

וַיַּאכְהֶל THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 70 VAYAKHEL 24 ADAR I 5765 MARCH.5.2005

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 TABERNACLE OF TESTIMONY: THE HEART AND SOUL OF ISRAEL (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The Midrash teaches that after having received from the Children of Israel the silver and gold destined for the construction of the Tabernacle and its vessels, as well as for the making of the garments to be worn therein, Moses made a detailed inventory of all the expenses incurred, lest people suspect him of having enriched himself with the silver or gold that he had received (Shemot Rabba 51:6).

Elsewhere it is written, "It was in the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, that the Tabernacle was erected. Moses erected the Tabernacle; he put down its sockets and emplaced its planks and inserted its bars and erected its pillars" (Exodus 40:17-18). Concerning this, the Sages teach that Moses erected the entire Tabernacle alone, without any outside help, and that miracles were performed for him while he was building it (Bamidbar Rabba 12:11; Nedarim 38a). He even managed to lift extremely heavy planks. However when he became tired, G-d told him, "Grab hold of them, and they will lift themselves up," as it is written, "the Tabernacle was erected [by itself]" (Exodus 40:17).

These Midrashim raise a certain number of questions, ones that we have answered in previous issues. However, since there is no Beit Midrash in which we do not learn something new, we propose suggesting some new ideas:

1. Why did Moses have to count all the silver and gold that he had received from the Children of Israel? Who could have suspected Moses (G-d forbid), the father of all the prophets of Israel (Vayikra Rabba 1:15), who spoke to the Eternal face to face (Exodus 33:11), of having stolen? This was especially so because Moses was very wealthy (he had, as we know, become rich with the remnants of the Tablets of the Law [Exodus 34:1]). As for the 1775 shekels of silver that were amassed (Exodus 38:25), from which hooks for the Tabernacle's pillars were made (v.28), the Midrash teaches that Moses had forgotten them and that G-d had to remind him about them. How can we conceive of such a thing happening?

2. Why did Moses have to erect the Tabernacle all by himself? Why did G-d have to perform miracles for him? Why didn't Moses ask the Children of Israel to help him? Was the Tabernacle not destined for them?

If our explanations have been mentioned elsewhere, we know that the words of Torah are poor in one place and rich in another.

We know very well that the Eternal needs neither the Tabernacle nor its vessels, and that "all the earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). We know that there is no place that is not covered by His Presence (Shir Hashirim Rabba 3:16), that despite our blemishes He resides in us (see Yoma 56b), and that He gives strength to the Kelipah, for "You made the heavens, the most exalted heavens and all that is in them, and You give them all life; and the heavenly legion bows to You" (Nehemiah 9:6). We know that He created the evil inclination in order for man to untiringly fight, defend himself against, and finally triumph over it. Man will thus have reached a state of perfection, most notably by the diligent study of Torah, which is the remedy against the evil inclination.

However, as we have seen in preceding issues, man's body alludes to the Sanctuary. A man should therefore examine his 365 tendons and 248 members. The Eternal will then reside in his midst if he really so desires, if he chooses the Torah, which is called "life" (Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 34:10) and "good" (Berachot 5a).

In the opposite case, the Divine Presence distances itself from him. He will then understand that everything that has happened to him stems from the fact that he did not learn from the example of the Tabernacle. For one can only be imbued with the Shechinah but by the diligent study of Torah and the continual performance of mitzvot.

If a man sees himself afflicted with suffering, he should examine his ways. One thing is certain: His sufferings have been caused by the fact that he abstained from Torah study. We know that the Eternal punishes the one He loves (Proverbs 3:12). He only allows a man to suffer trials that he can overcome. The Hidushei Harim of Gur, commenting on the Sages' instruction concerning this subject (Kiddushin 69a, according to which there were Jewish slaves only during the Jubilee), explains that through serious introspection and diligent Torah study, we can overcome trials, easily rise above obstacles placed before us by the evil inclination, triumph over the evil inclination itself, and get closer to the Holy One, blessed be He.

