
Sichos in English Classics 13

SOCIETY'S GREAT HOPE:

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**“A Moment
of
Silence”**



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IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

These weekly publications can be sponsored to honor a loved one, a Yortzeit or a simcha by contacting us at **sichosinenglish@gmail.com**. If you would like to receive this weekly publication to your email, then please use the above email address as well, or you can sign up to receive it on WhatsApp at 917-868-6509.

To partner with us, so that we can continue to publish original Sichos in English content as well as behind the scenes stories and documents, please make a contribution at: sie.org/partner

INTRO

Last week we brought an essay of the Rebbe regarding bringing in non-denominational prayer (NDP) into the public school system. This developed into a campaign for a Moment of Silence (MOS).

“When a “Moment of Silence” is instituted at the start of the school day there is no compromising of the neutrality of the state, for this is not prayer, but silence!” - the Rebbe.

With the recent push towards activating this vital campaign across the country we hope that this essay, and its introduction from its original printing, will inspire us all to do our utmost to make this a reality.

SOCIETY'S GREAT HOPE: “A MOMENT OF SILENCE”

While parents may have failed in their moral responsibility to train their children in the faith in the Creator — the schools cannot look aside and circumvent the issue. If we want the next generation of children to grow up as productive, moral *humans*, they must be given the opportunity — during school hours — to meditate on matters of vital importance — their purpose in life, and the belief in the Creator and Ruler of the World. Our democratic form of government and the principles of our republic provide for the freedom of religious practice and faith. This basic freedom must be afforded the children, by setting times for a “Moment of Silence” at the start of every school day.

In this essay based on the talk of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, delivered on Simchas Torah 5746, we follow the Rebbe’s urgent plea to American society for this *last great hope*. It is clear that this is our only chance to make the future generations socially adapted human beings.

You may want to review other Sichos of the Rebbe on this same topic. May we refer you to the 19th of Kislev 5745, the 12th of Tammuz 5744 (Sichos In English vol. 21, pgs. 290-300), and the 10th of Shevat 5741 (Sichos In English vol. 8, pgs. 198-202).

Is there an antidote for the problems that plague society today?

How do we ensure that the children of this generation will grow up to be responsible citizens of the world?

How do we balance the self-centered attitude of the “Me” generation?

Is there a means of assuring that civilization will continue to follow the norms of justice and the socially acceptable rules that have become the pillars of a just social order?

The answer to these and other troubling and heartbreaking questions facing the world today may be found by first recognizing and accepting certain objective truths about ourselves and our universe.

At the heart of the response and at the base of the solution lies the need for the universal acceptance of, and firm faith in, the Creator and Ruler of the world. This bedrock of belief will provide the immutable foundation upon which may be built the assurance of future civilized conduct, in accordance with socially acceptable norms, laws of justice and propriety, and sensible rules of human rights and privileges.

THE NATURE OF MAN

Scripture describes for us the primitive nature of the uneducated and untrained human being:

The inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.
(*Bereishis 8:21*)

To this Rashi adds:

From the moment the fetus bestirs itself to have an independent existence the evil inclination is given to it.
(*loc. cit.*)

This being the case, will the average child have any impulse or motivation to refrain from fulfilling his desires or lusts — even when it means taking something which belongs to a friend or to a

teacher? This problem is especially prevalent among American children who have been given the notion that they are the “chosen creations” — certainly *everything is theirs* for the grabbing.

While the child may be aware of the existence of the police or some other restrictive force — he is not stymied, because he considers himself smart enough to outwit the policeman.’

THE ONLY SOLUTION

The only solution to guarantee that this child will follow the laws of justice and morality is to inculcate in him the recognition of, and belief in, the Creator and Ruler of the world.

The child must be given to understand that the world is not a jungle, for there is a Creator and Master who sees and evaluates all his actions, there is the “Eye that sees and the ear that hears.” For *this* reason he must conduct himself in a civilized and just manner.

