

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## IMITATION INCREASE WISDOM

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**J**oseph was not crying on the shoulders of his father because he had missed him for 22 years. He cried in reflecting upon the greatness of Jacob's soul and the degree that he had reached in his service of G-d. Joseph sensed just how far he was from that level, and realized that he still required much time, practice and contemplation before ever reaching such a high state.

At that moment, Joseph learned that in the service of G-d, "imitation increases wisdom" (Bava Batra 21a). This is a positive kind of emulation, a type that makes a person more enthusiastic. Someone who sees his fellow serving G-d in a completely unselfish and enthusiastic way feels, no doubt, like lamenting over not being able to do as much. Only this type of regret and jealousy allows a person to gain wisdom.

In expanding on this notion, it seems that the evil inclination can also provoke in a person authentic jealousy for his fellow. If a person's fellow serves G-d better than he does, the evil inclination can incite that person to serve G-d in the same way, with an intention that is pure, and perhaps even better, than his fellow. The evil inclination thus loses what it thought to have gained by this incitement.

The Sages said, "I have learned many things from my teachers, from my companions ..." (Taanith 7a), which means that a person learns to serve G-d neither through imitation nor by jealousy. After having eliminated selfish feelings – after having wept before G-d – we don't become jealous of our fellow, but instead continue to love this person, one who has taught us a chapter, a law, or a verse, and who merits being called our teacher (Perkei Avoth 6:3).

What we have just mentioned explains the first verse in Parsha Beshalach: "G-d did not lead them by way of the Philistines, because it was near, for G-d said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt'" (Ex 13:17).

This verse shows us that G-d advised men not to cross the country of the Philistines, meaning that a man should not try to seek out and face trials, nor should a man think that he can affront dangers with impunity. The Talmud relates that two Sages were discussing with each other whether it was safer to travel near an area where there were idolaters or near an area where there were prostitutes. It's a mistake to think that one can mix with wicked people without being influenced by their behavior or without having improper thoughts. We are forbidden to "shut [our] eyes from seeing evil" (Isa 33:15) and, because the risk of sinning is great, "if there is another way, we err not to take it" (Bava Batra 57b). The evil inclination lurks in the heart of man (Sukkah 52b) and sets traps for him. It is the evil inclination that inspires such improper thoughts and that advises man to court danger precisely in places where wicked people are found, all while making him think that he won't sin. But in such areas there is a war going on, a difficult war between man and the evil inclination, and so "they return to Egypt," which means that man risks falling again under the hold of the evil inclination.

The man who wants to stay connected to G-d should not expose himself to unnecessary danger. If he is tempted to take chances without weighing the risks, he should remember that such thoughts are inspired by the evil inclination. One must not listen to advice to serve G-d while taking risks or through jealousy of one's neighbor. One must serve G-d solely because He commands us to do so. If we envy our neighbor, be it only because we want to better serve G-d, increase our wisdom, or have a better understanding of the Creator, the evil inclination will eventually take advantage of this envy and lead us down paths that are not conducive to our spiritual health.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditshev

**W**hen we speak of a Tzaddik, a righteous man, two sayings of our Sages come to mind. The first is “The Tzaddik is the foundation of the world.” We learn from this that, despite the torments that they’ve endured throughout history, if the Jewish people have managed to survive where other nations have disappeared, it is because of the presence of the Tzaddikim among them. The second saying is “The Tzaddik decides and G-d executes” and it perfectly illustrates the considerable influence that the Tzaddik, the living symbol of piety and virtue, has on the highest celestial entreaties that govern the entire universe.

These two sayings seemed to have been coined to define the exceptional character of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditshev. Whenever the name of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is mentioned, one immediately thinks of the defender of the Jewish people. This Tzaddik, in reality one of the pillars of the Chassidic movement, has become indelibly etched in our collective memory as the one who, in all circumstances, didn’t hesitate to take G-d as witness to plead Israel’s case.

When it came to requesting favors for the community, or for coming up with unexpected agreements in their favor (arguments that were fervently true yet disarmingly simple) the Celestial Court could not refuse him.

