

The World That Once Was



RABBI ELCHANAN WASSERMAN

BOCA RATON SYNAGOGUE

RABBI PHILIP MOSKOWITZ

Who was Rav Elchanan?

Why then, I asked Reb Elchanan, is learning Torah judged to be more important than all other Mitzos? What good do I do for another person when I learn Torah?

He answered, if we will stop learning Torah, then the world will go under. The existence of the world depends on Jews learning Torah. So if a Jew learns Torah, he not only has the Mitzvah, but more importantly, he sustains the entire world and prevents its destruction.

-A Fire in His Soul: Irving M. Bunim



His Life

- ✿ *Born in 1874 in Birz, Lithuania*
- ✿ *Beinesh the Shamash*
- ✿ *In 1890, his family moves to the city of Bauska*
- ✿ *He then goes to the Telz Yeshiva for 7 years*



R. Shimon Shkop, left, conversing with R. Chaim Ozer Grodzinski

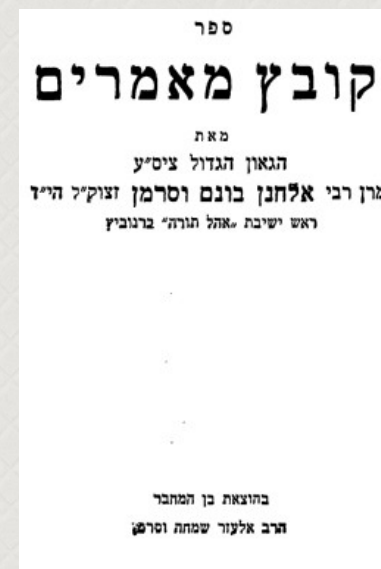
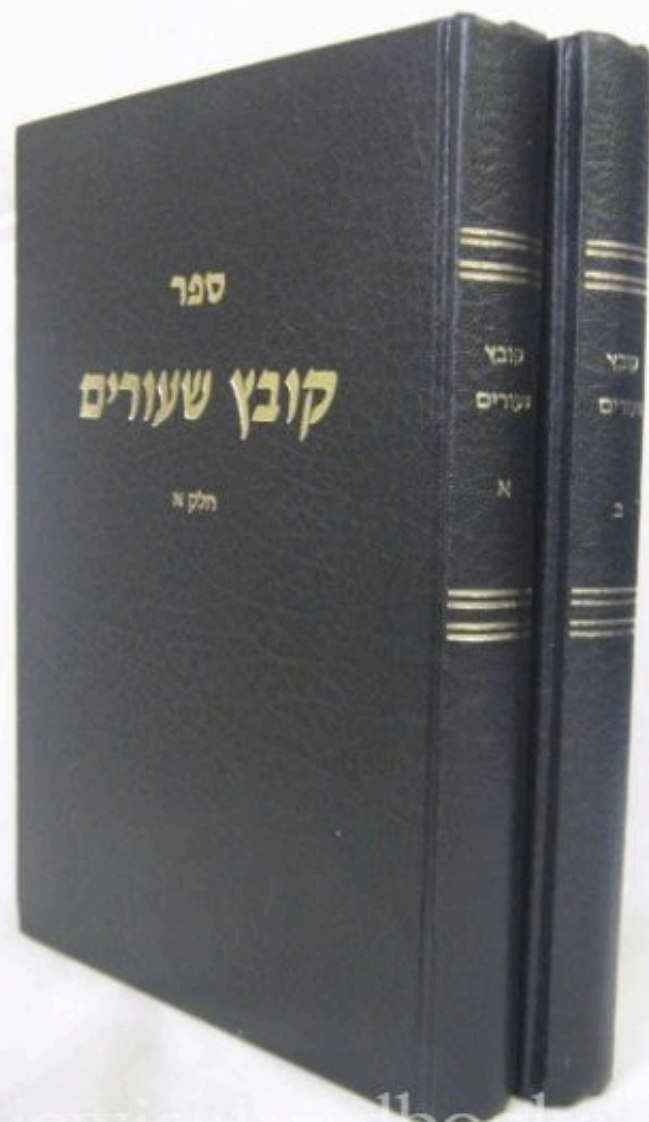
Making his own Yichus

- ✿ *Rav Kook*
- ✿ *Rav Chaim of Brisk*
- ✿ *In 1898, he marries the daughter of R. Meir Atlas, Rav of Shavli*



About R. Elchanan

- ✿ *In 1902, he accepts a position in the Amitchslav Yeshiva*
- ✿ *Should they learn Russian?*
- ✿ *R. Tzvi Direktor - Don't come back!*
- ✿ *In 1907, at 32, he goes to Radin to learn with the Chafetz Chayim*
- ✿ *1910 - He accepts the position of Rabbi in Brisk*
- ✿ *1921 - Ohel Torah in Baranowicz*



Torah im Derech Eretz?