WHAT ABOUT SECULAR EDUCATION?

We should add, that in our generation it is redundant to cite proofs, to *refute* the claim that we can rely on the study of the physical science or social sciences in order to refine or moderate a child’s conduct.

This generation has witnessed the awesome destruction wrought by the nation which boasted the greatest advancement in science and philosophy — they *studied morality* and *produced the greatest murderers*, whose bestiality was unmatched in the annals of human history. Why, they even used their advanced scientific and technological expertise to expedite their murderous designs with alacrity, efficiency and bestial inhumanity.

Scientific knowledge and worldly wisdom are *tools*, which may be utilized for *good* or *bad* — all depending on the character of the person using them. A person of fine character and good attributes — will use his scientific and secular knowledge to improve the state of the world. While in the opposite dimension, the one who follows the will and wile of his evil impulse is capable of utilizing

science and knowledge in a negative manner, to increase evil and suffering, in an immeasurable way. *We are witnesses to this fact!* (Affliction shall not rise up a second time. Nachum 1:9)

These phenomena have clearly proved that civilized behavior cannot be based solely on human intellect or social teachings — only on faith in the Creator and Master of the world.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

It therefore follows, that this faith must be imbued in our children while they are in school — for is it not the role and goal of the school to educate and mold the child to be worthy of the name *human being*?!

In past generations the role of the school was only geared to imparting knowledge, because moral values were imbued at home, by parents. In our generation, however, and especially in recent times, parents are bogged down with the problems of making a living and communal activities, and consequently, they do not nurture or train their children in moral values, but rely on the schools to fill the vacuum. It therefore becomes the responsibility of the schools and the professional educators to assume that role and to impart the moral education in addition to the three R's.

We see this fact so crystal clear in this country, where over the past so years the spiritual and moral standards of our youth have deteriorated astonishingly, from one extreme to the other. In outlook and in action, we see a tremendous increase in anti-social (almost sub-human) behavior among the youth.

The *sole reason*? — a lack of belief in the Creator and Ruler of the world. In the earlier generations, when each person believed in G-d, he educated his child likewise, but today we have a generation of parents whose parents left that moral responsibility to the schools, no wonder that their children are in such a sorry state!

THE BACKLASH OF LAXITY

In the end, the parents will suffer the backlash of their laxity, for just as the child steals from others, he will also steal from his own parents, especially since he knows them to be merciful; so he fears no punishment. It is concerning such mercy that Scripture states:

Hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children. (*Eicha 4:10*)

And the wisest of men proclaimed:

He that spares his rod hates his son. (*Mishlei 14:24*)

How can the moral condition of our children be corrected. By placing attention and emphasis on inculcating the faith in the Creator. And this must be done *in every school* which is concerned with the education and training of children and their initiation into the socially acceptable norms of society.

WHAT ABOUT THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION AND STATE?

Enter those who ‘care’ for the “basic principles” of our republic. They argue that to teach belief in the Creator is against the statute and principle of separation of religion and state.

This argument has no basis in fact!

Any principle or rule in a democratic society exists *only* for the *good* of the *people*. When the good of the people demands a change (or modified interpretation) of the rule — then the rule *must* be *adapted* or *changed* to match the need.

A society which lays down the principle of the separation of religion and state really means that it wants to provide a framework for *freedom* of *religion* — without the interference of government. That was the true intention of this hallowed statute — not the opposite — to restrict or prohibit the opportunity for expression of religious practice and belief!

Yet, there are still those who stubbornly want to protect the ‘letter’ of the law *against* the *good* of the *people* — and in total disregard for the *spirit* of the law — *religious freedom!*

THE ANSWER: A “MOMENT OF SILENCE”

It was in response to this opposition that the suggestion for a “Moment of Silence” was propounded. When a “Moment of Silence” is instituted at the start of the school day there is no compromising of the neutrality of the state, for this is *not prayer*, but *silence!*

Knowing that school time is devoted to education, the child realizes that the moment of silence must be dedicated to the most important things in this life: his outlook on life, and his belief in the Creator and Ruler of the world: as per the instructions which *his parents will give him.*

I want to stress that this must be at the *start* of the *day* to emphasize the magnitude of the subject. At any other time of the day it would not have the proper impact — the child would contemplate on this last lesson.

