

הַיְיָ וְהַיְיָ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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A SPIRITUAL WAR FOR ALL GENERATIONS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "Moses sent emissaries from Kadesh to the king of Edom" (Numbers 20:14), and further it is said, "Let us pass through your land ... on the king's road shall we travel ... if we drink your water – I or my flock – I shall pay their price ... He said, You shall not pass through!" ... So Edom refused to permit Israel to pass through his border." Several points regarding this passage need to be understood. We shall specify them one by one.

1. How is it possible that Edom, who greatly loved wealth, refused to let the Children of Israel pass through his territory? The Edomites could have earned a fortune because the Children of Israel were ready to pay for the permission to pass through. Now the Children of Israel did not lack money, for they possessed all the riches of Egypt, yet Edom opposed them to the point of marching out to war against them, as it is written, "Then Edom went out against him with a massive throng and a strong hand" (v.20). How can this be understood?

2. We are still more surprised when we recall that Edom represents the descendant of Esau. Now the latter passionately loved gold and riches, since the Sages have said, "From where did Jacob have a tomb in the cave of Machpelah? He took all his silver and gold and placed it into a pile, which Esau took and gave Jacob his portion in the cave of Machpelah" (Tanhuma Vayechi 6). Esau therefore greatly desired silver and gold. Thus how can we understand that Edom refused to take what the Children of Israel proposed to give them in exchange for the water they would use?

3. There is yet another problem. After the refusal of the king of Edom, it is written, "and Israel turned away from near him" (v.21), meaning that the Children of Israel immediately gave up and left. How could Moses not fear that the Children of Israel would become instilled with terror (since they were going to have to wait for 40 years in the desert) by making them back away as soon as they reached their first obstacle? Was Moses not afraid that from that moment on, the other peoples would not at all hesitate to come out against the Children of Israel because they had backed away from before Edom? Moses should have at least demonstrated an outward show of strength, and even if G-d had ordered him not to fight against Edom,

in any case he should not have backed away immediately without leaving the Children of Israel any way out for all the years to come!

We shall now explain all this. Concerning Jacob and Esau, the Sages say that already while in the womb of their mother, they shared the heritage of two worlds (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zutah 19). Esau had taken this world, which is why he sold his part in the world to come to Jacob, as it is written, "Jacob said, 'Sell, as this day, your birthright to me'" (Genesis 25:31), meaning "according to that which we've agreed to in our mother's womb." We know that this world is filled with food and drink and the possibility of becoming rich, everything that Esau desired and obtained. We therefore see that the sharing between them did not consist of a material distribution, but rather that it was above all a distribution of the whole, according to which Esau would not partake of any spiritual resources whatsoever. In fact, the Sages teach: "If one tells you that there is wisdom among the nations, believe him; that there is Torah among the nations, do not believe him (Lamentations Rabba 2: 17). The wicked Esau passed down to all his descendants the characteristic of not attributing any worth to spirituality. They were people who did not have any regard whatsoever for the Children of Israel because they had no portion whatsoever in the G-d of Israel.

There is a difference between Jacob's and Esau's nature. Even before blessing Jacob, Isaac said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are Esau's hands" (Genesis 27:22), meaning that in the same way that a voice is only heard (and not seen), Jacob's children (the Children of Israel) do not only believe in what they see, but also in that which is hidden, in spirituality. It is not same with Esau ("the hands are Esau's hands"), who believes in hands that are seen – in his own strength – and in that which he sees with his own eyes. This is why he does not believe in the G-d of Israel. It is because he does not see the Creator.

We will now understand why Edom did not allow Israel to cross over his territory. During the 40 years that the Children of Israel spent in the desert, they elevated themselves to a high level of spirituality, to the point that

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they truly resembled the angels, arrayed in glory. Their faces beamed with the radiance of the Shechinah, for in them was a portion of G-d Most High, particularly with Moses at their head. Who would not have marveled at their holiness? Just the fact of letting them cross their territory would have amounted, therefore, to recognizing the Creator of the world, and this Edom would not do at any price! "It is known that Esau detests Jacob" (Sifrei Beha'alotcha 9:10), and his hate is such that he preferred to lose gold and silver rather than to accord the least recognition to the Children of Israel, a recognition that would have been equivalent to recognizing the Master of the world. That would have been impossible, for Esau and his descendants have no portion in the G-d of Israel.

