

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generations. Noah walked with G-d" (Gen 6:9).

In the name of the Sages, Rashi says the following on this verse, "For some of our Sages, 'in his generations' is to his credit, for if he was righteous in his own generation, how much more would he have been in a generation of righteous men. For others, this is to his discredit, for he was righteous only in comparison to his contemporaries, but had he lived in the time of Abraham, he would not have been so notable."

Let us begin by relating what Rabbi Hiya bar Achy said: "The righteous rest neither in this world nor the next, as it is said, 'They advance from strength to strength; each one will appear before G-d in Zion' [Ps 84:8]" (Berachot 64a).

Concerning this subject, the Vilna Gaon wrote that in this world, it is said that man "walks", for he advances without stop and grows in the knowledge of Torah and the performance of commandments and good deeds. But in the next world, he no longer has any obligations, for it is written, "I will grant you passage among these [angels] who stand here" (Zec 3:7). In the next world, everyone is static (like the angels), and it is only in this world that we have the possibility to grow spiritually. This is why it is said

concerning angels that they "stand up", but of men that they "walk", for men should always be progressing.

We can go on further and note that, once we leave a dead body we say "Lech Beshalom", but when we leave a living person we say "Lech Leshalom" (Berachot 64a). This is because the letter Beth represents a state that is static and permanent, which is the case with the dead, whereas the letter Lamed represents movement and activity. And yet, it is said concerning certain of the righteous that they "walk" even in the next world, because there too they continue to progress. The Sages say concerning them, "Even in the next world they have no rest," and they continue to grow and advance in the service of G-d.

We see therefore that there are two types of people: Those who, when they arrive in the next world, remain static, and those who continue to progress. What is the difference between a man who observes the Torah, obeys the commandments, and performs acts of goodness in this world – yet in the next world remains static – and a righteous man who did the same yet continues to progress in the next world?

There are pious men who study and observe the Torah, but who unfortunately work only for themselves, giving no thought to others. They share none of their teachings with others, don't pray for them, don't care about the welfare or well being of their fellow, don't correct them in their conduct, etc. Of such people it is true, they don't have rest in this world, but they grow without concerning

themselves over the needs of others, needs that they don't come to aid. They remain cloistered in their "four cubits". All the time that they spend in this world, they grow. But when they leave this world for the next, they remain calcified in the level that they reached when they passed away. In the next world, they will no longer be able to take action, as it is written, "Among the dead who are free" (Ps 88:6) which means that "Death frees one from all obligations" (Shabbat 30a, 151b; Niddah 61b). Concerning these righteous, it is said that they find peace in the next world, having no longer to exert themselves, but they remain at the level that they attained in the lower world.

On the other hand, there is another category of men, righteous as well, who of course occupy themselves with the study of Torah, obey the commandments, and fear G-d, but possess the additional characteristic of coming to the aid of others. They help to encourage and bring people back to G-d. Aside from their individual piety, they put themselves at the disposal of others, and their reward is great. Although they have no rest in this world (occupied as they are with gladly providing for the needs of other), they are happy to help and direct people in the right path and teach them Torah, and are rewarded by seeing the fruit of their labor.

Since "G-d deprives no creature of its reward" (Bava Kama 38b; Nazir 23b; Pesachim 118a), and He pays

Continuation page 2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT (continuation from page 1)

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back to each measure for measure, their joy and reward in the next world will be to continue to progress by concerning themselves over the fate of Jews still living. As our Sages say, “Jews, even when dead, are called alive” (Berachot 18a).

Noah is an example. As we said earlier, even though the Torah testifies that he was “a righteous man and perfect in his generations” (Gen 6:9), some Sages judge him unfavorably. Why did they interpret this verse negatively?

It is because at the end of the section, it is simply said of Noah that he was “a man of the earth” (Gen 9:20). And why? Because he was concerned only about saving himself, not others. His very name, Noah, indicates rest (mihnuha in Hebrew); Noah was troubled only over himself. This wasn't the case with Abraham, who thought not only of himself, but also came to the aid of others, whom he instructed in the fear of G-d. It is written, “And the souls that they made in Haran” (Gen 12:5), which are Sages explain as follows: “Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women, and the Torah considers this as if they themselves had created them.” It is possible that this is the reason why it is written, “Noah walked with G-d” (Gen 6:9), for he went only with G-d in his observance of the commandments, without concerning himself with others.

