

# הַמַּחְלָה וְהַדָּרָה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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**HEVRAT PINTO**

Under Aegis of

**Rabbi David Hanania Pinto** שליט"א

11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: 01 42 08 25 40 • Fax 01 42 08 50 85

[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)

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### **WHO IS STRONG? HE WHO SUBDUES HIS EVIL INCLINATION**

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**W**hen Jacob “rolled the stone from the mouth of the well” (Gen 29:10), our Sages tell us that he did it as easily as “someone who uncorks a bottle” (Bereshith Rabba 70:12), which shows us just how strong Jacob was.

Some questions may be asked here:

Q1. It is written, “When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well.” Why didn’t he do this sooner? Why only when Rachel came with the flock?

Q2. If Jacob was in fact so strong, why didn’t he fight when Eliphaz, acting on his father Esau’s orders (Sefer Hayashar, Vayeitzei), chased him in order to kill him?

There are several possible answers to this second question:

A1. If Jacob had killed Eliphaz, Esau’s hate would have been further fueled, and he would never have forgiven him for this crime.

A2. We know that Eliphaz had grown up with the Patriarch Isaac and was raised in the way of Torah (Sefer Hayashar, ibid.). The Sages add that Eliphaz, Esau’s son, was a virtuous man, and not only that, but he possessed Divine inspiration (Devarim Rabba 2:13). If he

were to have killed him, Jacob would have inflicted great pain on Isaac, which is why he didn’t do so.

A3. The fact is, Jacob wanted to see if Eliphaz would be satisfied in only taking his possessions, while leaving him alive. And this is precisely what happened. If, however, Eliphaz would not have been content in only taking his possessions, it is highly probable that Jacob would have fought him.

A4. Actually, Jacob could have fought, but G-d wanted to hand his possessions over to Eliphaz. This is clear by the fact that, despite the blessings that Jacob received from his father and the promises made to him by G-d, Eliphaz nevertheless pursued him with intention to kill. This occurred because G-d didn’t want Jacob to become wealthy through his father’s inheritance, but rather from what G-d would give him.

A5. Finally, Jacob wanted to reduce the severity of the decrees that would be levied against his descendants over the course of the generations, since “the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children” (Sotah 34a). In the case where the descendants of Esau would want to harm the Children of Israel, they would only be able to harm their possessions, not they themselves. They would only be able to take their goods, not extinguish their lives.

This is also the answer to the first question. Jacob didn’t demonstrate such great strength until Rachel approached with her flock because

he wanted her to see him and tell Laban her father just how strong he was, and thus discourage him from warring against him. On the contrary, it was preferable to have him keep the flock, which he would watch over day and night.

There is a lesson to be learned here concerning Jacob’s strength. When a man is weak and doesn’t have the courage to fight the evil inclination that burns inside him, he thereby falls into its trap. Just as Jacob removed the rock from the mouth of the well, everyone can learn from him how to strengthen himself in the study of Torah (Torat Hacoanim Vayikra 26:3) and to evade the evil inclination, which is called a “rock” (Sukkah 52a). Jacob possessed the strength that the Torah provides, a strength that, as our Sages say, is compared to a well of living waters: “The Torah is called ‘life’. It is an elixir of life for all parts of the body.” The Sages add: “If you encounter this scoundrel, drag him along to the house of study; if he is of rock, he will be shattered; if he is of iron, he will be melted, as it is said, ‘Behold, My word is like fire – the word of the L-RD – and like a hammer that shatters a rock’ [Jer 23:29]” (Sukkah 52b). Such is the power of the Torah.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

### Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia

Credit must go to Rabbi Haim Aboulafia for the rebuilding and restructuring of the Jewish community of Tiberias. Rabbi Haim Aboulafia was born in Hebron in 1660, and rendered his soul to G-d on Nissan 6, 1744.

During his youth, Hebron's Jewish community sent him on a mission to Turkey, where his knowledge and wisdom enabled him to be named Chief Rabbi of Izmir. In addition, upon returning to the Holy Land he was named Chief Rabbi of Sefat and later of Tiberias.

He was the friend and study partner of two of the greatest sages of his generation: The author of *Peri Hadash* and the author of *Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh*. He himself wrote several important works on Torah, in particular *Etz Haim*, *Mikraei Kodesh*, *Yosef Lechah*, *Shevuot Yaakov*, *Yachei Yaakov*, and a commentary on the laws of Passover and the holidays.

Rabbi Haim Aboulafia committed himself to the spiritual resurrection of Tiberias' Jewish community through the construction of yeshivas and synagogues. As well, he consecrated himself to the development of the city itself by improving numerous homes for the community. Yet he didn't stop there, as the members of the community owed him much – some their jobs, some their livelihoods. In fact Rabbi Haim, whose name had become synonymous with *chesed* (generosity), was responsible for reviving the famous Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes fund, a communal fund devoted to the city's poor. He didn't hesitate to send messages, and messengers, to the Diaspora and call Jews the world over to come help their brothers in Tiberias.

