

תורה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE TORAH IS ACQUIRED BY HUMILITY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Commenting on the verse that states: “Ve’ata [And you] tetzaveh [you shall command] the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil” (Exodus 27:20), the author of Vayechi Yossef asks why the verse employs both the word Ve’ata (“And you”) and the letter tav that prefixes the word tetzaveh (“you shall command”). Simply using one of these would have sufficed, and instead the verse could have stated Ve’ata tzaveh (“And you shall command”). The Ohr HaChayim explains that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Moses not to prescribe this mitzvah to the Children of Israel in His Name, for it is not becoming of G-d to order that the lamps in His House be lit. Hence for the sake of the dignity of G-d’s House, Moses prescribed this Divine precept in his own name. Yet if so, a question arises: Did the Children of Israel not know that everything Moses commanded them was but an expression of G-d’s will (see Megillah 31b)? In response, we may say that with respect to this particular mitzvah, the Shechinah did not speak “from the throat of Moses,” as the Zohar puts it (Zohar III:232a). What is the reason for this, and did Hashem really need this light (see Shabbat 22b)?

We may also ask why G-d did not tell Moses to transmit to the Children of Israel the mitzvah of building the Sanctuary in his (Moses’) name. Rather, G-d ordered that it be transmitted in His (G-d’s) Name. Was it ethically appropriate for G-d to ask them to build Him a Sanctuary with their contributions? Since everything belongs to G-d, what did He need with their money? Finally, concerning the mitzvah to provide oil for the Menorah, why did G-d order Moses to transmit it directly to the Children of Israel in his own name?

The reason is that, as we saw, the construction of the Sanctuary and the Temple shows the great modesty of the Holy One, blessed be He. Despite the fact that the whole world is filled with His glory, He desired to contract Himself into the Sanctuary, which alludes to the body of a Jew. G-d desires to dwell within each Jew, but only on condition that harmony reigns among us. Let us therefore act like G-d and embrace that prime virtue which is modesty.

The mitzvah of lighting the lamps also implies the attributes of humility, submission, and diminishing oneself.

These can only reach a state of perfection, however, through the diligent study of Torah, which is compared to light, as it is written: “For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23), “Practice is the essential thing” (Perkei Avoth 1:17), and “Great is Torah study that leads to deeds” (Kiddushin 40b). The Torah survives only with one who demonstrates humility (Eruvin 54a), and it is acquired only by a modest man (Perkei Avoth 6:6).

G-d said to Moses: “You alone, who ascended to the heavens and spoke to Me face to face [Numbers 12:8], all while remaining the most humble of men [v.3], truly understand the value of modesty. Therefore instill that virtue into the Children of Israel and teach them to study Torah with humility. From Me they will learn the attribute of diminishing oneself, as I demonstrated in general with respect to the Sanctuary. I require neither light nor lamps – not even the Sanctuary – for the whole world is filled with My glory and ‘The Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool’ [Isaiah 66:1].”

G-d therefore wanted to honor Moses by asking him to teach them to study Torah with the utmost enthusiasm and humility (Katit lamaohr: Crushed, humbled for the light of Torah). In fact the Children of Israel, as we saw above, knew very well that everything Moses said was but an expression of G-d’s will.

Rabbi Chanania ben Akashia said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to grant merit to Israel. Therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance” (Makot 23b). The Children of Israel would thus be entitled to two rewards: The first for having, in accordance with His will, studied Torah with enthusiasm and pleased their Creator, and the second because this Torah is as magnificent as the one that emanated from our holy forefathers. G-d said to Moses: “Because you were the only one to sense the sweetness of the Torah, I command you to transmit it to the Children of Israel. It is in no way proper for Me to do so, since it was for this purpose that they were created.” The first reward that they received was thus for having studied Torah. To that end, the Talmud teaches that one who studies Torah because he has been commanded to do so is more meritorious than one who studies it without having been so commanded. The second reward was for having had the merit to receive commandments directly from Moses.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

RABBI AVRAHAM SHEMOUEL BINYAMIN (THE KETAV SOFER)

Many years had passed, and Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the Rav of Pressburg, still had no children. After the death of his wife, the Rebbetzin Malka, he married Sarah, the daughter of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and with her he merited to establish a great dynasty.

