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№ 77
ACHAREI MOT
14 NISSAN 5765
APRIL.23.2005

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Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

THE POWER OF HABIT IN THE PERFORMANCE OF MITSVOT

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Our parsha deals with, among other things, the placing of lots upon the two he-goats during Yom Kippur, as it is written: "Aaron shall place lots upon the two he-goats, one lot for the L-RD and one lot for Azazel" (Leviticus 16:8). How were these lots taken?

The two he-goats were placed on either side of the High Priest, one to his left and the other to his right. Two lots were then placed in a box, one labeled "for the L-RD" and the other "for Azazel", and the High Priest took these into each of his hands. The lot drawn in his left hand was placed on the he-goat to his left, and the lot in his right hand was placed on the he-goat to his right (see Yoma 37a, 39a, which explain the process in detail).

This placing of lots is difficult to understand. Why did G-d command that the High Priest proceed in this way, rather than deciding for himself which he-goat he would take for Hashem or Azazel, with G-d's Providence guiding him to make the right choice? In what way was the drawing of lots necessary?

We will also try to understand why the Torah commands that two he-goats be taken, rather than rams, turtledoves, or any other type of animal.

There is also another problem: According to the Sages, before the he-goat for Azazel even reached halfway to the bottom of the mountain (from the summit, off of which it was thrown), it was already crushed and mangled. We may ask why it was necessary to throw it off the top of the mountain, rather than to slaughter or strangle it, or to kill it by the sword, by fire, or stoning. What is the significance of throwing it off a mountain?

In my humble opinion, we must understand this passage as alluding to something else. By the drawing of lots, G-d is showing the Children of Israel the greatness of the mitzvot, for the performance of mitzvot comprises two elements, and for that matter the acknowledgment of a sin. The first is the habit that comprises the mitzvah or the sin. When someone is in the habit of only performing mitzvot, sin does not present itself to him, for one mitzvah brings about another

(Perkei Avoth 4:2; Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 25:4), without mentioning the fact that "great is a mitzvah, for it causes those who perform it to inherit this world and the World to Come" (Midrash Gadol Ch. 6). This greatness even covers a deed that was performed with ulterior motives (Nazir 23b; Horayot 10b). Alternatively, the force of habit can also bring about a sin, which in turn brings on others (Perkei Avoth 4:2). This is why G-d commanded that lots be drawn (goral), for the letters of this word form the word hergel ("habit"). This teaches the Children of Israel to perform mitzvot habitually, a habit that will help them to constantly place their prayers and mitzvot before G-d so that they will always be like a pleasing sacrifice to Him. This is the significance of the drawing of lots. The second element is the direct intent that we put into the performance of mitzvot (or sins) – the desire to perform the Creator's will.

Nevertheless, if we commit sins to the point of getting into the habit of doing so, we fall into the realm of the evil inclination, which as we know is called a "mountain" (Sukkah 52a). We can then expect a bitter end, for when the Satan makes a man transgress, he will be punished like the he-goat that is sent to the mountain (which evokes the evil inclination) to be torn to bits and dismembered. Therein lies the allusion contained in the choice of the two he-goats, the mountain, and the dismemberment of the animal.

We can then understand why he-goats are required rather than other animals, for they belong to the same family as the ez ("goat"), which evokes az ("impudence"). Arrogance can easily lead to sin ("The az [impudent] is headed for Gehinnom" – Perkei Avoth 5:20). Thus the habit of committing sins will earn him the punishment of being torn to bits like the he-goat sent towards Azazel, which is an expiatory sacrifice alluding to sin.

Inversely, a person who has the habit of performing mitzvot and good deeds will succeed in everything he does. He will be "az ['bold'] as a leopard ... to carry out the will of [his] Father in Heaven" (Perkei Avoth 5:20). Such a person will end up attaining holiness and be worthy of being sacrificed on the altar to atone for the sins of the Children

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of Israel. This is the second he-goat, which was drawn by lots for Hashem and sacrificed for the atonement of the Children of Israel's sins.

We now understand why lots needed to be drawn, why he-goats were involved, and why everything was done to these two he-goats (which represented the upright and the sinners): It encourages us to resemble a sacrifice before Hashem, rather than an atonement sacrifice cut into pieces, and to invest all our *az* ("boldness") into holiness.

Now a man possesses the necessary strength to leave the realm of the evil inclination (the mountain of Azazel) and to enter the realm of the good inclination (the sacrifice for Hashem), which we will better understand after a short introduction on the subject.