Consequently, if Moses had made a detailed inventory of all the silver and gold that the Children of Israel had given him for the construction of the Tabernacle, it was to teach them that a man should constantly examine his conduct lest he sin. If he is afflicted with suffering, it is because he blemished one or several

Continuation page 2

of his members (which are compared to the Sanctuary), spoke bad words, or maintained bad thoughts. If he knows which of his members has been affected, he can return to G-d.

Thus even a great man such as Moses is capable of forgetting a small detail. Only the person who does everything for the love of Heaven finds his consciousness awakened because of G-d, and causes no harm either voluntarily or involuntarily. Just as the sage must measure his words and steps, so too must a teacher (see Perkei Avoth 1:11). In the opposite case, he is capable of succumbing to forgetfulness, as was the case with the generation of knowledge, who, having failed to acknowledge the miracles that G-d had performed for them, finished by committing the sin of the golden calf.

By the extensive study of Torah and serious introspection, one arrives at correcting all one's sins. If G-d had threatened to bury the Children of Israel under Mount Sinai by obliging them to accept the Torah, even though they had proclaimed, "we will do and we will understand," it was because He wanted that they should all teach the Torah to their neighbor. Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai said, "If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself" (Perkei Avoth 2:8[9]), for one can find everything in the Torah: "Learn it and learn it, for everything is in it" (ibid. 5:21). Therefore Moses made a detailed inventory of everything that the Children of Israel had brought to him in order to provide them with an example of proper conduct.

A man should nevertheless realize that he cannot do everything alone. Without G-d's help, he cannot triumph over the evil inclination (Kiddushin 30b), which carries the name "old fool" (Kohelet Rabba 4:15), and which tries by all means possible to make a man sin, including the Tzaddik. This is why the Mishnah advises us to not vouch for our virtues before the day of our death (Perkei Avoth 2:4[5]). A man cannot claim that it is impossible for him to triumph over the evil inclination; all that G-d asks of him is that he takes the first step (Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:3). He will then most certainly help him and perform miracles in his favor. He did so for Moses, who experienced difficulties lifting the large beams of the Tabernacle, beams that in the end lifted themselves. As it is written, "He guards the steps of His devout ones" (I Samuel 2:9), meaning that He helps them to not commit sins, even involuntary ones.

If we take the first step, then help from Heaven will not delay in arriving and we will sanctify ourselves like the Tabernacle and the Temple. For even in our days, the Shechinah does not move from the Temple and the synagogue. May we be imbued with it all the days of our lives. Amen.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

The Merit of Shabbat

One day a Jew came by the home of Rabbi Israel Yitzhak of Alexander, author of Yismach Israel. The Jew was not particularly pious, and even far removed from the path of Torah and mitzvot.

"Rabbi," the newly arrived Jew said, "What can I do? I have a small shop that sells a little of everything, but for a long time I haven't been able to earn a living. I've already considered selling it, but what work could I find in its place? I'm not young anymore and I'm not capable of learning a trade." The Tzaddik looked at the man before him and finally said, "Would you be prepared to accept me as your business associate?"

"Business associate? The Rabbi involved in my affairs?" The man looked at the Tzaddik with amazement. The Rabbi continued: "I have no intention of investing money with you. However if you give me a part of your store, a certain percentage, say 15%, I promise that you'll live well!"

"But my shop is running a deficit," the man thought. "How can we share losses? Would the Rabbi accept to share the debts that I've accumulated?" He dared not express all his doubts out loud. The man vividly recalled what his neighbors and acquaintances had told him: "The Tzaddikim don't operate in a natural way. Everything they do succeeds." This is what prompted the man to reply, "Alright. I will gladly give the Rabbi a part of my shop."

"But I have a condition to add," said the Rabbi. "From the part that belongs to me, I want to do what I wish with it!" The shopkeeper accepted this as well, since he was in such a difficult financial situation that he couldn't allow himself to haggle.

The Rabbi's assistant quickly wrote up a business contract that stipulated that 15% of the shop belonged entirely to the Rabbi. The latter signed it, and the shopkeeper added his signature. Then, before he left, the Rabbi told him, "According to the business partnership that we've just formed, one seventh of the business belongs to me, and so I choose Shabbat. Consequently, the money that the shop makes on the six days of the week will be yours, and the profit made on Shabbat will be mine. Is this acceptable to you?"

