

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

Nº 23 VAYIKRA

5 NISSAN 5764
MARCH.27.2004

Publication
HEVRAT PINTO

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

MODESTY AND HUMILITY ENABLES ONE TO ACQUIRE TORAH AND ATTRACT THE SHECHINAH

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

He called to Moses, and the L-RD spoke to him ... saying, 'Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD ...' (Lev 1:1-2).

Our Sages have spoken at length on the small-sized *aleph* in the word *vayikra*. For example, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 427) explains that Moses merited being summoned by G-d because he made himself small and ran away from honors. Moses did this when he said, "I am not a man of words" (Ex 4:10), meaning, "I am unworthy of the mission that You want to entrust me with."

The Torah, which is the path of life, teaches us in this Parsha that one must serve G-d without any reservations, as we have explained with regards to the verse that states, "When a man among you [*mikem* – lit. "of you"] brings an offering to the L-RD." One must observe the commandments of the Holy One, blessed be He, up to the granting of one's very self – including even martyrdom for the Torah and the mitzvot – and to take nothing into account but G-d's honor, without worrying at all about one's personal interests. This is what is meant by offering a sacrifice to the Eternal "of oneself", meaning to make a sacrifice of one's self, and at that moment it will be considered as being "to the Eternal".

This is why the Torah begins the book of Leviticus with the word *vayikra* written with a small-sized *aleph*, which in addition has the smallest numerical value of all the letters, meaning that a man should compare himself to it. He should, moreover, be conscious that the enthusiasm that reigns over the beginning of his

task should be accompanied by great humility and self-effacement. The Torah also instructs us that it – the Torah, which is called *aleph* in the sense of the verse, "*Va-a'alephcha* [And I will teach you] wisdom" (Job 33:33) – can only survive and take root among one who makes himself small, for the Sages have said that the Torah only resides among the humble (Taanith 7a).

As for the word ויקרא, as a whole it evokes the same thought. The letter ו (*vav*) represents man who bends and humbles himself, for he was created but on the sixth day, at the end of the entire Creation. This is so that he may realize that everything already existed before him (Sanhedrin 38a), without mentioning that he is dust and ashes: "For you are dust, and to dust shall you return" (Gen 3:19). He must therefore work enormously hard to arrive at a state of true perfection.

The middle letters (יקר) of the word are the same that form the word ריק ("void"), which alludes to the realization that man should have of his emptiness. Even if he is great in Torah, it suits him, nevertheless, to have the sense of being completely empty, as if he were at the very beginning. Finally, the small-sized *aleph*, as we mentioned, indicates the one who begins to study Torah, for it should always be in his eyes as new as on the day when it was given on Mount Sinai, as if he had just received it (Tanhuma Ki Tavo 1 on verse 7). At that very moment, he will have no reason to be proud of himself, since he will have started studying but on that very day. If he really behaves as such, he will merit that the Torah comes to live in his heart, as it is written,

Continuation page 2

“Your Torah is in my innards” (Ps 40:9). Radak explains that “in my innards” means “the inside of my heart”, for the heart is part of the innards. All these considerations lead to modesty and humility.

Unfortunately, the Torah is not the only thing to be found in the heart of man. The evil inclination also aspires to enter into man and make its home within him. Furthermore, it is said that it rests in the heart, between the two openings therein (Berachot 61b). Man’s essential fight therefore lies with his evil inclination, and man’s greatest aim should be that his interior be similar to his exterior (Berachot 28a). In effect, we know that, vis-à-vis a person’s exterior, it is very easy to come off as virtuous, to do good deeds in public, and to therefore fool the entire world. It even happens that a man convinces himself that he is a Tzaddik, whereas in reality he has neither Torah, nor fear of G-d, nor love for people, nor love of G-d. He resembles an empty well, a well that the Torah says contains not a drop of water, but rather is packed with serpents and scorpions (cf. Gen 37:24; Shabbat 22 and Rashi). What does this mean? The Sages have said that water always represents Torah (Bava Kama 17a), as indicated by the verse that states, “Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water” (Isa 55:1). Now concerning the well that we are speaking of, not only does it not contain words of Torah comparable to water, but it is filled with evil forces, comparable to serpents and scorpions (Perkei d’Rabbi Eliezer 13). A man such as this can appear righteous from the outside, however to arrive at a level of true perfection that would prevent him from ever falling spiritually, he would require great help from Heaven as well as a tremendous amount of work on his part.

