

הַיָּהוּדִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Parsha *Acharei Mot* and Parsha *Kedoshim* are normally read together. To explain the connection between the two, one would have to say that a person only considers examining his spiritual state and repenting after the righteous die, telling himself that if such Tzaddikim (who were upright and perfect, and thus whose merit benefited everyone – see Perkei Avoth 5:18) have left this world, what could we expect, we who are nothing? They, at least, had properly prepared themselves for eternal life, but as for us, pity us, especially now that we have lost the leaders of the generation. What will we be able to say before G-d?

Acharei Mot and *Kedoshim* teach us that after the death of Tsaddikim, their holiness allows us to elevate ourselves spiritually and to examine our actions, particularly this year (5758), where because of our many sins, many of the righteous who were among the great of Israel have left us. It is obvious that we have much to learn from them and their way of life, and “we bewail those who have left and cannot be forgotten” (Sanhedrin 111a).

Our sins plainly provoked their departure, which is why we should do some soul-searching. We should ask ourselves what happened that caused our great Rabbanim to pass away one after the other, without even bringing us the Final Redemption. Naturally, the Satan manages to give a person neither the time nor the opportunity to reflect upon these things, but rather keeps him in a state of perpetual unrest by telling him to “do this” one day and to “do that” on the next (Shabbat 105a; Pesikta Zutah Nitzavim). This happens to the point that a person comes to actually forget what he is doing in this world, to neglect Torah, and to sin and make others sin as well (Avoth d’Rabbi Eliezer 40:3). This is why G-d removes a righteous individual from us, then another, with the world being left in the dark. It is at that moment that a person awakens slightly from his numbness and begins to reflect on things. “The righteous one perishes, and no man takes it to heart” (Isaiah 57:1), writes the prophet, which is why after the death of the righteous – *acharei mot kedoshim* (lit. “after the death of the holy

ones”) – a slight awakening occurs and a person begins to question himself a little.

One can say, as well, that as long as the righteous live in this world, the evil inclination certainly doesn’t leave them at peace, and even makes them suffer. Yet these troubles mean that they arrive at a higher level of holiness after their death, so much so, in fact, that even while dead they are called alive (Berachot 18a). This is what it means to “behold the sweetness of the L-RD and to contemplate in His Sanctuary” (Psalms 27:4), and this is the significance of the idea that after their death (*acharei mot*), they become holy (*kedoshim*).

It can emphatically be said that many of the righteous desire to literally attach themselves to G-d (in accordance with the verse that states, “cleave to Him” [Deuteronomy 30:20]), with complete devotion, almost to the point of putting their lives in danger. This is why Scripture warns us: “He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary” (Leviticus 16:2). This means that despite the intense desire of the righteous to die for the sanctification of the Divine Name in accomplishing their service, they should all the same know that they do not have the right to act this way whenever they want, and that the prospect of attaining a state of holiness after their death should suffice them. This is what one can read in the words themselves: It is after death (*acharei mot*) that one becomes holy (*kedoshim*).

Nevertheless, the righteous that have left us this year served G-d with literally all their strength. They devoted themselves completely to the community, and we bewail their passing. In addition, they began by giving everything to others and put themselves last. They killed themselves for Torah study (Berachot 63b; Shabbat 83b), and this devotion combined with their humility gained them a considerable level of holiness. This is *acharei mot kedoshim*: The last (*acharonim*) that killed themselves (*mot*) for the Torah thus became holy (*kedoshim*). May it be G-d’s will that their merit protect us, as well as all of the Children of Israel, and that G-d hastens the Final Redemption to our exile and sends the Messiah quickly, in our days. May it be so, Amen.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was one of the most remarkable men to have ever lived. Very few in number are those individuals whom his contemporaries, as well as his posterity, have held in such high esteem. In the era in which he lived, people would oftentimes say, "Happy are the days in which a man like Shimon bar Yochai can be found." And today there are still tens of thousands of Jews that journey to his tomb on the anniversary of his passing (Iyar 18, Lag BaOmer) to pray there.

Through his own efforts, this great man raised himself out of a position of the greatest hardship. In Jerusalem, it is said that Rabbi Akiva refused to admit Rabbi Shimon as one of his students, and that he only did so after making him take an exam. His father Yochai had been on the Roman side during the terrible time in which Emperor Hadrian had ordered the Jews persecuted (Pesachim 112a). This is probably the reason why Rabbi Akiva refused to take in the young Rabbi Shimon among his students. Yet, all the same, Rabbi Shimon managed to stand out among all the students and thus become (along with his companions Rabbi Jose, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Nechemia) one of the pillars of Torah.

As opposed to his father, Rabbi Shimon was pursued by the Romans and condemned to death. The situation was so serious that he, along with his son Rabbi Eliezer, had to hide in a cave for 13 years where together they studied Torah incessantly. After the death of Emperor Hadrian, he was sent to Rome by his fellow Jews. There he succeeded in curing an imperial princess from a serious illness, at which time Emperor Antoninus suspended Hadrian's decrees.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai also attained importance in a domain other than the study of Talmud. He achieved a profound understanding of *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), of which he became the main guide. When we say that he was the author of the holy Zohar, one should nevertheless not take this to mean that he himself wrote it, but rather that it was the Sages after him who did so. His son and his students received their understanding from him, so well in fact that the Zohar carries the imprint of his spirit. One day, one of his students went abroad to devote himself to business. Returning some time later with great wealth, his former fellow students

saw him and were seized with a desire to become wealthy, and so they also wanted to give up on their studies and go off in search of riches. When Rabbi Shimon learned of this, he brought his students to a vast plain. There he prayed to G-d that He cover the entire area with gold, and it was so. "The one whose heart clings to gold," said their teacher, "should take what he wants. But know that the one who now takes of this gold loses his share in eternal life." No hands reached out to take the gold, and his students abandoned the idea of exchanging the precious good of the Torah for gold (Midrash Rabba Pekudei).