During that era, the Holy Land's Jewish community was weak, and the country's roads were fraught with danger. An Arab Sheik, who had rebelled against the central controlling power, marched on Tiberias and took control of the town and its surroundings. This Sheik wanted to develop the region under his control and knew that he could only achieve this with the help of the Jewish community. He hoped that Jews would settle in Tiberias, create jobs by investing there, and give the city a much-needed boost. In doing so, the Sheik also sought to increase his power base and political standing against the *Pasha* (high ranking official) who ruled in Damascus.

This Sheik therefore wrote letters to the leaders of the Jewish communities in Turkey, proposing that they encourage their brothers to settle in Tiberias. He promised to grant them protection and rights.

Thus Rabbi Haim Aboulafia, who was then Chief Rabbi of Izmir in Turkey, had found an opportunity to return to the Holy Land, which he did as soon as possible with his family and a dozen of his students. Beforehand, however, he went through the entire city collecting funds aimed at strengthening the community of Tiberias. On the day that he did this, the Sultan was also in town, and when he came across Rabbi Haim Aboulafia, he saw a column of fire above the head of the Tzaddik.

The Sultan hastened to have Rabbi Haim Aboulafia approach him, then showed him so much respect that the Sultan's counselors were astonished. "If you had seen the column of fire above his head as I did, you too would have showed him honor," he replied.

The Sultan wasn't content to simply show Rabbi Haim Aboulafia honor. When he learned that the great Rabbi was gathering funds for his sacred cause, he rushed to give him a very large sum of money.

Thanks to this, as soon as he arrived in Tiberias, Rabbi Haim Aboulafia took to renovating a synagogue located in the very same place that the Arizal used to pray. The community didn't cease to grow and develop with every new wave of immigrants from countries abroad. It was thus that Rabbi Haim, after having built a magnificent synagogue, went on to create stores, public markets, and local industries as well.

It was not surprising that the author of *Ohr HaChayim*, on the day that he immigrated to the Holy Land, decided to settle in Tiberias, and this even before coming to Jerusalem. The Rabbi of the city endeavored to persuade him to stay and build a yeshiva there, but the author of *Ohr HaChayim* replied that he couldn't do so before receiving a letter from by his Italian friends. The Chief Rabbi of Tiberias therefore dispatched messages to the leaders of the Jewish communities in Italy.

Before the answer could arrive, however, it happened that the Pasha of Damascus resolved to quell the Arab Sheik's rebellion, and so he dispatched a significant military force to Tiberias with firm intention of reconquering it. For 85 days, assault troops tried subjecting the city to such massive bombardment that Rabbi Haim's friends begged him to escape. But he stubbornly refused, certain that Tiberias would not suffer from this attack. With a surprising calm, he promised that with G-d's help, nothing bad would happen. And in fact the shells aimed at Tiberias miraculously missed all their targets and landed in Lake Kinneret.

Among the assault troops, the rumor quickly spread that the bombardment's failure was a result of Rabbi Haim's influence on the decisions of Heaven. They sensed that there was nothing they could do against Rabbi Haim's prayers, and so decided to rise up against their commanding officer and break camp.

This occurred on Kislev 4, and in order to commemorate this miracle (comparable to the one of Purim) Rabbi Haim Aboulafia decreed that every year from then on, Kislev 4 would be a holiday for the Jewish community of Tiberias.

Several months later, the Pasha of Damascus once again attempted to attack. This time his troops assaulted the city from every side, including from the water. Frightened, the city's inhabitants joined together at the synagogue to hear Rabbi Haim say to them, "Don't be afraid. Remember that today is Friday, the eve of Shabbat. Tomorrow we read Parsha Shoftim, and in its Haftarah it is stated, 'Who are you that you should be afraid of mortal men?'"

The next day, Shabbat, Rabbi Haim again encouraged his compatriots by repeating this same prophetic verse.

Thus it was on Sunday that an emissary from the city of Akko arrived and announced that on the day earlier, the Pasha of Damascus fell seriously ill and died the very same day. All danger having thus finally been removed, the inhabitants of Tiberias decided that Elul 7 would itself be a holiday as well, in the same way as Purim.

From this we can easily understand that Divine protection never ceased to accompany Rabbi Haim, a protection that provided him with success in all his endeavors.

Of particular relevance to this subject is the following story, which occurred well before Rabbi Haim Aboulafia settled in Tiberias to become Chief Rabbi.

One day Rabbi Haim traveled to Sefat on a pilgrimage in order to pray at the tombs of the Tzaddikim. On the way back he passed by Tiberias, which was then a small town with a scanty population, inhabited solely by Bedouins. Rabbi Haim sent his *Shamash* (assistant) into town to buy him something to eat. When there, however, a group of non-Jewish youths ganged-up on the Shamash, throwing stones at him and then violently hitting him. They finally stopped and left, but the poor Shamash, who could only speak Turkish, Hebrew, and Spanish, didn't know what to do. He happened to notice a passer-by, who saw the Shamash and came to his aid. This man spoke a little Turkish, and our Shamash managed to

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## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### The final redemption (A teaching of the Maggid of dubno)

**A**nd [Jacob] dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reaching to the heavens, and behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending on it" (Gen 28:12).