The Ramchal says that when a man sins, the evil inclination seizes him and he has neither the will nor the energy to escape. Even after repenting, it is difficult for him to break free of this hold, just as a prisoner cannot free himself from his own cell. The only way to break these fetters and liberate himself is to be reprimanded.

Let us explain what this consists of. It is actually a great mitzvah to reprimand one's fellow (Leviticus 19:17), yet it is difficult to see the connection between this mitzvah and the act of liberating oneself from the grip of the evil inclination.

What the Ramchal meant to say is that when nobody reprimands a man for the sins he has committed, and when nobody rattles him, he has no chance of liberating himself from the grip of the evil inclination. This is why he specifies "to be reprimanded," which means that a man should reprimand himself. He should reflect upon returning to G-d, and so his uncircumcised heart will be broken and little by little he will free himself from the power of evil.

It is written, "You shall surely rebuke your fellow" (Leviticus 19:17). If you are a prisoner of the evil inclination and there is nobody to reprimand you, it is the evil inclination that becomes your fellow. This means that you must reprimand yourself, and do the same to your fellow (none other than the evil inclination), until you dominate it and liberate yourself from its grip. In fact we know that to deceive a man, the evil inclination presents itself to him with love and tenderness. The Sages describe this process as follows: The evil inclination is at first like a passerby, then as a guest, until finally it becomes the master of the home (Sukkah 52b; Bereshith Rabba 22:11). This means that in the beginning it speaks a sweet talk, like someone who is concerned with his friend's well-being, yet "inside of him he lays his ambush" (Jeremiah 9:7), all while secretly scorning those who fall into its power, for it only appears to want their good. This is why a man should reprimand himself, for doing so will allow him to leave the realm of this arrogant one, from that high mountain (the evil inclination), and to arrive into the realm of the good inclination and become like a sacrifice before G-d, worthy of atoning for others by the holiness of his deeds.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

How to Easily Repent

A young man from a good family distanced himself from the right way and followed dire paths, until finally feelings of remorse and repentance awakened in him and he wanted to return to his Creator. He therefore went to find a Tzaddik, and with tears and supplications he recounted the following to him: "I am up to my neck in sin and wrongdoing, but I want to return to G-d with all my heart. The pain and sorrow caused by my wicked deeds are indescribable. I beg you, Rabbi, tell me how I – who has breached the 49 gates of impurity – can return to the good path? How can I succeed in conquering the seductions of the evil inclination? I beg you, Rabbi, guide me on the path of truth!"

"Don't cry, my son," the Rabbi reassured him. "There is a simple way to solve your problems. Be careful never to utter a lie, and in this way you will be saved from all harm." The young man calmed down and said, "That's really a simple way to repent. Alright, I promise with all my heart and soul not to lie." However the Tzaddik was not satisfied with such a promise. "You must swear to me," the Tzaddik demanded. The young man swore to keep himself from lying. As mentioned, he was plunged up to his neck in sin, and among other things he stole.

Some time later, the young man noticed that his neighbors were away on a trip, and he found their empty house tempting. He made his way into the house and began to steal everything he could find in silver and gold. As soon as he left the house with the "spoils" in his hands, a thought crossed his mind: What would happen if his neighbors suspected him and asked if he was the thief? If he told them that he was innocent, it would be a lie, and he couldn't lie because he swore to the Tzaddik that he wouldn't!

He immediately went back and put all the silver and gold objects in their place, leaving his neighbor's house with nothing in his hands. Ever since, whenever he was at the point of committing a sin, he asked himself: "What will I say afterwards? If I lie, I will have desecrated my oath." He was prevented in this way from committing new sins, to the point that he repented completely, and all thanks to the extraordinary advice of the Tzaddik!

THE PATH OF THE JUST HUMILITY - PART VI

Humility has many positive consequences.

The modest man is patient, and from patience peace is born. Thanks to his humility, he manages to appease the anger of the person who is upset with him, as it is written, “A gentle reply turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). Now seeking peace is a very great virtue.

The modest man is gracious, as it is said, “To the humble He gives grace” (Ibid. 3:34). A humble man’s prayer, which demands nothing and holds nothing against anyone, is pleasing to the Holy One, blessed be He. This is the reason why the prayer that Rabbi Akiva recited, Avinu Malkeinu, was accepted (Taanith 25:2).

The humble man merits his wisdom by virtue of the fact that he yields before the Sages and sits at their feet, as it is written, “One who walks with the wise will grow wise” (Proverbs 13:20). Hashem takes pity on the humble: “One who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will be granted mercy” (Ibid. 28:13).

