

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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WELCOMING GUESTS UNDER THE WINGS OF DIVINE PROTECTION

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written in this week's Torah portion, "And the L-RD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting in the door of the tent in the heat of the day" (Genesis 18:1).

"That day was the third day after Abraham's circumcision, and G-d came to visit the sick. When G-d saw that he was suffering from his circumcision, He created a great heat in order that no visitors should pass by" (Bava Metzia 86b). Abraham was known for his hospitality, since "his tent had an entrance in each of its four sides so that visitors could easily enter regardless of the direction from which they came" (Bereshith Rabba 48:9; Yalkut Meam Loez Bereshith 420). Having no visitors on that day, Abraham sent out Eliezer to find some guests, but he returned empty handed. Therefore Abraham himself went out in search of passers-by, telling Eliezer that he did not believe him because he was a slave, and "one cannot put one's trust in slaves."

Rabbi Yossef Seruya once said to me: "Eliezer was the faithful servant and student of Abraham. He was close to him like a son, as Abraham himself said, 'And behold, the son of my house is my heir' [Genesis 15:3] and 'Eliezer drew from the Torah of his master and spread it to others' [Yoma 25b; Pesikta Zutah; Rashi Lech Lecha 15:2]. Since Abraham had faith in his servant Eliezer for the choice of his son's wife, a woman from whom the entire Jewish people would spring, why then, when it came to visitors, did Abraham not trust him?"

I would add to this yet another question: If it was not possible to trust Eliezer concerning guests, how is it conceivable that Eliezer drew from the Torah of his master, faithfully transmitted it to others, and taught the truth of the Torah to everyone who gathered at Abraham's home? How could he instruct G-d's Torah to others?

In response to these questions, one must say that Eliezer, Abraham's servant, was his heir before Isaac's birth. As it is written, "And the son of my house is Eliezer of Damascus ... and behold, the son of my house is my heir" (Genesis 15:2,3). This means, therefore, that Eliezer was directly concerned with the inheritance. This is why Abraham had reason to suspect that Eliezer, his inheritor, did not properly look for guests, but instead let a visitor go by without inviting him. It is therefore possible to attribute to Eliezer the thought that Abraham, happy now that he was circumcised, would now – precisely because of his joy – give all that he possessed to the poor, leaving nothing for Eliezer to inherit. In order that he not be deprived of his inheritance, Eliezer therefore did not want to bring back any guests. Abraham did not trust him because he knew that he acted selfishly, which is why Abraham himself went to look for passersby.

Nevertheless, when a wife had to be found for Isaac, Abraham had faith in his servant Eliezer, knowing without any doubt that he would return with an upright woman from a good family, just as his son needed. Abraham felt this way for two reasons:

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First, at that point it was no longer Eliezer who would inherit from Abraham, but Isaac, and this according to G-D's promise: "That one will not inherit you. Only him that shall come forth from within you shall inherit you" (Genesis 15:4). Therefore, from that moment on, Isaac would be master of all he possessed and Eliezer would become Isaac's servant, not receiving any inheritance from Abraham because "that which a slave owns belongs to his master" (Pesachim 88b). Consequently, there was no reason to suspect that Eliezer would come back with a woman for Isaac that was not suited for him, for he wanted to be able to tell Isaac that it was he that chose a wife for him, and Isaac would be grateful to him for all his life.

In addition, Eliezer said to Abraham, "Perhaps [ulai] the woman shall not wish to follow me" (Genesis 24:5), and later on, when Eliezer recounted what Abraham said to him (Genesis 24:39), he used the same word ulai, but written without the letter vav. As such, it can be read as eilai ("to me"), concerning which the Sages have said, "Eliezer had a daughter, and he wanted to give her in marriage to Isaac, yet Abraham refused. He told him, 'My son is blessed, and you are cursed [because of the curse on Noah's son], and the one who is cursed cannot associate with the one who is blessed' " (Bereshith Rabba 59:9,12). No doubt, the daughter of Eliezer was an upright woman, otherwise Eliezer would not have risked proposing her as a wife. However Abraham rejected this union, for in his eyes the daughter of Eliezer did not merit marrying Isaac and giving birth to the Jewish people. Therefore, precisely for this reason, Abraham did not think that Eliezer would come back with a woman who was ill-suited for Isaac. Eliezer himself understood that if his daughter, even though she possessed great qualities, was rejected as a choice for Isaac, he could not choose a woman for Isaac with inferior qualities. There was good reason, therefore, to believe that he would come back with a woman having exceptional qualities for the son of his master, and Abraham trusted him concerning this.

This also explains the oath that Abraham had Eliezer make to him (Genesis 24:3). Abraham

asked Eliezer to take an oath, lest his eyes fail and mislead him by not allowing him to see in a woman greater qualities than his daughter possessed. He also made him take an oath in order that he search for and scrupulously verify the exceptional qualities of the woman who will merit to marry his son Isaac.