"Naturally!" The shopkeeper rejoiced because he could finally rest from his work for one day of the week. However his astonishment was quickly awoken: "Was it possible that the Rabbi had the intention of opening the store on Shabbat?"

Before daring to express the question out loud, he continued listening to the Tzaddik: "Since Shabbat belongs to me, I order you to close the shop on that day, for it is a holy day!" The man, who was already preparing to leave, came back. "Rabbi!" he cried. "Even now, when the store is open every day, it makes no money. If I close it for one day every week, I will quickly become bankrupt!"

"I stated the condition beforehand that I had the right to do what I pleased with my part," retorted the Rabbi. "Have you already forgotten? Go, and G-d will send you blessing and success."

When Shabbat arrived, the man kept his promise. As the Rabbi had ordered, he bolted the store shut on that Shabbat as well as the next and all the rest.

One month passed, then two, and the man had still not gone bankrupt. Blessings then made their way into the store by the merit of Shabbat, which he had accepted to respect.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI ABRAHAM BEN MOUSSA

Rabbi Avraham was very poor. He was a man imbued with holiness and purity, knowing the hidden sense of the Torah as well as the revealed sense perfectly well, and performing miracles and bringing deliverance. He was always busy consulting a book, and the Torah appeased his hunger and made him forget his material worries. However the thing that tormented him the most was the fate of his Jewish brothers, subjected to suffering and humiliation in the lands of their exile.

He decided to leave Morocco and immigrate to Tunisia. He and his wife arrived in Tunis with the greatest discretion, both of them exhausted and famished by the trip. A passerby noticed them and advised them to go to the wedding of one of the prominent Jews of the area and thus present their request to the community treasurer.

Thus he went on his way to the wedding. When he got there, the hall was still empty, so he decided to sit at one of the places of honor. Little by little, the guests began to arrive, along with the family of the groom. In approaching one of the tables of honor, they discovered a Jew, clothed in tatters, sitting down quietly. Seeing this, the brother of the groom kicked him out. Rabbi Avraham left disappointed and very irritated. Along with his wife, he headed for the closest inn, telling her, "If someone comes to find me, tell him that I'm resting."

Meanwhile in the wedding hall, everyone was singing and dancing, and the rejoicing was at its height. Suddenly the brother of the groom began to cry, "I can't see anything! Darkness is covering my eyes!" The stunned crowd gathered around him. The mystery behind this astonishing event was still on everyone's lips when the agonizing answer burst into the air: "He insulted the Jewish beggar that was here. He must have been a messenger from G-d!"

Very quickly, people began to look for the poor man who had disappeared. His wife was finally found at the inn, and the father of the groom anxiously asked to introduce them to her husband.

"What do you want?" she retorted to them. "My husband is sleeping now and I can't wake him up."

However the members of the family, with tears in their eyes, implored her. She went into the room of Rabbi Avraham and woke him up gently, explaining that the family of the groom wanted to speak to him.

"What do they want?" he asked. "Don't I know that the groom's brother has become blind? What more do they want?"

He had not finished speaking when the family of the groom, all in tears, burst into the room and beseeched Rabbi Avraham to forgive the groom's brother. Rabbi Avraham arose, went to wash his hands, and called the groom's brother.

"I must now castigate you with words that are very severe," he said. "Whoever publicly humiliates his fellow has no part in the world to come. This bad habit of humiliating a man – rich or poor – entails terrible punishment."

He continued to speak for a long time to the man in this way, and he cried bitterly in regretting his evil deed. Rabbi Avraham then passed the palm of his hand over the eyes of the man and said, "G-d alone heals the sick and helps them during time of tragedy." Upon finishing his words, the man regained his sight.

With understanding and emotion, those gathered about exclaimed, "Blessed are you, O Eternal ... Who gives back sight to the blind!"