סימן ע'

בענין „תורה עם דרך ארץ“

שאלה! אם מותר להתעסק בחכמות חזוניות
ובאיזה אופן יתקיים היתר כזה?

וכל הנ"ל הוא רק לעורר גאוני הומן יחיו
להורות לנו דרך סלולה וישרה בעיניים אלו
ואיננו כדאי לדון ולהורות בשאלה זו העומדת
על פרק בפרט במדינה זו ואפשר שנצרך כעת
הוראת שעה למעשה משום עת לעשות ונ' ודע
מה שתשיב וכו' אבל נתון לזה הוראה ברורה
עפ"י משפטי תוה"ק בברור כל הפרטים והתנאים
והאופנים בדיוק.

שמעון שוואב

רב דבהכ"נ „שארית ישראל“ בלטימורי

ד) היכא שאין צריך ללומדה בתורת אומנות,
אלא שרוצה להשתעשע בה, יש מקום לאסור
משום ביטול תורה, דהיכא דעייל ירקא ליעול



R. Shimon Schwab

I. Ikvesa De-Meshicha

If we wish to grasp the essence of the events in our lives, we must seek verses and statements that pertain to the period of "*ikveta de-meshicha*," i.e., the period of transition between exile and redemption. If we compare that which is written to what is taking place, we see in the Torah – as though through a clear glass – all that is happening to us, and all the reasons for it. Everything that is stated in those verses is being realized, and everything that is being realized was foreseen. Let us start reading the Torah.

II. Birthpangs of Mashiach

We may indicate several periods in the history of the Jewish nation: the period of the Tannaim, the period of the Amoraim, the period of the Savoraim, the period of the Geonim, the period of the Rishonim, etc. The final period is referred to in the holy writings as "the end of days," and the Gemara refers to it as "*ikveta de-Meshicha*," the footsteps of the Messiah (*Sota* 49b), or "*chevlei Mashiach*," the birthpangs of the Messiah (*Ketubot* 111a). The concept of the "end of days" includes the period immediately preceding the redemption and the redemption itself, while the "footsteps of the Messiah" or the "birthpangs of the Messiah" refers only to the final period of subjugation.

III. Idolatry?

Let us review all the forms of idolatry that they have worshipped in the last hundred years. First, there was the Berlin enlightenment – or, more accurately, the Berlin foolishness - from which they hoped for all-encompassing salvation. When the winds of liberalism began to blow, the Jews quickly arranged themselves in the front lines of its defenders. After liberalism lost its luster, they turned to democratism, Socialism, Communism, and the other "isms" that have showered down on our generation in such abundance. To these idols they offered sacrifices of creeping things – in both senses of the term. They all proved worthless. Not a single one of these forms of idolatry fulfilled the hopes that had been attached to it. Moreover, each of these "isms" died a quick death and suddenly disappeared.

IV. Time is Short

The Chafetz Chaim taught further: The changes that take place in the world today within a short time, used to take hundreds of years. We see that the wheel of time is spinning at lightning speed...

Since the time of the Messiah is very close, it is imperative that this process be speeded up. From the day that the Chafetz Chaim, z"l, expressed this view, the pace of events in the world has grown even faster. Overnight, literally, things have happened that previously would have taken many generations... It is as though the wheel of time is accelerating under pressure from an external command: "Hurry up!" Anyone with intelligence can understand that we are living in a special period, which is destined to change the entire world order; day by day, the pace grows faster...

Opposition to Zionism

A proposal has been made to combine the Hareidi Beit Din with the Chief Rabbinate. It is well known that he who heads [the Chief Rabbinate] has written and signed on a declaration calling on Jews to contribute to Keren Hayesod. It is also known that the funds of Keren Hayesod go towards educating intentional heretics. If that is the case, he who encourages supporting this organization causes the public to sin on a most terrible level. Rabbeinu Yona in Sha'arei Teshuva explains the verse "The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, and a man is tried by his praise" (Prov. 27:21) as meaning that in order to examine a person one must look at what he praises. If we see that he praises the wicked, we know that he is an utterly wicked person, and it is clear that it is forbidden to associate with such a person.

