faith, presented in a language and style that reach directly to the heart and mind of any thinking person.

The true climax of this hero's self-sacrifice was when he entered politics – that harsh, bleak place that wears down even the noblest spirit. Yet Rav Chanan, though he walked in that complicated valley, retained all of his holiness and purity. He never fell in love with his Knesset seat -- a rare phenomenon indeed in our political sphere. Thus, when the "Matzad" political list was formed, he joined, but did not take his National Religious Party mandate with him to the new party. He instead quit the Knesset. Later on as well, he left the National Union to leave his spot free for another Knesset member.

There is a story of a Knesset member who tried to convince his acquaintances that his actions were sincere, "for the sake of Heaven". One wit remarked by quoting G-d's pronouncement from Yeshayahu 66:1: "My seat is the heavens". Our friend Chanan, however, really did act for the sake of Heaven. That is why he twice gave up his seat. He toiled untiringly on the Jewish People's behalf in all that he did. He was always looking forward to see how best to renew his activities for the sake of the Nation, how not to let the light of truth be obscured, and how always to increase the Nation's spiritual might. Indeed, Torah scholars have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come.

After he left national politics, Rav Chanan was among those who set up the great Herzog College. He not only taught there, but also in Yeshivat Beit Orot, and in many other yeshivot, including Machon Meir. At that point it was revealed to all that here was a great Torah scholar and a deep thinker.

We can also point out that the weekly Torah leaflet he humbly edited, "Me'at Min Ha-Ohr" [a Little of the Light], contained a great deal of light. It was a gentle light, a sweet light. It wasn't a blinding light, or a burning light.

What sphere of activity did our pristine hero not touch? He had an ongoing radio program on Galei Yisrael. He was one of the founders and heads of "Orot Ha-Chessed", an organization which provided food, electrical appliances and clothing to people lacking means.

About a year ago, our friend Rav Chanan fell ill with cancer, but his spirit remained unharmed. In a radio interview he proclaimed that he was not afraid of death, because "death is not the end of life. Rather, one just undergoes a change. One passes on to a great light."

Without a doubt, our hero is presently enjoying that great light, but we are left orphans. We miss his light. How shall we be comforted? We send our condolences to his wife Rachel who was his partner in work, and to his eleven children.

This Torah scholar, so rooted in the Land of Israel, so rooted in redemption, has ascended on high. Yet his spirit beats on in our midst, and in all of our enterprises. It will illuminate them forever. “The righteous in their deaths are called living”. He lives on in our midst through the enormous works he performed for the Nation’s rebirth in the Land, according to the Torah.

Rav Aviner on... The Culture of Leisure

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Yom Kippur 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Does there exist a concept of “free time” or “leisure time”? And if so, how should one fill up that time, as for example, during “Bein Hazmanim,” vacation time from yeshiva?

Answer: According to one approach among the early and late sages (such as the Vilna Gaon and Rabbi Schneur Zalmen of Liadi, and the Mishna Berura), there is no true “free time”. A person has to devote every second to Torah learning. Otherwise, he violates the sin of neglecting Torah study. He is allowed to cease Torah learning only to fulfill another Mitzvah or for the sake of actions essential to life, such as eating, sleeping or work.

According to the second approach of the early sages, a man is not required to study every free second. He should be trying to study Torah as much as he can, but he is also allowed to do other things. Such is the view of Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his Or Sameach at the beginning of Rambam’s Hilchot Talmud Torah, and so holds Rabbi Issur Zalmen Meltzer regarding Rambam’s ruling in Hilchot Melachim that a king [of Israel] must learn Torah every free moment. Rav Meltzer explains that the king’s heart is the heart of all Israel. He therefore derives that any other Jew is not obligated in this manner. Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook likewise leans in this direction in his article “Al Geder Chiyuv Limud Torah,” in the book “Ma’amarei HaRe’iyah”,

To summarize, according to the first approach, there is no such concept of “free time”, while according to the second approach, the concept does exist, but a person must strive to fill up that time with positive activities, first and foremost learning Torah. If not Torah learning, he should occupy himself with Mitzvot and positive activities.

Therefore, it is clear that the concept of “Bein Hazmanim” – “vacation from yeshiva” – has no real place. This term [literally “between the times”], as mentioned in the Talmud (Berachot 35b), refers to taking off time to work, in other words, to engage in compulsory activities. As for “Bein Hazmanim” as practiced nowadays, it was long ago decried by Maharal and Shela. Maharal [Rabbi Yehuda Loew of Prague] wrote, “The worst slight against the pillar of Torah is neglect of Torah learning, for their study is irregular and not permanent, but only lasts the year. And then they ‘proclaim liberty throughout the Land’, establishing a period which they label ‘between the times’, during which everyone follows his own willful heart... thinking he doesn’t have to learn Torah at all, as though the break is called ‘between the times’ because it is not a time for Torah. And if the early sages practiced the inclusion of such a break, they most certainly had several good, Torah-compatible reasons, as we know. Now, however, the break is only being used to minimize Torah... And through this neglect, they habituate themselves to frivolity, lewdness and other unsavory activities.” (Drush Al HaTorah 26a).

The Shela [Shnei Luchot HaBrit – Rabbi Yeshayahu HaLevi Horowitz] writes, “During the ‘Bein Hazmanim’ break [when a person is neglecting Torah], he is not remembered or mentioned in Heaven, and he is uprooted from the world” (Sefer Ha-Shela 181).

If someone who learns in yeshiva decides that his chief occupation, at least for several years, will be Torah study, he should learn Torah as much as he can, and not engage in other activities.

Yet if, for various reasons, he cannot learn Torah (cf., he has a headache or some other constraint,) he should fill his time with positive activities, i.e., Mitzvot or essential activities.

What is meant by Mitzvot? Acts of kindness – for his family, for his neighbors, for the poor, for the ill, for little children... There is no shortage of channels for one's kindness.

Essential activities include: tidying or cleaning one's home, making repairs, and learning secular studies (for someone who needs it for his future. Obviously one can go on excursions as well – assuming they are reputable excursions to sexually modest places where visitors do not get involved with nonsense.

Rambam, in the fifth chapter of Shemoneh Perakim, writes that there is also room for having fun, to the extent that a person needs it to air himself out. Obviously one should not exaggerate with this. Two-and-a-half months of vacation from yeshiva is certainly too much. When people work, they receive one day of vacation per month. In other words, twelve days of vacation per year – not seventy! No one needs so much time to rest.

One should therefore study Torah or do Mitzvot, or engage in essential activities. This is proper use of what is popularly known as "free time".

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Preserving the Four Species throughout Sukkot

Question:

How does one preserve the four species throughout all of Sukkot?

Answer:

This is what one should do to preserve the four species so that they do not dry out:

- 1) Lulav (palm) - One should store it in a cool place such as on the floor. Do not place it in water after it is open, rather wrap it in a slightly damp cloth. If the cloth is too wet, the lulav will become spoiled. Wrap it around the holder, or else it will become spoiled within the holder.
- 2) Hadasim (myrtle) - Place the lower end in water. Wrap in a slightly damp cloth (not too wet, as we mentioned), or in a damp newspaper, and place in the refrigerator or in any cool place.
- 3) Aravot (willow) - Wrap in up in a damp cloth. Placing the lower end in water will not help.
- 4) Etrog - Wrap it and keep it in a shady or cool place.

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