

The Great Lesson To Be Learned From The Hurricane: Every day there are hurricanes from which Hashem protects us!

Many of our brothers in America, especially those who live in communities close to the ocean front of New Jersey and New York, such as Seagate; Far Rockaway; the Five Towns, Lakewood, Deal, etc., are going through tough times after experiencing the traumatic event of being in the path of one of the biggest storms ever to strike the east coast. Some are beginning to feel despondent over the destruction that was brought upon many Yiddishe neighborhoods.

The hurricane brought strong winds and waves that caused the Atlantic Ocean to cross its natural borders. Homes were decimated, and it is miraculous that few people were hurt, with the damage limited to material things. But the financial loss, numbering in the millions, is staggering, and its effects will be felt for years to come.

After the initial shock of a catastrophe, Jews begin to contemplate what we are meant to learn from an event of so great a magnitude. It is praiseworthy of our people that we look to our leaders for guidance, and that we know our limitations.

It is important to point out that we will not try to participate in the hunt to trace these cataclysmic events to a specific area of sin, as has become the custom of so many, because in my humble opinion this area belongs only to Gedolei Yisroel, leaders of Klal Yisroel, who as we see are very cautious about assigning blame.

We all know that there are so many areas in which we can improve. We seek to understand these events from the perspective of our holy great Rabbis, the Rishonim and

Acharonim from the past. Their teachings can still lead us on the proper path through the storm to show us how to react and in what areas to improve.

The *brachah* to Hashem of “עושה מעשה בראשית”, the Creator of the world

To begin with, we must reaffirm our faith and remember that any time an unnatural event occurs, it is done only with the watchful eye from Above, as the law states: “On a shooting star; earthquake; lightening; thunder; hurricane; on all these, one says the brachah ‘Praise You, Hashem our G-d, Who created the world.’ And if he chooses, he may say, ‘Praise You, Hashem our G-d, Whose strength fills the world.” (Orach Chaim 227:1)

Those people who survived the hurricane must praise Hashem with a full heart, like David Hamelech sings (Psalms 107:23):

“יורדי הים באניות עושי מלאכה במים רבים, המה ראו מעשי
ה' ונפלאותיו במצולה, ויאמר ויעמד רוח סערה ותרום גליו, יעלו
שמים ירדו תהומות נפשם ברעה תתמוגג, יחוגו וינועו כשיכור וכל
חכמתם תתבלע, ויצעקו אל ה' בצר להם וממצוקותיהם יוציאים,
יקם סערה לדממה ויחשו גליהם, וישמחו כי ישתוקו וינחם אל מחוז
נפצם, יודו לה' חסדו ונפלאותיו לבני אדם, וירוממוהו בקהל עם
ובמושב זקנים יהללוהו.”

“Those who go down to the sea in ships, who work in mighty waters; they saw the deeds of Hashem and His wonders in the deep. He spoke and He set up a storm and raised its waves. They

went up to the Heavens, they came down to the depths. Their souls melted with trouble. They were frightened and staggered like a drunkard and all of their wisdom was destroyed. They cried out to Hashem from their distress that He take them out of their straits; [thus] the storm He settled into a calm and the waves were stilled. They rejoiced and they were stilled, and He led them to the region of their desire. They shall thank Hashem for his kindness and for his wonders to the children of men. And they shall exalt Him an assembly of people and in a sitting of elders praise Him.”

How should we look upon recent events?

To those of our brothers who experienced damages and financial losses, we have a big obligation to empathize with them in their sorrow and try to help them in every way possible, but they themselves who suffered financial losses should realize that amazingly, this historic event was included in the words of David Hamelech, when he mentioned three times the words: **“הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו”**. “Praise Hashem for all the good, for His kindness is forever.” (Psalms 106:1, 107:1, 136:1)

In Gemara Pesachim (108a), we learn that Rav Chisdah asks, what does it mean when it says **“הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו”**? The Gemara answers that it means “Praise Hashem, Who pays mankind back with good; a wealthy man with his ox; a poor man with his sheep; an orphan with his eggs; and a widow with her chicken.” Rashi explains that “the wealthy lose their belongings and are forgiven.”