Indeed, he will have to put in unceasing effort to maintain within himself, both internally and externally, the Ark of the Covenant, which is in actuality the holy Torah. The fact that the Ark was inside the Temple, not outside of it, teaches us that the essential effects of study occur within a man; the Torah should truly become part of his body. And in the same way that the Ark was covered with gold both inside and out (Ex 25:11), the interior of a man should be as fine as his exterior (Yoma 72b). Even if he is extremely learned and great in Torah, this does not exempt him from watching over the internal aspects of his actions in such a way that his words actually reflect his

thoughts (Pesachim 113b), and that his mouth and his heart be in accord with one other (ibid. 63a). In fact, the greater someone is, the more powerful the temptations he will experience. This is why the evil inclination tries Torah scholars more than all others, which obligates them to watch themselves without cease.

Now, this is what we call the presence of the Shechinah in man: The more a man conducts himself with modesty (feeling, as if were, empty, and conscious of being but dust and ashes, nothing permanent and nothing to feel proud about), the more he merits, in the same way, that the Shechinah should reside in him. It could happen that at that moment, the evil inclination will look to discourage him by telling him as follows: “If you are as empty as that, how are you ever going to amount to anything?” A man should therefore know that even if he is at the very beginning, he is nevertheless very precious in the eyes of G-d (יקר), which brings to mind the middle letters of the word ויקרא).

We will now be able to explain why our Parsha follows the one of Pekudei. The Book of Exodus ends with the verse that states, “For the cloud of the L-RD would be on the Tabernacle by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all the House of Israel throughout their journeys” (Ex 40:38). The word “fire” alludes to the Torah, as it is written, “from His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them” (Deut 33:2). The Sages have said that fire always designates the Torah (Mechilta Ex 19:18). The concept of travel also alludes to the Torah, which allows for an internal voyage “from strength to strength” (Ps 84:8). On the verse that states, “They journeyed from Rephidim” (Ex 19:2), the saintly Or HaChaim explains that the Children of Israel had considerably strengthened themselves in the study of Torah. This means that when a man dives into the Torah day and night and “journeys” in it “from strength to strength”, he merits that the Divine cloud comes and rests on the Tabernacle, which is to say that he will enjoy the presence of the Shechinah in himself as well as in all the House of Israel. All this is because of humility, evoked by the word *vayikra*. Certainly, this requires considerable personal work, however humility is one of the traits by which the Torah is acquired (Taanith 7a), and a man who practices it resembles the Temple.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI ABDALLAH SOMECH

Enormously knowledgeable, never compromising, and conducting himself with humility that was proverbial, Rabbi Abdullah Somech was the teacher of the Ben Ish Hai. He was also the teacher of Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, the author of the famous work Kaf HaChayim, that monumental Shulchan Aruch and necessary reference book in all yeshivas and sacred study centers in Israel and throughout the world.

Rabbi Abdullah Somech was, without doubt, a Torah giant that the Jewish people can be proud of. The teacher of the Ben Ish Hai, he is part of the inestimable and everlasting dynasty of Babylonian Sages, whose wisdom clarifies every page of the Talmud.