It must be said that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak had been endowed by G-d with enormous spiritual powers that allowed him, whenever necessary, to raise his soul towards the celestial realm. It was there that he made himself the poignant advocate of the Jewish people and usually won his case.

It was an unconditional, absolute love for the Jewish people that burned in the heart of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. This love was so evident that whoever approached the Tzaddik had but one desire: To emulate him, if even just the slightest bit, and to take shelter under the wings of the Shechinah (the Divine Presence). For this, everyone got ready to go back on the road of Torah and mitzvot. It was in this way that, thanks to him, many of our Russian brothers who had been more or less dangerously removed from Judaism came to make the decisive choice to do Teshuvah. Just as for Moses, we say of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak: “Many were those that he removed from sin.”

Many are the stories and testimonies that evoke the righteous mission that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak had taken upon himself, as well as the unique manner in which he carried it out. Each of them invites us to emulate him, for as our Sages teach us, the Holy One, blessed be He, rejoices every time a Jew invokes him in order to defend another. And, our Sages add, the more this happens, the quicker the long awaited Geula (Final Redemption) will happen. What follows is just one of those stories.

It happened that in Berditshev, when the large synagogue overflowed with people on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was standing near the amud (the lectern) of the speaker. His voice, both strong and beautiful, as well as his prayers – sung with such force and emotion that they could only belong to him – shook everything around. The faithful, their souls moved to trembling on that Yom Hadin (Day of Judgment), didn’t miss one word of the Rabbi’s prayers, all while their eyes filled with tears. Such an irresistible magnet, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak carried away all the Jews in the town with his own emotion.

After the Amidah (the prayer composed of 18 blessings) and just before the Kedusha (the solemn sanctification of the Divine Name), Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began singing, with trembling voice, the song la-El orech din (“to G-d Who judges”). Each of the faithful felt his heartstrings tighten, and each was truly and deeply cognizant of appearing, at that moment, before the King of kings Who presides over the Celestial Court and Who judges the entire world. He places one and the other on the balance of good and evil, and He examines all hearts with a penetrating and forceful gaze, revealing all secrets. He knows the least of our thoughts and will soon pronounce His verdict.

“Avinu Malkeinu! [Our Father, Our King!]” – a single and unified cry sprang from the mouth of all – “consider us with kindness and mercy. Otherwise, no one can stand before You!”

Now, just before chanting the phrase lekonei avadav bedin (“Who acquires His servants through judgment”), Rabbi Levi Yitzchak abruptly stopped. His face turned pale – as white as a ghost. He was incapable of uttering the least sound. The faithful, at first surprised by this interruption, were later shocked by what their eyes saw: The Tallit (prayer shawl) of their Rabbi slowly slid off his head, all the way onto his shoulders. Having come closer, certain of the Rabbi’s long-time Chassidim found him motionless, his eyes shut. His disciples, as opposed to the rest of the congregation, understood what was happening. Due to Ruach Hakodesh (Divine inspiration), Rabbi Levi Yitzchak had learned that at that moment the Celestial Court was preparing a great punishment (G-d forbid) for the Jewish people. As soon as they learned this, they followed their Rabbi’s lead and closed their eyes, then began a great soul-searching exercise in Teshuvah, repenting of any evil thoughts that they had perhaps once entertained.

For many long and seemingly unending minutes, the entire synagogue remained like this, as if frozen in time. Finally, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak opened his eyes and little by little his features began to take on their normal appearance. Everyone truly had the impression that the Tzaddik, after having left this world, had just made it back.

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# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditshev

And for all the more reason, the faithful started to feel happy and reassured when the face of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began beaming with joy and he finally started to sing that famous phrase, *lekonei avadav bedin* ("Who acquires His servants through judgment").

After the service, as the Rabbi and his disciples were gathered around the table to eat, one of the Chassidim got up the courage and asked his teacher what he had seen in the upper worlds.

