

הַמַּדְרָשׁ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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LET US BE CONTENT WITH LITTLE LET US SERVE G-D WITH FAITH *(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

Commenting on the verse that states, "Moses caused Israel to journey from the Red Sea and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur" (Exodus 15:22), Rashi cites the Midrash as follows: He caused them to journey against their will because the Egyptians had adorned their horses with gold, silver, jewels, and precious stones, objects that the Children of Israel collected on the shore. The spoils found by the sea were greater than that which they amassed in Egypt (Tanhuma Bo, 8), as it is stated in the Song of Songs (1:11).

Why did Moses act in this way? Why did he not let the Children of Israel take as much silver and gold by the sea as they wanted? All they would have been doing by this was to obey an explicit Divine command, as it is written, "and you shall empty out Egypt" (Exodus 3:22). Was it not a pity for all these riches, riches that would have allowed them to perform mitzvot and good deeds?

The reason why Moses acted as he did was because he wanted to teach the Children of Israel to be content with little, and not to allow themselves to become seduced by silver or gold, even if it is obtained honestly. The Midrash reports that the Children of Israel became greatly enriched with the spoils of Egypt, and they had more than enough to accomplish mitzvot and build the Tabernacle and Temple (Bamidbar Rabba 13: 19). Instead of continuing to amass more, they should have prepared themselves to receive the Torah, the sole aim of their departure from Egypt. They learned that the person who is never content with his lot can never seriously engage himself in Torah study, for "the one who has 100 desires 200" (Kohelet Rabba 1:34).

The Children of Israel were in constant elevation. Each day they tore down a gate of impurity and crossed through a gate of holiness. They purified their body and

soul in order to better serve G-d. Then here, the Torah suddenly proclaims that their hands (an allusion to the study of Torah) had slackened. Amalek then came and attacked them.

As we have said, they were filled with Ruach Hakodesh, wisdom, and intelligence, but the gold and silver that they amassed in Egypt disturbed them a little. Their greed testified to a certain lack of trust in G-d, and it was this fault that weakened their study of Torah.

Moses also had to make them journey from Egypt in all haste, and this because an abundance of possessions is likely to lead to sin (see Berachot 32a). The Children of Israel's constant financial worries weakened their Torah study ever more, and they regretted not having taken more valuable items by the shore of the Red Sea. They wondered how they were going to invest their money in the land of Canaan. This money was, essentially, destined for their service of G-d after receiving the Torah. Yet because they thought about it too much, instead of engaging themselves in Torah study, one can say that they sinned (with respect to their lofty spiritual level) by not having been able to master their material instincts.

Moses therefore had to make them leave Egypt against their will. If he had left them by the seashore for one more day, they would not have been ready to receive the Torah on the fiftieth day, meaning to say the day set by the Eternal, the 6th of Sivan.

Having left Egypt, the Children of Israel continued to think of the money that they had left there. This is why G-d sent them Amalek – it was to show them the price that one pays for neglecting the study of Torah. The Children of Israel understood the lesson. They repented, waged war against their great enemy, and even triumphed over them, as it written: "Joshua weakened

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Amalek and its people with the sword's blade" (Exodus 17:13). The Eternal then said to Moses, "Write this as a remembrance in the Book" (v.14) to show that "The L-RD maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation" (v.16). It is therefore appropriate to take note of the fact that rescinding Torah study generates illness and war (Berachot 33b), as well as the death of children and the war brought on by Amalek.

Each one of us should therefore put an effort into fighting the evil inclination, a force that tries to distance us from the Torah.

According to the commentators, it was because the Jews did "not observe the king's laws" (Esther 3:8) – meaning that they did not study Torah – that Haman (the descendant of Amalek) wanted to exterminate them. Esther then told Mordechai, "Go, assemble all the Jews" (ibid. 4:16), meaning, "Go study Torah, which is acquired only in a group, and pray with them" (Berachot 63b). The righteous Mordechai therefore assembled the children in the synagogues, and their prayers and their Torah annulled the sentence of the wicked one (Yalkut Shimoni, Esther 1057). The Midrash reports that the voice of the children rose to Heaven, and that night the King could no longer sleep (Esther Rabba 6: 1; 9:5). Sleep escaped the Master of the world so that He could help His children and liberate them (Yalkut Shimoni ibid.).

It is therefore proper for an individual to be content with what he has. We should not think that an abundance of money would help us to accomplish many mitzvot and good deeds. This is the work of the Satan, who only looks to beset us with worries and difficulties, and to distance us from the Torah. It was this abundance of wealth that drove the Children of Israel to the sin of the golden calf. Instead of being preoccupied solely with escaping from the 49 levels of impurity during the 49 days of the Omer, the time that the Children of Israel devoted to material affairs harmed their preparation to receive the Torah, and this is what led them to the sin of the golden calf. The one who succumbs to greed taints his faith in G-d. In the final analysis, it is G-d Who opens His hand to "satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalms 145:16).

