

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE VIRTUE OF OUR TEACHER MOSES

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

As opposed to every other human being, one may ask why it was Moses who actually "ascended to G-d" (Ex 19:3).

If he was able to come so close to the Eternal, it was because he "was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). And so when he was accused of having behaved improperly with his wife, he kept quiet and did not at all respond to gossip (Sanhedrin 110a; Shemot Rabba 1:32). This king and chief of the prophets grieved over the assembly of the people of Israel, as it is written, "Moses grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens" (Ex 2:11). He did everything to come to their aid, and, as we have seen, he even had pity for animals (Shemot Rabba 2:2; Zohar II: 20b, 21a).

Finally, we know that when Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp and predicted that Moses would die and that Joshua would replace him, he did not become jealous and did not get angry. On the contrary, he told his servant Joshua, "Would that the entire people of the L-RD could be prophets" (Num 11:29).

Even after his death, Moses demonstrated his humility, as it is written, "No one knows his burial place to this day" (Deut 34:6). There was neither Hilloula nor candles nor known locale. He didn't even want that people should bother themselves to come and pray at his tomb.

If Moses held such importance in the eyes of the Eternal, why then – despite having prayed 515 prayers (the numerical value of Va'etchanan [Devarim Rabba 11:6]) and asking the heavens and the earth, the mountains and the hills, and even the great ocean to garner Divine mercy in

his favor (Tanhuma Va'etchanan 6) – did he not have the merit to enter into Eretz Israel?

It seems to be because he became angry with the Children of Israel when they asked for water: "Listen now, you rebels ..." (Num 20:10). He certainly felt mercy towards them, and the Children of Israel no doubt pardoned him for his remarks, however a man of such great stature should not get upset; the Eternal is very strict with the Tzaddikim (Yebamot 121b).

Moreover, as we have seen, if Moses had entered into the Land of Israel, he would have built the holy Temple, and since the atmosphere of Eretz Israel makes a man wise (Bava Batra 158b), he would have built it in such a way that it would never have been destroyed. Since he never succeeded in entering Eretz Israel, no one knows where his gravesite is. With the Temple now destroyed, to merit the Final Redemption the Jews must now rely solely on the Holy One, blessed be He, and not on men (cf. Lev Simcha of the Admor of Ger, section Pinchas, according to one interpretation of the Macharsha).

After the death of Moses, the Children of Israel entered into the Holy Land, but they also began to worship idols and stopped studying Torah. Thus they arrived at speaking ill of and hating one another. They were neither accommodating nor easy to get along with, and they didn't want to comply with the strictures of Torah law concerning the welfare of others (Bava Metzia 30b).

If they had observed the Torah, the Temple would not have been destroyed and the Final Redemption would have occurred. May it happen swiftly in our days! Amen!

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI YAACOV ISRAEL - THE STEIPLER

Rabbi Yaakov Israel was born on Tammuz 9, 5659 (1899) in the Russian town of Horon-Steipel (hence the moniker “the Steipler”).

His father, Rav Chaim Peretz Kanievsky, was a Chernobyl Chassid. He died when his son was only 7 years old, and food was hard to come by in the Kanievsky household after his departure. Later, when the Novardoc Yeshiva sent representatives looking for new students, the Steipler’s mother sent him with them and told them, “Take him with you to study in the yeshiva. There he will have something more to eat to satisfy his hunger.” He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah alone at the yeshiva: He received a pair of Tefillin, gave a brief speech, and then returned to his studies.

At the age of 18, he was bestowed the leadership of the Rogatchov Yeshiva. However the Bolshevik revolution was in full swing and Rabbi Yaakov Israel was drafted into the Red Army. He once briefly remarked about this period in his life, saying that because he refused to work on Shabbat, he was forced to pass through a row of soldiers that beat him with their rifle butts. He related that he would never forget the joy he felt for the honor of Shabbat.

Once, when he had to perform night duty in Siberia during a deathly cold night, he refrained from wearing his hood because he feared that it might contain some Shatnez. He managed to survive the night thanks to the indomitable willpower that always characterized him. Yet from that day on, he began to lose his hearing because of what the cold had done to his ears. He managed to get discharged from the army and with some old friends attempted to maintain yeshivas under the new communist regime. Noting the futility and danger of such an initiative, he decided to move to Poland to study at the Bialystok Yeshiva.

His devotion to Torah study quickly garnered him a special place in the yeshiva. Over the course of the years he imposed on himself a rigorous schedule that was quite impressive, studying long hours at a stretch and sleeping a few hours for what amounted to a minimum of rest. As his friends could testify, his bed at the yeshiva was mostly vacant.

In 1925 he published his first book, Sha’arie Tevunah. This book made its way to the Chazon

Ish in Vilna. The Chazon Ish didn’t know the author of the book, but reading it was sufficient for him to decide that the author should marry his sister Miriam.

The marriage was in fact celebrated, and Rabbi Yaakov Israel began to teach at the Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk. A turning point in his life occurred in 1934 when, pressed by the Chazon Ish, he went to settle in Eretz Israel in what was then the tiny village of Bnei Brak. Thus he went from first directing the Novardok Yeshiva to assisting his brother-in-law in running the Chazon Ish Kollel. He continued in this capacity even after the death of the Chazon Ish, assuming the responsibility of lecturing as well. During his final years, he was content to give a shiur on his brother-in-law’s yahrtzeit.