The Rabbi agreed to answer and said, "All of a sudden I saw the Satan pulling a large bag behind him, and that gave me a very bad feeling. I understood that in that bag, the Prosecutor kept all the sins that the Jewish people had committed in the year that had passed. I approached to see its contents: Gossip and slander, baseless hatred, pettiness, negligence of Torah study ... there was everything there, enough to delight the Satan, the Prosecutor who rushed before the Celestial Court to pronounce the most violent accusations against our people. As soon as I saw this I thought, 'Oh no!' The vision had thrown me into such a distressed frenzy that I didn't know what to do.

"All of a sudden, it happened that the Satan stopped. His shrill eyes had just caught site of a Jew who, on that very day of Rosh Hashanah, was about to commit a sin. He then let go of his bag and ran in the direction of the Jew to take his sin and add it to his evil harvest. I took advantage of the situation to approach the bag and examine each of the sins. I realized that the poor authors of these sins had mitigating reasons for their actions, namely the bitter exile to which we had been condemned and the bitter lot of many of us: Ignorance, suffering, poverty, etc. What could our brothers do in such circumstances? What could they do in light of temptations that were capable of making a Jew forget his spiritual identity and transform the people of the G-d of Abraham into coarse beings that wallow in sin? However, I asked myself, what were these sins compared to the murders, acts of armed robbery, and thievery that so many in other nations committed?

"As I reflected on this, it happened that the sins of our brothers disappeared from that terrible bag. When the Satan discovered it empty, he let out a scream, 'Thieves! I've been robbed of all the sins of the Jews that I had worked so hard to gather!' It was then that he saw me, standing near the bag, and understood that I had tricked him. He took me by my shirt and demanded compensation from me for having stripped him of the sins of our brothers! I replied that I didn't have any money. But the Satan, who knows Torah, answered that he would therefore have to sell me as a slave! He took me by the beard and offered me to the first angel that passed by there. The angel refused, explaining that I was an exiled Jew who had to earn a living, and so he didn't want to have the responsibility for me, even if he could acquire me freely. Can you believe that? Even for free he didn't want me! All the other angels

to whom the Satan offered me as a slave also refused.

"Seeing this, the Satan brought me all the way to the Master of the universe, Who was seated on His royal throne. The Holy One listened carefully to the arguments of the Prosecutor, then declared, in citing a Psalm of David, 'It is I Who will act, I Who will judge, and I Who will save!' He then said, 'I Myself will buy you!'

"With these words, the Satan remained frozen with his mouth wide open. He had no further arguments. It was then that I began to pull myself together. As you can see, we can now better understand the phrase of the song that states *lekonei avadav bedin*. We are the servants of the Holy One, and thanks to our piety we may escape the

## EISHET CHAYIL

### SHABBAT CANDLES – PART II

#### *Who is Obligated to Light?*

7. There is an obligation to light candles in honor of Shabbat. This mitzvah falls on women because they form the heart the home. However, a man who lives alone is obligated to light and recite the blessing.
8. A single woman who lives alone, a widow, and a divorcee are also obligated to light candles in honor of Shabbat.
9. A married man who is spending Shabbat alone in the house (as, for example, when his wife is in the hospital) is obligated to light the Shabbat candles with the blessing, even if his wife lights in the place where she is staying.
10. According to Halachah, single young women that live with their parents are not obligated to light the Shabbat candles. Sephardim never had the habit of doing this. Yet if they so desire, they may do so, but they do not have the right to recite the blessing.
11. A student living on campus must light the candles in their room and recite the blessing.
12. A married woman who spends Shabbat at her in-laws', or at her own parents' home, is obligated to light the Shabbat candles and recite the blessing.
13. Similarly, when one spends Shabbat at a hotel, one is obligated to light the Shabbat candles, be it in the room or in the hotel's dining area.
14. A woman staying at a clinic or a hospital to give birth must light the Shabbat candles and recite the blessing next to the area where she eats, even if her husband lights the Shabbat candles at home.
15. If a woman forgets to light the Shabbat candles, and her husband also has not done so, she should from then on light an additional candle. However according to certain authorities, since in our days an electric light stays on in the home, it is not necessary to implement such a measure.
16. A woman who has refrained from lighting Shabbat candles for a long time, but later regrets her actions and decides to observe Torah and mitzvot, is not under the obligation to light an additional candle.

