

הַיְהוּדִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE TORAH IS THE BEST REMEDY FOR THE EVIL INCLINATION AND FORBIDDEN GLANCES (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The Gemara teaches that the Tzaddikim master their heart (Sukkah 52b; Kiddushin 30b), which is to say that they dominate their instincts. It is therefore better that a man knows where his own evil inclination is, namely beyadecha (in your hands), rather than the contrary. This is also valid for the one who repents. As soon as he feels a spark of Teshuvah, he should begin fighting the evil inclination. And when he will have chosen life (Deuteronomy 30:19), he can be assured that the Holy One, blessed be He, will come to his aid.

This is what we see in the latter portion of the verse: "...and the L-RD your G-d will deliver them into your hand, veshavita shivyo [and you will capture its captivity]" (Deuteronomy 21:10), which shows us the value of Teshuvah. As we have seen several times before, sins are transformed into merits because of Teshuvah, and the evil inclination's hostage is liberated and moves onto the right path through intensive Torah study. This in turn brings about an end to the evil inclination's reign (the evil inclination's keitz eish [end of fire] has the same numerical value as teitzei).

Commenting on the verse that states, "And you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife" (Deuteronomy 21:11), Rashi writes: "The Torah speaks only in deference to the evil inclination, for if the Holy One, blessed be He, would not permit her [to the warrior], he would live with her illicitly. However if he does marry her, he will ultimately hate her, as it is further said, 'If a man will have two wives...'[v.15]. And, ultimately, he will father a wayward, rebellious son from her. This is why these chapters adjoin one another."

If he had such a son, it would be because he neglected the education that he himself received from his parents and because he became progressively worse. His son will be a glutton and a drunkard, and he will steal and pillage from people (Sanhedrin 71a). Nevertheless, a question arises concerning this subject. As we have seen, only the great Tzaddikim went out to war, as it is written: "Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows, like his heart" (Deuteronomy 20:8). The Gemara comments that this refers to one who fears the consequences of the sins that he has committed (Sotah 44a), even if he spoke between the recitation of Yishtabach and Yotzer (cf. Beit Yossef, Ohr HaChayim 54, according to the Yerushalmi). How can we even imagine that these Tzaddikim had fallen to such a point? If the Torah had prevented them from legally taking such women, would they have transgressed this prohibition and married them anyway? The Holy One, blessed be

He, performed miracles for them in particular and made their enemies fall into their hands. Yet instead of praising and exulting Him, they coveted non-Jewish women, which put the stability of the family and the greatness of the nation in danger.

We see from this just how serious it is to cast the slightest glance on the forbidden. Even the most courageous and powerful man, both physically and spiritually, is liable of letting himself be seduced by the evil inclination and falling into its trap.

Certainly, one must go out to war in order to exterminate G-d's enemies and in this way neutralize their ministering angel (Zohar II:17a). However in battle one must primarily seek to glorify G-d's Name, for we must overcome great tests in the mist of hostilities. The time spent in the enemy's camp also poses great problems, and if we do not pay particular attention to our eyes and heart, which are the agents of sin (Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:5), we run the risk of tainting our souls, even if we are great Tzaddikim.

The Torah warns us concerning this, as it is written: "And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, after which you go astray" (Numbers 15:39), as well as "You shall guard yourself against everything evil" (Deuteronomy 23:10), and "Your camp shall be holy" (v.15).

The Torah permits the warrior to take the woman of beautiful form as his wife only after he acts according to the Torah's instructions. This is done in the hope that its directives will diminish his desires and make him carefully think things over, until he completely separates himself from her.

During these holy days of Elul, we must do some careful soul-searching. We must awaken ourselves and implore Hashem to remove all the sins that we have committed during the summer, and to silence all those that bring accusations against us because of our wrongdoing.

It is not enough to go out to war (that is, to engage in Torah study) in order to destroy the evil inclination and, in this way, thanks to our Teshuvah – by which we take the evil inclination bashevi (into captivity) – to transform our sins into merits (Yoma 86b). We must, above all, be careful to distance ourselves from dangerous places that put us to the test. It is only in this way that the merit of our Torah will protect us and we will stop sinning.

Even at the time when He created the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not neglect the Torah. He did stop looking to it in order to create the world (cf. Zohar II:161b). What then will we say, we who are but

dust and ashes, food for worms? We must insure that our thoughts are constantly on Torah, otherwise we risk digressing despite all our wisdom and intelligence. We risk falling into the hellfire of a world where desire and craving increase, and where the evil inclination is free to act as it pleases.

As we saw above, King David only asked for one thing: To dwell in the house of the G-d. At first glance, this request seems paradoxical. Why did he not implore Heaven to provide him with an honorable living, to give him good health, to help him conquer his numerous enemies, and to plan for the construction of the holy Temple? How could he – he who was to care for the countless needs of all Israel – permit himself to constantly dwell in the house of G-d?