The Sages ask, “With what do the righteous occupy themselves in the next world?” (Zohar I:183a, III:159b-160a). They answer as follows: “In the next world, they occupy themselves with the same things that they did in this world.” This means that if they were occupied only with Torah, they will continue to study Torah, and if they also helped others – praying for and having a positive influence on the lives of their contemporaries – then in the next world they will continue to do so.

This is why “the righteous rest neither in this world nor the next” (see Maharcha, Berachot 64a). In the next world, “they sit and rejoice in the Divine Splendor” (Berachot 17a; Avot D'Rabbi Nathan 1:8). Because of this, if we make mention of their merit in our prayers, we will disturb them in their rest, and what's more, will connect them to the material world, which for them constitutes a great disruption. It is extremely difficult for them to leave their rest, up there, to take note of the concerns in this lower world and to pray for us. Yet despite this, when we expose them to the problems of the material world, they remember that they too were once part of it. They recall how difficult it is to live in this world, and so

they pray for us in order that we may be granted an abundance of blessings and success.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai protected his entire generation in his lifetime, to the point that he could say, “I could have saved the entire world from catastrophe” (Sukkah 45b). After his death he also continued to protect the world, and even in our days his name is revered by all. It is the same with Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, may his merit protect us. I've heard it said that the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, in his lifetime, felt the personal problems of everyone. If such was the case when he was alive, how much more so after his death. It is therefore not without reason that, in order to benefit from the merit of his father-in-law, the Lubavitcher Rebbe z"l would read at his gravesite the requests and letters that he received. Similarly, it is said concerning my ancestor and revered teacher, the holy Rabbi Haim Pinto, that he had promised before dying that whoever would pray at his gravesite on the day of his Hilloula (Elul 26), would be favorably mentioned on the day of Rosh Hashanah.

And yet all the men who have, during their lifetime, observed Torah in the hopes of being able to eternally bask in the Divine Splendor don't become renowned after their death. This doesn't mean that the righteous who have remained unknown have not helped others, but rather that their contemporaries were incapable of recognizing the great sanctity of their souls, and that is why they remain relatively unknown.

It is therefore natural that certain people mistake themselves into thinking that men known for their piety don't deserve the honors that they receive, or that they attained their position without effort or pain. This is simply not true. These righteous men greatly suffered before becoming known, struggling day and night to become one of the “Righteous for whom G-d executes the decree” (Shabbat 59a). Nothing is gotten without effort and without pain, even less so the fear of G-d, of which it is said, “Everything is in the hands of G-d except the fear of G-d” (Berachot 33b; Zohar I:59a). It is certain that they worked very hard before attaining their position.

Without a doubt, the righteous after their death continue to work for their people, and they progress and their powers grow due to those who follow them and who give them merit. When we recall the Patriarchs in our prayers, G-d is favorable to us because of their merit, as it is said, “And I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember “ (Lev 26:42).

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

Rabbi Elyahu Lopian

How Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian prepared himself in light of the Great Judgment

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian was born in Poland. His father and mother, Rabbi Yaakov z"l and Rebbetzin Freida, were known for their piety and their Yirat Shamayim, their fear of G-d.

Having just reached the age of thirteen, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian's entire family decided to immigrate to the United States. Now the little Eliyahu didn't want to hear of leaving, wanting entirely to continue studying there. He was therefore completely opposed to this plan, to the degree that his parents resigned themselves to leaving without him, but not without having seen to it that he was registered in the Lomza Yeshiva.

To persuade him to come rejoin his family in the United States, Rabbi Yaakov refrained from sending his son money for the first three months after their departure, certain that the difficulties of life would soon make him change his mind. But, as he would later recount, the future Rabbi Eliyahu of Lopian had in mind only one objective: Torah study, which he was consecrated to with all his soul.

Rabbi Eliyahu therefore spent his youth in Poland, studying until he became a Gaon – a genius recognized by all – specializing in Mussar (Jewish moral teachings). He would eventually marry and build numerous yeshivas, not only in his native country, but in Eretz Israel as well.

Rabbi Eliyahu was accustomed to traveling to cities and villages and give courses and lectures in front of enormous crowds. Lasting for hours, he made Jewish parents understand the absolute necessity of sending their children to study in yeshiva.