In his dream, our father Jacob saw the angels of various nations. The angels of Babylon had climbed 70 rungs of the ladder, which correspond to the 70 years of our exile in that empire. The angels of Media climbed 52, and those of Greece 180. From this Jacob learned the length of his descendants' sojourn in each of these countries. Yet he was sure that each exile would end. Sooner or later, his children would return in peace to their country.

The last angel to climb the ladder was that of Edom. Our father Jacob counted the rungs that he climbed: 50, 100, 150, 200.... He didn't stop. Did this mean that Jacob's posterity would never be free from the clutches of his cruel brother Edom?

Hashem reassured him: "Even if you [the descendants of Esau] raise your nest like an eagle, or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there" (Ob 1:4).

Nevertheless, Hashem did not reveal to Jacob the length of time that the *Galut* (exile) of Edom would last.

The Maggid Of Dubno explains this by means of a parable.

A rich man of ripe old age died, bequeathing all his fortune to his only son. Since the little boy was still too young to take care of himself, the court named a guardian for him. The family of the heir lived in an immense home, and the guardian decided to put it up for rent. News of this quickly spread like wildfire, and four of the town's richest families rushed to acquire it, regardless of the price. A violent argument soon broke out.

"Why fight over it?" asked the guardian. "Years will pass before the heir will become old enough to live here. You should therefore agree to take turns living in this house. You have well enough time ahead of you."

Everyone accepted and a schedule was established. A contract was given to three of the families specifying their length of stay. The contract for the fourth family, however, did not specify when they had to leave. In effect, the guardian couldn't see that far in advance; he couldn't tell when the heir would be capable of taking charge of the place, since he was now much too young. The fourth contract therefore only stipulated that the family would leave when the heir would be ready to move in.

It is the same with Klal Israel. We will be in exile until worthy enough to merit the *Geula* (Redemption). The number of years that this takes depends solely on our behavior with regards to observing mitzvot and studying Torah. Hashem didn't reveal to Jacob the moment of the final redemption because He wants us to struggle each day to bring it about.

**May that day come as quickly as possible. Amen.**

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

### Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia (continuing from page 2)

explain to him what happened. From his description of what transpired, the man understood that the leader of the youths was the son of the Sheik of Tiberias. The man therefore suggested to the Shamash that he come with him to the Sheik, and assured him that the latter would not remain indifferent to this incident, and would no doubt punish his son for having publicly dishonored his father by his disgraceful conduct.

The Shamash accepted and followed the man to the Sheik, where he explained everything. And so indeed the Sheik became violently enraged and resolved to punish his son as he deserved: "Even 100 clubs on his back wouldn't be enough to pardon such an offence!"

Having heard from the Shamash that he served the great Tzaddik Rabbi Haim Aboulafia, the Sheik thereafter asked if he could meet him. Thus Rabbi Haim came to the Sheik, who received him with great honor. He was impressed by the both the Rabbi and his Shamash, and confided in Rabbi Haim the following: "The punishment that I swore to inflict on my son is clearly too severe. Please advise me on another punishment, but in such a way that I don't break my oath."

Rabbi Haim responded, "Since you didn't speak of actually blows, I suggest that you simply place 100 clubs on his back without actually striking him. In this way you will not break your oath, and it will be sufficient to dissuade your son from repeating his offensive behavior."

Hearing such wise advice, the Sheik took a great liking to Rabbi Haim Aboulafia, and when the time came he generously helped him to rebuild the Jewish community in Tiberias.

The Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Aboulafia is Nissan 6.

## Eishet Chayil

### BIRKAT HAGOMEL, TEFILAT HADERECH, AND SHECHEYANU

1. Women are obligated to recite the *Birkat Hagomel* blessing after an illness in which they were confined to bed, as well as after childbirth. They may recite this blessing in the woman's section of the synagogue when a *minyan* of ten men is present. They may also recite it at home when ten men are assembled for the ceremony commemorating the birth of a girl, and for a boy on the night before the *Brit Milah* (called *Brit Yitzhak*) or during the meal following the *Brit Milah* itself. One must recite this blessing in a raised voice so that it may be heard.

2. A woman who travels more than 72 minutes from one city to another should recite *Tefilat Haderech* (the prayer for travelers). This blessing is performed when one travels by car, train, or airplane.

3. It is traditional to have a small party and a thanksgiving meal for a girl's *Bat Mitzvah*, the day when she reaches the age of twelve years and a day (which is to say, on her twelfth birthday). During this celebration, it is advisable to speak *Devrei Torah*, to discuss Jewish ethics, and to address praise and thanks to G-d. One must equally ensure that all rules of modesty demanded by our Holy Torah are respected. It is recommended that the young girl wears new clothes on that day, and that she recites the *Shecheyanu* blessing.

4. Women recite the *Birkat Hailanot* blessing (for trees in bloom) in the month of Nissan when they see two fruit trees in bloom.