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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
8 Morris Road - Spring Valley NY 10977
Tel: 1-845 426 1276 • Fax: 1-845 426 1149
www.hevratpinto.org
Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

MAN'S SOUL IS THE LAMP OF G-D

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The Midrash recounts that Moses experienced more difficulty with regards to the Menorah than with any other item in the Sanctuary, to the point that the Holy One, blessed be He, had to show him in detail how to make it (Bamidbar Rabba 15:4). The same thing occurred for the hooves of pure and impure animals, as it is written, "These are the creatures you may eat ... this is what you shall not eat" (Leviticus 11:2,4), which indicates that He showed him these in detail. And as for the New Moon: "This month shall be for you the beginning of the months" (Exodus 12: 2). Regarding that which concerns the Menorah, it is written, "This is the workmanship of the Menorah, hammered out gold" (Numbers 8:4). Moses therefore experienced great adversity, to the point that the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Take a block of gold and throw it into the fire." He did this, and a Menorah came out by itself, as it is written, "You shall make a Menorah of pure gold" (Exodus 25:31), meaning that it would be made by itself. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses, "If you are careful to light before Me, I will protect your souls from all harm." This is because the soul is compared to a lamp, as it is written, "A man's soul is the lamp of the L-RD" (Proverbs 20:27).

The book *Sheerith Israel* (by the Admor of Pilov-Kotzk) states the following: It must be understood why Moses found the Menorah more difficult to understand than the hooves of animals or the New Moon, since for the latter two G-d showed him in detail, but for the Menorah even that didn't suffice, and in addition it had to be made by itself. Moreover, since in the end the Menorah was, in fact, made by itself, why was it necessary for the Holy One, blessed be He, to begin by showing Moses how to make it in detail? He could have arranged things such that the Menorah was made by itself immediately, at the outset!

In my humble opinion, we can explain this in the following way. The Menorah, its branches, flowers,

buds, and cups represent the body of man and his limbs, while the olive oil represents the soul, the latter being pure and originating from under the Throne of Glory (Zohar III:29), the most holy of places. Consequently, Moses' great difficulty consisted in understanding how a man can be made of one single piece, truly whole and perfect in the ways of G-d. And even though G-d showed him in detail that a person can work on himself until becoming perfect, he still found this difficult to understand, for every day the evil inclination is stronger than man and is trying to kill him (Sukkah 52a), and it is very difficult to defeat it.

At that moment, the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him that by means of the pure soul found in the body of man and which helps him, it is always possible to defeat one's desires and to be stronger than them. Yet despite all this, Moses still had difficulty imagining that man, who is dust and ashes, can defeat the stronger evil inclination every single day – an inclination that seeks to make him transgress – even with the help of the soul that is a Divine spark.

This is why G-d finished by telling him, "Strike it with a hammer, and it will be made by itself." This is an allusion to the fact that man should work diligently on Torah, and that it is only by this relentless labor that he will perfect himself. (The allusion is contained in the word "hammer", which cross-references what the Sages said about the evil inclination, namely that a hammer will shatter it). Without the considerable effort that this represents, man will experience much obscurity in his service of G-d. And as Rav Israel Salanter wrote, that which characterizes Torah labor is actual sweat while studying. When we build an object with a hammer, the more we strike it, the more finished it becomes. It is the same when we vigorously study Torah: The more we work, the

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stronger we become in terms of controlling our drives. This is what the Midrash says at the end, namely that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses, "If you are careful to light before Me, I will protect your souls from all harm," for the soul is compared to a lamp. In working on Torah, it is possible to become stronger and to be protected from all harm, since it is also stated, "For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). The Torah and the mitzvot are also called a lamp, and the one who delves into the study of Torah and performs the mitzvot is protected from the *Yetzer Hara* ("evil inclination", as it written, "only evil the whole day" [Genesis 6:5]).

One may also explain the Midrash in another way. Why in fact did Moses – who what a great Sage (*Vayikra Rabba* 1:15) and who possessed enormous intelligence (see *Hagigah* 14a) – experience such difficulty with regards to the Menorah, animals, and the New Moon? In particular, with regards to the Menorah, it was not Moses who received the order to build it, but rather Betzalel and Oholiav. Consequently, even if Moses did not understand how to make it, who says that this would have also been the case for Betzalel? Perhaps he would not have had any difficulty with it!

The answer to this, of course, is the one that we have already given above, and we learn from all this how a man can shape himself into a single unified whole, to connect himself to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to conquer his evil inclination.