Now we have an answer to our second question. Eliezer was a pious man, and his daughter was a virtuous woman. Hence he was not thought of as being incapable of instructing his master's Torah to others. Yet, in that which concerns hospitality, especially on that day (the third day after the circumcision), it was another story. As we know, Abraham never entrusted the task of welcoming guests to others. It was always he who personally went to welcome them, who served them, who gave them to eat and poured them to drink. He personally cared for all their needs, spiritual needs included, until the Name of G-d was known and invoked by all (Yalkut Shimoni Chayei Sarah 107; Sotah 10a).

Yet on that day only, Abraham asked his servant Eliezer to go and bring back some guests (and even if one wants to say that Abraham often sent Eliezer to find guests, he always found someone to invite). Yet G-d caused it to be tremendously hot on that day so that visitors would not disturb Abraham. When Eliezer returned alone, Abraham was so disappointed that he suspected Eliezer of fearing that his inheritance would have been distributed to the poor if he had brought any back with him. This is why Abraham did not believe Eliezer when he said that he could not find anyone to bring back. However in everything else that Eliezer did, he was an upright and faithful servant.

It is possible to say, by comparison, that this is also the meaning of hospitality. In the same way that one should not study Torah for oneself, one should also "welcome guests" and instruct them in G-d's Torah, similar to that which is stated by the Sages: "If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself" (Perkei Avoth 2:8). One should do this in order to spread the knowledge of G-d to every place and to all the Children of Israel.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is indeed exceedingly heavy" (Genesis 18:20). The first "is indeed" (Hebrew: ki) of this passage seems completely unnecessary.

We know that there exist people quite different from one another. Some have never had to undergo difficulty or pain. They have never been hit or insulted. They have never undergone such things, to the extent that if one but dares to lay a hand on them, they protest so violently and with such indignation that they give the impression that they are being trounced upon. And yet no one takes the trouble to come and see what is happening, for we know very well that the person in question will begin to scream at the slightest thing. On the other hand, someone hardened to blows and bruises will only be affected by really brutal treatment. If such a person begins to scream, people will rush to his aid, because for him to complain like this means that something serious has occurred.

We find a similar difference in the area of money. When one steals from or cheats an honest man, one who has never touched anything not belonging to him, that man will become enraged. However for a man whose hands are far from clean, being cheated from will not cause him to raise such a cry. He will only become enraged if he has endured considerable pain, and those about him will know with certainty that he is in serious trouble.

This last attitude was that of the inhabitants of Sodom. As we know, they stole from one another, swindling each other even more, and so they certainly did not have the habit of flying into a fit for nothing. This is the meaning of "The cry of Sodom of Gomorrah is indeed great": If people cry so greatly there, one must believe that "their sin is indeed exceedingly heavy," to the point that it is impossible to tolerate it any longer.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

Rabbi Meir Leibush "The Malbim"

Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (the Malbim) is universally known in all Jewish communities as one of the great commentators of the Bible. Almost all Jewish homes possess his commentary. He was a genius, an extraordinary man who knew every field of Torah perfectly well. He was 20 years old when he was given the title "The Prince of Torah," and all the great of his era regarded him with great esteem.

Rabbi Yossef Dov Soloveitchik, the Rav of Brisk, once said that the Malbim's explanation of the verse that states, "When I shall seize the appointed time, I shall judge with fairness. The earth and all its inhabitants are melted. I have firmly established its pillars" (Psalms 75:3-4) would have been impossible for a man to formulate unless Ruach Hakodesh rested on him.

The Malbim began to write his commentaries and explanations on the Bible and Talmud at the age of 13. In the introduction to his book *Artsot HaHaim* he wrote, "When I was 13 years old, as a solitary bird in the nest of wisdom, my soul was awakened to the enchanting voice of the love of study, a voice that sang in my ear. The spirit of Torah that had always accompanied my fathers had awoken my mind from its sleep, and thus the rapid plume of a scribe was in my right hand. I wrote and brought forth new explanations, and the hand of G-d gave me strength."

Due to his great reputation in Torah and the strength yet gentleness of his words, he was accepted as the Rabbi of Warsaw in 1839. He stayed there seven years, during which time he established numerous organizations aimed at strengthening religious life.

During the course of his life, he was appointed as Rabbi of different communities: Kempen, Prussia (for his contemporaries, he was known as "the Kempener"); Bucharest, the capital of Romania; Koenigsberg, Germany; and Mohilev, Russia. His many travels from town to town and from country to country testified to the fact that he found no satisfaction in the rabbinate, for by his nature he was courageous. He was a man of truth, a man with firm opinions, and a man who never flattered those who could help him. He fought against the atheists who introduced "reform" into religion, as well as against the rich who did not give enough for the poor. All this brought him many enemies, men who pursued him without giving him rest. He was also denounced as an "enemy of the state," however Rabbi Meir Leibush did not let himself be distressed by this, and he continued to lead the fight for truth and honesty. Those people who understood the purity of his heart and his way of life loved him enormously. They came to see him in droves in order to hear his talks and to take advantage of his holy words.

The Malbim lived 69 years, and his name is forever enshrined among the great commentators of the Bible.