# THE MORAL OF THE STORY

## THE DUKE'S AMAZING SAPPHIRE

### *A teaching from the Maguid of Dubno*

**A**nd now, do not be distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you" (Gen 45:5).

After a tragic separation that lasted many long years, Joseph finally found his brothers. Nevertheless, his brothers felt uneasy. They were afraid of him. They feared that Joseph bore a grudge against them for having sold him. Twenty-two years earlier, they had ridiculed his dreams that were now actually happening: They had bowed themselves before the powerful governor of Egypt. This man was none other than Joseph himself, their brother who had long ago disappeared. A feeling of shame became mixed to their fear of Joseph's reaction.

Yet the words of their young brother betrayed no hate. He was even calm when he explained to them that the famine has reigned in Egypt for two years, and that no growing or harvesting would be possible before another five years pass.

"And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me father to Pharaoh, master to his entire household, and ruler throughout the entire land of Egypt" (Gen 45:8).

Why does Joseph explain himself to his brothers for so long? Why does he give them details on his position as Pharaoh's minister? What does he want them to understand?

The Maggid explains by means of a parable.

There was once a Duke who possessed a fabulous sapphire, one that he was extremely proud of. It was the most beautiful and largest in the entire country. This incomparable gem, known by all, assured the Duke's fame and renown. To be able to gaze at the splendor of the sapphire was considered a privilege, and the Duke kept it well protected. Yet an unfortunate event occurred one day. Two visitors asked to have the privileged honor to admire this treasure. The Duke opened the silver case with much care and gently took out the famed stone. He carefully removed the thin silk covering that enwrapped it, then suddenly let out a scream.

"No! It's not possible. My sapphire – it's cracked!!"

His visitors looked over his shoulder and could see a deep crack, well visible to the naked eye.

"How could this have happened?" moaned the Duke. "How could this gem have been damaged? I always keep it in this well-padded case."

Yet no one was able to give him an answer. Nothing, for that matter, could remedy the situation. What was he to do with the stone now?

The Duke decided to consult with the best gem-masters in the kingdom. As soon as they heard, these expert artisans came rushing from all parts to the palace.

What an honor it would be for the one who could restore the gem to its initial splendor. And what an incredible reward the Duke would give for this feat, they thought! Yet none of them succeeded. Each one examined the sapphire and sadly shook his head in a gesture of helplessness.

"Not possible," one of them concluded.

"Even polished, there would still be mark on it," said another.

"All I can do is to make the crack less noticeable," ventured a third.

An expert presented himself to the palace. He proposed an idea likely to yield a completely satisfactory result. He examined the gem for a long time, then addressed the Duke as he bowed greatly.

"If His Majesty so desires, I can carve out an exquisite miniature by using the crack that occurred. The stone can only become more beautiful. It will have an even greater value."

The Duke was so taken by this idea that he ordered him to start the work right away. A completely original pattern of flowers and arabesque soon appeared around the sapphire. In the middle, the name of the Duke was inlaid in fine, thin letters and highlighted with his own coat of arms. After several days of feverish activity and sustained effort, the engraver finally put down his tools. He then announced that his work was finished.

It was absolutely magnificent. The brilliance of the sapphire was beyond compare. No one could have thought that an imperfection had once marred it. Most surprising of all was that the crack served as a guide for the arabesque that had been engraved all around.

That crack, which had once caused so much anxiety and hopelessness in the Duke, was now the source of joy and contentment.

"If the stone had never experienced that 'bad turn'," he explained, "it could have never undergone this transformation. Its value and beauty have now been doubled."

This is what the righteous Joseph wanted his brothers to understand. The error that they had committed and which had such tragic consequences was the source of Joseph's incredible fate. In fact, all was part of Hashem's plan: They had sold Joseph into slavery so that afterwards the Hebrews could be saved from famine.

What would have happened if Joseph had never been in Egypt? Where would they have found food to survive?

Joseph therefore reassured his brothers.

"Don't worry. All this is part of Hashem's plan. It is He Who marks out the great paths of our lives."

A horrible "crack" can, in the end, be transformed into an exquisite "work of art".