Everyone should learn from this that it is not easy to understand the Torah without an enormous amount of effort, since even Moses, who was extremely great, experienced difficulties in things such as the Menorah, animals, and the New Moon. For these, he put in much effort and strain in trying to understand, yet in the end he didn't succeed and so he asked G-d to help him, which also shows us his humility. Every man should learn how to acquire Torah: When he does not understand something, even if it consists of something simple, he should not be ashamed to ask again and again. This is the only way, and it is in line with what the Gemara says: "It is from myself and from you and the subject will be properly understood" (*Pesachim* 88a). Thus, he will be able to elevate himself in Torah knowledge.

It is written, "When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light towards the front of the Menorah" (*Numbers* 8:2), which signifies that if a man desires to elevate himself as much as possible in Torah and the fear of Heaven, he should invest a great amount of work into doing so. Then the seven lamps light the Menorah, which represents the body, and he will be protected from all harm and similar to a single block by his spiritual perfection. When he attains this ideal state of body and soul, he sees the Holy One, blessed be He, everywhere,

as the verse states, "I have set the L-RD before me always" (*Psalms* 16:8), and everything he does, he does to unite the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah. Even in darkness and obscurity, he only feels the reality of G-d.

At that moment, the Holy One, blessed be He, also sees him in all places, follows him attentively, and protects him from all harm, as it is written in the Gemara concerning the verse that states, "all your males shall be seen" (*Deuteronomy* 16:16). The Hebrew word for "shall be seen" can also be read as "shall see" (*Hagigah* 2a), meaning that in the same way that he comes to be seen, he also comes to see. He sees the face of G-d, and G-d also sees him. This is what is said in the following verse: "The eye of the L-RD is on those who fear Him" (*Psalms* 33:18), for G-d regards all Jews favorably. This means that those who fear Him are also the ones who desire to see Him (the Hebrew for "fear" and "see" have the same roots), and desire to elevate themselves at every moment in Torah and mitzvot, in whatever circumstance they may be found.

There is much to support this idea, as for example the Parsha containing the commandment of *tzitzit*: "You shall look upon it and remember all the mitzvot of the L-RD" (*Numbers* 15:39). In effect, if a man wants to observe all the mitzvot, in accordance with the idea that *tzitzit* are considered equal to all the mitzvot (*Nedarim* 25a), he should see the reality of G-d everywhere ("You shall look"). This is also what is said in the following: "When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light towards the front of the Menorah" (*Numbers* 8:2), meaning that if one wants that the lamps be lit, one should always face the Holy Shechinah. During the festival of Chanukah, we also say, "These lamps are holy. We do not have the right to benefit from them, but only to look at them," which is to say that if one desires to feel the holiness of the lamps, the holiness of the mitzvot, one should live in the fear of G-d (as we have said, the Hebrew words for "fear" and "see" are formed by the same letters). How can one achieve this? When one feels the reality of G-d, one finds oneself in front of the Menorah.

When a man conducts himself as such, he receives from Heaven an abundance of faith to thank and praise G-d, and he feels that G-d protects and performs miracles for him. This is just like a baby that always has his eyes on his mother, and she looks back at him with mercy, as it is written, "As a nurse carries a suckling" (*Numbers* 11:12). Thus a man who conducts himself as such belongs solely to the Eternal and elevates himself without cease.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI AMRAM BEN DIWAN

It is always with a feeling of respect and awe that the Jews of Morocco evoke the holy name of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan. He was born in Jerusalem, and later he settled in Hebron. In 5523 (1743), he was chosen by the Rabbis of Hebron as an emissary to Morocco with the mission of collecting money for the yeshivas of the Holy Land. He decided to settle in the Moroccan town of Wazan, and there he founded a Talmud-Torah and a yeshiva where numerous students came to quench their thirst for study by drinking from the source of his words.

Rabbi Amram became attached to his students. His fatherly affection created a solid connection between him and his students. He provided for all their material needs, and spiritually directed them on the path that leads to the performance of G-d's will. By his rich and varied pursuits, he contributed to the elevation and dissemination of Torah in all the communities of Morocco. Rabbi Amram was also known for his miracles. His blessings always came to pass, and Jews would travel from all the towns of Morocco to urgently seek him in order to be delivered, through his merit, from their troubles. He occupied himself with the well-being of everyone in particular, and the well-being of the community in general. His home was always open to all the afflicted who came knocking at his door, hoping that the Tzaddik would be their staunchest defender before our Father, the Holy One, blessed be He.

After a long stay in Morocco, Rabbi Amram felt a great longing for the Land of Israel. He therefore interrupted his holy work. His students, to whom he had taught Torah, had themselves become great scholars over the course of the years. Thus he decided to return to the Holy Land. When he arrived in Hebron, he became friends with Rabbi Haim Bagoyo and Rabbi Avraham Gedalia, the Rabbis of the city. Together they studied Torah and penetrated many of its wondrous secrets, ascending day by day the rungs of perfection in Torah study and Divine service.