One of his students related the following story: One morning, having entered the room of my teacher to bring him breakfast, I noticed that he was extremely tired. I asked him why he was so, and he responded, "I'll tell you. It's because I wake up every morning before sunrise." I asked him why he forced himself to get up so early, since the morning service at the yeshiva only started at seven o'clock. He explained as follows: "It's written in our holy books that at the moment a man arrives in the world above, we ask the man if he observed Torah and mitzvot. He will no doubt respond yes. We will then bring him a Shulchan Aruch and will begin to question him, section by section. We will no doubt begin with the first volume, that of

Orah Chaim. Now in this section, the author decides in this manner: 'Everyone should arouse himself like a lion to wake up in the morning so as to accomplish his task of serving G-d. It's for man to awaken the dawn.' Now it won't be pleasant to transgress already the first section of the Shulchan Aruch. This is why I obligate myself to awaken very early in the morning, so as to be in a position to say that I carried out this command properly."

One day Rabbi Eliyahu said the following: "I sometimes have the impression that I've corrected in myself the character fault of kapdanut, severity. But this is not the case. In fact, if I don't feel ill disposed towards anyone, it's because everyone shows me respect. But if I were put to the test, perhaps this fault would show itself. To what can we compare this? To a thief, who found neither the right place nor the right time to commit his crime. Which is to say that I've corrected my fault as much as the thief has corrected his – coveting – his desire to steal other people's money. It is the same for me. To know if someone is capable of harboring a grudge, all one has to do is see if, in his home, he acts as though everyone should obey his rules."

One day, as he was coming home, Rabbi Eliyahu noticed that the cleaning woman had just finished washing the floor. Our teacher stopped at the doorstep, and began to diligently wipe his shoes at the doormat in order to clean them. Wanting thereafter to verify if they were clean, he held himself up on one foot, then on the next, to scrutinize each sole. Assured that they were clean, he finally entered the house. As one can well imagine, the cleaning woman, understanding that Rabbi Eliyahu didn't want to dirty the floor and thus ruin her work, couldn't believe her eyes. "Never," she later said, "have I ever seen someone trouble themselves over others like this!"

The entire existence of our teacher was devoted to kedusha (sanctity), tahara (purity), and Torah, which is what drove him to always push himself to elevate his behavior towards perfection. This elevation manifested itself with the greatest brilliance during Yamim Noraim, the days of awe that span the gap between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The Hilloula of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian is Elul 19.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

The right choice (A teaching of the Maggid of dubno)

And Noah began [to be] a man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard" (Gen 9:20). Our Sages say that Noah should have begun with another type of crop. Why? Is the grape – and above all, wine – not important?

Why then was Noah's choice incorrect?

The Maggid of Dubno gives us the following machal (parable):

"Tell me Shimon, isn't that the saintly Reb Meshulam sitting over there at the large round table?" David asked.

"Where?" exclaimed Shimon, leaping. He was all excited. "Here, at the hotel? In the same room as us?"

The two friends wanted to confirm this with the manager of the hotel, so they went in search of him. In getting to the kitchen, they managed to almost get run over by two waiters carrying rather large platters.

David asked one of them, "Is that really the Tzaddik Reb Meshulam sitting over there at the table of honor, in the dining room?"

"Certainly" replied the waiter, all out of breath. "And I have to bring him these dishes immediately."

"What a incredible chance!" David said as he shook Shimon by the shoulders. "The great Tzaddik in person! All that we have to do is to wait for the right time and ask him for a blessing. Everyone knows that his blessings always come true."

A few hours later, Shimon and David left the hotel, their faces beaming.

"A blessing from the Tzaddik!" David repeated to all who wanted to hear. "You heard what he told me: The first thing that I would do when I get home would be successful, guaranteed. And you know what I thought of? I'm first going to take that sac of gold coins – the one that contains all my savings – and I'm going to count everything in it. Piece by piece, I'm going to count! I'm going to be rich Shimon! You hear me? I'm going to become a millionaire!"

At these words, David began to walk faster, while Shimon struggled to keep up. At an intersection, where their ways parted, David barely stopped to say goodbye to his friend. Shimon, on the contrary, wished him good luck.

