

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## ***The children of Jacob were conceived in complete purity***

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**T**heir father Jacob said to them, 'I am the one whom you bereaved! Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you would take away Benjamin?' (Gen 42:36). Rashi cites the Midrash: "He suspected them of wanting to kill or sell Benjamin, just as they had sold Joseph" (Bereshith Rabba 91:9).

The sale and story of the bloodstained tunic that Jacob was alluding to indicates to us that he suspected them, which is something new. One must ask why he didn't believe their story.

Let us first cite some verses that deal with this subject. This will allow us to clearly understand the entire episode.

It is written, "He recognized it and he said, 'My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph has surely been torn to bits!' ... But he refused to comfort himself and said, 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.' And his father bewailed him" (Gen 37:33,35). Afterwards, when they went to Egypt to buy grain, it is written: "Behold, I have heard that there are provisions in Egypt. Go down there and purchase for us from there, that we may live and not die" (Gen 42:2). And so upon their father's request (v.3), the ten sons of Jacob went down to Egypt to buy things to eat.

In the verses that relate the sale of Joseph and the subsequent pain of Jacob, that which is not stated is by far more than that which is. Based on this, we may ask the following questions:

1. Why was Jacob's mourning so great? He had faith in G-d, and he knew that everything that happened came from Him. What was he afraid of then?

2. How is it that he suspected the brothers? Did he not know that "the one who suspects the innocent is punished for it" (Shabbat 97a)? He was certain that the brothers, "heads of the tribes of Israel" (Ps 122:4), were men without fault, upright and just (Shabbat 146a). Why then did he suspect them without proof

or reason? Moreover, after the sale of Joseph, Jacob lost Divine inspiration (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). How then was he able to know that his sons were guilty (since G-d didn't reveal it to him)?

3. How does one explain that all of Joseph's ten brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain? One or two would have sufficed to accomplish that task.

The Sages tell us, "Jacob should have gone down to Egypt in chains, but his merit protected him" (Shabbat 89b).

For his part, Jacob would certainly have preferred to go down to Egypt in chains, and to make the prophecy given to Abraham come true, rather than to suffer the pain of Joseph's sale and the loss of Divine inspiration (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). The prophecy to Abraham stipulated: "Your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own – and they will serve them, and they will oppress them – four hundred years" (Gen 15:13).

From the time that Jacob was told that Joseph was dead, Jacob served G-d in pain. He refused to let himself be consoled, and he feared that a lack of perfection (Pesachim 56a) prevented him from becoming "a receptacle for the Divine Presence" (Bereshith Rabba 47:8). Since he felt that he was missing such perfection, it meant that the fault lay in him, to the extent that he cried, "I will joint my son in the grave," so great was his pain and grief at the thought that he himself was the cause.

Concerning the verse that states, "he has surely [תא] been torn to pieces" (Gen 44:28), we may add that the word תא always expresses a limit (Pesachim 5a). This indicates to us that Jacob wasn't sure that a wild animal had devoured his son, and that's the reason why he refused all consolation. The Sages even said, "A law desires that the deceased be forgotten, since one doesn't accept consolation over a person who is still alive" (Bereshith Rabba 84:

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*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

21). As such, Joseph would still have been alive in Jacob's mind, and Jacob would have continued to pray to G-d, asking Him in His mercy to allow him to find his son. Jacob would have thereby known that his seed was perfect. Thus Jacob never lost hope of finding his son Joseph alive.

We can understand why Jacob hesitated so much to send his son Benjamin to Egypt, as it is said, "You will take Benjamin away!" (Gen 42:36). It is because "all roads are dangerous" (Yerushalmi Berachot 4: 4) and "the Satan appears only at a time of danger" (Yerushalmi Shabbat 2:6). Jacob feared that "should trouble befall him on the journey which you shall take, then you will have brought down my gray hair in sorrow to the grave" (Gen 42:38). If Benjamin were to die, it would be because the children of Jacob were not perfect. We see in this just how much suffering a man is prepared to accept, just as long as the Divine Presence doesn't leave him.

It's a known fact that there are some Jews that proclaim to be Jewish, yet don't at all hesitate to marry non-Jewish women. They should realize that not only does the Divine Presence abandon them when they distance themselves from the G-d of Israel, but that they also create enormous danger for the Jewish people as a whole. They especially cause their parents great suffering when they see their children leaving their people "to go feed in foreign pastures." Parents such as these prefer to die rather than to see their children assimilated among foreign peoples. Children such as these are guilty of selfishness, having acted this way only to satisfy their own desires, without thinking of the pain and suffering that they've caused.

When G-d saw the pain of Jacob, a man who longed for perfection, in His great goodness He restored to him a little Divine inspiration, as it is said, "Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt" (Gen 42:1). On this the Sages remarked: "By Divine inspiration, he saw that there was some hope by way of Egypt" (Bereshith Rabba 91:6).

In learning that his son Joseph was alive and that he was the governor of the entire country (Gen 42: 6), life came back to the heart of Jacob (Gen 45:27). Rashi explains as follows: The Divine inspiration that previously left him now came back (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). Jacob feared that his offspring lacked purity, this being the reason for why the Divine Presence abandoned him. But then, upon learning

that Joseph was the governor of Egypt and that he had remained a righteous man, Jacob understood that such was not the case. What's more, Divine inspiration was restored to him.