It remains for us to understand why Moses wanted to pass through Edom, since he could have bypassed that country without the risk of having to reverse the Children of Israel's direction and allowing fear to take hold of them. He did this because he understood the danger that Edom represented to the spiritual lives of the Children of Israel, even until the coming of the Redeemer. This is why he wanted to subject them to Esau, from the very beginning. It was in order to make Esau understand the greatness of the Children of Israel, for all undertakings begun by Moses are permanent. And even if it had been decided that Moses himself would not enter into Eretz Israel (Numbers 20:12-13), he laid out for the Children of Israel the path to the Redemption, of which the submission of Edom was the first step.

However the Holy One, blessed be He, did not let the Children of Israel fight against Edom, for before the time of the Redemption, Edom and the Children of Israel must retain their free will. "The voice is Jacob's voice" – when the voice of Jacob will be heard in the places of prayer and study, the hands of Esau will be powerless (Bereshith Rabba 65). And if, unfortunately, this is not the case, then the hands of Esau will be dominant and the voice of Jacob will have to return through the intermediary of the sufferings that the nations will make him endure. This is why Edom did not allow Israel to cross over his country. He feared that this would give the Children of Israel an influence over the Edomites, that they would push them to believe that there is a G-d and try to precipitate their repentance. If this were to have been the case, Edom would have had to admit that the blessings rightfully belonged to Jacob, which would have meant that they would have had to submit themselves and disappear from the world. This is why it was preferable to them that they lose a great amount of wealth than to let the Children of Israel enter.

We should be even more amazed by the fact that the king of Edom was not afraid to come out for battle against Israel, even though he had heard what had happened to Pharaoh in Egypt and by the sea. As it is written: "Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moab, and the dwellers of Canaan dissolved" (Exodus 15:15). In reality, Edom was very fearful of the Children of Israel, and if he went out with a great quantity of men and weapons, it was not for waging war. When the king of Edom noted Moses' persistence (since even after Edom refused the Children of Israel the right to cross his territory, Moses still asked him, "And if we drink your

water – I or my flock – I shall pay their price"), he began to ask himself why Moses continued to act in this way. Certainly, he wanted to enter in order to have an influence over the people of Edom and to convince them to return to G-d, which is demonstrated by the words "if we drink your water." He planned to bring them closer to the Torah, which is compared to water (Bava Kama 17a), and to have that which they had swallowed come out of their mouths, similar to what is written in the verse that states, "He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it" (Job 20:15). The king of Edom therefore came out to meet him with many people in order to make the Children of Israel understand that the spiritual battle had not yet ended, and that it would continue until the time of the future Redemption.

This is the difference between Edom and the Children of Israel. Edom said, "You shall not pass through me – lest I come against you with the sword!" (Numbers 20:18). All Edom's strength is in his sword and spear, in accordance with the blessing of Isaac to Esau his son: "By your sword you shall live" (Genesis 27:40). Yet the strength of the Children of Israel is in their mouths, as it is written, "We cried out to the L-RD and He heard our voice" (Numbers 20:16). Their entire nature was to be completely self-effacing before the Eternal, without any ulterior motives. From this, everyone should understand that sometimes a person does something and thinks that it constitutes a desecration of the Divine Name, while in reality there is a sanctification of the Name. How is that possible?

Imagine that someone who wears a kippah, eats kosher, and observes the mitzvot is scorned by all those around him. He may therefore think that this entails a profanation of G-d's Name, since they are really scorning the Torah and the mitzvot. Now he should realize that it is precisely because he pays no attention to them and observes the mitzvot with pride that he sanctifies the Name of G-d! In fact, in the case of Edom and Israel, when G-d commanded the latter that they not wage battle against Edom, they could have thought that this constituted a profanation of G-d's Name, since all the other peoples believed that the Children of Israel did not have the means to defend themselves. However the Children of Israel had no ulterior motives. Thus by performing His will by not defending themselves, they sanctified the Name of G-d.

In this we find a proof for what we mentioned earlier, namely that Edom did not wish to do battle against the Children of Israel because he was content by coming out against them without pursuing them. Why this attitude? We have already said that Edom wanted to imply to them that their spiritual war was not over, but that each side would continue to try and weaken the other, similar to what is written in the verse that states, "I will be filled, for she was destroyed" (Ezekiel 26:2). When Edom was destroyed, Jerusalem lived in peace, and when Jerusalem was destroyed, Edom lived in peace (Megillah 6a), for the goal of Israel is to influence Edom, and vice-versa. This battle will continue up until the time of the Final Redemption, when that which is written will occur: "And saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge the Mountain of Esau" (Obadiah 1:21). Thus the Eternal will uproot Edom from the world, speedily in our days. Amen.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI CHAIM BENATTAR

The city of Sale, located on the Atlantic Ocean coast at the far end of Morocco, is not large in terms of cities. The Jewish community there, although small in number, has nevertheless left its imprint on Israel's history because of our revered teacher, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar. Born and raised in Sale, he grew up in the city until he felt the need to leave for the Holy Land and Jerusalem, where he now lies buried.