His friend was already far away when he nevertheless shouted: "You'll tell me what happened. I hope that everything works out the way you want."

"Good luck to you too," cried David before disappearing over the bend.

At David's home a few moments later, he burst out and cried, "Sarah! Get over here fast! I met the Tzaddik! Bring me my sac with all the gold coins. Quickly!"

Poor Sarah. She didn't even get a Shalom Aleichem from her husband, nor any explanation. All that she could understand was that her husband had met a big Rebbe who was in dire need of money, and her husband intended to give him his life savings. But what was so urgent?

"Tell me first what happened David. I'll bring you the sac afterwards. I absolutely have to know," she demanded.

"No! No! And no!" David stamped his fist on the table. "Do what I'm asking you. I need it now – immediately! Yes, that's it! The very first thing! Where is it? Where did you hide it?"

"I'm going to get you something to drink," Sarah said in rushing to get a glass.

But he didn't let her divert him from his first idea. "No! Stop this stupid game! I don't want anything for now. You're going to ruin everything! The money – get me the money! That's all I'm asking you," David ranted.

But the more he screamed, the more Sarah couldn't bear to give him the money. She was thrown into a panic to see him in such a state.

"No David! It's not possible. Let's discuss it beforehand."

The "discussion" turned very quickly into an argument. Then there was a veritable cat and mouse game played. And who won? David of course. Didn't the Tzaddik tell him that he would succeed in the first thing he chose to do when he got home? The very first thing – even if it was an argument

with his wife!

And so David won. But in reality he had really lost. He had lost the opportunity to count his money in the "shadow" of the blessing. The blessing didn't help him become rich. Unfortunately, it only served in helping him get into an argument with his wife, which was a sad result indeed, and an enormous loss.

"Vayahel Noah [and Noah began]" can also be read as "and Noah profaned" (he made himself Chol, the opposite of holy).

The Torah, in using these two meanings, comes to teach us that Noah dishonored himself by choosing the grape as his first crop.

After the flood, G-d gave Noah His blessing in everything that he did in order to rebuild the world. But it was up to Noah to decide how to use this blessing. He chose to plant the grapevine that he had taken with him aboard the ark. The blessing occurred immediately: The same day that Noah planted them, the grapevines blossomed and brought forth fruit. That same day, Noah picked the grapes and made some wine. He became drunk and dishonored himself.

Noah had received a blessing, just as David had in our story. Both of them were responsible for using it with care, as if it were a powerful machine. They didn't think to anticipate the consequences of their choices, and Noah's lack of foresight brought about his fall. Not only that, but Canaan, his grandson, was cursed because of him. And yet Noah was a Tzaddik! It was he who was granted the privilege of rebuilding the world after the flood, and yet Noah lost everything by taking action without thinking, like David in our story. On the other hand, if we pay attention to the consequences of our actions, and act according to the wishes of HASHEM, we will profit from the benefits of blessings for many years to come.

Eishet Chayil

LAWS OF THE MORNING BLESSINGS

- Women are obligated to recite the morning blessings every day, with the exception of shelo asani isha, which must be replaced by she'asani kirtzono, without mentioning the name of G-d or His majesty. On the other hand, women say the blessings of shelo asani goya and shelo asani shifnah by pronouncing the name of G-d.

- As soon as one has opened their eyes, and this before performing netilat yadayim, one says the modeh ani blessing by which one thanks G-d for having returned the breath of life to the individual. Women also have the obligation to say this blessing.

- On Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, one does not say the blessing of she'asa li kal tsarki.

- A blind person does not say the blessing of pokayha ivrim.

- Women are obligated to recite the blessings concerning the Torah, for they are obligated to study the laws that apply to them: The laws of Shabbat, the laws concerning the taking of challah, the laws of family purity, the laws concerning the blessings used in different benedictions (Birkat Hamazon, etc.), and the laws on the lighting of the candles for Shabbat and Yom Tom.

- One may recite the morning blessings either standing or sitting, but one avoids saying them in a nightgown or in an apron used for cleaning around the house.

- Women should first recite the morning blessings before all other prayers (such as the selichot prayers, or those that one is accustomed to saying, such as vatitpalail Hannah).

- A woman who was up all night must recite the morning and Torah blessings as soon as sunrise. On the other hand, she will wash her hands without saying the blessing for netilat yadayim.