

# הַמַּסַּלַּח THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## **EDUCATION; THE FOUNDATION OF HUMILITY**

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

**W**here does Mount Sinai come from?" asks the Midrash (Shochar Tov 68). From Mount Moriah. It had been taken from there like Challah is taken from dough, from the spot where Isaac was to have been sacrificed. Thus G-d said, "Since Isaac was to have been sacrificed here, it is good that his children receive the Torah here."

We may ask ourselves at least three questions concerning this passage.

1. If Mount Moriah is so important, why was the Torah not given on it (without having a portion taken from it and placed on Mount Sinai)?
2. What exactly does "It had been taken" mean? Why did our Sages add, "like Challah is taken from dough"?
3. What is the connection between the sacrifice of Isaac and the giving of the Torah? Did these two events have to occur in the same place?

The Torah commands: "Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it" (Deuteronomy 20:5). What exactly does "lest he die" signify? It means that all those who leave for war are exposed to danger.

What then does "who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it" mean? It is that even the construction of a house implies the performance of several mitzvot that are inseparable from one another, from the mitzvot connected to the house itself (such as the mezuzot [Deuteronomy 6:9] and the fence on the roof [ibid. 22:8]) to the mitzvot that one performs within its walls (such as the laws of kashrut, family purity, being fruitful and multiplying). The precepts carried out within the home, and the Divine Presence found therein, constitute the very foundation of the Torah. Concerning this, the Talmud teaches that if a man and his wife are worthy, the Divine

Presence lives among them; if not, they are devoured by fire (Sotah 17a). A man performs mitzvot and good deeds in every corner of the house. He impregnates it throughout with holiness, and it is difficult to commit a sin there. The beams and the walls of the house will witness against him if he commits a sin within (Taanith 11a). In the same way that one educates one's children, one educates and impregnates one's house in the service of G-d.

If, as the Talmud relates (Yoma 47a), Kimchit had seven sons who all became High Priests, it was because the beams of her house never saw the braids of her hair. She was careful to hide them even when she was alone in the house, doing so in order to impregnate it with holiness. Because of her modesty, she had the merit to give birth to seven High Priests.

Therefore if a person has built a house without having performed mitzvot in it that he had intended to carry out, he does not have the right to go to war. He will be judged for not have having inaugurated it with mitzvot and good deeds. Moreover, Jonathan ben Uziel translated the verse in question into Aramaic as follows: "If someone has built a new house, and has not affixed a mezuzah to it..." For it is the mezuzah and other mitzvot that constitute the foundation of the Jewish home and generates humility in man, a guarantee that the Divine commandments will be carried out.

On Mount Moriah, our Patriarch Isaac was taught to fear the Eternal and to serve Him with the greatest of devotion. Our Sages teach that when the Jewish people finds itself in distress, the "ashes" of Isaac rise toward the Holy One, blessed be He, and his merit saves them. Where, in fact, do these "ashes" come from? Isaac was never sacrificed! The answer is that his modesty and humility allowed him to reach the level of dust and ashes, which are scattered by the wind to the four corners of the earth. It is similar to the Challah that we take from

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the dough: It is really bread, but when we burn it, it is literally transformed into ashes.

The Talmud teaches that from Mount Moriah, an instructional teaching was sent to the Jewish people – a teaching of modesty, submission, and the fear of Heaven. Just as Mount Moriah was uprooted, the Torah does not stay in one place; one finds it everywhere. We too should perform mitzvot everywhere, with the greatest humility – that is the essential thing. As we have seen, the Torah was given on Mount Sinai because it was the smallest of mountains, and it is part of Mount Moriah.

Desiring to impregnate the Torah and mitzvot within themselves in order to defeat the evil inclination, the Children of Israel therefore settled in the desert, where the forces of evil especially raged, close to Sinai. They wanted to attain very high levels of spirituality on this mountain, a mountain that meromem Y-h (“the Eternal uplifts”) Note that Moriah = meromem Y-h, as well as the similarity between the numerical values of Y-h (the Eternal) and ga’avah (pride): Both equal to 15. By the study of Torah, we only adorn ourselves in the Eternal’s majesty.

