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## Eulogy for Ha-Gaon Rav Natan Tzvi Finkel ztz"l Obligates Us

One of the great Rabbis of our generation – Ha-Gaon Rav Natan Tzvi Finkel ztz"l, Rosh Yeshivat Mir – ascended on high. Yeshivat Mir is the largest Yeshiva in Israel, with approximately five thousand students. The only Yeshiva which is larger is Yeshivat Lakewood in America, which numbers some 6000 students.

Perhaps you will say: What is a yeshiva with 5000 students? No one knows anyone else!

There are two answers:

1. Not all 5000 students learn in one place. There are various sections. There is a section for students from America (about half of the students in the Mir Yeshiva come from America). There is even a section for Chasidic students, even though it is a Lithuanian Yeshiva, because many Satmar Chasidim come to learn there. And there are other sections as well.
2. The Rosh Yeshiva, through his incredible self-sacrifice, had regular contact and personal conversations with every student. He would daven Shacharit in the main Beit Midrash in the

"Beit Yisrael" Neighborhood of Yerushalayim; he would give a class to the whole Yeshiva once a week; he would travel twice a week to a branch of the Yeshiva in Achuzat Brachfeld for the morning learning and Minchah; and he periodically delivered a class on Musar. The remainder of the time, he had personal conversations with students in his home. He even spoke with the new students who wanted to attend the Yeshiva. He knew every one of them. Every student who came for counsel was known to him: the Rosh Yeshiva knew who that student was, what had occurred in his life and even why he was coming to talk to him. On the whole, he displayed great self-sacrifice. After all, he is the great-grandson of the Saba Mi-Slabodka, who was also called Ha-Rav Natan Tzvi Finkel.

How did this Yeshiva grow in quantity and quality? I have not seen an explanation for this, but it seems that it was the case from the beginning. The Yeshivat Mir was established in Russia in 5575, approximately 200 years ago. It was then known as "The Yeshiva of Roshei Yeshivot", since many of its students became great Roshei Yeshiva: Ha-Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, Ha-Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, Ha-Rav Shimon Shkop. Ha-Rav Yeochiel Yaakov Weinberg (author of *Shut Seridei Aish*), Ha-Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, Ha-Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg and many other great Torah scholars. Everyone knew that the Yeshiva drew great learners to it. There is therefore only one explanation for its success: They learned Torah. What is the big innovation there? The innovation is that it is possible to be involved with many different things in life and therefore not learn Torah. There are many important things to be involved with, but these are for before one learns in Yeshiva or after one leaves. When one is in Yeshiva, he should learn day and night.

My cousin's cousin learned in Yeshivat Mir. He once visited me when I was learning at Yeshivat Mercaz Ha-Rav and he ended up sleeping over. He said to me: "You know, in Yeshivat Mercaz Ha-Rav, they learn Torah. I thought they were involved in Zionism all the time". He saw that guys were sitting and learning at one o'clock in the morning. He was surprised: "They lied to me. They told me that they don't learn here". By the way, this is not the only time that people said that they don't learn at Mercaz Ha-Rav. Other claim they are involved in politics all the time. There are many conditions and paths in order for one to become a Torah scholar. There are 48 ways of acquiring the Torah (see *Pirkei Avot*, chap. 6). But the first way is: Learning Torah.

A person can have all the right conditions, but he will not become a Torah scholar if he does not learn. In contrast, a person can have difficult conditions – no livelihood, no food, no Chevruta, etc. – but if he learns, he can become a Torah scholar. There are some things that are dependent upon external factors, such as one's wealth, family size, length of life, etc., but the amount of Torah one learns depends on the individual himself. If one says that he toiled and found Torah – believe him (*Megillah 6b*). If one toils, he will become a Torah scholar. There are many important things: Building Eretz Yisrael, serving in Tzahal, agriculture, etc., but devoting ourselves to learning Torah day and night is our greatest responsibility. There was a secret society established in the Volozhin Yeshiva called "Nes Tziona," which had the purpose of spreading the idea of settling the Land of Israel among the Nation. A group of students signed a document describing its activities. Maran Ha-Rav Kook's signature did not appear on it even though he was learning there at the time. Someone once asked our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, why Maran Ha-Rav Kook was not part of it. He answered innocently: "He was learning Torah..." (see *Tal Ha-Re'iyah*, p. 68).

The Gemara in *Yoma* (35b) writes that when a poor person comes to give a Divine accounting in the World to Come, he will be asked: Why didn't you involve yourself with learning Torah? If he says: I was poor and busy trying to make a living, the Heavenly Court will respond: Hillel obligates you! Were you poorer than him? Hillel worked every day and made a minuscule amount of money, half of which he would give to the guard at the door to the Beit Midrash to gain entrance and half of which he used to support his family. Hillel was

extremely poor and displayed self-sacrifice to learn Torah. And when a wealthy person comes to give a Divine accounting in the World to Come, he will be asked: Why didn't you involve yourself with learning Torah? If he says: I was wealthy and busy taking care of all of my belongings and property, the Heavenly Court will respond: Rabbi Elezar ben Charsom obligates you! Where you wealthier than him? He was extremely wealthy and nonetheless dedicated himself to learning Torah.

We therefore learn that Hillel obligates the poor and Rabbi Elezar ben Charsom obligates the wealthy to be involved with learning Torah, i.e. there are no excuses for one who is not involved with Torah learning.