The modest man discreetly flees from honor and positions of prestige, as it is written, “and to walk humbly with your G-d” (Micah 6:8). The humble man rejoices in the lot that G-d grants him, whether he has little or much, as the verse states: “Good is the little of the righteous” (Psalms 37:16). By this he disconnects himself from the worries of the material world and can devote himself to the acquisition of wisdom and the service of G-d.

The humble man judges all men favorably, accords honor to all, and yields before everyone.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY *from the Maguid of Doubno*

It is written: “This shall be to you an eternal decree to bring atonement upon the Children of Israel for all their sins once a year” (Leviticus 16:34).

This passage raises a question that King David dealt with by stating, “Why should I be fearful in days of evil? The injunctions that I trod upon will surround me!” (Psalms 49:6). We also find in the Gemara the concept of “sins that a man casts underfoot” (Avodah Zarah 18:1). How can we speak of casting sins underfoot? We may understand it in the following way:

A person built a house to a degree of perfection that was complete. He wanted that not even the smallest elements be missing, nor that there be the slightest fault or crack in the house, so that neither gusts of wind nor dust could enter. The owner moved into the house after it was built, and he was seen bringing several brooms with him. Upon noticing this, some people asked him, “Didn’t you build a house that had not the slightest opening? What do you need with a broom?” He replied, “What’s so surprising? It’s true that the house is almost hermetically sealed, but there are people who enter and leave it, and they inevitably bring dust and dirt inside. I therefore need to sweep the place, otherwise the dust will accumulate to the point of being everywhere.”

Like a person living in a house, the Creator placed the soul in the body, which He surrounded and protected by mitzvot that apply to all the body’s members. There are some mitzvot that concern the eyes, others the ears, the mouth, tongue, hands, feet, and so on, as the author of Sefer Haredim explains. All this is in order that no dust of the vanities of this world should penetrate into the soul. Yet once all this is properly sealed, by his very nature a man is obliged to leave this seclusion and involve himself in the world – by eating, drinking, sleeping, speaking with people, etc. At that point, when he leaves to care for the needs of his body, it is inevitable that a little of the dust that we call “the sins that a man casts underfoot” clings to him. By leaving the service of G-d to attend to earthly matters, it is impossible that no dust of the vanities of men should attach themselves to him. This is why Hashem created Teshuvah before creating the world, and it is why He prepared a holy day of repentance and prayer that allows a man to clean his soul from time to time, like the owner of the house with his brooms. “This shall be to you an eternal decree” means that it is indispensable, something that we cannot do without, “to bring atonement upon the Children of Israel for all their sins once a year.” It goes without saying, however, that when a man accumulates sins, one day is not enough to cleanse himself of them.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RABBI MOCHE SCHICK - THE MAHARAM SCHICK

Rabbi Moshe Schick, the Rav of Khust, was unique in his generation. All the great qualities that the Sages saw in the great men of Israel were found in him. He was steeped in Torah and wise in the ways of this world. He spoke the truth and judged fairly. He was pious and humble, fearing no man. He was constantly seated in the tent of Torah study and quickly wrote his responsum; he was scholarly and possessed a lively mind, and he was loved and respected. He was truly a prince of Torah in his generation, and a magnet for all those who questioned him in Halachah and sought his advice to their problems.

Rabbi Moshe was born on Adar 21, 5567 (1807) in the tiny city of Rezawa, Hungary. His father Rabbi Yossef, who lived honestly and uprightly, died when he was only six years old. The lively intelligence of Moshe made itself known from his childhood. He was extremely diligent and always revised what he studied in school. By the age of 10, he knew all of Tanach and the six orders of the Mishnah by heart, and at a very young age he had a reputation as being a genius of extraordinary proportions.

At the age of 11, he left his mother to go study Torah at the yeshiva of his uncle Rabbi Yitzchak Frenkel, the Rav of Freuen Kirchen. He stayed there for three years, returning to his mother knowing several tractates and numerous Talmudic subjects by heart. He then decided to travel to the city of Pressburg and learn Torah with the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the author of Chatam Sofer. Not having the means to rent a carriage to travel there, however, he went by foot, passing from town to town and from village to village until reaching Pressburg. He arrived two days before Yom Kippur, having only four cents in hand.