This Torah portion carries the name Yitro because he, fleeing all honors, went to the desert to impregnate himself with Divine worship and to fight the evil inclination.

This is also what the Children of Israel did. In fleeing from honors into the desert, they were then “pursued” by Mount Moriah, which elevated them and allowed them to reach sublime spiritual levels.

Commenting on the verse that states, “So shall you say [ko tomar] to the House of Jacob and relate [veteigehd] to the Children of Israel” (Exodus 19:3), the Talmud explains (Shabbat 87a) that the Eternal uses gentle language with the House of Jacob (that is, with the women), and rough language with the Children of Israel (that is, with the men). Why two different manners of speaking? Why, moreover (and contrary to that which normally happens), does the verse mention the women before the men?

The answer is that a man learns the virtue of humility from a woman. If on Mount Sinai it was the Torah that reminded him to conduct himself in all humility, who would remind him to do so in his home, if not his wife? The Midrash teaches that all while being strong, a woman is born with a discreet, modest disposition (Bereshith Rabba 18:3). This is why, in order to learn humility (which is the very foundation of the entire Torah), a woman needs ko tomar (“thus shall you say”) and “I am the L-RD your G-d”.

## THE STORY OF THE WEEK

### RESPECT FOR THE WIFE

The following account is told concerning the love of reproof shown by Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, the Rav of Rabbi Aryeh Levine and author of the book *Even HaEzel* on the Rambam.

Every night Rabbi Aryeh Levine gave a course in the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, located in the Knesset district of the city. The course on the Parsha of the week took place on Shabbat, between Mincha and Ma’ariv.

A certain woman, herself delicate and refined but married to a simple, uneducated and uncultured man, came to see Rabbi Aryeh. She asked him to encourage her husband to treat her with some respect, without yelling, insulting, and even striking her, as oftentimes would happen.

Rabbi Aryeh did not want to speak to her husband directly, for he feared that the man would strike his wife as a “punishment” for having gone and complained about his treatment of her, and also as a warning to not dare complain about him again. Rabbi Aryeh took advantage of the fact that this man attended his course on Shabbat in order to establish a connection between the Parsha of the week and the following statement of the Rambam: “The Sages have also commanded that one’s wife should be respected more than oneself and loved as oneself.”

Rabbi Aryeh greatly elaborated on this subject by evoking what the Sages said on this subject, explaining it as best he could. The author of *Even HaEzel*, who was also at the synagogue at the time, was sitting nearby and listened to the course of Rabbi Aryeh Levine, his student of many years. After Ma’ariv, he addressed himself to Rabbi Aryeh as follows: “I want to congratulate you, Rabbi Aryeh. Your words really opened my eyes. I am always deep in study, and I never really delved into the duties of a man towards his wife, nor the mitzvah of making her happy.”

Rabbi Aryeh was stunned by this discussion, for he himself had been in the home of his teacher at least once a week, and he was often a witness to the mutual respect that reigned between him and his wife (a respect in perfect accord with the instruction of the Rambam) and his constant efforts to bring her satisfaction. Now it was precisely his teacher that had examined himself with a critical eye, whereas the man to whom Rabbi Aryeh’s words were really addressed hadn’t at all felt that he should improve his behavior. For that matter, maybe he had not even understood the significance of what Rabbi Aryeh had said.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

## RABBI EZRA ATTIYA

### ROSH YESHIVA OF PORAT YOSSEF

**R**abbi Ezra Attiya was born in Aleppo in 1884 (5645) and died in Jerusalem in 1969 (5730). Our great Rav, the renowned Gaon Rabbi Ezra Attiya, Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yossef in Jerusalem, combined in himself greatness and humility. He educated many generations of Talmidei Chachamim of great caliber. He was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1884 (5645) into a very respectable family. His father, Rabbi Yitzchak, was the grandson of Rabbi Ishayah Attiya, the descendant of Rabbi Shem Tov Attiya, one of the disciples of the Beit Yossef.