He was born in 5456 (1696) into the Ben Attar family (originally from Muslim Spain, "Attar" means "perfume" or "perfume merchant") and studied Torah with his grandfather, after whom he was named. As he relates in the introduction to his book Hefetz Hashem, "I studied Torah with my teacher and grandfather, Rav Haim Ben Attar of holy and blessed memory. He was a great Rav, well known, pious and humble, who in his time I drank living waters from. From my birth, I grew up on his knees and took in all his wondrous sayings. He was so pious that I would say that he almost never slept even half a night. He even spent the nights of Tammuz reciting lamentations over the destruction of the House of G-d, crying profusely, like a widow. He finished the night by studying with myself and others who, like myself, were his descendants." In Sale, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar gained a living through his work, which tradition says was in making clothes, especially clothes made of luxury materials woven with gold or silver thread.

Once, the governor of Sale was about to marry his daughter, and when he heard that the work of our teacher was done to perfection and with great precision, he decided to entrust the creation of his daughter's wedding dress to him. He governor had one condition, however, which was that the work had to be completed before the end of the week. As we have said, our teacher earned a living through his work. However he maintained one principle: From the moment that he had earned enough money to live on for the week, he returned to his studies. The servants who had brought him the bride-to-be's clothes were shocked to hear him refuse the job. They returned a second time on orders from the governor, and threatened him with death should he refuse. However our teacher remained firm in his conviction. The governor could not tolerate the fact that a Jew refused to obey him, and he ordered him thrown into the lions' den (after having starved the beasts) found in his court. The governor's servants, who had chained our teacher to bring him to the lions, could hear the hungry roars of the big cats from afar. Yet our teacher, without being perturbed, moved firmly towards the den. The governor's servants were even more surprised when the lions met him by lining up in front of him, wagging their tails and seemingly showing him respect. During this time, our teacher had taken out the book of Psalms and had begun to recite it. The governor, who hastened to come to the den to witness this marvel with his own eyes, greatly regretted having mistreated our teacher and ordered that he be freed. He also gave him expensive gifts and asked for forgiveness.

This is only one of the widespread stories circulating in the Jewish community concerning the greatness of our teacher, whom even wild beasts had a reverential fear of.

Staying with his father-in-law from his youth, our teacher did not cease elevating himself in Torah. He finished by founding a yeshiva in his home, where he taught Torah publicly without receiving any salary for it, for from his youth he had undertaken to study and teach. In 5492 (1732), while still living in Sale, his book Hefetz Hashem (a commentary on the Gemara) was printed in Amsterdam. However persecutions forced him to leave the city of his birth, and he left for Meknes, then to Fez, where he studied for several years with certain students and friends. His home was wide open to everyone, and how much more to Bnei Torah. Every week he would purchase a calf for Shabbat, slaughter it, and distribute the meat to Talmidei Chachamim so that they could have something to eat in honor of Shabbat.

The story goes that one week, an epidemic erupted among the livestock of Sale, and all the animals that were slaughtered in honor of Shabbat turned out to be treif, with exception to the calf slaughtered by our teacher. One of the inhabitants of the city, a very wealthy and honored man who greatly regretted not being able to eat meat for Shabbat, went to see our teacher to ask him to

give him some, regardless of the price. Our teacher refused, explaining that all the meat was devoted to the needs of the Talmidei Chachamim who came to receive their portion in honor of Shabbat. While they were yet speaking, one of the poor Torah scholars that had regularly helped him came by, and our teacher gave him his portion. The wealthy man was greatly hurt by the fact that he had no meat for himself, whereas this poor man dressed in tatters received a generous portion. In his rage he heaped words of scorn on the poor man, who was a great Talmid Chacham. Our teacher did not wish to talk with the rich man, and so he left without having obtained what he wanted.

That night, our teacher dreamed that he was condemned into exile for an entire year because he did not defend the honor of the Talmid Chacham in lieu of the rich man's insults. He accepted the decree. The following week, he left his place and undertook a year of veritable exile. He didn't sleep more than one night in the same place, leaving the next morning to pursue his exile. He was often assailed by hunger, yet accepted this trial because of the insult suffered by a Talmid Chacham.