On the first of Adar 5575 (1815), the Rebbetzin Sarah gave birth to a son, and the residents of Pressburg welcomed this news with the greatest of joy. It was as if a prince had been born after a wait of many years. Rabbeinu Moshe was 52 years old at the birth of his firstborn son.

Legend has it that when the Rebbetzin was about to give birth and the delivery was proving to be difficult, some of Rabbi Moshe's disciples came to see him to ask that he pray for her to have a speedy delivery and that her suffering stop. Rabbeinu Moshe, the author of Chatam Sofer, replied by saying, "Do you not know the teaching of the Sages on the verse: 'The sun rises and the sun sets' [Ecclesiastes 1: 5]? Before the sun of one Tzaddik sets, the sun of another Tzaddik arises. I am filled with hope that a Tzaddik will be born to me, and I do not want to shorten the days of another Tzaddik because of my prayers for this one." When the child was nine years old, he fell ill and his remaining days seemed few. Even the doctors felt that his case was hopeless. Rabbi Moshe, however, placed himself before the desk that contained his writings and implored G-d to have pity on the child. His prayer was accepted and his son survived.

Even though his father did everything to prevent this oldest son of his from becoming famous, Avraham Shemuel Binyamin was known from the age of 11 to possess the mind of a genius. By nature he was very diligent, and he studied Torah day and night.

At the age of 17 he was already corresponding with great rabbanim on matters of Torah, and everyone was aware that a great light was rising in the firmament of Judaism.

At that time he married a young woman by the name of Chana Leah, the daughter of the renowned Rabbi Yitzchak Weiss, the Rav of Garlitz. Since his father-in-law was wealthy, he promised to support the couple for six years so that his son-in-law could settle in the tent of Torah and study in peace and tranquility.

During the first year of his marriage, the Ketav Sofer lived with his father and helped him in his holy tasks. Rabbi Moshe took advice from his son and asked him for his help in all his undertakings. Many times, he also let him respond to questions of Halachah. The Chatam Sofer would then reread what his son wrote and sign it as "the father of Shemuel." On Tishri 25, the day of Rabbi Moshe's pass-

ing and the end of the Chatam Sofer's era, a new chapter opened in the life of the Pressburg Jewish community, one written in gold – the chapter of the Ketav Sofer.

Rabbi Avraham Shemuel Binyamin was 24 years old when he assumed the position of Rav, yet his abilities enabled him, despite his young age, to command the people's authority. Not long afterwards, he amazed the entire community by his firm and resolute conduct. He closely observed everything that was happening in the city and safeguarded the observance of all his father's customs and decrees. He also devoted himself to the yeshiva with all his heart and all his soul, and there he introduced new regulations that met the needs of the time. He would rise early in the morning to prepare courses that he gave in the yeshiva, and he loved to say that there is no greater pleasure than rising at dawn to study Torah with a clear mind.

Besides his greatness in Torah, the Ketav Sofer especially distinguished himself by his acts of generosity. He put aside a tenth of his money for Tzedakah, financially supported many Talmidei Chachamim, and in honor of the holidays he would customarily send wine to all who studied Torah. He also donated large amounts of Tzedakah secretly, so as not to embarrass those who received it.

Above all, however, the Ketav Sofer grew with his students in the Pressburg yeshiva. He loved them enormously, and he strived to help them in every way possible. If he saw that someone was looking pale, he covered the costs of his recovery. He gave new clothes to his poor students, and he also helped them to find wives and attended their weddings, exactly as if they had been his sons.

His battles against the destroyers of the religion, who wanted to introduce reforms into Israel's Torah, played a large role in his life. He went to see kings and ministers to defend the holy values of Israel by means of his gentle words, ones that emanated from a heart that was pure and holy, and which always made a great impression on his listeners. A king once told him, "I am pleased to receive such a great and noble man in my palace today."