At the age of 11, he came with his parents to Eretz Israel, and they settled in Jerusalem. At the beginning he studied Torah with Rav Eliyahu Hacoen Dawik, but soon afterwards Rav Eliyahu called for his father to inform him that he no longer had anything to teach his son, for his son's understanding of the Talmud surpassed his own. Thus Rabbi Ezra elevated himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven, in the "Jerusalem on high" that was filled with greats and holy gaonim similar to angels.

The Rav suffered greatly during his lifetime. His father died while he was still young, and his mother had to go out and work. On the day of his wedding, his mother was forced to borrow a coat from her neighbors. During the nights of Shabbat, when he studied Torah by the light of a gasoline lamp, his mother acted as a shomer (guard) for him late into the night so that he would not touch the lamp by accident.

"You will eat bread with salt" – for a long time, he would only eat a piece of pita bread with salt, and even when his financial situation improved, he continued to eat in this way.

At the start of the World War I, there was a general draft announcement for the Turkish army, and the great rabbis of Jerusalem advised Rabbi Ezra to flee to Egypt until the situation became calmer. He arrived in Egypt with a few gold coins in his pocket, and he began to instruct Torah there. He handed over his money to one of the wealthy Jews of the area, who promised to invest it and give him the returns. However, many months passed and he still did not receive any money. G-d sent him the Tzaddik Rav Nissim Nachum, who himself had just arrived in Egypt, and for eight years our teacher in-

structed Torah in the Keter Torah and Ahavah Ve' Achva yeshivas built by Rav Nissim.

During the time of the First World War, a generous man by the name of Yossef Avraham Shalom founded the Porat Yossef Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Our teacher came back to the city, and after the death of the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Shlomo Laniado, he was named as its head. He devoted all his energy to this task, sometimes spending many hours on teaching his students just one of Rashi's explanations. On Rashi's famous expression kelomar ("which is to say") he used to say: "Everything is found in Rashi. You will find everything in Rashi." He thus accustomed his students to study the commentators of Gemara, the Maharsha and the Maharam Schiff, whose views form the veritable foundation of the plain meaning of the Gemara.

During the funeral eulogy for Rav Ezra, Rav Ovadia Yossef testified to the fact that our teacher knew the entire Choshen Mishpat by heart, as it was given on Sinai, and this when he was still young. Many sages and decision-makers came to ask him for his opinion, among others begin the Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, the Rav of Jerusalem. Furthermore, he answered everyone who inquired of him with humility and affection. Sometimes he stayed with a student for a long time in order to find out what he was concerned about, and then he would give him a comprehensive answer. After having studied with Rav Ezra, the Chazon Ish one day expressed the opinion that, "his view is like the view of the Rishonim."

In his letters, Rabbi Ezra avoided giving numerous accolades to people. When he wrote to sages, he weighed each word by asking himself if he should write it. Moreover, in his courses he spoke at length on the value of humility, and these words took on that much more importance in the mouth of a true Torah giant.

He educated many generations of sages and great scholars during the 45 years that he directed Porat Yossef Yeshiva. When he noticed in his students the positive results of his work and efforts, he rejoiced as if having found a great treasure.

Rabbi Ezra passed away on Iyar 19, following four years of suffering. His method of teaching and his lifestyle remain an example for the entire world.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### From the Maggid of Dubno

**I**t is written, “Jethro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that G-d did to Moses and to Israel His people. ... And Moses told his father-in-law everything that the L-RD had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel’s sake” (Exodus 18:1,8).

