

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE OBLIGATION TO LEARN THE REASONS FOR EACH OF THE MITZVOT

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Commenting on the verse that states, "Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil of illumination" (Ex 27:20), both the Midrash and the Zohar (III:246b) note that the name of Moses is not mentioned in this week's Parsha because of the fact that Moses told the Holy One, blessed be He, "If not, erase me now from Your book that You have written" (Ex 32:32).

How can one imagine that the name of the man who devoted himself body and soul to the Children of Israel, who begged the Eternal not to wipe them out, is not mentioned in a Parsha? One could say that the Children of Israel are greater in His eyes than Moses, but in reality it is quite the opposite, for one sees that the Eternal wanted to wipe them out: "And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them, and I shall make you a great nation" (Ex 32:10). Nevertheless, this was not what Moses had in mind. Rather, he preferred that his name be erased, provided that the Children remain alive. Moses was an exemplary figure par excellence! Why then this anger of G-d against him?

In addition, why does this week's Parsha begin precisely with the mitzvah of the oil rather than another mitzvah? What connection could there be between the olive oil and the fact that Moses' name is not mentioned in the Parsha?

It is because, as we read, all the souls of Israel were connected to Moses (Zohar III:216b). In every Torah Sage there shines a spark of our

teacher Moses, and very often one tells another, "You have answered well, Moses" (Shabbat 101b). Furthermore, Moses is equivalent to all the people of Israel (Zohar II:47a). Thus, even when the Children of Israel are seduced by the evil inclination and commit sins, they repent because of their connection to our teacher Moses, who tells them, "Whoever is for the L-RD, join me!" (Ex 32:26). Moses differentiates between those that don't sin and are connected to his soul, and those who sin. The latter he reprimands in public, and so they confess their sin and attach themselves to his soul.

G-d told Moses: You know very well that the soul of the Children of Israel is connected to your own. How can I then erase you from the Book of Life? Who then will they attach themselves to? Erasing your name is the same as erasing the names of all the Children of Israel. It is in accordance with My will that you have access to the spiritual level of Vayikhu Eilecha ("that they take for you"). They are taken and attached to you. It is because of the mitzvah of the oil (SheMeN – pure olive oil) that their soul (NeShaMah) is connected to yours. How can I extinguish your light? I am resolute on keeping you alive in order to elevate the soul of the Children of Israel, which is connected to yours. Consequently, instead of asking Me to erase your name from My book, pray on their behalf. When they will have repented, they will then be able to link up with your soul and spiritually uplift themselves without cease.

Thus Moses is well and truly mentioned in this week's Parsha.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI CHAIM YOSSEF DAVID AZULAI - THE CHIDA (1724-1806)

In the month of Sivan in the year 5484 (1724), the oldest son of Rabbi Yitzchak Zerahya Azulai and his wife Sarah was born in the old city of Jerusalem.

He was named Yosef, from the name of his maternal grandfather, and the names of Chaim and David were given to him to well. When later he became famous as an adult, people were content to call him “the Chida”, after the initials of his complete name Chaim Yosef David Azulai.

The Azulai family was considered among one of the oldest and most respected of those in Eretz Israel. The Chida was a descendant of the famous Tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Azulai, author of Chesed leAvraham, who immigrated to Eretz Israel from the town of Fez, Morocco around the year 1620.

From his most tender age, one could discern exceptional traits in the young Yosef. Frail by nature, he nevertheless studied with great concentration and without respite from morning till night.

At the age of 8, following an epidemic, his mother rendered her soul to her Creator. This death tremendously affected Yosef. He matured ahead of time and became serious for his age. He didn't play with other children, but rather put himself to studying our holy Torah day and night. At hardly 9 years of age his father enrolled him in the Beit Yaakov Beit Midrash, an institution renown for the quality of its instruction, and from which the majority of Jerusalem's scholars emanated. It was in this house of study that the incredible talent of the young prodigy blossomed.

Already, at the age of 12, he put into writing some original laws concerning Kashrut and also composed responsum on some aspects of Halachah.

Moreover, the young boy revealed a brilliant ability as a speaker, appearing in public to give uplifting drashot.

Not long after his marriage in 5502 (1742), Jerusalem was visited by the extraordinary Gaon and Kabbalist Rabbi Haim ben Attar (known by his nickname Ohr HaHayim Hakadosh), who set up his Knesset Israel Yeshiva.

The Chida became a member of his Yeshiva, and this brief period was time enough for him to enter into a profoundly deep relationship with the Tzaddik Rabbi Haim ben Attar.

In the works that he wrote afterwards, the Chida very often cites the teachings and customs of Rabbi Haim ben Attar, whom he considered to be his teacher par excellence.