Rabbi Abdullah Somech Zatzal was born in Baghdad in 1813. He was the son of Rabbi Abraham Somech, himself a descendant of Rabbi Nissim Gaon, head of the famous Babylonian yeshiva at Nehardea, as well as the author of the Vidui (confessional) prayers for Yom Kippur. The sons of Rabbi Nissim Gaon were Yehoshua, Yosef, and Yehezkel. Yehoshua named his first and second sons Abraham and Abdallah, respectively, names that one finds in the family from generation to generation, including today. As for the family name Somech, in Hebrew it means "support", "backing", and it probably comes from the fact that one member of the family, Yehezkel, was a Somech (assistant) of the synagogue's Chazan (Cantor) during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

From his earliest youth, Rabbi Abdullah Somech had been entrusted by his father to one of the greatest teachers of the era, namely Rabbi Yaakov Harofeh. He therefore didn't stop studying Torah day and night, year after year, until he himself became an uncontested teacher for generations of students. One among them, Rabbi Shlomo Bechor Chotsin, wrote as follows: "If I were to praise him, even just the slightest bit, all the pages in the world would be insufficient. What's more, this would no doubt displease him, for he was extremely humble and wanted nothing less than fame."

Besides the Shulchan Aruch of his student, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, we owe to Rabbi Abdallah Somech a great number of rulings, particularly in matters of Shechita (ritual slaughter) and Treifot. All these rulings have been published in the work Zivchei Tzedek. As soon as they were disseminated, no one dared to turn aside from them by one iota, exactly as if they had come from Mount Sinai.

As we have seen above, Rabbi Abdullah Somech was the teacher of Rabbi Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai. When the latter began to give public lessons in the great synagogue of Baghdad, Rabbi Abdullah Somech would come and attend, each time that he could, specifically to hear his student. Another mark of this Torah giant was that when his student, the Ben Ish Hai, made his entry into the synagogue, he would rise before him, just as all present would. Because of the manner of the teacher, everyone understood the greatness of the student.

One day, policemen came to bring him to the walli (governor), who desired to speak with him after he had dismissed a dayan (rabbinic judge) who had proven to be unsuitable for his position. Yet when the policemen had hardly entered Rabbi Somech's home, they froze in seeing him seated among bearded scholars who were listening to his teachings. He himself appeared to them like an incarnation of an angel come from heaven, and this site impressed them so much that they hastened to turn around and leave the premises. To the governor who asked them why they had not brought Rabbi Somech, the policemen replied, "Do you know who you sent us to get? The prophet Moses himself!"

The governor therefore dispatched persons of honor to Rabbi Abdallah to persuade him to go back on his decision. Rabbi Abdallah replied, "My decision was made in accordance with the Torah of Moses. I therefore cannot change it."

The governor perfectly understood this point of view and agreed. It goes without saying that this incident only added to Rabbi Abdallah's prestige.

It was on the eve of Shabbat on the 18th of Elul, 1889 that Rabbi Abdullah Somech left this world. However, astonishing events weren't late in occurring around his tomb, events whose echoes rang out not only in Iraq, but all the way to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) and even to London and Paris. For example, following an outbreak of leprosy, the mayor of El Krach decided to forbid the burial of Rabbi Abdallah next to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Yehotzedek, who had been a Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Infuriated, the Jewish community (who, naturally, disregarded the prohibition) requested the help of Baghdad's mayor, a man who didn't hide his sympathy for the Jews. This had the result of dividing the population into two camps: Jewish and Arab. Certain Muslims had, in fact, falsely accused the Jews of having struck them. The anti-Semitic mayor of El Krach took advantage of the situation to imprison several Chachamim (Sages), and the local Jewish community therefore sent delegations to influential people in Constantinople (to the Sassoon family), to London, and to the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. At the end of it all, the anti-Semitic mayor was fired from his position. All this took about a month. Nevertheless, in order to ease people's nerves, the Jewish community resigned itself to exhuming the remains of the deceased illustrious Rabbi. Several Rabbis descended into the tomb and asked mechila (forgiveness) from Rabbi Abdallah. However, they were utterly astonished when they noticed that the body of their revered teacher had remained completely intact, exactly as on the day he died.