We learn from this that when someone loses his possessions he must praise Hashem, keeping in mind the concept of **“הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו”** – praise Hashem for all the good, for His kindness is forever. Hashem took from him his physical wealth in lieu of physical punishment.

Every day there are strong winds, but Hashem protects us.

What we should begin to recognize when we think about this hurricane is that each day we are faced with multiple dangerous situations, but Hashem protects us. Any time we walk in the street we are placed in harm's way, but Hashem watches over us.

The Gemara Shabbos (32a) teaches us:

“אדם יוצא לשוק, יהי דומה בעיניו כמי שנמסר לסרדיוט, חש בראשו, יהי דומה בעיניו כמי שנתנוהו בקולר, עלה למטה ונפל, יהי דומה בעיניו כמו שהעלוהו לגרדום לידון, שכל העולה לגרדום לידון, אם יש לו פרקליטין גדולים ניצול ואם לאו אינו ניצול, ואלו הן פרקליטין של אדם תשובה ומעשים טובים”.

“When a person sets out to the marketplace, it should appear in his eyes as if he were handed over to the Roman court; if one experiences a headache, it should appear in his eyes as if they placed him in chains; if one becomes bedridden, it should appear in his eyes as if they brought him up to the scaffold to be judged. For anyone who ascends the scaffold to be judged, if he has powerful advocates, he will be saved; but if not, he will not be saved. And these are a person's true advocates: repentance and good deeds.”

And we also find in the Gemara (Niddah 31a):

“דרש רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב (ישעיה יב-א) אודך ה' כי אנפת בי ישוב אפך ותנחמני, במה הכתוב מדבר, בשני בני אדם שיצאו לסחורה, ישב לו קוץ לאחד מהן התחיל מחרף ומגדף, לימים שמע שטבעה ספינתו של חברו בים, התחיל מודה ומשבח, לכך נאמר ישוב אפך ותנחמני, והיינו דאמר רבי אלעזר, מאי דכתיב (תהלים עב-יח) [ברוך ה' אלקים אלקי ישראל] עושה נפלאות לבדו, וברוך שם כבודו לעולם, אפילו בעל הנס אינו מכיר בנסו”.

“Rav Yosef learns “I thank Hashem when he is angry with me; your anger turns away to comfort me.” What is this passuk speaking about? Two people who are about to set out on a trip; the first one injures himself and is unable to make the trip, and he is cursing his situation. Days later he hears about the sinking of the boat his friend was on and he begins to sing the praise. That is the meaning of “your anger turns away to comfort me”. and Rabi Elazar asks, what does it mean? He alone makes wonders; blessed is Hashem forever – even the person for whom the miracle occurred does not know of this.” (Psalms 72:18)

How incredible are the words of the Toras Chaim (Bava Kama 16), who teaches us that the reason that the members of the Great Assembly instituted the blessing of “Modim” to be recited in the Shemoneh Esrei thrice daily is in order to fulfill the command of: **“על כל נשימה ונשימה - כל הנשמה תהלל י-ה”** —“One must praise Hashem for each and every breath one takes.”

Here are his beautiful words:

"לפי שהוא יתברך עושה חסד עם כל אדם בכל יום ובכל עת ובכל רגע, אלא שאין בעל הנס מכיר בנסיו, סבור עולם כמנהגו הוא נוהג, ואינו מרגיש שכל פסיעה ופסיעה וכל תנועה ותנועה וכל נשימה ונשימה הוא ממנו יתברך שמו, כמו שנאמר (תהלים לז כג) מה' מצעדי גבר כוננו, וכתוב (איוב יב י) אשר בידו נפש כל חי ורוח כל בשר איש.

