

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א

11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: (331) 42 08 25 40 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

LOVE FOR JEWS BRINGS THE REDEMPTION

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "And Israel stretched out his right hand and put it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manasseh. He crossed his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn" (Gen 48:14). And then we read of an argument between Joseph and Jacob: "And when Joseph saw that his father put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him. And he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head onto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father. This is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.' And his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. But truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations'" (Gen 48:17-19).

This incident should be explained. The Sages have said, "Because Jacob preferred Joseph over his other children, he made him a special tunic that provoked his brothers' jealousy and brought our ancestors to Egypt" (Shabbat 10a). If such is the case, why did Jacob cross his hands and place his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger child, thus risking to provoke Manasseh's jealousy? In addition he said, "May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh" (Gen 48:20). Why is the younger mentioned before the elder? If he blessed them with such a benediction, why does the Torah add, "And he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (ibid.)?

Such an order of priority would have provoked jealousy, and Joseph asked his father Jacob to place his right hand on the head Manasseh, the first-born. But Jacob intentionally put Ephraim and Manasseh to the test, in the same way that he put his own children to the test in order to verify that they had been reconciled to Joseph with all their heart. Harmony was to be the foundation of their future. If their descendants know how to give way one before the other, their sins would be pardoned (Yoma 23a). In

conducting oneself with respect towards the other, in thinking first of all to the good of one's neighbor, one guarantees good social relationships, relationships built on love and respect.

To put his grandchildren to the test, Jacob first of all asks, "Who are these?" (Gen 48:8). Rashi explains his words as meaning, "'From where come these children who don't deserve a blessing?' For Jacob saw that Jeroboam and Ahab would descend from Ephraim, and that Jehu and his children would descend from Manasseh. And he was troubled" (Tanhuma Vayechi 6). If both of them would have descendants that would be equally wicked, one must ask why he gave preference to one of them, since that was only meant for putting them to the test to determine if they would accept such a preferential situation and continue to love one another. In that case, the children of the other tribes would also learn how to live conflict-free in peace with one another. Joseph pointed out the error to his father, but the tribes accepted the decision of Jacob and resolved to conduct themselves lovingly with one another. "And he set Ephraim before Manasseh" in view and knowledge of all so that everyone understands that no one should be jealous of others, but rather should behave with fraternity and love towards one another.

The remainder of the story becomes clear. It is written, "And Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather yourselves together and I will tell you what will happen to you in the latter days. Assemble yourselves and hear ...'" (Gen 49:1-2). Jacob wanted to make it known to them that they will only be saved because of fraternal harmony and the attention that each gives to the feelings of others, as it written: "Redemption will only come when the entire Jewish people will be united" (Tanhuma Nitzavim 1).

What remains for us to explain is why, when Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons the events of the latter

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days, Divine inspiration left him (Pesachim 56a). He therefore thought that there lay a fault in them. His sons told him, "Hear O Israel, the L-RD is our G-d, the L-RD is One." He then replied, "Blessed be the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever." It is difficult to understand how Jacob could have suspected his sons of having any doubts concerning the unity of G-d, to the point that they were obligated to make this proclamation. Precisely why did they say, "Hear O Israel"? And what is the sense of Jacob's response: "Blessed be the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever"? Moreover, if they actually had been whole in their faith in G-d's unity, why was Jacob deprived of Divine inspiration?

To clearly respond to these questions, it must be stressed that hate and jealousy risk leading a man to damage the image of G-d that is in his neighbor. To cause harm to him is to deny the existence of G-d (Bereshith Rabba 34:20), as if there were many gods, and to give strength to the forces of evil. In addition, if a man's faith is not whole, each commandment that this man performs reinforces his mistaken faith, and in that case his good deeds will benefit people that he has slandered (Chofetz Chaim, *Shmirat Halashon*) and he loses all Divine likeness. In effect, how could he still carry the image of G-d in himself after having denied the image of G-d in others?

The Sages say that Jacob actually revealed to his children the end times, for in gathering and uniting them, he made them know that this unity will bring about the redemption. It was when he wanted to reveal to them the details of the redemption that Divine inspiration left him. And so he feared that there still remained in their hearts a feeling of hatred towards Joseph because Jacob had given him "one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (Gen 48:22).

"From the moment that Joseph was sold into slavery, I lost Divine inspiration" (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2) and it only returned to Jacob when the brothers were reconciled, as it is written, "then the spirit of Jacob their father was revived" (Gen 45:27). And then all of a sudden, Divine inspiration again left him. Perhaps they again felt hatred in their hearts for Joseph because Jacob gave him precedence, or because he gave him the city of Shechem. Or perhaps it was because he gave to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh two inheritances (Tanhuma Vayeichi 6), as it is written, "Ephraim and Manasseh are mine

like Reuben and Simeon" (Gen 48:5). Was it possible that Jacob's sons still felt hatred for Joseph?