When Divine inspiration came back to him, he also knew that his sons, those who had sold Joseph, had prepared the journey down to Egypt, and that their intentions had been pure, since G-d Himself took part in the oath not to reveal the truth to Jacob (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). For what reason, therefore, did Jacob suspect his sons up to that point?

Everyone knows that the kindness that we experience in this world comes only because of the righteous, and that the entire world enjoys prosperity because of them, as it is written: "The whole world is fed thanks only to the merit of my son Hanania" (Taanith 24b). Actually, Jacob at first thought that his son was dead, and he was in mourning. Yet afterwards, upon seeing that Egypt was enjoying material and spiritual prosperity, he understood that this was thanks to Joseph. Jacob had no further doubts that his son was alive and that he had remained righteous, as the Sages testify (Vayikra Rabba 32:5), and he therefore had no further reason to suspect his sons in the sale of Joseph. He understood that everything had been motivated by pure intentions so that the Children of Israel could prepare for the descent into Egypt.

Now we can explain why Jacob sent his ten sons (except Benjamin) to Egypt. The elation felt in Jacob's home was great when they said that grain was for sale in Egypt. The reason for this joy was not because they had lacked food (since we know that some of the harvest still remained [Taanith 10b]), but rather because Divine inspiration had been restored to Jacob, and he was preparing himself to meet Joseph. He therefore sent all his sons to make peace with Joseph and to ask for his forgiveness. Finally, he also sent Benjamin so that the brothers could be reunited.

If there had not been a famine in the land of Canaan, the sons of Jacob would not have been able to descend into Egypt to find Joseph without awakening the suspicions of their father. The famine forced the brothers to descend into Egypt, which then gave them a pretext to look for Joseph without raising their father's suspicions.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

### Rabbi Israel Salanter

*A man who could see right to a person heart*

**R**abbi Israel Salanter could read a person's heart like an open book. One Shabbat, Rabbi Israel Salanter was invited for supper by a distinguished member of the city, a man who was also among one of Rabbi Salanter's friends. Yet he refused the invitation and said, "Outside of my home, I prohibit myself from eating regardless of where I am, unless I am sure that Kashrut in particular, and Halachah in general, are most strictly observed there."

The distinguished individual replied, "I can assure you that everything in my home stringently conforms to Torah and mitzvot. I only purchase meat at a butcher known for his fear of G-d, and whose products are beyond reproach. Our cook is a Jewish maid, and her behavior is, in all points, exemplary. She is the widow of a *Talmid Chacham* [a scholar], and she herself comes from an excellent family. In addition, my wife frequently comes into the kitchen to watch over everything. On the eve of Shabbat, we prepare a splendid table. In between each serving we speak of Torah in order not to be compared (G-d forbid) to those whom the Sages said 'have eaten of a sacrificed of idolatry.' We study Torah laws, sing songs in honor of Shabbat, and stay up at the table well into the night, moved by great joy."

In hearing this, Rabbi Israel Salanter could only accept the invitation. He laid out, however, one condition: That this time, the Friday night meal be shortened by two hours. The host accepted.

That Friday night, the meal went rather quickly. In between each of the servings, there were hardly any words of Torah exchanged, and barely any songs of Shabbat were sung. It was thus that one hour later, they came to the Birkat Hamazon. At that moment, the head of the household turned to Rabbi Israel and asked him to explain the strange condition that he had requested. Had the Rav found something to say on the behavior of his family at the table?

In response, Rabbi Israel called the widow who was busy in the kitchen. With great delicacy, he "excused himself" in front of her for having imposed such difficult work on her that night. As she stood there surprised, he said to her, "Because of me, you were obliged to bring out serving after serving in rapid succession, which is contrary to your normal routine."

Gripped with emotion, she told him, "May all the blessings possible come to the Rabbi! If only the Rabbi would come here every Friday night! Actually, the head of the household normally prolongs the

Shabbat meal well into the night. It's true that this tires me out, especially since I work all day, to the point that I can hardly stand. But thanks to the Rabbi, tonight everything was done quickly, and so I can go home early and relax."

Rabbi Israel turned to his host and said, "This poor widow answered your question and your surprise at my request. Certainly, you have a very beautiful way of celebrating the rest of Shabbat, but it's by depriving others of the rest that they also have a right to."