Letter to Rav Yosef Tzvi Dushinski, June 25, 1924



Opposition to Zionism

It is known to all that the leadership of this organization [Histadrut] has set a goal of uprooting the Torah from its root with a mighty hand, and educating and raising a new nation of Israel in place of the old nation of Israel... It is clear that one may not join with them in any sort of union. Even living in their neighborhood is prohibited; woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor!

Open Letter to the leadership of Poalei
Agudat Yisrael, 1934



Avodat Ivrit?

Should Rabbis in the Diaspora
be involved in Israeli Politics?

Some thinkers in the religious Zionist camp also invoked the notion of *hevlei Mashiach* as an overarching explanation for the travails of the interwar period. They differed vehemently with Aguda as to the operative conclusions one should draw...Like his Aguda counterparts, R. Yitzchak Nissenbaum of the religious Zionists saw the hand of Providence in the catastrophic events of his time, but unlike them, he saw the present calamities as stemming at least in part from the refusal of the masses of Jewry to enlist in the cause of rebuilding the Land of Israel. In his chilling words of 1939:

“The longer the footsteps of the Messiah tarry through our own fault, the fault of the nation that stays distant from the building of its own land and the founding of its state, the greater will grow the birth pangs of the messiah....”

—The Politics of Tradition, 67-8

What did the Aguda suggest that the Jewish people do in this time of crisis? Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman pointed to the advice offered long ago...to be saved from the hevlei mashiach, a person should engage in study of Torah and perform acts of kindness.

-The Politics of Tradition, 67-8





Third Agudah Convention - 1937, Marienbad

ZIONISM ASSAILED AT MARIENBAD PARLEY OF AGUDATH ISRAEL

MARIENBAD, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AUG. 18. (JTA) — THE PRESIDENT OF THE AGUDATH ISRAEL CHARGED TODAY BEFORE THE WORLD CONGRESS OF THE ORTHODOX JEWISH ORGANIZATION THAT ZIONISM "BROUGHT CONFUSION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND ROBBED THE JEWISH PEOPLE OF ITS SOUL."

DR. JACOB ROSENHEIM, OF LONDON, TOLD THE 720 DELEGATES AND MORE THAN 2,000 SPECTATORS THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO WAS "A REACTION AGAINST THE ZIONIST RACIAL PRINCIPLE OF ORGANIZATION."

"Rabbi Wasserman, Rabbi Kotler, Rabbi Rottenberg from Antwerp, and rabbis from Czechoslovakia and Hungary were unanimous in rejecting any proposal for a "Jewish State" on either side of the Jordan River, even if it were established as a religious state because such a regime would be a form of heresy in our faith in the belief in the coming of the Messiah, and especially since this little "Jewish" state would be built on heresy and desecration of the Name of God."



~Hapardes 7

Coming to America

1938





Yeshiva University

When Rabbi Wasserman visited America in 1938, he refused to lecture at the Yeshiva and gave all of his support to Mesivta Torah Vodaath. Even though Revel sent the Yeshiva's highly respected and competent student Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman to escort Rav Elchanan to the Yeshiva, he refused to come.

-Bernard Revel, 155





Yeshiva University

Mr. Manischewitz related to me that Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, in the presence of 25 people, declared that Yeshiva is a center of apikorsus and shmad since the writings of Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger, and Isaac Hirsch Weiss are studied in the Yeshiva. These men attempted to completely uproot traditional Judaism.