G-d ordered the Children of Israel to gather the manna, "every man according to what he eats – an omer per person – according to the number of your people, everyone according to whomever is in his tent shall you take" (Exodus 16:16). We may well ask ourselves why this was so. What would happen if one took more?

It is the author of Messilat Yesharim (chap 1) that provides us with the answer. What our Sages teach us is that man was created only to delight in G-d and

fully rejoice in the glory of His Shechinah. That is true pleasure. Such a level of refinement is only found in the world to come, which was in fact created for this goal. We cannot reach the desired harbor in this world, which is "like an ante-chamber before the world to come" (Perkei Avoth 4:16[21]). Yet it is only in this world that man feels the elevation of his soul and the Eternal's existence in every place, as it is written, "The whole world is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). An abundance of wealth has never spiritually elevated man, who should be firmly convinced that even a poor income can be the source of blessing.

Yet the evil inclination deceives a man: "Eat much," it tells him, "and in this way you will be able to better serve G-d." There is nothing more erroneous than this, for even if one eats little, one can see his body blessed (see Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 24:5). It was only those among the Children of Israel who had kept the manna for the next day that showed their lack of faith in G-d. The result? "It became infested with worms and it stank" (Exodus 16:20).

Fearful of losing a faithful friend, the evil inclination searches by all possible means for someone who wants to take to the right path, but only after being "satisfied" with material pleasures. Consequently, a man should distance himself from this as much as possible, and he should stay constantly connected to G-d, both in times of joy as well as in times of grief (G-d forbid). It is in this way that we experience the true pleasures of this world, ones that lead to the sublime pleasures of the world to come.

Nevertheless, let us realize that we attain these pleasures gradually, not immediately. "The one who tries to grab everything," says the proverb, "seizes nothing." It was in this way that Yochanan the High Priest, because he incessantly aspired to greatness, became a Sadducee after 80 years of priesthood (Berachot 29a). This is also what happened to Elisha (Acher, "the other"), the teacher of Rabbi Meir. Having entered Paradise, he "mutilated the shoots," and corrupted himself because he wanted to gain access directly to sublime levels (Hagigah 14b). Hence one whose ascension is slow, gradual, and controlled, and who only aims at getting closer to G-d, is helped by Him. The Children of Israel only acceded to the level of "the generation of knowledge" because they corrected their bad character traits regularly, day after day, for 49 days.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI CHAIM HIZKIYAHU MEDINI AUTOR OF SDEI HEMED

Rabbi Hizkiyahu Medini's books provide an abundance of principles concerning Halachah, both in general and in detail, and reference a great many authors from different eras. He was great in Torah and deeds, and the great authorities of our time cannot make do without his works. We will cite one story that he himself recounted as to the origin of his wisdom.

Rabbi Hizkiyahu once told a friend that in his youth he did not have any particular talents. The sources of wisdom had only opened for him when he was older because of a certain incident.

"When I was a young avrech," began the Sdei Hemed, "I studied in a kollel financed by a wealthy man, and which was located in his own home. At that time I was not among the most brilliant minds in the kollel, however I learned with great diligence and steadily progressed in my studies. One of the students of this group became jealous and set a trap for me. Every morning a cleaning lady came to work in the Beit Midrash. He bribed her to publicly accuse me of trying to seduce her when she arrived in the Beit Midrash to do her work in the early morning.

One day, as soon as this woman arrived in the Beit Midrash, she began to scream and accuse me of disgraceful behavior. Everyone immediately gathered about, and I was accused of hypocrisy and insulted over and over again. It was a tremendous desecration of G-d's Name. Unable to tolerate such shame, I was forced to flee. The Rosh Kollel did not believe the cleaning lady, and he fired her.

"After a certain time, when the cleaning lady had exhausted all the money that she had made with her accusations, she came to beg my forgiveness for the tremendous wrong that she had done. She promised me that she would publicly recount the truth and state that it was all a plot,

that one of the avrechim had given her money to accuse me.

"Given that she had no longer any livelihood, she implored me to do all that I could, once she had cleared my name, to help her get her job back.

"At that moment," said the Sdei Hemed, "I was confronted with a tremendous dilemma. On one side, I was happy with this unexpected opportunity to see my name cleared of this terrible accusation and to have everything put back in order. I almost agreed to her request, yet at the same time the complete opposite thought came to me. A terrible desecration of G-d's Name had already occurred, and if the actual story were to become known, there would be yet another one due to the shameful conduct of the avrech. Not only that, but he himself would suffer a terrible fate. Consequently, it was preferable that I continue to bear my shame in silence than to provoke a new scandal. The decision was very hard to make, and my thoughts were jostling against one another in my head as I changed my mind from one minute to the next. Finally, I decided to tell the cleaning lady that I would push myself to speak in her favor, but I absolutely forbid her to tell anybody about the bribe.