Rabbi Avraham left this world in 5501 (1741), and even up to our days his name is venerated by the great community of Tunisia.

May his merit protect us. Amen.

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE - PART XIV

Make a barrier to distance yourself from arrogance and other bad character traits. To completely uproot pride from one's heart, one must begin by distancing oneself from pride and leaning towards the other extreme. How can this be done? If one normally wears costly garments, one should wear proper clothes, of average value. If one normally shows off through speech or deeds in order to gain personal honor, the solution is to endure great shame, to sit lower than everyone, etc., to the point that pride is completely uprooted from one's heart. Next, one will be able to return to the middle path that is to be followed for the rest of one's life. One will act in this way with regards to all that concerns one's bad character traits: One will begin by completely distancing oneself from it for a long enough period of time, then follow the middle path afterwards. The one who desires to serve the Creator in the best possible way will choose this path and encourage his friends to do so as well. Concerning this subject, it is written, "One who orders [his] way, I will show him the salvation of G-d" (Psalms 50:23).

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “And Moses assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: ‘These are the things that the L-RD commanded, to do them: “On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for the L-RD” ’” (Exodus 35:1-2).

The Yalkut Shimoni states: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: ‘Make large assemblies and expound the Torah to them in public, the laws of Shabbat on Shabbat.’” We conclude from this that Moses instituted the custom of giving discourses at the time of their subjects, meaning that the laws of Passover were expounded on Passover, those of Shavuot on Shavuot and so on; the laws of a given holiday were explained on that holiday.

Why does the Biblical text put so much emphasis on Shabbat and the holidays? Be it to praise them, or to protest that we do not observe them sufficiently, it is an issue raised more with regards to them than for all other mitzvot. Concerning no other subject do we speak of remembering and observing as much as for Shabbat. And the desecration of holy times is vehemently condemned, as for example with the following: “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me” (Isaiah 1:14).

There was once a rich man who had many sons, yet his sons were always sick. The man had a doctor, whom he greatly loved, come over to his house and asked him to devote himself entirely to healing them. Everything worked out quite well as long as the children did not protest against the medications given to them. Yet one day they caught a very dangerous disease and refused to take the medication that the doctor had prescribed. When the father saw that the situation was grave – that his sons’ lives were in danger yet they refused to take their medication – he blamed the doctor. But the latter protested that there was nothing he could do if his prescriptions were not being followed.

“All the same, it’s your fault that I’m more worried than normal,” the father retorted, “for if no one was taking care of them, I would have given up hope anyways. However, in knowing that they have a skillful doctor nearby who has know how to heal them many times before, yet at present they remain sick, my heart is only heavier.”

The interpretation of this parable is clear.

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Shabbat and the holidays as remedies to heal our soul of all the illnesses occasioned by our many activities, that assail it on all the other days. When He sees that we do not accept keeping them, He complains and says, “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me.” It is not that these days themselves have become a burden, but since it is uniquely through them that evil can be repaired – yet they remain neglected – they become like a burden on the soul, as our parable illustrates.

Returning to our subject, this means that Shabbat and the holidays were only given so that we may complete that which we lack in the fear and service of Hashem during the regular days of the year. “Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it” (Exodus 20:8) means that we should always remember to sanctify it with the holiness that was ours on the day when the Torah was given, when we were given this commandment.

It was on Shabbat that we were all assembled before Hashem to hear His holy words. In the same way, we should assemble every Shabbat to hear from our teachers the words of Torah, words of wisdom and the fear of Heaven. Another verse states, “Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the L-RD your G-d has commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:12), which even more explicitly teaches us that we must observe Shabbat in this way – “as the L-RD your G-d has commanded you” – meaning as on the day when the Torah was given. This is the sense of the Yalkut Shimoni that we cited: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: ‘Make large assemblies and expound the Torah to them in public, the laws of Shabbat on Shabbat.’” This was said in order that all Shabbats should resemble the first one, during which time the Torah was given. The verse that states, “Six days shall you labor and accomplish all your work, but the seventh day is Sabbath to the L-RD your G-d” (ibid. 5:13-14) is to be understood in entirely the same way.