The Ketav Sofer directed the community of Pressburg for more than three decades, and he saw great blessing in everything he undertook. He then suddenly took ill, but still had time to send the first part of his responsum on Orach Chayim to get printed. Nevertheless, he felt that his days were numbered and that the hour had come to depart from the community. Thus he ordered that his son, Rabbi Simcha Bunim, replace him.

On Tevet 19, 5632 (1871), after having been the Rav of Pressburg for the same length of time as his father, 33 years, and even though he was not even 57 years old, the

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Ketav Sofer's pure soul ascended to Heaven. Rabbi Simcha Bunim, the author of Shevet Sofer, took his place as the Rav of Pressburg.

The following story is often told concerning the Ketav Sofer:

A large gathering was taking place in the home of the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Shemuel Binyamin, the Rav of Pressburg. All the great rabbanim of the generation were present, and in his desire to honor his guests, the Rav of Pressburg showed them a special gold coin. He told them, "Please examine this precious coin that has been in my family for many years. It was among those fashioned by King David, and there is none like it in the world."

The rabbanim admired this ancient coin and examined it in detail. It was passed from hand to hand, and each person thanked the Rav for the great honor he showed them by allowing them to look at such a precious object. Then all of a sudden, without anyone realizing how, the coin disappeared! The rabbanim were looking at each other in astonishment, not knowing what to do, for it was impossible to imagine that one of them had stolen it.

When people began feeling that finding it was hopeless, one of the rabbanim stood up and said, "Gentlemen! We have not yet done enough. Everyone here should check his clothes in case the coin fell into a pocket."

Everyone complied, but even then the coin could not be found. Once again someone in the gathering stood up and said, "As long as we have not found it, we are all under suspicion of theft. We are therefore obliged to search each other so as to leave no room for suspicion."

Everyone was in agreement except for one person, a very honorable man who was older than anyone there. He stood up and said, "Gentlemen! Let us not do such a thing, for it entails an element of insult to the honor of the Torah. Let us wait a little. Perhaps it will be found."

A half-hour passed, and the coin was still missing. Then the master of the house rose up and asked in a trembling voice for everyone to search the other, as had been suggested. At these words, the great and honorable older man grew pale. When the Chachamim saw him, they begin to suspect in their hearts that he had taken the coin.

At that moment, the door opened and one of the residents of the household came in and announced that the coin had fallen into one of the plates that had been removed from the table, and that it had been found when the dishes were being washed. Everyone felt relieved, and the gathering ended in a good and joyous atmosphere. The elderly man then stood up, and from his pocket he took out a coin that was exactly the same as the Rav of Pressburg's. He explained that he also possessed a coin like his, one that he had inherited from his forefathers and which he always kept with him because of its holiness. However when the master of the house, the Rav of Pressburg, had shown his coin to everyone and said that it was the only one of its

kind in the world, he kept quiet so as not to upset him. Thus when the coin disappeared and a search was proposed, he was in great disarray, for who would have believed his story if they had found the coin on him? This is why he prayed for G-d to get him out of that predicament, and his prayer was answered.

The Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Binyamin Sofer, the Rav of Pressburg, stood up and said: "Do you know why we are assembled here today? It is to learn the meaning of the Mishnah: 'Judge every man favorably.' When an accused man stands before you, even if you believe that he is probably guilty, you must nevertheless strive with all your might, before rendering a decision, to give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps you will be able to. And if you put effort into it, you will succeed!"

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE - PART XII

Pride running counter to wicked people is extremely laudable. One must reprimand and shame them. One should not yield before them, but should rather, to the best of one's abilities, encourage them to do good and warn them against doing evil. Each time that the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, one must do so without yielding before the wicked, who, by their humiliating taunts, push man to abandon doing good. One must act intelligently so as to know in which case to dominate the wicked in order to perform a good deed. In fact, it is not always advisable to confront them. If one does so in order to have them perform a commandment, one risks losing the opportunity to perform a hundred.