Since the substance of this reflection time would depend on the free will of each individual, without teacher, supervisor or government intervention, it does not represent an incursion of the state into the free exercise of religion by the individual.

WHAT TO MEDITATE ON?

Even those parents who do not have the time to train their children, will still find the time to suggest some momentous subject to their children to think about, not “lollipops” or “football,” or the “prowess” of attacking other children. Rather they will instruct their children to meditate about such matter what will make them worthy of the name *human being* — not wild beasts of the jungle — in a proper, civilized manner. The children will remember that they heard their parents tell them of the “Eye that sees and the ear that hears.”

At some point in this crusade there were well-meaning representatives in government who . tried to introduce a “Moment of Prayer” — this was doomed to fail, for “If you grab a lot you cannot hold it.” (*Rosh Hashanah* 4b) In fact, that bill has recently been rejected. Good that it was — for a “Moment of Prayer” might

create a scenario where a teacher or supervisor could impose his particular form of prayer, or his religion's version of prayer on the students — something which would be wholly unacceptable.

Now that the first bill has been defeated the time is propitious to work for a "Moment of Silence."

ACT — AROUSE PUBLIC OPINION

Therefore:

Public opinion is very important — everyone in government is sensitive to a wave of public interest, the people at the top, the Senators, Congressmen etc. It is therefore very important, that this time, the circles of government in Washington should see a swell of public opinion to institute a "Moment of Silence" at the beginning of the school day.

Preferably this momentum should come from the children themselves. They should send individual letters or sign petitions wherein they will express their desire for a "Moment of Silence." And, since they are not the ones who make the decisions, although it pertains to them, and since we are a democratic nation — they should therefore turn to their representatives *to act on their behalf* and institute a "Moment of Silence." Certainly this will have a strong impact on all who receive these petitions.

If the effort will be explained in this manner there are good chances for success. There is the added factor in that the President and those who are influenced by him, look favorably on this proposal and they too want a bill that will provide this opportunity. It is only necessary to make the small move of showing them that public opinion is on their side.

ACTION — LETTERS AND PETITIONS

There is much to say, but the deed is of the essence. Letters and petitions must be sent to the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives (after first consulting with those who worked on this before, and know from experience what to do).

And may this involvement bring the hoped-for success in a great measure, so that it will happen naturally and without any problems; and quickly — ”An hour earlier is always better.”

May it be the Will of G-d that there will be no need to speak of this matter in the future, as it will be rectified very soon, and through this act we will merit speedily the complete and true redemption for the whole world. It will usher in an era of no famine and no war, no jealousy and no hate for all the good things will be plentiful and we will devote our time to knowing the L-rd. The Jewish people will have the free time to be involved in the study of Torah and its wisdom. This will come about because of our work on behalf of mankind.

(Sorry to say, there are also Jews who need the Moment of Silence, because so many Jewish children still attend public schools. Their parents are insensitive to the importance of a religious education. We must encourage them and strengthen their faith — but in broader terms this subject is important for Jews and non-Jews.)

And may we merit the blessings of the Holy One blessed be He — ”and I will pour out for you blessings immeasurable.” (*Malachi 3:10*)

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe

*whose teachings and example are a
never-ending source of life for all mankind.
May we continue in his paths, and complete
the mission with which he has charged us:
to make the world conscious of the imminent Redemption
and to prepare an environment
in which this ideal can be realized.*



& In Memory of

Yaakov ben Yisroel ה"ע Spitzer

On the occasion of his Yartzeit,
2nd Day of Iyar

&

Tana Leah bas Moshe ה"ע Fein

On the occasion of her Yartzeit,
12th Day of Iyar



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