EISHET CHAYIL

CHALAH

1. One is obligated to take challah (remove dough). This obligation applies to dough made from one of the five grains: Wheat, rye, spelt, barley, or oats.

2. The obligation to take challah only applies to dough that is to be made into bread (for dough to be used in cakes, see No. 7). For dough kneaded only with wine, eggs, or oil (that is, dough in which no water has been used), one takes challah but does not recite the blessing.

3. The minimum amount of flour required in order to recite the blessing for taking challah is 1667 grams. For reasons of piety, one takes challah, without reciting the blessing, beginning at 1616 grams.

4. One removes a symbolic amount of challah and then burns it.

5. Before removing the challah, one recites the following blessing: *Baruch ata Hashem, Elokeinu melech haolam, asher kidishanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehafrish challah terumah*. Immediately after the blessing, one removes the challah in saying: *Harei zeh challah*. Women should push themselves to perform this mitzvah at least once a year.

6. Before taking challah, it is good for the dough to have been kneaded evenly and to have a consistent composition throughout. If one has forgotten to remove challah before baking the dough, one removes it immediately after it baking.

7. When one makes a dough for cakes using 1667 grams or more of flour, one must also remove dough and recite the blessing, but only on condition that this dough is cooked in the oven. If, however, this dough is to be fried, it is preferable that one removes the dough without reciting the blessing. This also applies for dough kneaded only with wine, eggs or oil

PERKEI AVOTH

THE THREE CROWNS

by Rav M. Lehmann רב מ. ליהמן

Rabbi Shimon said: ‘There are three crowns – the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship; but the crown of a good name surpasses them all’ (Perkei Avoth 4:13).

The preceding statement speaks of the responsibilities that are incumbent upon those who study and teach Torah. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai speaks of the rewards that the Torah gives to its faithful followers, and of the crown and honors they will enjoy.

First of all, it is surprising to read that Rabbi Shimon speaks of the existence of three crowns, but in fact lists four! Many of our commentators explain that the first three crowns (those of Torah, priesthood, and kingship) deserve this name only if the one who wears them is also adorned with the crown of a good name. This is because the crowns of Torah, priesthood, and kingship bestow a certain amount of authority to those who wear them. It provides an influence on those around them. They should therefore exercise this authority for the common good, and in this way they will also attain the crown of a good name, the crown that surpasses all the privileges stemming from lineage or knowledge. Without a good name, the other crowns have no value. For example, the one who distinguishes himself by his knowledge of Torah only deserves the crown of Torah if he conscientiously practices everything that he has learned. The one who is born with the privilege of the priesthood only deserves the crown of the priesthood if he forces himself by his behavior to emulate the ideal priest. Thus for each of these crowns to be truly deserved, the crown of a good name must be combined with them.

One can go further and state that the crown of Torah implicitly includes, for those who merit it, the crowns of priesthood and kingship. In giving our ancestors the Torah, did G-d not tell them, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6)?

It is true that over the course of our people’s history, priests and kings – the altar and the throne – have often been in opposition to one another. Yet in the type of theocracy that our nation should be

structured as, altar and throne (spiritual and earthly power) should live in perfect harmony because they will both have their roots in the Torah, which is the revealed law of G-d. Harmony between the two powers has never been completely realized in the course of our history, yet it has always been proposed by our prophets and sages. Thus in speaking of David and his messianic ideal, the author of Psalms 110 writes: “You shall be a priest forever, because you are a king of righteousness” (Psalms 110:4). In fact, by virtue of Divine command he holds both responsibilities: His spiritual tasks (priestly duties) and his kingly tasks.

Much later in history, during the time of the incoming of the first exiles under the direction of Joshua (the High Priest) and Zerubbabel (a descendant of the royal family), the prophet Zechariah’s vision again shows the interdependence between these two crowns and the crown of Torah (see Zechariah 4:11-14). When Zechariah asks what the two olive trees to the right and to the left of the Menorah represent, G-d tells him: “These are the two sons of the oil [Rashi: the anointing oil of the priest and the king] who are standing by the L-rd of all the land” (v14). These men take their inspiration from the Torah given by G-d.

The numerous duties of the priest in the Temple service, as well as in the application of the laws of purity (*negaim*), required that the priest have a profound knowledge of Torah. The ideal priest, as the prophet Malachi sees it, makes of himself a veritable messenger of G-d. He should therefore be simultaneously adorned with the crowns of Torah and the priesthood. However when the priest is an ignoramus, the Mishnah instructs us that even a learned bastard has precedence over an ignorant High Priest (Horayot Ch. 3).

The one who wears the crown of kingship has as his first duty the study of Torah and the performance of Torah laws, as it is written in Parsha *Shoftim* (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Moreover, it is King Solomon himself who in the book of Proverbs glorifies the Torah by stating: “Through me kings will reign, and nobles will decree righteousness” (Proverbs 8:15).