In fact, what King David wanted was for G-d to help him in all his endeavors, for the individual as well as for the community, and this thanks to the fact that, as he admitted, “*I have set the L-RD before me always*” (*Psalms 16:8*). He wanted that the Book of the Torah not leave his mouth (*see Joshua 1:8*). All these actions, whose aim was only to enable him to conform to the dictates of the Torah, come to reside in the house of G-d in a new way at each instant.

Thus, even when we are not actually in the house of study, if everything that we do aims at glorifying Hashem, it is as if we were permanently sitting there. If we are careful to constantly perform the mitzvot of the Torah, it is as if we are in the house of G-d day and night.

Let us therefore attach ourselves to the Torah, particularly during these days of Elul. We will then manage to repent of all our misdeeds. Acknowledging the truth will make us realize our sins, and we will then be aggrieved and strive to take to the right path. In my opinion, Elul is called the month of repentance not only because we do Teshuvah and rectify our sins during this time, but also because during Elul we await the teshuvah (answer) of the Creator of the universe. Finding ourselves on Rosh Hashanah in the state of a newborn, free of sin (*Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:4*), we wait for Him to tell us, just as He told Moses, “*I have forgiven because of your words*” (*Numbers 14:20*).

Forgiveness is proportional to repentance. It is up to us to choose. It is up to us to decide to go out and battle the evil inclination with all the strength and yearning that we have been granted following our Teshuvah, doing so by diligently engaging in Torah study and conforming ourselves to its laws. The Torah actually corrects our ways and gives us the necessary strength to fight the evil inclination. G-d assures us that such indeed is the case, as it is written, “*I created the evil inclination and I also created the Torah as a spice [i.e., an antidote] for it*” (*Kiddushin 30b*). We will thus receive a good response from Him.

The word veshavita (and you will capture) has the name numerical value (718) as the term haTeshuvah, meaning that if we sincerely repent, G-d yashiv (will answer) us and yashuv (will return) to us (yashuv being formed by the same letters as shivyo). The expression vera'eeta bashivya (and you will see among its captivity) means that, despite everything, we have sinned by looking – illustrated by the statement “*I made a covenant with my eyes*” (*Job 31:1*) – and it is an indication that we have deceived ourselves from the outset. The verse states, “*[She shall] remain in your house ... for a full month*” (*Deuteronomy 21:13*), meaning that we are given 30 days to examine our ways and repent. The woman of beautiful form must carry out all the steps prescribed by the Torah, the goal of this being to protect the warrior in question

and to encourage him to conform to the Torah that permitted her to him. All the same, he should realize that he will end up regretting his action (*Rashi on Deuteronomy 21:14; Sifri ibid.*).

Let us return to the Zohar's teaching that we saw earlier, according to which G-d looked into the Torah to create the world. The question is, why?

If the Holy One, blessed be He, acted in this way, it was mainly for man's good. By looking into the Torah, He impregnated all of Creation with details of it. In this way we can attach ourselves to the Torah at all times and in every place, elevating ourselves in our service of G-d and contemplating His splendor. Otherwise, a man would find himself in situations where his strength would not allow him to conquer the evil inclination, which incites him to refrain from studying Torah.

It was only by this Divine glance into the Torah, and by the holy fire of Torah that spreads to every place, that we can fight the evil inclination. We have but to awaken ourselves and taste it. Nevertheless, we should realize that G-d made one correspond to the other (*Ecclesiastes 7:14*), meaning that the more holy a place is, the more that forces of evil can hold sway over it (*Zohar II:297a, 207a, 223b*). The forces of evil are also rampant during the holy days, to a degree proportional to their holiness. Seven days before Yom Kippur, when the High Priest was to enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple, he was taken from his home and brought to an area on the Temple mount that was reserved for this occasion. This was done lest the High Priest become impure before Yom Kippur (*Yoma 6a*). An important question arises: How can we have doubts regarding the holiest of all men, one who serves Hashem on the holiest day, Yom Kippur, and in the holiest of places, the Temple?

This is because we cannot vouch for his integrity before the day of his death, and the precautions undertaken before Yom Kippur apply to all High Priests without exception, be they as important as Shimon HaTzaddik (with regards to this, refer to what the author of Pnei Menachem has written in his teachings concerning the Ten Days of Repentance). It is during these circumstances that the evil inclination increases its efforts in order to make a man transgress.

During this first holy day in the month of Elul, we should realize that the evil inclination endeavors to sow discord between a man and his fellow, a sin that Yom Kippur does not atone for (*Yoma 85a*). Let us do our best, therefore, to humble ourselves before our Creator, for it is in this way that we will also be able to humble ourselves before others. Our burning desire to come closer to the Holy One, blessed be He, will contribute to us coming closer to our neighbor, It will also help us in our primary goal of seeking G-d's glory and dwelling in His house.

How did King David react to the insults of his enemies? He told Abishai and all his servants, “*Here my own son, who has issued from my innards, seeks my life, so what now of this Benjamite [Shimei ben Gera]? Let him be; let him curse, for the L-RD has told him to*” (*II Samuel 16:11*). Since David's only goal was glorifying G-d's Name, he did not get angry with Shimei, for he knew that everything originated from G-d.