והיה מן הראוי שיודה האדם ויברך בכל עת ובכל רגע על כל פסיעה ותנועה ונשימה, כמו שאמרו חכמים כל הנשמה תהלל יה, על כל נשימה ונשימה חייב אדם להלל יה, וכל מי שאינו מעלה על לבו בכל רגע שהכל מאתו יתברך אלא עולם כמנהגו נוהג, הרי הוא ככופר בו חס ושלום.

ולפי שהוא מן הנמנע שיעמוד אדם מן הבקר ועד הערב, ויתן שבח והודאה על כל פסיעה ונשימה ותנועה, וכל שכן רוב בני העולם הולכים תמיד אחרי הבלי העולם הזה באסיפת ממון וכיוצא בזה, ואפילו הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה והודאה, אמרו חכמים (ברכות לה:): דהוי כאלו מעל וגוזל לכנסת ישראל שנאמר לה' הארץ וגו'.

ולזאת המציאו אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנה, ויסדו לומר בכל תפלה ערב ובקר וצהרים ברכת הודאה, כדי שיכלול אדם בהודאה אחת את כל הנשימות וחסדים ונפלאות שהוא יתברך עושה עמו בכל רגע, ויוצא ידי חובת כולן בבת אחת בהודאה אחת, ולזה יסדו לומר מודים אנחנו לך וכו', על חיינו המסורים בידך ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך, דהיינו על כל נשימה ונשימה, ועל נסיך שבכל יום ויום עמנו ועל נפלאותיך וטובותיך שבכל עת ערב ובקר וצהרים וכו'."

"In reality, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is constantly performing favors on our behalf, to which we are, for the most part, oblivious. Most of His deeds are taken for granted as part of the daily scheme of things. Every step, every movement, and every breath; all emanate from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore, it would behoove man to thank Hashem and bless Him every minute of every day. Not to appreciate this kindness is a form of denial, chas v'shalom.

"Seeing as it is impossible to stand in praise and thanks to Hashem from morning until night – and most people, unfortunately, are busy chasing after money and other trivial matters of this world, without so much as uttering a brachah or a word of thanks – the Members of the Great Assembly devised a brilliant solution. They established a blessing of gratitude to be recited during each of the three daily prayers. In this

manner, one can simultaneously fulfill one's debt of gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for all His constant favors and miracles on our behalf with one single expression of thanks. This is the purpose of reciting the formula of "Modim Anachnu Lach" – thanking Hashem for our very lives and our every breath, which are under His constant control and supervision."

From here we see that we are constantly standing in harm's way, susceptible to all types of disasters. We might not openly see it, but this does not absolve us from our requirement to thank Hashem. We must remember, **יהי דומה, יהי דומה לעינינו כמי שנתנוהו בקולר** – "When a person sets out to the marketplace, it should appear in his eyes as if he were handed over to the Roman court; if one experiences a headache, it should appear in his eyes as if they placed him in chains; we should therefore praise Hashem three times a day for all He does for us."

This, brethren, is the lesson we need to learn from the storm that Hashem has sent us. The passuk says **כי יצר לב האדם רע** – "man can stray from an early age." The daily routine can cause people to forget to properly and actively appreciate all of the many miracles they experience each day, so every now and then Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends us a reminder – a hurricane, which, even if the machines and weathermen can predict its course, they are honest in that they cannot stop it, nor protect us from it, as it says in Mishlei (21:30), "There is no council, nor ideas, that can go against His wishes."

Just because we do not actively see and feel the danger is no reason to assume it is not there. The author of the Pesach Haggadah states: **והיא שעמדה לאבותינו ולנו, שלא אחד בלבד, עמד עלינו לכלותינו, אלא שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו, והקב"ה מצילנו מידם"**

"This helps us, because in each generation there are forces that come out to destroy us, but Hashem saves us from them."

There are good reasons why the chachamim have instituted that every morning we say a thank you for "opening our eyes" – **"פוקח עורים"**; for "standing us straight" – **"המכין מצעדי גבר"**; and for "setting our feet" – **"זוקף כפופים"**; because sadly, there are too many who do not have these abilities, R"l. For every time we return home safely we should again take a moment to thank Hashem.