However, Rabbi Amram's stay in Hebron was short-lived. An unfortunate incident caused his departure, forcing him to take up the mantle of sojourner once again and return to Morocco. The following story describes what happened.

At that time, Jews were not permitted to enter into the tomb of the Patriarchs. However, for Rabbi Amram, this prohibition did not in the least quench his fervent desire to pray by the tomb of our Fathers. He therefore disguised himself as an Arab, and without being noticed he entered the cave with the rest of the Muslims that had also come there to pray. Imagine his emotions when he approached the tomb of the Patriarchs! As his face became drenched with tears, he quietly uttered his prayers, beseeching the Creator of the world to hasten the Final Redemption. No one doubted that this "Muslim", so absorbed as he was in his prayer, was nothing other than a Jew. Suddenly, as Rabbi Amram was preparing to leave, an Arab saw and recognized him. Immediately, he ran to the Pasha and informed him of the offense.

Rabbi Amram incurred heavy suffering for such a sacrilege. A friend of Rabbi Amram, who was also a servant of the Pasha, hurried to warn him that he intended to arrest him. In the middle of the night, Rabbi Amram, accompanied by his young son, Rabbi Haim, left their home. They feared returning to Jerusalem or a neighboring country because during that era Turkish power held sway over several countries. He therefore decided to return to Morocco. As soon as he arrived in Fez,

the city's inhabitants welcomed him with great honor. Many of the city's notable men quarreled over the merit of having him as their guest. He was finally received by Rabbi Menasheh Ibn Denan, one of the leaders of Fez's Jewish community.

The story is told that Rabbi Menasheh's children were all girls, and that another girl had just been born to him. Rabbi Amram advised him to name her Fedina, which means, "we have finished". In other words, we have finished giving birth to girls. And it was thus that after this girl, Rabbi Menasheh had only boys.

Not long after his arrival in Fez, Rabbi Amram and his son Rabbi Haim traveled to all the towns of Morocco in order to spread the teaching of Torah. He arrived in Sefru, where he lodged in the Elbaz home. Having no children of their own, they asked him for a blessing to have a son. Rabbi Amram blessed them and promised that in the following year, at the very same time of year, the wife would give birth to a son who would later become a great Torah scholar. The blessing of the Tzaddik came to fruition. The son who was born to the Elbaz family was given the name of the Tzaddik, Amram, and afterwards the name of Rabbi Amram of Sefru became famous as a Gaon and great Torah Scholar.

While Rabbi Amram was staying in the Elbaz home in Sefru, his son Rabbi Haim fell deathly ill. The doctors gave him no chance at recovering. Rabbi Amram prayed to the Creator of the world that He take his soul in place of his son's. His son, Rabbi Haim, recovered from his illness, and they continued on their journey to all the towns of Morocco. When they arrived in Wazan, Rabbi Amram himself fell gravely ill, and soon afterwards rendered his soul to his Creator.

The tomb of Rabbi Amram became a place of pilgrimage for all the Jews of Morocco. Each year on Lag BaOmer, thousands of Jews come to Wazan to make the pilgrimage to the grave of the saint. Numerous miracles are said to have occurred on his tomb: Incurable illnesses have been healed, the blind have regained their site, the mute have found their voice, the paralyzed have returned home on their own, and infertile women have had children after having prayed there.

They tell that a French military sergeant had a son who remained paralyzed after a serious illness. This sergeant had a Jewish friend that advised him to take his son to the tomb of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan in Wazan. At first, the sergeant was skeptical and refused, but then later promised that if a miracle were to happen and his son would be healed, he would build a road with his own money in order to facilitate access to the tomb of the Tzaddik. The miracle occurred: As soon as his son approached the tomb of Rabbi Amram, he was healed. The happy father kept his promise and constructed a road that leads to the tomb of Rabbi Amram.

The great poet, Rabbi David Ben Hassin, composed a liturgical poem especially in his honor, a song that is sung by the Jews of Morocco on the day of his Hilloula.

His son, Rabbi Haim Ben Diwan, continued his father's work. He traveled from town to town with the goal of instructing Torah. He died at a ripe old age and rests in the village of Anranz, south of Marrakech. His tomb has also become a place of pilgrimage for all the Jews of Morocco.

May his merit protect us. Amen

THE MORAL OF THE STORY A LESSON IN HUMILITY

A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno

Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light towards the front of the Menorah. And Aaron did so'" (Numbers 8:2-3).

Why does the Torah take the effort to tell us that Aaron the priest lit the Menorah exactly as he was told?

The Midrash explains: To glorify Aaron for not having changed anything in Hashem's detailed instructions.

Why was Aaron's compliance so meritorious?