It is only when “*I am my beloved's*” (*Song of Songs 6:3*) – when the greatest harmony reigns between my friend and I – that “*my Beloved is mine*” (*ibid.*), that the Holy One, blessed be He, comes close to me and answers my prayers. The connection between man and G-d begins with the one between man and his fellow. Everything that we have said applies particularly to the eve of Yom Kippur. Let us not wait until the fast day itself in order to reconcile ourselves with all our friends and relatives.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

THE HOLY CITY

In the city of Kedoshith in the Galilee, people placed large posters on billboards that read: "Our guide and teacher, Rabbi Shemaryahu HaCohen, invites the entire community, from the youngest to the oldest, to an important assembly." When everyone had gathered together, the Rav told them the following:

"I wish to inform you of a special task that I desire to impose on all the residents of the community, without exception."

Many people automatically reached for their wallets, certain that the request consisted of a collection. However the Rav's discourse took another turn.

"I want you to be holy. Starting tomorrow, I'm asking everyone, from the youngest to the oldest – including women and children – to be holy. This is what I wanted to tell you. And now holy flock, go home and begin to be holy."

"What?"

"Us – be holy?"

"What are we, that we can be holy?"

When the Rav finished making his request, the public was utterly confused.

"What did the Rav say?"

"You heard what he said!"

"I'm going to be holy? What does a holy policeman look like?" asked the town's police chief.

"And how can a person be a holy tailor?" asked the tailor.

"Am I going to open a holy restaurant?" asked the owner of an eatery.

"How can one be a holy mechanic, a holy street sweeper, a holy engineer, a holy banker, a holy electrician, or a holy farmer?" asked someone rather loudly.

"What is the Rav talking about?" asked Chaim the businessman. "Rabbis, scholars, kabbalists, Tzaddikim, and judges – those who occupy themselves with the Torah day and night – they can be holy. As for us – who spend the whole day working – how can we be holy?"

The Rav quieted the crowd down and said, "I'll explain what I mean. I didn't invent the requirement to be holy. It is clearly written in the Torah: 'The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I the L-RD your G-d am holy" ' [Leviticus 21:1]."

The Rav continued: "It's not without reason that this mitzvah was given before the entire Jewish people together. If it had been given like all the other mitzvot – first to Aaron, then to his sons, then to the elders, and finally to everyone else – the people would have thought that it applied only to the Sages and Tzaddikim. That is why Hashem ordered Moses to assemble the entire community in order to command them to be holy. Parsha Kedoshim explains how we can all conduct ourselves with holiness."

The Rav went on to explain what holiness entails: "If instead of taking the entire harvest for himself, a farmer leaves the Leket [gleanings], Shikchah [forgotten bundles] and Pe'ah [unharvested edge of his field] for the poor, and gives the Terumah [offering] and Ma'aser [tithe] to the Priests and the Levites, his labor is transformed into holy work. The work of a businessman who owns accurate scales, weights, and measures conducts his transactions with honesty, and thus his work becomes holy. The individual who observes the laws of discretion and modesty that are found in Parsha Kedoshim thereby lives a holy life. The one who guards his tongue from evil gossip, his tongue becomes holy. All human activity becomes sanctified if people do their work for the love of Heaven, not simply to earn money. If one sweeps the streets with the intention of making the city a clean place, he does holy work. We can all be holy, each according to his own level, and with G-d's help we will all be successful."

After a year, the city of Kedoshith became known for its special ambience. During city meetings, nobody yelled at or insulted others. In the local newspaper, there were no slanderous stories or tales of defamation, only accounts of people helping others and mitzvot being done. The courts were almost without work, for no one attempted to earn money dishonestly. Any doubts that arose in a trial were justly clarified by the judges, and lawyers acted honestly and recognized the truth. Residents from villages and settlements around Kedoshith came to the city for a Din Torah because they believed that justice there was sure. Men and women in the city dressed modestly, without trying to be noticed for their apparel. City workers received their salaries on the same day and performed their work with integrity, not carelessly. All these things greatly boosted the city's economy.

Doctors worked extra house and paid visits to people's homes without charging extra. The poor did not have to beg for money, for the city's charitable organizations collected enough and discretely allocated it to them by depositing it into their bank accounts. Children did not utter vulgar words, and no obscenity was heard in the city. Whenever a car broke down, others immediately stopped and offered to help. Public transport was barely used, for almost everyone offered others a lift in their own vehicles. There was no need to lock cars or bicycles, and homes remained open, without doors needing to be reinforced or barred. The city's houses of study were filled with people studying Torah, and Torah lessons were given on the local television station along with visual presentations to make understanding easier. There were also educational organizations that elevated the moral consciousness of youngsters. Nobody threw garbage outside, and street sweepers were free to study for half the day; all they had to do was empty trashcans. The police were mainly busy directing traffic and carrying out the mitzvah of returning lost items. There were no traffic accidents, for everyone drove carefully. People from all over came to see this amazing and contented city, the holy city of Kedoshith.