And so his sons replied, "Hear O Israel, the L-RD is our G-d, the L-RD is One," which is to say, "we feel no hatred or jealousy, G-d forbid! Neither towards Joseph nor towards anyone else." The declaration of *Shema Israel* means that before we can come to a love for G-d – a true reverence for Him and a faith that is whole – we must love our neighbor, be attentive to his feelings, and share his pains. The children of Jacob told him that they love their neighbor and support one another, and that it wasn't because of them that Divine inspiration had left him. Jacob responded, "Blessed be the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever," or in other words, "the honor and reign of G-d are intact solely when the Children of Israel are united, and so His Name is complete and His reign is made apparent." Divine inspiration left him only so that he not reveal the details of the events concerning the end times.

Later, when he was blessing them, Jacob reprimanded his sons, yet they did not turn to jealousy. Although he rebuked some and blessed others, "he included them all in a single unified whole" (Bereshith Rabba 13:8) because they were all united with the same intention when they made their common declaration of *Shema Israel*.

It is also possible that Jacob thought that his children had not understood the lesson that he gave them when he met Joseph. "He gave to Joseph the city of Shechem" (Midrash Haggadah Vayigash 28:29) precisely to remove all jealousy from their heart. When they replied with *Shema Israel*, Jacob understood that they had been reconciled to Joseph and that they weren't jealous that he had received that city. It is written, "with my sword and with my bow" (Gen 48:22), meaning, "with my prayers and supplications" (Bava Batra 123a). It's a known fact that something acquired through prayer doesn't provoke jealousy, for it was not obtained through natural means. Man must sanctify his spirit as much as his body, and to consecrate both to G-d. He must do this in the same way as "when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy to the L-RD..." (Lev 27:14). In the same way, a man's body and his entire being is sanctified when he serves G-d with enthusiasm. When harboring jealousy, no one can do this. Thus the love for Jews is spread and brings the time of the Final Redemption closer.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI MOSHE IDAN OF JERBA

Born on the Isle of Jerba in 1842, Rabbi Moshe Idan was without question one of the greatest Kabbalists of his time. He was also a poet and outstanding grammarian. His father, Rabbi Kalifa Idan, had as his disciples the majority of those who would eventually become the spiritual leaders of Jerba. To get an idea of the scope of his intelligence, we need only to cite the praise given him by Rabbi Massoud Cohen El-Haddad, of Beth El Yeshiva in Jerusalem, when he visited Jerba. After meeting with him, Rabbi Massoud was asked by his hosts what his impressions were. He replied, "Rare are those who have, in this world, attained his level in Kabbalah – even in Eretz Israel."

In the preface to his literary works, Rabbi Moshe Idan wrote the following as his signature: "The one who is content with very little, the servant of G-d, Moshe Idan."

In fact, despite his enormous knowledge in the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah, Rabbi Moshe demonstrated a humility that was proverbial in degree. Furthermore, not wanting to rest on any certainty of his spiritual state, he thought it good to undertake a great many fasts.

As we stated earlier, Rabbi Moshe Idan was the author of many literary works. Among them were *Torah Moshe*, *Tif-Eret Moshe*, and *Shashuah Mitzvah*, which contained commentaries on Torah, Kabbalah and mitzvot. This last item is explained in *Shashuah Mitzvah* by enumerating and explaining the mitzvot in the form of long poems.

What follows are some stories concerning this Tzaddik.

One day, while he was teaching at the yeshiva in the city of Gabes, a woman came and asked him to write a letter for her. Rabbi Moshe explained to her that he could not, on that day, help her because he was busy as a paid employee for the day. The woman didn't understand his explanation at all. Worse, she thought that he had insulted her and went to the *Gabbai* (synagogue's administrator).

The Gabbai asked her, "Are you sure that you remember exactly what the Rav said?"

"Yes," responded the woman. "He treated me as if I was his employee."

The Gabbai quickly explained to her that an insult (G-d forbid) was not intended here. In fact, what Rabbi Moshe had told her was that, as a salaried employee, *he* was responsible for keeping track of his time – to the minute – for the yeshiva. Once free of his obligations, he would no doubt make it his duty to write that letter for her.

The Gabbai added: "Go to his place tonight, to his house, and I am certain that he will kindly help you."

Reassured, the woman realized that it was all a simple misunderstanding on her part. She then went to Rabbi Moshe's home that same night, later to leave with the letter that she had so desperately wanted.

The following scene took place in a café in Gabes. One of the patrons, a non-Jew, began to tell everyone

as follows: "There's not another person in the world like Rabbi Moshe Idan." And since he was asked the reason for this compliment, he told them the following story.

"This morning, at sunrise, we heard a scream coming from the beach. We got there as quickly as possible and saw a man stuck in the sand up to his waist, unable to move, and even less to free himself.

"We asked him, 'What happened?' He answered us by pointing his finger at Rabbi Idan who, as he normally did, had come to immerse in the sea. The man added, 'That man bothers us every morning by coming to soak in the sea. To prevent him from returning, I got the idea of taking his clothes that he normally leaves by the edge of the water. Then it happened, after I snatched them, that I found myself frozen to the ground, not able to move. I beg you, do me a favor – get me out of here!'

