

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 63
BO
5 SHEVAT 5765
JAN.15.2005

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א
11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS
Tel: (331) 48 03 53 89 • 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

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVING THE COVENANT

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The servants of Pharaoh said to him, "How long will this be a snare [mokesh] for us? Send out the men that they may serve the L-RD their G-d. Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" (Exodus 10:7).

Why did Pharaoh's servants wait until the plague of locusts to speak in such a way to their master? Moreover, what did they mean by asking, "Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" Was Pharaoh really unaware of this?

The answer is that the observance of the covenant allows man to conquer the forces of evil where they are found. For the forces of evil, such a man becomes a mokesh (snare). The sparks of holiness that dwell within him serve as weapons that he can use to eliminate them. The land of Egypt was filled with impurity (Shemot Rabba 22) and its inhabitants were sunk in immorality. The righteous Joseph (righteous because he guarded the covenant [Zohar I:59b]) was the first to repair and harvest the sparks of holiness. Later, it was the role of the Children of Israel to do the same when they went down into Egypt. They had to raise the 288 sparks of holiness that had fallen into impurity because of Adam's sin (Or HaHaim Genesis 49:9).

Even though they were not circumcised in Egypt (Pesikta Zutah, Bo 12:6), the Children of Israel repaired the sparks of holiness thanks to their hard labor and the fraternity that united them. They were helped in this by Moses, who was born circumcised, as our Sages have explained (Sotah 12a) concerning the verse that states, "She saw that he was good [good alluding to the covenant]"

(Exodus 2:2). Moses, who was equal to the totality of the Children of Israel (Mechilta Beshalach 10,15a), enlightened them with his majesty and splendor, and together they managed to rectify what remained in order to bring the redemption closer.

This is what is specified by the passage that states, "It will cover the surface of the earth so that no one will be able to see the earth; and it will consume the remaining residue that was left by the hail" (Exodus 10:5). In fact, the Egyptians feared that the forces of evil would be weakened, forces from which they drew their existence. Egypt, struck by these plagues, was henceforth without any protection. Pharaoh and his servants therefore understood that it was dangerous to keep the Children of Israel in Egypt, especially at that time, when the Children of Israel guarded the covenant and drew their strength from Moses, who was considered as equal to the entire Jewish people. The word zeh in the verse that states, "Ad matai yiyeh zeh lanu lemokesh [How long will this be a snare for us]?" (Exodus 10:7) corresponds to the Divine Presence, as it is written, "Zeh, he stands behind our wall" (Song of Songs 2:9). In other words, the Shechinah guards anyone who observes the covenant (see Zohar III:297b, where it is explained that the word zeh alludes to the covenant). The word lanu ("for us") has a numerical value of 86, the same as milah (85 plus 1 for the kollel). The word lemokesh ("a snare") is the trap that destroys the Kelipah.

Pharaoh's servants hoped to be a snare for the Children of Israel, who would be assimilated

Continuation page 2

among them, and therefore they expected to form one large nation governed by the forces of evil. Yet as we have seen, it was the opposite that happened. It did not take the Egyptians long in realizing the fact that the Children of Israel (since they observed the covenant, and Moses – born circumcised – supported them) were in fact a trap for them. Providence protected them, and they were able to diminish the influences of the forces of evil that operated in Egypt. This is why Pharaoh's servants told him, "Do you not yet know that Egypt is *avedah* [lost, ruined]?" It was the Eternal's 12 tribes that caused their ruin (*avedah* has a numerical value of 12, which alludes to the 12 tribes). Moses, who also carries the name of *zeh* in the verses, "For *zeh* [this] man Moses" (Exodus 32:1,23), helped them to triumph over the *Kelipah* (negative forces, the other side). The Egyptians were thrown off balance. It was with regards to them that Jethro said, "For in the very matter in which [the Egyptians] had conspired, [punishment was brought] upon them" (Exodus 18:11). "It was the in the pot that they had prepared that they were cooked" (Sotah 11a).

We can therefore understand why the Egyptian magicians feared Moses even before he was born (Tanhuma Vayakhel 7). It was not his ability to eventually liberate the Children of Israel that frightened them, but his ability to eliminate the forces of evil in Egypt. Thanks to the covenant that they observed on the same day as Passover, the blood of their Passover sacrifice mingled with that of their circumcision (Shemot Rabba 17:3). They "emptied Egypt" and were in a position to vanquish the forces of evil. The Egyptians could thus no longer defend themselves.

Looking at this a little more closely, we note that the plague of locusts aimed at eliminating everything on the surface of the ground so that the forces of evil could no longer have any hold. It was this that the Egyptians feared the most – being cut off from their strength. In truth, it is said that Pharaoh was so frightened of this plague that he called it *mavet* ("death"), as it is written, "Entreat the L-RD your G-d, that He remove from me only this death" (Exodus 10:17). Pharaoh saw that his

servants were right. Deprived of *Sitra Achra* (the other side, the forces of evil), Egypt was in fact ruined. Pharaoh finished by giving up and deciding to free the Children of Israel from their servitude. However, the Eternal continued to harden Pharaoh's heart and inflicted three more plagues on him so that he could realize His Divine grandeur, as well as corrective work of the Children of Israel.