The wise man should therefore think, in accordance with the case before him, about which way to best carry out his deeds. These recommendations only apply when the case involves performing a commandment. If a case involves business dealings, one should yield before them and act over and above the requirements of the law, this constituting a great mitzvah.

The one who possesses the character trait of arrogance should put an effort into distancing himself from it, for this is an extremely reprehensible trait. It is certain that he will always cause harm to people, whereas the benefits that he gives them are minimal. One should therefore distance oneself from it as much as possible, for pride leads a man to destruction and humiliation, as it is written, "Pride precedes destruction" and "A man's pride will bring him low" (Proverbs 16:18; 29:23). We know what happened to Pharaoh, to Goliath, to Sennacherib, and to Nebuchadnezzar because of their arrogant words, as well as to other men who have uttered similar statements and whose end was thus shame and disgrace. Whoever clings to this character trait is not saved from sin and wicked deeds. As King Solomon says, "The boastful, willful man, scoffer is his name. The arrogant evildoer, he is a willful man" (ibid. 21:24).

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

A mistake Rectified

Rabbi Shemuel Shtrashun (the Rashash) directed, among other things, a free-loan fund that issued loans of substantial amounts to whoever was in need. Now the reality of things is that if any such institution treats its borrowers gingerly, it ends up slowly disappearing. Therefore Rabbi Shemuel established very strict rules governing the repayment of loans, demanding that borrowers make regular, monthly payments.

One day, a G-d-fearing but unlearned Jew from Vilna arrived at the Rashash's free-loan fund and borrowed 100 rubbles, which he was to repay in one lump sum three months later.

When the time came for repaying the loan, the borrower came to Rabbi Shemuel to give it back to him, but he did not find him at home. He then went to the Beit Midrash, where Rabbi Shemuel studied every morning, and there he saw him immersed in his studies, oblivious to the fact that someone had just arrived. The man was hesitant to disturb him, but ended up telling himself that he had to reimburse his debt on time. He therefore approached Rabbi Shemuel and said that he had come to pay back his loan, then deposited a bill of 100 rubbles on the Rav's open Gemara.

Meanwhile Rabbi Shemuel, absorbed in his studies, noticed neither the identity of the Jew who had suddenly appeared, nor the money that was on his Gemara. He had the vague impression that someone had been standing next to him, and out of politeness he had nodded his head in his direction. The Jew, however, took this as a sign that Rabbi Shemuel had acknowledged his repayment of the loan, and at that point he left the Beit Midrash.

When the Rav finished studying, he closed his Gemara without noticing the bill within it. He then put it back on a shelf and went home.

Rabbi Shemuel had the habit of checking the free-loan fund ledger every week to verify that payments were being made on time. To those who had not yet made that month's payment, he sent a reminder letter. As he was checking the ledger that day, his eye spotted the name of a Jew whose repayment date had already passed 15 days earlier, yet there had been no sign of him. Rabbi Shemuel gave him the benefit of the doubt, telling himself that the borrower was no doubt in a tight situation, and that he should give him one or two more weeks until he could repay such a hefty loan. Two weeks then passed, but still nothing, so Rabbi Shemuel sent him a notice to repay.

"But I already reimbursed you about a month ago, at the due date," the man responded.

"I don't understand what you are saying!" Rabbi Shemuel told him, gently but firmly. "When did you pay me, and where is your receipt?"

"How can the Rabbi have forgotten?" the borrower responded in astonishment. "I placed a 100 rubble bill in front of you in the Beit Midrash, and you even nodded at me to indicate that everything was in order. Perhaps I should have asked for a receipt, but I didn't want to disturb you, and I relied on your memory."

"Never!" Rabbi Shemuel said resolutely. "I did not see you at the Beit Midrash, and you did not give me any 100 rubble bill. You're simply trying to avoid paying your debt. I'm not in the habit of accepting loan repayments without issuing a receipt or returning an acknowledgment of debt."

For his part, the Jew continued to assert that he has already paid. True, he did not have a receipt, but he knew that he had repaid his loan.