-Bernard Revel, 156

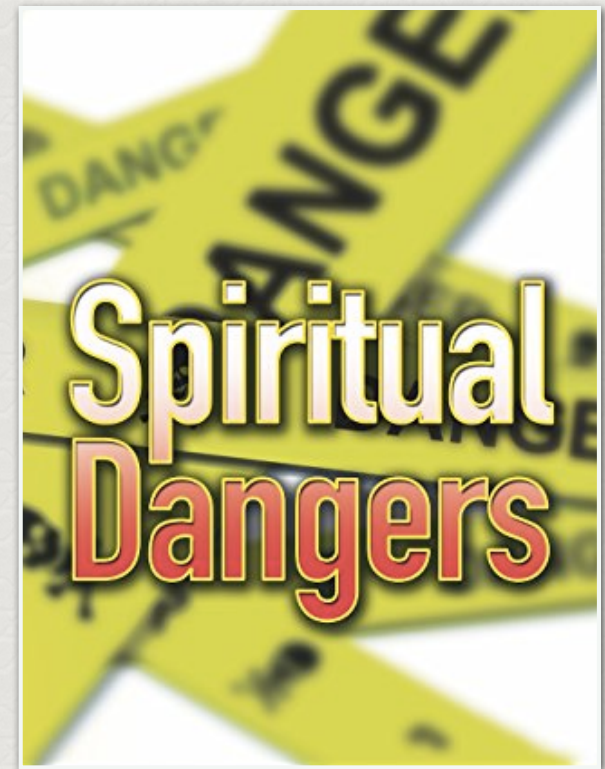




Yeshiva University

"I received your letter. However, I did not act as you requested. The yeshiva in America which can bring in students are those that Dr. Revel in New York and the Hebrew Theological College of Chicago. Both institutions are permeated with spiritual dangers since their fundamental principles are contrary to the Torah. What good will result if you escape from physical danger only to encounter spiritual peril. I therefore sent your letter to the gaon, Rabbi Shlomo Heiman, of the Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn.

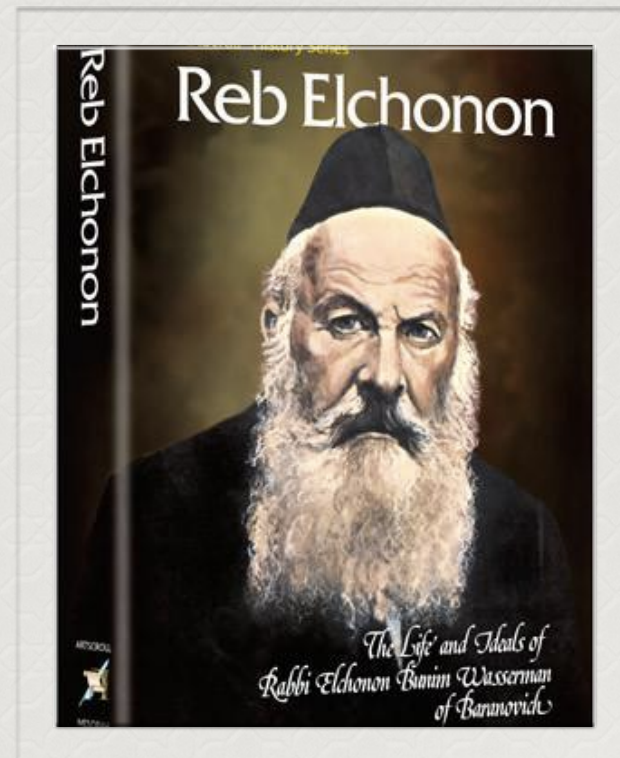
-The Silver Era, p. 273



America and Spiritual Dangers

“How can I help you emigrate to America when you have small children? Here we are in physical danger, but is it a secret that there is tremendous spiritual danger facing children in America?”

-Reb Elchonon, p. 383-4



To Stay or To Go?

bochurim. How can I leave them?"

His faithful driver, Reb Shraga Block, begged Reb Elchonon with tears in his eyes not to leave. "*Rebbe*, you are not allowed to travel," he cried out excitedly with deep anxiety. "Since when does Mr. Block give *halachic* rulings regarding what is forbidden and permitted?" Reb Elchonon replied. Reb Shraga was shocked and deeply hurt. Those present were also astonished by Reb Elchonon's sharp rejoinder, so unlike his normal behavior.¹⁰ Subsequently they realized that Reb Elchonon himself was torn by an inner conflict, and was fighting to strengthen his resolve. He had decided that it was his duty to return to Poland, despite the danger and even at the cost of his life. Yet in the face of the many cogent arguments made in favor of his remaining — among them the benefit that would accrue to Jewry as a whole — he was afraid of yielding to persuasion, and so he replied to Reb Shraga with exaggerated forcefulness. He also hastened to sail on the first available boat, and would not defer his voyage even by a day. Asked by Rabbi Naftali Carlebach of the *Kehillas Yacov* Congregation in New York what justification he had for knowingly returning to a danger zone, he answered unequivocally: "I am a soldier; I have to go to the front."¹¹

To Stay or To Go?