This shows us the importance of observing the Covenant, since it brings the Final Redemption closer. This is what our orphaned generation should especially be careful about. Seeing that the advent of the Final Redemption approaches, the evil inclination, aware of our efforts to observe the mitzvot and correct our sins – particularly those that caused the destruction of the Temple (such as baseless hatred) – inflicts a plague on us that we do not even think about, namely sexual immorality. This is so prevalent in our day because of our many sins (may G-d help us), even though until recently the nations have guarded themselves against it, at least in public.

Let us therefore emulate the Children of Israel, who for 49 days following their departure from Egypt (corresponding to the 49 gates of impurity ([Zohar Chadash Yitro 39a]) put great effort into eliminating the forces of evil so as to be worthy of receiving the Torah. If they attained such a sublime level (particularly the level at which they witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea), it was because they continually worked at eliminating their wicked traits and sanctifying themselves. The Children of Israel, who observed the foundations of Judaism, nevertheless complained to Moses: "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge" (Numbers 11:5), meaning to say that it required neither the study of Torah nor the observance of mitzvot (Sifri 11:5). Why, therefore, did they revolt after so much self-denial? It was because, following their long sojourn in Egypt, they had not entirely erased burning desires, greed, and lust from their character. Finally, all depends on the elimination of these faults, as well as the observance of the covenant in purity and holiness.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI RACHAMIM HAI HAWITA HACOHEN

Rabbi Rahamim Hai Hawita Hacoen was born on the isle of Jerba on Sivan 22, 5661 (1900). His father, Rabbi Hanina, had great difficulty in providing for the needs of the family, but never did he ask his son to help him in his work.

Rabbi Rahamim studied with great passion and raised himself in the knowledge of Torah, for his father would tell him that the Torah is more precious than gold or pearls. He loved to delve into each point of his study, doing so well into the nights.

At the age of 15, Rabbi Rahamim joined the classes of Rabbi Moshe Kalfon Hacoen, the Av Beth Din of Jerba. Already at that age, he began to exchange correspondence with Torah greats. A few years later, he was named Shochet of Jerba and Sofer of the Beth Din.

When he married, Rabbi Rahamim decided to begin teaching, and his fame eventually became great. His students admired him without limit, and he devoted a great part of his time to them. He got them into the habit of writing down in a small journal their own commentaries on the Talmud and Bible, later correcting their style of commentary in order that they love their studies. Rabbi Rahamim innovated teaching methods and inculcated in his students, from their earliest ages, the principles of study and the foundations of Torah. This method enabled the creation of decision-makers and teachers destined to become rabbis in Jewish communities everywhere.

Famous students developed in his shadow, among them being the Gaon Rabbi Matziah Mazuz and the Gaon Rabbi Raphael Hadir Tsaban.

In 5691 (1930), one of the positions of Dayan in Jerba became free, and the sages of the city asked him to come and sit among them. Nevertheless, they feared that by naming him to this post, they would lose a great Torah educator. After discussing the issue many times, they decided to appoint him. It was thus discovered that he possessed the abilities of a great decision-maker, and in every field. Moreover, he wrote 10 books of Halachah.

Rabbi Rahamim knew how to vigorously preserve Judaism, and he enacted various laws for his community. His fame as a preacher and orator drew crowds to hear him speak. He had the habit of illustrating his lectures with marvelous explanations. His novel

interpretations illuminated the Torah with a great light and brought back many Jews closer to their source.

The life of Rabbi Rahamim was beset with much suffering. In his letters, he recounted that the difficult ordeals that he endured prevented him from having a clear and tranquil mind. Despite his weakness and illness, he wrote a commentary on the Book of Esther in which he stated, "Since it is impossible for me to dig thoroughly into the Talmud and the Poskim because of my illness and pain ... Hashem healed me so that I could study during my recovery ... Between two attacks, I drew comfort and strength from the Book of Esther ... Blessed be the Eternal, Who gave me His help during my distress, Who sent me His word and healed me." Despite these difficult trials, Rabbi Rahamim did not abandon his ways, but continued to study, teach, question, and answer.

When Rabbi Moshe Kalfon Hacoen passed away, Rabbi Rahamim replaced him as Rosh Av Beth Din. He was loved by all the inhabitants of the city. Despite his sufferings, he received everyone warmly and always with a smile. He occupied this position for four years, until he left for the Land of Israel. One week before his departure, a large crowd gathered at his door. Everyone came to see him to be blessed by his holy mouth. When he began departing on route, the entire city accompanied him and firmly decided not to separate themselves, despite the difficulty, from their greatly beloved teacher.

