



AVODAS HASHEM IS THE KEY *Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

My loyal readership will know that I am never shy in relating stories from our past Chasidic Masters. It is therefore my greatest pleasure to share this one from the paramount Tzadik and Goan of the Torah world, the Vilna Goan Ztl.

It happened that one time the Goan was framed for some minor civil infraction and as a result was sent to prison. In those days these places were far from inhabitable, they were dungeons, often infested with rats and guarded by the most unsavoury of characters. The Goan was permitted to take with him an attendant, a gabbai, and so the first night passed in the damp darkness. At two o'clock in the morning the Rav got up and washed his hands. He turned to his gabbai and said I need a cup of coffee so I can concentrate on learning. The poor attendant was lost for words, how do you get room service in a dungeon? The Tzadik thought for a moment and then explained to the fellow that there was a tunnel under the cell, and that if you lifted up the grate one could go through the tunnel and reach outside the jail. He could then go to the Goan's home, get a cup of coffee and return. Well if this is what the rav said, this is what the fellow did, he went into the tunnel, ultimately returning with the coffee for his Rav. After some hours the gabbai plucked up the courage to ask the Goan, "If the Rebbe knew I could get out of here safely for the coffee, why shouldn't we just go out and escape?" Answered the Tzadik, "for some reason it has been ordained from Heaven that I must spend some time in this jail, however that doesn't mean I should not be able to concentrate on my learning, something I needed the coffee for."

We are all sometimes in a sort of jail, caught in circumstances we would rather not be in. It could be parnosa, depression, ill health, or sholom bayis. Stuff happens and although we may wish things could be different we are where we are. However that doesn't mean we should stop in our service to Hashem,

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in fact, despite the imprisonment we find ourselves in, we are meant to carry on with our devotion to Hashem and in this way we will find the key to our freedom.

I recently heard from HaRav Fishel Schacter an inspiring story. In the Warsaw ghetto there was a group of Gerrer bochrin that were led by a Yungerman named Matisyohu. He was a remarkable soul, and with his charismatic leadership he kept this group of students learning throughout the travails of the ghetto. None of the boys gave in to our enemies, they kept their payos, long coats and hats, learning in some basement as if the outside world didn't exist. At one point one of the chevre was caught by the nazis and was beaten ruthlessly in front of his chaverim. With his last gasp, he cried out, "Gedenke, tonight we start saying tal umuter lebracha!"

Such a powerful thought, here this young tzadik is about to die, and he cries out that the world must go on, and we must remember that our goal is to keep the Torah in all its majesty.

The Hieliga Tage (The Holy Days) are a time to face our individual imprisonment, whatever that may be, and to focus on the fact that the key to true freedom can be found in the acceptance that no matter what, we must remain Torah Yidden who learn, daven and perform chesed. We have no idea what Hashem's plans are, and why we find ourselves faced with our individual dilemmas. One truth must take precedence over all the worry and turmoil. The Eibishter is there for us and on these days we are each invited into the inner Realm of our Loving Father. It is He who will hear our cries with compassionate understanding.

In this zchus may we get through our own tunnels of darkness and find the comfort that lays in our trust in Hashem.

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