months, despite his premonition that the catastrophe was approaching. During *Sivan* 5699 (1939) he was among the guests of the Sternbuch family in London. When he was about to depart the mistress of the house suggested that perhaps it would be better for him to wait until the situation clarified. Rumor had it that war with Poland was likely any day. He answered: (1) The captain does not desert his ship in a storm, and (2) his remaining away would not help. "These are the birthpangs of the Messiah, and it has been decreed upon us to bear them. No one can escape or avoid his assigned portion of the birthpangs of the Messiah." (The testimony of the son, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, author of *Moadim Uzemanim*.) Similarly, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the London *Etz Chaim*, attempted to convince Reb Elchonon, even as he was boarding his plane, to stay in England. He argued that it was a time of emergency, but Reb Elchonon refused outright. He was firmly resolved: "We shall all have to endure *chibbut hakever* (buffeting of the grave). I want to suffer this together with my students." (Related by Rabbi Zupnick, a former Baranovich pupil, who heard the account from Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, who visited the United States after the Holocaust.) See *Lev Eliyahu*, II (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 217, for similar remarks made by Reb Elchonon in the *Machzikei Hadas* synagogue in London.

Final moments...

12 Tammuz, 1941

מות הקדושים של אבינו הגאון ישראל הי"ד הי' המשך ישר בשלשלת קידוש השם ועסק וקיום התורה של ימי חייו. שערות הראש תסמרנה עת נעתיק בזה מזכרונותיו של עד ראי' הרב אפרים אשרי שליט"א — נתפרסמו בספרי הרב אשרי שליט"א, בעתונים באה"ק ובחו"ל, וגם בספריו של הרב מ"מ ישר (שליט"א) — את דבריו האחרונים לחבריו קדושי עליון כשהופסקו מלימודם — מס' נדה — והובלו לקדש שם שמים ביציאת נשמותיהם בעלות הלהב מעל המזבח ביום המר והנמהר י"א תמוז התש"א.

"ר' אלחנן האט גערעט רוהיג און געלאסען, ווי תמיד, אפילו די שטימע האט זיך ביי איהם ניט געביטען. אויף זיין פנים איז געווען די זעלבע ערענסטקייט ווי תמיד. ער האט אפילו ניט אנגעשלאגען א פערזענליכען טאן, ניט געפרואווט זיך געזעגענען מיט זיין זון ר' נפתלי. ער האט גערעט צו אלעמען, צו כלל ישראל.

[ר' אלחנן דבר בשקט תוך מנוחה נפשית כתמיד אף קולו לא השתנה במאומה, ארשת פניו הביעה רצינות אך רגילה, בדיבורו לא הרגישו כל נימה פרטית, לא ניסה אף להפריד מבנו ר' נפתלי. שיחתו היתה מכוונת לכלם, לכלל ישראל...]

R' Elchanan spoke quietly with his usual composure. His voice was no different than always. He looked very serious but altogether normal... He did not attempt to part specifically from his son, R' Naftali, but spoke to one and all, to Klal Yisrael.

[במרומים מחשיבים אותנו כצדיקים, כנראה, כי נבחרנו לכפר בגופותינו על כלל ישראל, אי לזאת אנו צריכים לשוב לה' בתשובה שלִימה ומיד במקום... הזמן קצר, הזדך למבצר התשיעי (מקום הסבך של קדושי סלבודקה קובנה) קרובה, עלינו לדעת כי קרבנותינו יעלו יותר לרצון ע"י התשובה, וע"י כך נציל את חייהם של אחינו ואחיותינו באמריקה...]

[שלא תעלה ברעיוננו איזו שהיא מחשבת פסול ח"ו, שהיא כפיגול ופוסלת את הקרבן, אנו מקיימים עתה את המצוה הכי גדולה, "באש הצתה ובאש אתה עתיד לבנותה" האש היוקדת את גופותינו היא האש שתחזור ותקים מחדש את בית ישראל.]