Soon after this period in his life, the Chida managed to become one of the disciples of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, (the Rashash) in his Beit El Yeshiva. This Beit Midrash was the headquarters of great Tzaddikim and Kabbalists who, by completely consecrating themselves to Torah study, aspired to hasten the arrival of the Messiah.

The saintly Rabbi Shalom Sharabi and two of his disciples, the Chida and Rabbi Haim de la Rosa, felt that the time was right to hasten the final redemption. These three Tzaddikim, great men of their generation, removed themselves from all earthly matters and chose to live an ascetic life of fasting and self-mortification in order to sanctify and purify themselves.

The following story takes place in winter, when a thick blanket of snow covered the city of Jerusalem. These Tzaddikim rolled

about in the snow, praying with incredible devotion and fasting afterwards for three consecutive days. At the end of the fast, they went to an isolated place and began to concentrate on the “Yehudim” in order to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

However, they were suddenly petrified by the sound of a heavenly voice: “My sons, you don't have the right to hasten the Geula [Final Redemption]. The hour has not yet come, and to prevent you from together attempting to do it again, one of you will be exiled abroad.”

Since the heavenly voice did not declare who among them would suffer this fate, they drew lots and designated the Chida.

Without hesitation, the Chida accepted the verdict and put himself on route for a long exile, during which time he would meet the great men of his generation and travel to many countries, including Egypt, Italy, France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Sicily, Crete, and Turkey.

It is not without reason that the Chida acquired a reputation, while still alive, as a man possessed of supreme holiness, towards whom everyone looked. It is not only through his numerous praiseworthy books that he gained perpetual renown. He was a truly complete man, one who with remarkable harmony combined in himself traits and virtues that are rarely found in a single person.

Certainly, with the Chida everything was exemplary: His eminence in all domains of Torah, the influence he had on his contemporaries, the depth of his knowledge in worldly matters, and the prestige he garnered that commanded the respect and esteem of the great men of the nations. And yet his most remarkable trait was, incontestably, his characteristic humility.

We have a faithful witness in his journal, entitled Ma'agal Tov, in which the Chida recorded his personal observations as a keepsake, without any intention of publishing it. The following can be found in his journal.

“As for myself, the least of the inhabitants of the Jerusalem and Amsterdam, G-d made me find grace in the eyes of the ministers and deputies – me, the least of my brothers. I praise G-d, blessed be He, Who made my name grow even though I am devoid of all abilities.”

This is but an infinitesimally small portion of the thousands of entries abounding in his personal journal, entries that attest to his great modesty. Looking over his works, when we examine the greatness of the Chida's genius we are left breathless before the abundance of talent that Heaven bestowed upon him. It is almost impossible for us to evaluate this spiritual giant by our own gauge. He had acquired a mastery of character that he constantly used to elevate himself in the scale of perfection.

The Chida wrote more than 100 books. One can hardly imagine how so many quality works could have been written by a single man, a man that was otherwise constantly devoted to so many other things.

The Friday night of Shabbat Zachor, on the 11th of Adar 5566 (1806), Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai rendered his pure soul to his Creator. May his merit protect us. Amen.

PARASHA ZACHOR

REMOVE ALL TRACES OF AMALEK

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

G-d ordered King Saul to wipe out the descendants of Amalek from off the face of the earth, as it is written, "So said the L-RD, Master of Legions: 'I have remembered what Amalek did to Israel – [the ambush] he emplaced against him on the way, as he went up from Egypt. Now go and strike down Amalek and destroy everything he has" (I Sam 15:2:3). Thus the annihilation of Amalek comprises one of the three mitzvot that the Eternal commanded the Children of Israel for their entry into the Holy Land (Sanhedrin 20b).

Commenting on the verse that states, "Saul said to the Kenite, 'Go, withdraw, descend from among the Amalekite, lest I destroy you with them'" (I Sam 15: 6), the Zohar asks why the Holy One, blessed be He, was so merciless with regards to Amalek, even more so than with any other nation (Zohar II:194b). Rabbi Chiya responds: "Because the battle with Amalek took place from above to below, and on every side." Exactly what does this mean?

Everyone should constantly connect themselves to G-d, on every side, from above and below; this resembles "A ladder [that] was set earthward and its top reached heavenward" (Gen 28:12). This is done in order to bind the supernal world with the lower world, so that the Eternal may "dwell in the midst of both" (cf. Ex 25:8). If the Children of Israel were chased out of Egypt with neither delay nor "provisions for themselves" (Ex 12:39), it was because they found themselves at the 49th gate of impurity. Pharaoh, that reprobate, nonetheless cooperated with them, and liberated them before they reached the 50th gate, which is, as we know, a place without exit. Pharaoh even asked them to bless him (Ex 12:32) because he knew that if they had crossed it, both they and he would not have survived.