"At the time that I took this difficult decision, one that risked endangering my entire future in the world of Torah," concluded the Sdei Hemed, "I felt the sources of wisdom opening before me. Instead of the damage that my choice should have caused me, I had merited great Heavenly assistance, one that has led me until my present situation."

Rabbi Hizkiyahu Medini's Hilloula is on Kislev 24.

The above account was obtained from a reliable source,

and retold with slight changes in the book Va'ani Tefilah.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people” (Exodus 13:17). The Midrash states: When Pharaoh sent out the people, who cried “Alas”? It was Pharaoh. It is like a king whose son went abroad to live with a stranger, who received the king’s son with great honor. The king, having heard where this man lived and that he was harboring his son, sent him a letter that stated: “Send me back my son!” After the king sent many messages to the man, yet without compliance, he finally had no choice but to personally go and get his son. When this happened, the man began to cry because the king had removed his son from his home. The man’s neighbors said to him, “Why are you crying?” The man answered, “The presence of the king’s son brought me great honor, for the king wrote me letters – he needed me – and I was valuable in his eyes. Now that he’s taken his son from me, he no longer needs me. That’s why I’m crying!” This is what Pharaoh said. “When the Children of Israel were with me, the Holy One, blessed be He, found me valuable. From time to time He sent me messages, such as ‘So says the L-RD, the G-d of the Hebrews’ [Exodus 9:13].” When the Holy One, blessed be He, came down to Egypt to take the Children of Israel out from there, Pharaoh began to cry (“It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people”).

The above text is astonishing, for absolutely nothing is needed to realize the nature of the messages that Hashem sent to Pharaoh. To understand this point, let us examine the following verse: “The heart of Pharaoh and his servants became transformed regarding the people, and they said, ‘What is this that we have done, that we have sent away Israel from serving us?’” (Exodus 14:5). This in itself is just as surprising, for were all the plagues that they suffered not enough? And this goes without mentioning that the words “from serving us” are completely unnecessary. In Tractate Berachot 9, we find two opinions concerning the verse that states, “so they emptied Egypt” (Exodus 12:36). One opinion states that the Children of Israel turned Egypt into the depths of the sea metzula that contain no fish, while the other opinion compares it instead to a trap metzula that no longer holds grain. As a general rule, we know that “everywhere the Children of Israel are exiled, the Divine Presence exiles itself with them.” Even though this is not something that is permissible to boast about, our Sages have included in this idea the concept that when Hashem wants to pour out His kindness on the world, He makes all His blessings dependant on His own people Israel. As the Sages have said, “No goodness is bestowed on the world unless it is for the benefit of Israel, and every place in which the Children of Israel live, there blessing is found.”

When we arrived in Eretz Israel, the promises of the Torah were put into effect (“All these blessings will come upon you and will overtake you” – Deuteronomy 28:2). There, all the benefits of Divine influence came to us directly, and

it was through us that the rest of the world obtained sustenance and was granted prosperity. Yet in time of exile, the opposite occurs: “Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers” (Lamentations 5:2). Others obtain an immense amount of wealth so that we can live off their leftovers, as the Psalmist states: “You put gladness in my heart that is greater than theirs at the time that their grain and wine abound” (Psalms 4:8). In His immense goodness, Hashem gives them an overabundance of blessings so that we can live off their surplus.

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us with a parable.

A rich man’s son had committed an offence and found himself in prison for it. His father wanted to send him food and drink, but he realized that he couldn’t give him the same amount as he had enjoyed at home. At home, his son was the only one who would partake of his portion, whereas if the father sent him a normal portion while he was in prison, he could be sure that he would receive nothing of it in the end. Therefore the father had to send enough food so that everyone in the prison could eat to satisfaction, this in order that his son could profit from what the others left.

The imagery is clear, and it is the request of the prophet: “Have pity, O L-RD, on Your people, and do not let Your heritage be an object of scorn, for nations to dominate them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their G-d?’” (Joel 2:17).

THE PATH OF THE JUST

PRIDE – PART VIII

The first of the evil inclination’s tricks is to harden the heart and to make it swell with pride, and to have it value arrogance and other negative character traits. Even though a man knows without the slightest doubt that pride is sinful, he continues to willingly transgress and be proud of himself, for the evil inclination sweeps his heart up in the pursuit of honor, to the point that a man will no longer notice that he is sinning.

As for a man whose actions are pure and who flees from arrogance and vanity, knowing that they are sins, the evil inclination will come and set another trap. It will tell him that flattering himself is permitted, and will supply him with all sorts of arguments demonstrating that he will garner merit and reward for boasting and being proud. The evil inclination will even bring him, as proof, the words of our Sages: “Anyone with whom his fellowmen are pleased, G-d is pleased with him” (Perkei Avoth 3:10). Now all such “proofs” are erroneous, for reasoning of this type is driven by pride.