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

Three people were struck with the same illness, and the doctor prescribed the same medication to all of them. The first person asked no questions and did everything that the doctor had prescribed. He was cured. The second person knew a little about medicine, and in trying to understand the doctor's prognosis, rejected everything that seemed strange to him. He ended up dying. The third person also knew a little bit about medicine, but knew that the doctor's breadth of knowledge far exceeded his own. This is why he decided to trust the doctor even in those things that he didn't understand. He was cured.

Thus, the average man observes the commandments in their totality without trying to understand them. However the scholar, who examines every detail, easily risks transgressing that which he doesn't understand. This is what happened with King Solomon, who thought that his wisdom would help him to better observe the Torah, just as his father had said: "Grant me understanding so that I may cherish Your Torah and keep it with [my] whole heart" (Psalms 119:34). Solomon said, "All this I tested with wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 7:23). He stated that he would use wisdom for everything that concerns the Torah. Now this is precisely what provoked the opposite result, leading him to state "but it is far from me" (ibid.). It was further from him than from another person that doesn't look for explanations, for Solomon's speculative ideas lead him to decide things for himself and say, "Whatever my eyes desired, I did not deny them" (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Whereas the Torah orders that a king not have many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17), King Solomon thought he could trust his own strength and disregard this. The same occurred with regards to that which concerns the *mishpatim* ("laws"). He analyzed them from the point of view of truth. Yet when he came to the passage of the red heifer, he looked everywhere for an explanation for this mitzvah that satisfied his intellect, yet found none. For him, this constituted an obvious sign that the Torah far surpasses human intelligence, and that a man does not need to look for the reasons behind a mitzvah in order to perform it, as David said, "All Your commandments are faithful" (Psalms 119:86). This is what the Midrash is saying when it states that the verse in question (Numbers 8:2-3) "is written in honor of Aaron, to show that he changed nothing."

STORY OF THE WEEK REMOVE ANGER FROM YOUR HEART AND EVIL FROM YOUR FLESH

Rabbi Chaim of Kossov, author of the Torah work entitled *Torat Chaim*, related that he once traveled to a town to perform a certain mitzvah there. While on route, he stayed in a village and readied himself to spend the night with a local Jew. The latter was very happy to be able to host him, and he prepared a bed for Rav, who then retired for the night. After midnight the Rav heard someone reciting the blessing for Torah study with great concentration. He then heard him beginning to study Gemara. When daylight broke and there was enough light to make out shapes, the Rabbi saw a blind old man lying in a bed and studying with great devotion. The old man said that he was the father of the Rav's host, and that for 20 years he had separated himself from all worldly things and was occupied exclusively with Torah study and serving G-d. He had not the slightest contact with anyone, and he wanted nothing other than Torah. He lived with his son, who took care of all his needs, and was completely free to devote himself to serving G-d. The Rabbi, who then realized that he was in the presence of a man of great spiritual stature, asked that he enter into a firm pact with him, such that whoever would die first would come back in a dream and tell the other how he was judged in Heaven. He accepted, and they agreed to their pact.

Some years later the blind man died. He kept his promise and came to Rabbi Chaim in a dream. He told him the following: "When my soul rose to Heaven, there was a great problem among the Heavenly host. When they brought me into the Celestial Court and began to examine my case, they realized that during the last 20 years of my life I was spiritually elevated and pure, and as a result I had atoned for my sins, to the last trace of impure thoughts, to the extent that I was clean of all sin and filled with Torah and mitzvot. Then all of a sudden an angel dressed in black cried out, 'You wish to grant Gan Eden to this man? Yet he has scorned the Torah in public and has still not repented!'"

The angled explained what he meant in detail.

When he was younger, the man had taught young boys in a village far from where he lived. He stayed there all winter long and returned to his hometown for Passover, where he was known and honored as a Talmid Chacham. Once he went to Synagogue to pray on Shabbat, but when he was given the fourth Aliya his heart was filled with anger. He waited until the end of the service and went to express his irritation to the Gabbai. "To someone as honored as myself you give only the fourth Aliya? Someone of my status should get the sixth, or the Maftir!"

In Heaven the verdict was immediately pronounced, and the deceased was given the choice of either (1) Coming back in another incarnation to repair this sin, or (2) Suffering three minutes of shame in Heaven. Naturally, he chose the second penalty.

All of a sudden, the gates of Gan Eden were opened and an angel came to bring him to where he was to be put to shame before all the Tzaddikim in Heaven: "See this putrid drop – he had the insolence to say that the fourth Aliya was not enough for him."

When Rabbi Chaim would relate this story, he would finish by saying: "Know that the Holy One, blessed be He, had pity on that great man, lessening his punishment so that he did not feel too much shame. Otherwise, he would not have been able to withstand it any longer, and he would have asked to return on earth rather than to suffer this shame, be it only for a minute more. From this we learn what harm we do to ourselves by anger and stubbornness.