We heard that Ha-Rav Hershel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University, eulogized Ha-Rav Finkel based on this Gemara from two different perspectives:

1. Ha-Rav Finkel grew up in Chicago, in America, and was – in many ways – a regular American kid. He learned in a Jewish High School, but it was co-ed, he was a star on the basketball team, he was called Nati Finkel. He then came to learn in Israel. He learned and learned and grew into a great Torah scholar. Ha-Rav Finkel therefore obligates all those who grow up in an environment that is not the most religious.
2. Although it has been written that he died suddenly, this is not exactly the case. Ha-Rav Finkel suffered from Parkinson's Disease for many years. He nonetheless remained a world-class Torah scholar, had a personal connection with his students, and would travel to America to raise money for the Yeshiva in order to support its incredible growth. Despite being only 56 years old, and already having been ill, Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv declared that Ha-Rav Finkel should be appointed a member of the Counsel of Torah Sages on account of his great activities in the Torah world. He did not cease learning, teaching, raising money, building the Yeshiva, etc. because of his illness. He also did not take medicine, because memory loss was a possible side effect, and he was unwilling to risk forgetting his Torah learning. Ha-Rav Finkel therefore obligates all those who have difficulties in life.

It thus appears that Yeshivat Mir's great quantity and quality is in the merit of this exclusive devotion to Torah learning. We also need to be completely devoted to Torah learning. When a person learns in Yeshiva, he must be solely committed to learning Torah. Only afterwards should each person occupy himself with other Mitzvot, on the strength of the Torah he learned in Yeshiva.

## Rav Aviner on... The Balance of Terror

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

Question: If, G-d forbid, the army and police come to expel us from our homes, can we wage a violent struggle? Obviously I am against violence and I don't love violence, but what if for lack of any choice they evacuate us by force? Must I remain passive? If we use force in return, it may well deter them the next time. A balance of terror!

Answer: My dear friend, you suggest a balance of terror and argue that this is an effective method. Indeed, such is the situation that reigned for a long time between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both were afraid of war, and both understood that for both of them it would be a catastrophe. Therefore, the balance of terror prevented a Cold War from turning into a real war.

Yet this idea presents us with several questions:

1. A balance of terror is liable to lead us down a slippery slope and bring on an escalation. An example of this would be the balance of terror between our country and the terrorists in Lebanon, with each side not being interested in a broader struggle. Hence the conflict remained on a low flame, as a low-intensity conflict. The terrorists continued their terror acts, but they were careful not to go too far. They walked a thin line. Yet the balance of terror was broken in 5766 and it quickly led to the Second Lebanon War, and to great damage.

The lesson: If there is no real peace, and moderate violence reigns in its place, the moment one side goes too far, all hell can break loose.

2. What “force” would you like to use against the army? Do you really think you can beat them? Don’t you know that the army can throw one tear gas canister and everyone will flee? Do you really think that the I.D.F., which defends us against 300 million Arabs cannot overcome 300 or 3,000 people?! And I don’t want to mention the terrible possibility that instead of removing the fish from the sea, which isn’t easy, because they escape every which way, it could be easier to just remove the sea from the fish. In other words, the army could cease to guard the settlements, and then the Arabs would attack. The Government could turn off the water and electricity, and not let people travel on the roads. How many senior politicians have hinted at this and then denied it? Truthfully, I do not believe that someone would dare to do this. The point is, however, that you don’t have more power than the army and the police.

This reminds me of the story of Herschel of Ostropol, a beggar of Yiddish lore. One time a restaurant refused to give him a free meal. He threatened, “If you don’t let me eat, I’ll do what my father did in this situation.” The restaurant grew alarmed and let him eat. Afterwards they asked him, “What did your father do?” and he answered, “He went to bed hungry...”

3. A third problem, and this is the most serious, is this: The concept of a “balance of terror” is applicable between enemies. Here, we are friends. We and the army and the police and the Jewish State and the government are all friends. Sometimes our opinions are divided, but not our hearts. We are one people. Perhaps, my friend, you don’t look at it this way. Perhaps you think that the government and the army that executes its decisions are the enemy of Eretz Yisrael, and if so, war is war. Perhaps you associate yourself with those who call policemen Nazis, or hint that they are Nazis, or compare them to Nazis. As one boy asked me, perhaps with feigned innocence, “I understand that we’re not allowed to say ‘Nazis’, but are we allowed to *think* ‘Nazis’?” And I innocently answered him, “You can’t think it either.” So then he said, “But they really *are* Nazis!” I don’t know where he got such ideas. Therefore, you’ve got to realize something: None of them are Nazis! One time at one of the big demonstrations to stop the expulsion from Gush Katif, Knesset Member Scharansky said, “Don’t say ‘Bolsheviks’! You don’t know what Bolsheviks are! I do know! It’s true that what is happening right now is very bad, but it’s not Bolsheviks!”

And I say: Don’t say Nazis! Don’t say it. Don’t hint it. Don’t imply it. Don’t think it.

Maybe you don’t know what Nazis are. I know a little bit, because some of my family perished in the Holocaust, and as an infant I was hidden so that I wouldn’t end up in an extermination camp. So once and for all, remove this expression from parlance about Jews.

But I say a lot more than that: All of these people are our friends. We are friends! We have our differences, but we are friends. We are brothers. Remember that, once and for all – we are brothers.

You might ask: What do I suggest? I’ve been answering this question for more than thirty years, and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook has been answering it for a hundred years. I’ll repeat it now for the thousandth time: Be strong.

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