Rabbi Shemuel told him that since the money belonged to the community, he did not have the right to overlook it. Furthermore, if he did not repay his loan within eight days, he would summon him to a Din Torah.

After a week, Rabbi Shemuel summoned the borrower to a Din Torah, at which the latter vigorously asserted that he has already repaid his loan. The judges were about to render their decision, but Rabbi Shemuel intervened and told them that he was prepared to wait a few more weeks. Perhaps the Jew would feel remorse during that time, admit to the truth, and repay his debt.

In the meantime, news of what had happened spread. People heard that the

Rashash had summoned the man to the Beit Din, and that he had the gall to unabashedly contradict the Rashash. It goes without saying that the general public took the Rashash's side, with some people even venting their fury on the man by heaping insults on him. His assertion that he had already repaid his loan was viewed with scorn, and he was fired from his job, one from which he was already squeezing out a meager living. His boss openly told him that if he could lie to the Beit Din for 100 rubbles, he could also steal from him, which perhaps he had already done!

The man had a son of tremendous virtues who studied in a yeshiva in Vilna, yet the shame he felt was so great that he had to leave both the yeshiva and Vilna!

Then one day, as Rabbi Shemuel consulted the same Gemara where that ill-fated treasure lay, he saw the bill of 100 rubles. At that very instant it all came back to him: A Jew had in fact entered the Beit Midrash on that day! Rabbi Shemuel began to go over the events of that day. He had probably been immersed in study, and the Jew had entered and no doubt spoken to him of this loan repayment. Yet at the time nothing of this registered in his mind, and without wanting to interrupt his study, the man must have placed the bill on the open Gemara and thought that the Rashash had noticed, then he must have quietly left. It was in this way that Rabbi Shemuel reconstructed the incident, followed by which a terrible feeling of anxiety overcame him. He had but one question in his heart: How could he get this Jew out of the mud?

Rabbi Shemuel did not hesitate before having the man summoned, who appeared before him with an icy stare. The Rashash rose before him, and without any explanation as to why he was asking for his forgiveness, he went straight to the point: "Tell me yourself how I can obtain your forgiveness for all the suffering that I caused you. For my part, I am ready to forgive you in public before everyone and explain what happened in order to give you back everything you have lost."

The Jew, who was completely broken, remained still. He responded to Rabbi Shemuel's proposal with the certitude of a man who had lost all hope: "For me, that means nothing. People will say that your honor wanted to save me from the misery I was in. My name has already been used as a byword for disgrace. My son had to leave the city he was in, so great was the shame he experienced. What can you give me, or what can you add to such a request for forgiveness?"

These somber words pierced the noble soul of Rabbi Shemuel, for he possessed a great heart and had now fully understood the scope of this good Jew's distress in all its horror. He then began to reflect upon the situation very carefully, and all of a sudden he straightened up and his face lit up. He looked at the man straight in the eye and spoke to him with an almost ecstatic voice: "Your son is in another town? Send someone to get him and have him brought to me. I will take him as my daughter's husband!" (Note: The Rashash's daughter was an orphan that he had adopted as a young girl).

The eyes of the Jew lit up as a smile broke out on his face. He began to regain his vitality, like someone who had gone from the lowest depths to the greatest heights, and tears of joy welled up in his eyes. He was unable to make a sound. He grabbed the hand of Rabbi Shemuel with such warmth, it seemed that all the shame he had experienced up to that point was worth it just to hear this fabulous news. It placed him in a state of joy that he would have never dared imagine in his sweetest dreams.

Thus the two men were happy. One had found a way to rectify his mistake, and the other had found a wonderful wife for his son. They departed from each other warmly, and after a few days the engagement was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony in the Rashash's home, accompanied by the presence of Torah scholars and dignitaries of Vilna.

In Vilna itself, people were saying that Heaven must have decreed this marriage from the outset, for who would have had the idea to propose such a match to the Rashash? This event thus transformed itself into a marvelous matchmaker. (Hizorharu Bichvod Chavareichem)