His Hilloula is Elul 18.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

WHEN A HOUSE IS NOT A HOUSE

A teaching from the Maggid of Dubno

In a general way, when G-d in His wisdom commanded us to build the Sanctuary and the Temple, and to offer sacrifices there, it was with intention of allowing us to purify our souls by consecrating this form of worship: “This is the thing that the L-RD has commanded you to do; then the glory of the L-RD will appear to you” (Lev 9:6). In this context, let us appreciate the marvelous words of the prophet: “‘Why do I need your numerous sacrifices?’ says the L-RD” (Isa 1: 11). At first glance, doesn’t this seem to contradict the Torah, of which an entire book is devoted to dealing with sacrifices? In reality, the essential aspect of our religion deals with the purity of our intentions.

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us with the following parable.

A man hired a craftsman to construct a house for him with different rooms corresponding to particular functions. They agreed on a price, and the contract stipulated that the construction had to start before a given date. After having worked out the details, they recorded the essential details on a piece of paper: The craftsman was committed to building the house according to certain criteria, and the owner would pay him a set amount of money. When the time came to begin building the house, an official contract, much more detailed than the original note, was drawn up. Thus the work began.

The craftsman took measurements, cut the wood, made the plans, and constructed all the elements. All he had to do for the house to be ready was to assemble them. This foolish craftsman, however, thought that what he had done up to that point was sufficient to fulfill his end of the contract. He therefore went to the man and said, “I’ve already completed everything that was written in our contract. Here are the walls, the doors, the windows, and the beams. All you have to do is assemble them, if you want.” The man responded, “You scoundrel! What did you do with the tiny note that we had written at the beginning?”

When the Children of Israel were still in Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses in a general way, “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain” (Ex 3: 12). Then, on Mount Sinai, He explained in detail

just what this service entailed. From then on, whoever observes it (be it even in its entirety), but with the intention of erring (meaning, acting only out of personal interest), does in fact carry out all the commandments given at Sinai. However, he does not carry out what was said to Moses in Egypt, namely, “For I did not speak with your forefathers, nor did I command them, on the day I took them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt- or peace-offerings. Rather, it was only this thing that I commanded them, saying, ‘Hearken to My voice, that I will be your G-d and you will be My people; and you will go on the entire way that I command you [and which I will specify to you later on Mount Sinai]’” (Jer 7:22-23).

EISHET CHAYIL

RESPECT FOR PARENTS RESPECT FOR HUSBAND

1. Men and women are under the obligation to honor their parents. However, a wife cannot perform this mitzvah because she depends on her husband, and so she is exempt when she is married. If she is divorced or becomes widowed, she is again obligated. Even so, she is obligated to honor them to the degree that her husband is not opposed to her fulfilling their wishes.

2. The wife is obligated to honor her in-laws to the degree that she can. Her obligation to honor her in-laws is greater than that of a man because doing so is a way of respecting her husband.

3. If a father forbids his daughter from marrying so that she can take care of him, she is not bound to obey. However, because peace is great, she should push herself to help him so that he will accept to let her get married.

4. Women are obligated to rise before a Talmid Chacham (scholar) and before an elderly man. One should act as such before a scholarly or old person. A student is obligated to rise before his teacher who has taught him Torah, and doesn’t have the right to call him simply by his first name without the teacher’s proper title.

5. A woman is obligated to honor her husband. Concerning this subject, the Rambam wrote as follows: “In this way, our Sages have obligated a wife to honor her husband, to fear him, and to act according to his wishes. She should consider him as a minister or a king. This is the way that the daughters and sons of Israel should act if they desire to establish homes that are holy and pure, and it is in this way that their homes will be beautiful and worthy of praise. A man is also obligated to respect the honor of his wife” (Hilchot Ishut 15:20).