One may ask the following question: What had Moses told Jethro, since he had already heard what had happened? Apparently, Jethro had thought that what had happened to Israel was entirely due to the merit of Moses, a man who as important as the entire Jewish people. Now the truth was the opposite. In the words of Midrash Rabba, “The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses, ‘It was not because of your merit that you have ascended here, but because of the Children of Israel’s.’” In addition, we know very well that the importance of a community is greater than that of an individual, thus all the greatness of Moses existed only because of Israel. This is the meaning of “Jethro ... heard everything that G-d did to Moses.” He had heard it said that Moses was the principle reason for the display of wonders that had accompanied the exodus from Egypt, and which Israel had benefited from, hence the expression “to Moses and to Israel His people.” However Moses explained to him that it was the opposite – “Moses told his father-in-law everything that the L-RD had done to Pharaoh and Egypt” – that all this had been done “for Israel’s sake,” solely by the merit of the people. He explained it to him by providing a sign, that of “all the travail that had befallen them on the way” (v.8).

Let us imagine that a man pays a visit to the father of his son-in-law, who shows the man some precious gold and silver objects. The man leaves, then returns some time later. Upon his return, the man no longer sees any precious objects, and notices that his host looks unhappy at being humiliated (since he no longer has what he boasted of) in his presence. “Why do you feel uncomfortable with me?” the man asks. During the conversation that ensues, he inquires as to what became of the precious objects. His host answers, “Actually, it’s this that’s bothering me. I had to put all my precious objects as collateral because I had to borrow things. Now I don’t have them.”

“But there’s no shame in this,” the man interjected. “I would even say that you reassured me, because now I know that those objects belong to you, whereas before I asked myself if by any chance you had borrowed them.”

We know perfectly well that when someone receives a favor from Heaven because of his merits, they are abolished if he sins, and his good deeds are taken as collateral for his sins (see Ramban on the verse that states, “And he trusted in the L-RD. And He reckoned it to him as righteousness” [Genesis 15:6]). However when it is the merit of someone else, even if he departs from the right path, there is no reason to abolish

his personal merits. The Sages have said, “The wicked man who succeeds in everything is a wicked man, the son of a righteous man” (Berachot 7). Since the good that he partakes of is due to the merit of others, whatever good deeds that he may have are not taken as collateral for his sins. This is the meaning of “And Moses told his father-in-law everything that the L-RD had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel’s sake,” precisely because of Israel, by the merit of the people. Where’s the proof for this? “All the travail that had befallen them on the way” (Exodus 18:8). From the moment that they sinned by putting Hashem to the test, they were punished by having to confront numerous attacks. They had to descend from their greatness, and their glory was taken in collateral. This is the reason that allows us to assert that they were only rescued from such a fate by their own merit.

### THE PATH OF THE JUST

#### PRIDE – PART IX

*The reality is that, as the verse says, “When the L-RD favors a man’s ways, even his foes will make peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7). In fact, if people appreciate a person if he does not boast in front of them and does not try to find favor in their eyes by performing good deeds, this is the best proof that Hashem loves him. It shows that He has implanted love for him in the hearts of other men and that He has given him a good reputation. It is true that certain people are appreciated by others, even though Hashem loathes them because they do not perform the commandments (for Hashem loves only those who study Torah and carry out what is written in it).*

*The evil inclination will encourage you to display all your piety and good deeds in front of everyone. Now such an attitude also stems from pride. While it is true that several great Sages praised their own conduct, they only did so in front of their own disciples and colleagues, and only so that the latter would follow and emulate their ways. This behavior certainly consisted of the mitzvah of making them love good deeds. And even in front of these people, those great Sages did not boast inside thinking, “I know so much.” Nevertheless, in front of ordinary people, it is forbidden to display one’s good deeds or to reveal one’s wisdom.*

*Even if you remain humble, pray for a long time, and study regularly, the evil inclination will try to lead you to pride by telling you, “Now people who see you will respect and honor you for your good conduct. And this is very good because if you are honorable in their eyes, they will accept what you teach and reprimand them about.” This entire line of reasoning is worthless! If you act with no other goal than to fulfill Hashem’s will, your rebukes will be accepted even if it is not in the way that you thought, for people’s tendency to accept your rebukes is not dependant on your own thoughts.*