ויעלו קדושי עליון בסערה השמימה, ותורה באש חזרה עם תיקה ונרתיקה והדורשה וחוקרה, וגאון ישראל מופת הדור והדרו מנהיגו וקברניטו אדאמו"ר זצוקל"ה אבינו רכב ישראל בעתותי שלו' ופרשיו בשעות חירום ומלחמה ואחריו אחינו הקדושים העלוי העצום וקדוש הרב **נפתלי בינוש** זצוק"ל וצדיק וקדוש אהוב ונחמד הרב **צבי יהודא לייב** זצוק"ל הי"ד יצאו נשמותיהם מתוך אהלה ופלפולה של תורה מגופות צרופים בכל מיני טהרה גוילים נשרפים ואותיות פורחות, ואנחנו יושבים משוממים באשמה גדולה ובעוונותינו נתנו אנחנו מלכינו וכהנינו ביד מלכי הארצות בחרב בשבי ובכזה וכבשת פנים כהיום הזה ועתה כמעט רגע היתה תחנה מאת ה' אֱלֹקֵינו להשאיר לנו פליטה ולתת לנו יתר במקום קדשו להאיר עינינו אֱלֹקֵינו ולתתנו מחי' מעט בעבודתנו (עזרא ט') חידושי תורה וביאורי הלכות אודים מוצלים מאש להאיר עולם אשר חשך בעדנו, ומהם הספר הנדפס בזה **קובץ הערות** ועוד ספרים שיבואו אי"ה אחריו למאור עיני ההוגים בתורת ה' וממיתים עצמם באהלה.

In the heavens we are apparently regarded as righteous people, for we have been chosen to atone, through our physical selves, for the Jewish nation. Therefore, we must engage in complete repentance, and immediately ... time is short. The way to the Ninth Fort is near, and we must keep in mind that through our repentance, our sacrifice will be held in greater favor. No improper thought should enter our mind, heaven forefend, for it would be like a blemish, invalidating our sacrifice. We are now fulfilling the greatest mitzva. "You set fire to it, and through fire You are destined to rebuild it" (from the Tisha Be-Av prayers). The fire that burns our bodies will be the fire that will return and revive the house of Israel."

Torah: Yiras Shamayim

Kovetz Maamarim

“The end of the matter, all having been heard, fear God, and keep His commandments, *for this is the whole man*” [Ecclesiastes 12:13]. The intention in this is that it should not enter your mind to say that the fear of God is a virtue in a human being and whoever does not have the fear of God is a human being but lacks a necessary virtue. The text comes to tell us that this is not so. For one who does not have *yirat shamayim* is not a human being at all, but an animal, *for this is the whole man* [i.e., *yirat shamayim* is the whole man] and without it one does not have the rank of a man....

[E]ach human being is a microcosm containing within him the characteristics of all creatures, higher and lower. Thus, the faculties of all the vicious animals in the world are present in the human being. And you have no vicious animal more terrible than this one! Moreover, does not the human being possess instruments of destruction that no other beast in the world possesses – namely, thought and speech.

If a beast of prey must be bound with an iron chain, how many chains are needed to stop a terrible beast like man? Now, when God created man, he certainly created the chain to bind him so that he not destroy the world. And what is this chain? It is the fear of God, which alone has the power to stop a man from being like a beast of prey. Other than it, no ruse in the world is capable of restraining a human being from wreaking harm. Even if one is a sage and philosopher like Aristotle, his wisdom will not protect him when his passion attacks him. Thus

Abraham said to Abimelech, “*only* the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife’s sake” [Genesis 20:11]. The implication of “only” is that with the exception of the fear of God they did not lack any of the intellectual or moral virtues, but all this is of no avail if the fear of God is not among them.¹³

Torah: Lighting while Learning

Kovetz He'aros

"Should Kollel students should interrupt their studies to return home to kindle Chanukah lights at the optimal time or remain in the Bait Midrash until the conclusion of their scheduled study period"



לקיימה ע"י אחרים. וז"ל דכיון דאירי הרמז"ס הכא לענין
איחור המנחה ולא לענין ביטולה לגמרי, מה שאפשר לקיימה
ע"י עצמו לאחר זמן, הו"ל כאפשר לקיימה ע"י אחרים,
ובזה שייך לומר גם צח"ת עוסק במנחה פטור ממנחה.

Torah: “Contemporary” Lessons of Chanukah

Kovetz Maamarim

מלהלחם, אלא ברור, כי בימי המן ידעו כי לא זו הדרך להלחם בזרוע ואחזו רק באומנות אבותיהן לצעוק אל ה'. אמנם בגזירת אנשיוכס, אף כי בודאי ג"כ התענו והתפללו לה', בכ"ז לא הסתפקו בזה, אלא חרפו נפשם למות במלחמה ממש. וצריך להבין טעם ההבדל הזה.

When, as with Purim, there is a decree targeting Jews physically, it is, in truth, Hashem's decree, intended to arouse us to repent. In this circumstance, there is no place for armed resistance, and it won't succeed. But when there is an effort to tear Jews away from Judaism, that is the work of the satan, and in order to weaken the satan's power, Jews are called upon to go to war and be willing to lay down their lives for this cause.

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