Arriving in Israel, Rabbi Rahamim decided to settle in the tiny community of Berechia. The light of his teachings did not delay in surpassing the limits of the community. He was respectfully named HaAdmor Mi-Jerba, and his modest home became a prominent place of study. From all directions, people rushed to ask him for advice, as well as to benefit from the purity and clarity of his wisdom. He became the spiritual guide and Rav of all immigrants from Tunisia. He shared in their difficulties, and when they came to see him, he did not neglect to lavish his blessings and advice on them.

On Shevat 10, 5719, barely aged 58, his holy soul was called back to the Creator. His students established a yeshiva near his tomb and named it Kissei Rahamim in his memory. To this day, the yeshiva still radiates the light of its departed teacher's instructions.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow” (Exodus 11:2). The Gemara states, “The word na [please] always indicates a request. Hashem said to Moses, ‘Please, go say to Israel, “Please, borrow vessels of silver and gold from the Egyptians” so that the righteous one, Abraham, should not say, “He kept His word concerning ‘they will enslave them, and they will oppress them’ [Genesis 15:13], but He did not keep His word that ‘afterwards they will leave with great wealth’ [v.14]” ’” (Berachot 9).

Concerning this passage, the great commentators have already raised the issue that even if Abraham would not have made such a comment, Hashem would have, in any case, been responsible for carrying out His promise. We can use the following parable to illustrate the situation.

Two kings had been at war with one another for a long time. Finally, they agreed that they should no longer be the cause of so many men’s death. Rather, they decided to choose two warriors, one from each side, who alone would fight against one another and thus settle the issue of the war. The king whose warrior won would take over the crown and the kingdom of the other. The kings therefore chose their champions and had a deep pit dug in the ground into which each of the warriors would try throw the other, all under the gaze of the kings.

One of the warriors grabbed the arm of the other, threw him onto his shoulder, and prepared himself to hurl his adversary into the pit. When he approached the edge, his adversary took a hold of him, so well in fact that it was he who threw the first warrior into the pit. It was therefore his king that achieved victory.

Afterwards, the king rebuked his warrior: “It is true that you possess incredible strength, and that you struck my enemy from behind. But you should have never let him get hold of you and bring you to the edge of the pit. When I saw what danger you put me in, I experienced a thousand torments, for I thought that I had lost everything.”

Hashem had promised Abraham, “Your offspring will be aliens in a land not heir own – and they will enslave them, and they will oppress them – four hundred years ... and afterwards they will leave with great wealth” (Genesis 15:13-14). Now we know that what the Children of Israel took from Egypt was nothing compared to the spoils that they collected by the Red Sea. Concerning the verse that states, “circlets of gold will we

make for you and points of silver” (Song of Songs 1: 11), the Midrash explains that “circlets of gold” refers to the spoils of the sea and “points of silver” refers to the spoils of Egypt. In order that the promise could be fulfilled, it was thus necessary for the people to hurry and take the spoils of Egypt, since they would collect even greater riches by the sea. However, in seeing his descendants coming out of Egypt without that part of the promise being fulfilled, Abraham could have worried that it would never occur. It was therefore necessary to command the Children of Israel to borrow precious objects from the Egyptians.

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE – PART VII

As for the praise that a person gives himself for his own insight or good deeds, even though neither one nor the other is fully his, no other character trait is quite as reprehensible. All the more so, one should not deceive others by claiming to possess non-existent virtues.

Now we are obligated to accomplish all our deeds, public as well as private, in the Name of the Creator. All acts of Divine service should be aimed at accomplishing His will, without the expectation of receiving praise or honor. One should act uniquely for Hashem, Who probes the heart, as it is said, “The secret [things] belong to the L-RD our G-d” (Deuteronomy 29:28). This is why, if we do not wisely and briskly escape from pride – even if we possess Torah knowledge and good deeds – we will not escape from Gehinnom. This is because the evil inclination (whose mission is to destroy man) wars against him and tries to incite him with arguments and “proofs” in support of arrogant behavior. One must therefore fight the evil inclination every day. This is an essential fight.

Usually, if we strike an enemy down once, then twice, or even three times, he abandons the fight. However the evil inclination will never leave us alone, even if it is defeated one hundred times, as our Sages have said: “Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die” (Perkei Avoth 2: 4). The evil inclination fights you all your life, hoping to attack you unexpectedly. And if it triumphs over you in ordinary situations, it will then find a way to defeat you in serious situations. Given that pride is the source of many bad character traits, and that the evil inclination intrudes upon and infiltrates a man’s heart with the sole aim of falsifying truth and justifying falsehood, it encourages a man to become proud by bringing him various “proofs”. This is the reason why resorting to cunning is vital for escaping from it.