Noticing that he was overwhelmed with troubles, our teacher decided that the moment had come to ascend towards the holy city. As our teacher wrote, "Hashem cleared my mind, and I understood that this trial was only meant to encourage me to leave for the place that I had dreamed of, the place of the Shechinah, the exalted city that is precious to the Master of the world, Sovereign in the world above and in the world below. I armed myself with all my courage and faced great dangers by traveling in deserted regions, all this to arrive at the country that I had yearned for, that pure spot on earth, Eretz Israel. As for all the countries of the peoples of the world, their land – even the air that they breathe there – is impure."

On Rosh Chodesh Av in the year 5501 (1741), he left from Livorno, Italy with a group of students, 30 in all, for Alexandria in Egypt. From there he was to travel to Jaffa, and then on to Jerusalem. One of his students, Rav Avraham Ishmael Hai Sanguinetti, described in a letter to his father (who lived in Modena, Italy) the entire trip from Livorno until the city of Akko. The boat that they had taken stopped in Alexandria, from where the group was to travel to Jaffa and then on the Jerusalem, but the captain instead took them to Akko, where they arrived at the end of Elul 5501 (1741).

In fact, this was really a favor that G-d had done for them, for there was an epidemic that had broken out in Jaffa and Jerusalem. This is why the Rav established a yeshiva in Akko and stayed there for nearly a year, until the middle of 5502 (1742). In Eretz Israel, he was accustomed to pray at the graves of the Tzaddikim. He would go with his students, whether it be in Jerusalem, or in Sefat and Tiberias in the Galilee.

He was warmly greeted when he arrived in Sefat, and even the Beit Midrash of our revered teacher Rabbi Yossef Caro (the author of the Shulchan Aruch) was put at his disposal. There, according to tradition, the holy Arizal had prayed. From time to time, our teacher and his students left for ziarot (pilgrimages) to the graves of the Tzaddikim, Tannaim, and Amoraim buried in the villages of the Galilee. They approached the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron with particular emotion, and even though they traveled there by riding donkeys, when they saw from afar the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai on the mountain summit of Meron, our teacher descended from his donkey and began to climb on all fours, uttering with a bitter voice, "How can I – who am nothing – how can I enter into that place of fire, wherein dwells the flame of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah, while all the heavenly guides and all the souls of the Tzaddikim are here!"

When he visited the holy places of Tiberias, Rav Haim Aboulafia would insistently beg him to settle in Tiberias and to take charge of the new Jewish community of that city. In the end, our teacher decided to establish his yeshiva in Jerusalem, and near the end of the year 5502 (1742) he settled in the holy city with his students. His emotions in arriving in the holy city were expressed in a letter in which he enthusiastically described his first Yom Kippur in Jerusalem:

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"I saw a great light at the time of Kol Nidre ... and when I opened the heichal, it was truly for me like opening the doors to the Garden of Eden. There was such radiance in the synagogue that everyone was overflowing in supplications and cried abundantly in their desire to see the construction of the Temple. Even the Falachim did the same. [Editor's Note: Apparently these were the Jewish peasants that lived in the villages neighboring Jerusalem (such as Nevi Shmuel) and who came to the city on the night of Yom Kippur to pray with the community]. Believe me, in my entire life I have never seen such a thing."

Among his students was the Chida, who was 18 years old when he joined himself to our teacher's group as the latter ascended to Jerusalem. Even though our teacher lived only 11 months in Jerusalem, the Chida had the time to serve and learn Torah from him. In his book *Shem HaGedolim*, he speaks with great praise of his grandeur: "And myself the youngster, I had the merit to be part of his yeshiva. My eyes saw the greatness of his Torah, his extreme gentleness, and his extraordinary holiness. For our generation, the Rav had impressive strength in study; he was like a source of living waters. One perceives his wisdom in his books, yet this represents but only a fraction of his insight, the greatness of his heart, and his exceptionally sharp mind. All day long there hovered over him a spirit of holiness and detachment from the world, as well as exceptional spiritual strength."

Our teacher did not live long in the holy city, and before a year had passed from the time of his arrival, he departed from this world and joined the Celestial Assembly: "Because of the sins of the generation, he fell ill and died at the age of 87, in the year 5503 [1743]."

