



THE BUILDING OF TOMORROW

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

In the summer of 1960, the Torah community of America witnessed one of the most spiritual moments in recent history. Rumours had spread that a unique tzaddik who had been held in a Communist jail for many years was about to be freed and would be coming to the United States.

A feeling of shared excitement permeated the air as stories were told of this great man. We heard that he had chosen to stay in Romania after the Churban so that he could offer spiritual hope to the many trapped in that Communist territory. For years he fought a lone battle for Torah, being jailed at regular intervals. He adopted hundreds of Jewish orphans, teaching them and sharing with them every part of their lives. He married off many of them, treating them as his own children — all this under the noses of the hated tyrants who swore to stop him at every juncture. After much diplomatic maneuvering, he was freed from prison on the condition that he leave Romania forthwith.

We had heard that throughout his time in prison, this tzaddik was not allowed to have any seforim and that he had composed, in that place of agony, niggunim for every single passage of Tehillim.

It was this hero of the spirit who was now awaited with such anticipation.

He arrived in New York without a coat, carrying nothing but the enormous spirit that had withstood so much torment. That first motzei Shabbos a reception was held for him at the old Camp Agudah site in Ferndale. Thousands came to see this living saint, and all willingly packed themselves into the large yet inadequate building.

The place was hot, everyone was perspiring, yet no one moved. Suddenly, a gentle ripple made its way through the crowd. The silence was heavy with anticipation, and then through the door walked a tiny figure, white-bearded, stooped-shouldered, with eyes that sparkled. This was American Jewry's first sight of the Skulener Rebbe, ztz"l.

There are defining moments in everyone's life, and for me this was one. I had heard of heroes, seen great sages, but never had I experienced the electrified atmosphere that



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surrounded Yidden who were waiting to greet a tzaddik for the first time. America likes its heroes tall and larger than life, yet here was this diminutive wizened figure that seemed to percolate with love for every Jew. His shy smile took all the oxygen from the room, as everyone was overcome by the wave of warmth he generated.

He was soon sitting at the head table, and with a voice from another time he started to sing his beautiful songs. Every phrase was given new, heartfelt meaning; you could almost touch the words as he stretched them into an eternal line that reached the heavens. In his unique, high-pitched voice that was still vibrant, the tearfulness mixed with the joy. These were songs created by a huge heart, one textured with love for humanity.

Then this special tzaddik told us these amazing words of Torah “Each year parshas Masei, which describes the journeys of Bnei Yisroel in the desert, is read during the Three Weeks, the mourning period between the seventeenth of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av. This teaches us that just as all the trouble and bother that our forefathers endured during their travels in the desert had a purpose — to bring them to the Promised Land — all our wanderings in exile have a purpose: they are meant to purify us and ready us for the final redemption may it come soon.”

We stood in awe as the words, so soft and gentle, flowed from his holy mouth with genuine love. He trembled at the thought of the pain Yidden had to bear and wanted them to know how much it meant to a loving Eibishter. He who had gone through so much, said — no, cried — that we would see light and redemption.

Well, all this happened over sixty years ago, and despite rivers of Yiddishe tears having flowed in all kinds of situations, we still hold onto that Tzaddik’s truth. This year has been particularly troubling, with challenges rearing up with destructive regularity.

I had the zechus to be in the Rebbe’s proximity over several years and even escort him on some of his missions for the good of Klall Yisroel. He never ceased to amaze me; his life was totally lived for others. His words were thoughtfully selective and always flowed with Ahavas Yisroel.

In Parshas Devorim the Sefas Emes speaks to our golus and our personal role in it. He touches upon a medrash that exclaims: “Any generation in which the Beis Hamikdash is not rebuilt is on the same low spiritual level as the generation of the Churban — the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.”

Rabbi Leff in his work on the Sefas Emes explains that if taken literally, this is a very powerful, if enigmatic, statement. So much so that the Sefas Emes explicitly questioned its meaning. Thus, the Rebbe observed that, in fact there had been, many generations following the Churban in which exceptionally worthy and pious people (“tzaddikei elyon”) lived. Can we honestly say of those generations, he asks, that they literally would have precipitated the Churban of the Beis Hamikdash in their days? Likewise, do we truly expect that there will arise a generation so virtuous that it will, on its own, merit the Ge’ula (Redemption) that no earlier generation deserved?

The Sefas Emes answers that the Ge’ula will come as the result of a cumulative process, in which the spiritual achievements of each generation will be added to those of all preceding generations until finally we reach the “target level.” Thus, every generation that adds spirituality to the world, by bringing light to where darkness had previously reigned, participates in building the Beis Hamikdash. It turns out, then, that the Jewish people have actually been rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash throughout the entire duration of the Golus!

In this light the Skulener Rebbe’s words gain greater purpose. With each episode of our golus we build the future world of purity and the coming of the Moshiach. Our current challenges are part of a holy mosaic, one which will find its finality through our all too human footsteps. May this come soon and in our days.

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