"At the time, the Rabbi continued to bathe quietly, and we could see that while all this was happening, he was completely relaxed, oblivious to everything. We then approached the Rabbi to ask him to explain the man's mishap, and he replied to us, 'All that needs to be done is to put the clothes back in their place and the man will be able to go.' This was done, and the man's paralysis vanished as if by magic. He then took to his heels and, despite all our calls, decided not to return."

What follows is an excerpt from Rabbi Moshe Idan's book *Tif-Eret Moshe*.

There exists two traits that each one should cling to. First of all, respect for others, of which our Sages have said, "The arrogant are destined for hell, but respect for others leads to the Garden of Eden." The one who possesses this virtue lives among the righteous, of whom it is said that they are alive even after their death. Such a person will not be quick to sin. Our Sages have cited the word of the prophet: *Shuvu!* [Return!]. The reverse of the Hebrew letters give *Bushu* [Shame] – be ashamed of not respecting others. Be ashamed, they say, of the evil paths that you could have taken, and in this way you will merit the Garden of Eden and live eternally, just as the prophecy says, "Why should you die, O Children of Israel?"

The second trait that one should cling to is humility, a trait that the Sages have already praised by pointing to Moses himself as a role model. Even though he had thousands of virtues, the one that the Torah recalls to his credit is precisely humility: "Now this man Moses was very humble, more than all the men upon the face of the earth." Our Sages have also written that, in the history of Israel, three righteous people have had their humility recognized: Abraham, David, and Moses. Now the initials of these names form the word *adam* (man). I myself have cited this sacred adage: "A man's pride will finish by humbling him." No doubt, therefore, that it's necessary to recall the humility of these three righteous men in order to bring one's heart to its senses and thus escape pride.

Rabbi Moshe Idan returned his soul to the Creator on Elul 4, 1894 at the age of 52.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

THE KING, THE DIAMONDS AND THE JEWELERS

A teaching from the Maguid of Dubno

Why, during the first generations, could men live nearly to the age of 1000 while in our days we hardly speak of living to 80 or 100?

In order to answer this question, the author of *Or HaChayim* (in his commentary on Parsha Vayechi) tells the story of a king who entrusted hundreds of thousands of precious stones with all the jewelers of his kingdom. These gems came directly out of the king's mines and sent to the jewelers with the goal of having one of them fabricated, within 24 hours, into the most beautiful, gold-set gem possibly imagined. The king specified that the artisan who showed himself to be the most gifted in this creative undertaking would be rewarded as a result: All the precious stones would permanently belong to him and him alone, pure and simple.

On the set day, the king convened the jewelers in his palace with orders to have them bring the fruit of their work and their collection of precious stones. Now imagine how deceived he felt when he learned that not one of these artisans had managed to fabricate anything of worth, but had ruined the majority of the stones sent to them!

The king responded to this act of deception with such fury that he ordered all the jewelers to death. Thus he had them all put to the sword. But the king didn't stop there, for he ordered the sons of those killed to take up from scratch all their fathers' work. However, in order to lighten their load, he entrusted to them as many stones as in the previous case. Nevertheless, the king put them on grave notice: If they duplicated their fathers' incompetence, their fate would be the same.

And so it is with the King of Israel, the Master of the universe, Who Himself has also distributed to us hundreds of thousands of souls that are called precious stones. Our task is to inlay them with the pure gold that is Torah and mitzvot. How? By doing good and removing ourselves from evil. By conforming to the Law of G-d, each one of us can elevate our souls to a higher level, that of the royal crown. G-d Himself

also set a time limit of one day; in other words, each day of our earthly existence. These days correspond to the precious stones of history. To Adam, G-d gave 300,000 stones. Yet because the generations that followed were covered in sin, G-d progressively lowered this number, aware of the fact that men were incapable of edifying so many days.

Unfortunately, this is why the days of our lives are, as David said in the Psalms, about 70 years (or only about 25,000 days). And even with this small number of "jewel-days", rare are those among us who can boast of having known how to make them into beautiful gems.

EISHET CHAYIL

SHABBAT CANDLES – PART III

The Blessing for lighting

17. When one lights the Shabbat candles, one recites the blessing: *Baruch ata Hashem, Elokeinu melech haolam, asher kidishanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehadlic ner shel Shabbat.*

18. The blessing should always precede the lighting. The rule to follow is the same for all other mitzvot for which the blessing is recited before performing the mitzvah. According to the opinion of the Rambam and the Maran (the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*), the rule is as stated here. For Ashkenazim, according to the opinion of the Rama, one first lights the candles, then recites the blessing. However according to the Maran, a woman who does this puts herself in an uncertain situation, since the blessing that she recites is possibly said in vain.

19. A young married woman does not have to say *Shecheyanu* when she lights the Shabbat candles for the first time, for this action is not fixed to an exact time.