Following the example of Egypt, all the nations acted only with hate in regards to the Children of Israel. They didn't aim to distance them from faith in G-d. Rather, they complained that the Eternal chose us from among all the peoples to become the trustees of His law (Berachot 11b). Their sinah (hatred) against us stems as far back as Sinai (hence the name of the mountain), as we have already seen (Shabbat 89a).

On the other hand, Amalek aimed at completely distancing the Children of Israel from G-d, as much as in the supernal world as in the lower one. At their departure from Egypt, they yearned with fervor to purify themselves from all their spiritual blemishes. They engaged themselves in the study of Torah, even while on route, as it is written, "you will speak of them [Torah matters] ... while you walk on the way" (Deut 6:7). Yet just as someone who wants cool the waters of a hot bath (Tanhuma, Ki Tisa 9), Amalek came to chill their enthusiasm and to make them cross over the threshold of the 50th gate of impurity. He wanted to make them descend from the spiritual levels that they had ascended upon leaving Egypt (and while at the sea) and to prevent them from receiving the Ten Commandments. Over the course of the generations, there was thus never a worse enemy for the Jews than Amalek. His hatred for our nation has never been equaled in the history of humanity.

Amalek's brazenness stunned and chilled all the nations that considered his actions as tantamount to an all-out war not only against the Holy One, blessed be He (and His Shechinah), but also against Israel. Amalek had not understood that he couldn't triumph over them. He even ignored the fact that a powerful nation such as Egypt wasn't able to defeat them. The workings of the Satan succeeded nevertheless: The Children of Israel were terrified by him and began to abstain from Torah study. The forces of evil thus managed to defeat them in the supernal and lower worlds. Amalek, the descendant of Esau, knew perfectly well that as long as the voice of Jacob was not heard in the synagogues and yeshivas, he would triumph, as it is written, "when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck" (Gen 27:40).

The Holy One, blessed be He, hates this cruel enemy, an enemy that wanted to exploit the blessing of Isaac ("when you are aggrieved") and who didn't realize that the Torah constitutes an ideal remedy to the evil inclination. Without the Torah, how could the Children of Israel have managed to triumph over the Satan?

Amalek wanted to tear away the Children of Israel from the Holy One, blessed be He, and he wanted to do this both in the supernal and lower worlds. He even wanted to accuse them of neglecting Torah study. In this way he resembled a snake that lurks at the crossroads, waiting to suddenly pounce upon its victim. It is he who taught the other nations to involve Israel in sin. Now, as our Sages instructed us, one who involves someone else in sin is worse than someone who murders (Sifrei 23:117). He brings him to renounce G-d's existence. As it written, "When Moses raised his hand, Israel was stronger" (Ex 17:11), meaning that Moses put an end to Amalek's accusations on high while Joshua put an end to those below. Amalek's guardian angel was thus defeated above and below.

The Eternal therefore ordered Saul to annihilate all the descendants of Amalek, who chilled the enthusiasm of the Divine service, spiritually weakened the Children of Israel, and brought forth accusations both in the supernal and lower worlds. Amalek's fate is the fate of all those that follow in his footsteps, such as the Greeks, Haman, etc. For instead of encouraging them to engage in the study of Torah, he made them commit sins, and prevented shefa (abundance, both spiritual and material) from descending into the world. In fact, in a manner of speaking, he prevented the Kingdom of G-d from descending into the world as well. Amalek and his group aimed at wiping out the creation of the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus His Name and His Throne will not attain perfection until all traces of Amalek are erased (Tanhuma, Ki Tisa, end). The Kingdom of G-d will then spread out and nothing, neither in the supernal nor lower worlds, will hinder Israel's Redemption.

EISHET CHAYIL HALACHOT OF PURIM

1. Certain authorities believe that women must listen to the reading of Parsha Zachor in the synagogue during Shabbat Zachor.
2. Everyone, including women, must fast for Taanith Esther. However pregnant women (beginning from 3 months onwards) and those that are breastfeeding are exempt from fasting. As for a woman who can potentially breastfeed, even if she doesn't breastfeed her child, she is considered as one for the 24 months following her child's birth, and she too is exempt from fasting.
3. A woman who has miscarried is exempt from fasting for the following 24 months.
4. Everyone is obligated to listen to the reading of the Megillah Esther, including women. This is because our Sages have taught: "Women must listen to the Megillah because they played an active role in this miracle."
5. Women must also donate a certain amount of money in memory of Mahatzith Hashekel, and it is also good to do this on behalf of children.
6. Women are obligated to send Mishloah Manot to other women.
7. Women are obligated to observe all the mitzvot of Purim: Matanot Laevyonim (gifts for the poor), Seuda Purim (the Purim meal), etc.
8. It is absolutely forbidden for women to dress up as men on Purim. They do not have the right to wear men's clothing on that day.