## Eishet Chayil

### SHABBAT CANDLES – PART I

1. Lighting the candles before Shabbat is an obligation imposed by our Sages. It is important to perform this mitzvah with attractive candles, as Rav Huna said, "Whoever is accustomed to having beautiful candles merits learned sons" (Shabbat 23a). It is proper, therefore, that women pray after lighting the candles, as their prayer is more surely accepted after having performed the mitzvah.
2. According to Halachah, it is sufficient to light one candle only, but we are accustomed to lighting at least two of them, one for *Zachor* and one for *Shamor*. The more candles we light on Shabbat, the more merit we have.
3. A woman who normally lights a certain amount of candles in honor of Shabbat cannot light less than this amount. If for some reason (financial or otherwise) she wishes to light less than she normally does, she should perform *Hatarat Nedarim* (annulment of vows) in front of three men.
4. A poor person who has very little to eat is obligated to light at least one candle in honor of Shabbat. Someone who doesn't have enough money to purchase both a candle for Shabbat and some wine for *Kiddush* should first purchase the candle. He can perform *Kiddush* over bread.
5. If because of a breeze (or other such cause), the candles become extinguished after a few minutes, a woman should relight them without saying the blessing, but only if it is before sundown. On the other hand, if it is after sundown, she doesn't light them so as not to desecrate Shabbat. If she has accepted Shabbat upon herself by lighting the candles, she can ask a member of her family, who has not yet accepted Shabbat, to light them in her place (again, only if it is before sundown).
6. It is proper to put on our Shabbat clothes before lighting. However if this will take too much time, we first light the candles and then put on our Shabbat clothes. A married woman should cover her head to recite the benediction. It is customary to give money to *tzeddakah* before lighting.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### THE UNPOPULAR DOCTOR (a teaching from the Maguid of Dubno)

**A**nd now let Pharaoh look for an intelligent and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt” (Gen 41:33).

Hashem gave Joseph the ability to explain Pharaoh’s strange dream. Seven years of abundance would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph even proposed a solution to confront this challenge.

Up to that point, Joseph had been but a simple prisoner. That we find him now raised to the rank of counselor to Pharaoh in so little time seems odd. Pharaoh didn’t lack counselors, and moreover they were all present for Joseph’s explanation of the dream. Up to that time, none of the counselors had given a satisfactory interpretation, and they were impatiently waiting to hear the interpretation of the Jewish prisoner.

Didn’t Joseph fear arousing their jealousy?

The Maggid of Dubno explains what Joseph had in mind by means of a parable.

There was once a king whose son fell gravely ill. Neither the court doctors nor those who had come from the four corners of the kingdom could find a remedy to the prince’s affliction. The king was in the grip of desperation. He sent his messengers to look for any individual capable of coming to his aid. It didn’t matter to him whether he was a doctor, magician or sorcerer. His son had to be cured at all costs. He thus ordered that there be allowed easy access to any doctor who wanted to examine the prince. The king didn’t want to waste any opportunity to save him.

In the capital there lived a very competent, but unpopular doctor. He used methods unfamiliar to his colleagues. He possessed remarkable expertise, but had been kept on the sidelines because everyone thought that he was a bit strange.

When the prince fell ill, he didn’t dare offer his services to the palace because of his reputation. Yet he was certain that he could cure the young boy with the help of a plant whose existence only he knew of. But why wear himself out by recommending this method, for all his associates would surely refuse to listen to him.

However, when he heard that all those thought capable of being of assistance could freely come and examine the prince, he presented himself at his bedside. He immediately understood that his solution was the most appropriate for the situation, and fervently wanting to save the boy, he hastened to ask for an audience with the king.

The king was sitting on his throne surrounded by all the doctors that had come there from around the world. Some had even brought cases full of rare medications. They would surely ridicule the simple treatment that he wanted to prescribe. He therefore needed a way to persuade them that his solution was the best possible one.

He asked for permission to relate the findings of his examination to the king and the doctors gathered there. His report completed, he made it known to them that he possessed a miracle treatment. But he didn’t stop at that.

“The potion of which I speak,” he added, “should be prepared by a thoroughly competent professional. He should collect the plant by the banks of the river, dry them, and crush them in very specific manner. He must absolutely be extremely skillful in order to produce it. The prince’s recovery depends on it.

“It goes without saying,” he concluded, “that such a specialist should be generously rewarded for his services.”

In hearing these last words, all the doctors there thought, “I have such a good reputation that it will certainly be me that the king chooses. The king should follow the man’s advice at all costs.”

All of a sudden, everyone began to applaud and shouted out with admiration for the “unpopular doctor.” They greatly encouraged the king to try this miracle cure. What was happening, in fact, was that everyone was secretly thinking of the reward that they would get by turning that famed plant into powder. However they were quite disappointed when the king chose for this task ... none other than the “strange doctor” himself!

“It is you who is most suited for this task. Of all the eminent people that I consulted,” declared the king, “you are the only one to have proposed an effective treatment. I am sure that you can cure my son and heal his pain. No one can compare to you. I therefore choose you to prepare this remedy and to take care of my son.”

The righteous Joseph found himself in the same situation. He was but a humble prisoner, a stranger in that country, and above all he was an *Ivri*, a Hebrew, and as such the Egyptians detested him.

How could he manage to convince the counselors to accept his own interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream? He therefore suggested that the king name an inspector general and put him in charge of overseeing the economy of the entire country. Every one of his ministers, each viewing himself as eminently suited to occupy such an important position, was certain that he would be the one designated.

Yet Hashem had decided differently. He had chosen Joseph to be at the head of power. And this is why Pharaoh told him, “Since G-d has caused you to know all this, there is none so intelligent and wise as you” (Gen 41:40).