The official responsibility for the yeshiva, as important as it was, nevertheless was far from doing justice to the place occupied by the Steipler. His office was never empty, as it was constantly accommodating yeshiva students and directors of institutions, just as it did businessmen, craftsmen, doctors, industrialists, mothers of families (Ashkenaz as well as Sephardic), and so on. All were searching for a father, a teacher, a counselor, the Tzaddik of the generation.

In his book Birkat Peretz, the Steipler writes that the Patriarch Jacob kept his name even after he was called Israel, for Israel and Jacob refer to two different, yet complimentary aspects of the Jewish people. The Steipler was clearly Yaakov [Jacob] Israel: Israel on one side (battling against celestial forces, consecrating his life to an incessant and demanding spiritual ascent), yet also Jacob (Yaakov – from the Hebrew word ekev, the heel – a person of great simplicity, to whom nothing in the human realm was unfamiliar).

Yet what was the secret to his radiance and influence, devoid as he was of the means of the powerful people of this world? Perhaps it was because he had basically lost, for more than 35 years, his sense of hearing. A painful disability for sure, but also a protection against all the banality, pettiness, and ugliness of our world. Plunged from his early years into a universe in which Torah, Avodah, and Gemiluth Chesed are the real foundations of life, he possessed a true and just view of men and things.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

THE MAN CHERISHED BY G-D

A teaching from the Maguid of Dubno

On this verse “And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain. And Moses ascended to G-d.” (Ex 19:2-3). the Midrash says, “At that moment, the ministering angels tried to burn Moses. The Holy One, blessed be He, made his face like Abraham’s and told them, ‘Have you no shame? Is he not the one whom you descended to, and at whose table you ate?’”

The Maggid explains this Midrash to us by means of a parable.

There was once a king who had a minister of defense. The king valued this minister so much that he undertook nothing without consulting him first.

Now this king had an only son, weak by constitution, to whom he refused no request. However the king had his son leave the room whenever he had to speak in private to his minister, something that always made the minister quite proud of himself. “I’m more important in the king’s eyes than his own offspring,” boasted the minister to whoever would hear, “for when the king wants to speak to me, he sends his much-beloved son away. We then meet alone in one of the rooms of the palace and he tells me everything that’s on his mind.”

These remarks eventually made their way to the prince, who took them in a very bad way. He was so shaken that he had to be confined to bed. The doctors came to see him, and understood that he was in this state because of emotional despair. They concluded that medication would serve no use, but rather that he had to be distracted from his problem and made to laugh, which would make him forget his sorrow.

The king ordered that all sorts of musical instruments be played, but this didn’t help because the prince was already used to them. So the king ordered his counselors to help him find a better idea. They suggested that all the ministers without exception be ordered to disguise and present themselves to the prince, each one at a time, dressed up, for example, as a bear.

No doubt that the prince, knowing each one by his position and importance, would have laughter awaken in him by seeing these men frolicking around in this way, and so he would get better. Thus the plan was agreed to.

The day arrived and it was the minister of defense’s turn to disguise himself, and he dressed up like a bear just as everyone else and began to dance and frolic in front of the prince. The prince recognized him, burst out in laughter, and felt overjoyed in his heart.

When the poor minister left, the others accompanying him noted out loud that there was no one that the king

loved as much as his son, for when he fell ill the king went as far as to order his favorite minister to dress up as a bear to heal the prince through laughter, without any regard to the humiliation that the minister would experience because of it.

The angels, the ministers above, thought that there wasn’t anything similar between their importance and those of material beings. They are, after all, celestial beings, while men roam about on the earth in a state of extreme lowliness.

This is why they went as far as to say, “What is the son of men doing among us?” And so the Holy One, blessed be He, explained to them that beings of flesh and blood are more precious to Him than angels.

For this, he gave to Moses the characteristics of Abraham and told them, “Have you no shame? Is he not the one whom you descended to, and at whose table you ate?” We recall that Abraham was preoccupied with looking out for guests, though none showed up. The angels had to come to him under the guise of human form in order to partake of a meal, which is not suitable for a being of pure spirit that needs neither food nor drink. Despite all this, because of His love for Abraham, G-d ordered them to change their habits and eat there. Referring to this episode was a way of making them understand just how precious men are to Hashem, for they are His children, the principle work of His hands.

EISHET CHAYIL

KIDDUSH AND SHABBAT MEALS

1. Women are obliged by Torah to recite Kiddush.
2. When a woman doesn’t know how to recite Kiddush by herself and her husband is not present (e.g., he’s in the army or the hospital), a person aged at least 13 years and 1 day can recite Kiddush for her and discharge her of her obligation.
3. When the head of the household recites Kiddush, one should not say Baruch Hu OuBaruch Shemo after the Name of G-d is mentioned, and those present should have the intention of being discharged from their obligation of reciting Kiddush by hearing it.
4. One does not have the right to eat or drink on Friday night or Saturday morning before Kiddush.
5. Women are obligated to eat three meals on Shabbat: On Friday night, Saturday afternoon, and during Seuda Shelishit.
6. It is not permissible to eat between Seuda Shelishit and Havdalah, but it is permitted to drink water. After the end of Shabbat, it is not necessary to hear Havdalah in order to work, but this is only on condition that one first says Baruch Hamavdil ben Kodesh Lechol.