During the last year of his life on earth, our teacher was awake on the night of Hoshana Rabba and recited the tikkun, his expression as radiant as the sun. His face emitted rays of glory, and he was like an angel dressed in white. When midnight arrived, he went alone into his room, removed his white clothes, then dressed in black and prostrated his entire body length to the floor and began to cry bitterly. He remained stretched out this way until the time for prayers arrived, after which he returned to his room and again stretched himself out on the floor until the time for Shemini Atzeret. He then came out dressed in white. After the holiday, his student the Chida asked the saintly Ohr HaHaim the meaning of his behavior. He responded that he had prayed for the arrival of Mashiach and that his prayer was heard. "When the Angel of Death saw that evil was on the verge of disappearing, he put all his efforts into sweeping the world up in sin, and he succeeded to such a point that the situation had reversed itself and destruction had been decreed." When our teacher had seen this, he had prostrated himself and began to pray with all his strength, to the point of having accepted to take upon himself the burden of the decree, thus saving the entire generation. Because of our numerous sins, this is what happened. He departed from the world within the course of that same year. The Chida finishes his account of what happened by saying that he had understood from his remarks that he was Mashiach, and that he was prepared to come out and reveal himself, but because of our many sins it was not possible to do so.

Our teacher died on a Saturday evening, at the beginning of the night. At that moment, the Baal Shem Tov had just finished washing his hands for the third Shabbat meal (there, the sun had not yet set), and he said, "The light of the Orient has extinguished," meaning that our teacher, the saintly Ohr HaHaim, had died. At the moment he died, his friend Rav Haim Aboulafia fainted in Tiberius in the middle of prayer and remained unconscious for almost half an hour. In regaining consciousness, he said that he had accompanied our teacher up to the doors of the Garden of Eden. The Sages of Jerusalem speak of his death in their letter of recommendation for the book *Rishon Letzion*, which appeared in 5503 (1743). They stated, "That day, the entire country began to weep, the leaders of Zion sat in the dust, lamentations responding to tears, and everywhere we gathered together to eulogize him."

Rabbi Haim Ben Attar's tomb on the slope of the Mount of Olives is among the holy places where many people come to pray during the entire year. In particular, there are many who journey there on the day of his Hilloula, Tammuz 15.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY THIS IS THE LAW OF THE TORAH

A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno

The Midrash states: "This is the law of the Torah." The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I enacted a chukah [decree]; I prescribed a gezeira [prohibition]. You are not permitted to transgress My decree."

To understand this Midrash, let us consider the following example.

A man of little means was lucky enough that he managed to make a fortune for himself, to the point that he considered marrying off his daughter to the son of the Rav. He sent an intermediary to make this proposition to the Rav, promising to pay what he asked if he agreed to the man's offer. This intermediary therefore went to find the Rav, who upon hearing the proposition found it very questionable, for in his life the Rav never spoke a word to that good-for-nothing, not even, for that matter, to any other person from that town. Nevertheless, the intermediary knew how to present the idea with such eloquence that he managed to successfully arrange an agreement. Now after the marriage, the father of the young girl noticed that the Rav never spoke to him, which greatly surprised him. "Could it be possible that the parents of a married couple not communicate with one another?" he thought.

His sentiment made it to the ears of the Rav, who told the man that he was mistaken. In fact, the man was surprised because, given that he believed that the marriage was desirable for both sides, he felt it odd that the parents of the couple did not speak to one another. In reality, however, this was far from the case. The fact that he did not speak to him, said the Rav, is what is desirable, for what did the Rav have in common with that good-for-nothing? Of what could the Rav speak to him about? Rather, the Rav asked himself how he had consented to such a marriage, yet he could not find an answer to that question!

In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, concluded a covenant with an inferior creation of flesh and blood and gave him the marvelous Torah. And yet when a Jew reads the Torah and finds in it some mysterious passage, he is surprised: How is it that Hashem did not address Himself to him clearly, in a way that he could understand the minutest detail? The answer that Hashem gives is that man is mistaken by this. He imagines that the covenant that He concluded with him is desirable for both sides, and consequently he has trouble understanding why G-d does not clearly reveal Himself to him in the Torah! In reality, however, the opposite is true: "It is the honor of G-d to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). The fact that He concluded such a covenant with him should seem unfathomable and utterly mysterious. "This is the chukah [decree] of the Torah that the L-RD commanded," and consequently man should not embolden himself and try at all costs to find reasons and explanations for everything. Rather, he should accept the fact that such is the decree of the Torah, and he should understand that the real mystery that surpasses our understanding by far is why Hashem gave a treasure as magnificent as the Torah to men of flesh and blood.