After the Musaf prayer of Yom Kippur, the Chatam Sofer usually spoke some words of Torah to his students. A young adolescent, small of size, listened attentively to the words of the Rav. He then suddenly expressed his opinion on a matter, even bringing a proof that was completely relevant to the Rav's subject. The Chatam Sofer's attention was drawn to what he said, and he asked the boy what his name was. He replied, "My name is Moshe of Rezawa." The Chatam Sofer said to him, "Moshe, you will eat at my home after the fast." From that moment on, the boy attached himself to his Rav for the rest of his life.

He remained in the Pressburg yeshiva for six years, during which time he absorbed the entire Torah of his teacher the Chatam Sofer. The latter, who said that the boy was blessed and destined for greatness, treated him with great affection and rejoiced in his words of Torah. Before long, he became familiar with all fields of Torah. He was greatly loved by the students of the yeshiva, for besides his greatness in Torah, fear of G-d, and fine character traits, he was humble and self-effacing. He had a gentle nature and a pleasing disposition, and he was cherished by all. He also spoke calmly and loved every Jew.

At the age of 20, he married the daughter of a very wealthy man, Rabbi Peretz Frenkel of the city of Halitosch. He stayed with his father-in-law for ten years, studying Torah day and night. At that time the community of Yerguin was looking for a great Rav, and they asked the Chatam Sofer for his advice. He replied, "If you are looking for a Gaon and a Tzaddik as a Rav, take Rabbi Moshe Schick."

Rabbi Moshe remained in the tiny city of Yerguin for 25 years, caring for the community like a merciful father. His genius was not

only intellectual, it was also a genius of the heart. He loved doing good, and he was overjoyed when successful in helping someone with a problem. Once a peasant came to see him on the very same day that he received his salary for the previous three months. Now this man cried to him that his life was in great danger, for he owed a government minister 100 gold coins (an enormous sum at the time) for some alcohol that he had purchased from him. The minister had threatened to kill him if he did not pay his debt. The Rav ordered the Jew to give the minister a letter from him, but he replied, "I'm afraid that he'll kill me before reading it!" The Rav responded, "In that case, send the letter by a messenger." The Jew did so, and later when he heard a knock at the door of his home, he opened it to find the minister laughing: "Apparently your Rabbi is very rich," he said. As you would expect, the letter that the Jew had given to the minister from the Rav contained the money that he owed him.

Rabbi Moshe was content with little. He hated corruption and avoided receiving gifts. One day he sensed that the Shamash, who would normally bring him his salary, had brought more than expected. He immediately sent for him and said, "You must be mistaken this time with my salary." The Shamash replied, "I haven't made a mistake. The leaders of the community decided to give you a raise." The Rav refused to take this increase in salary, saying: "The teachers asked for a raise a few months ago, but the leaders of the community refused to give them one, with the excuse that they didn't have the money for it. They also didn't increase the salary of the Dayan or the Shochatim." When the Shamash related the words of the Rav to the leaders, they held a meeting and decided to increase the salaries of the Dayan, Shochatim, teachers, and the Shamash. Only then did the Rav accept a raise.

In 5621 (1861), Rabbi Moshe was appointed as the Rav of the large city of Khurt in Hungary. New horizons opened for him in this burgeoning community. He opened a large yeshiva from which leaders of the Jewish people emerged. He also watched over the "Talmud Torah" of the city, and every week he tested the school children there. During his time the Reform movement began in Germany, a movement that aimed at allowing things that our fathers and forefathers had prohibited. Rabbi Moshe Schick wrote many responsum in which he revealed the evil intentions of the Reformists. All Jewish practices were holy in his eyes, and he defended tradition with all his might. When some people wanted to abolish the practice of the bridegroom enveloping the bride with his burial garment (his Tallit) under the chuppah, the Rav explained its beauty: "This garment is the sign of the couple's covenant of love unto death, for only death can separate them." He also fought against those who changed their names by adopting new ones that were common to their country, for he saw a danger to the existence of the Jewish people in this practice. He would often say, "When a royal decree was issued stating that all Jews must acquire a family name, in addition to their holy name, the first in our family to do so did not wish to yield at first, since for him this was a serious matter. When he was forced to take on an additional name, he said: 'I will call myself Schick, a name formed by the initials of Shem Israel Kadosh [the name of Israel is holy].'"

On Shabbat, the 1st of Shevat 5639 (1879), the soul of Rabbi Moshe Schick left his world in holiness and purity. The greatest men of his generation gave eulogies for him, saying: "From Moshe – Rabbi Moshe the Chatam Sofer – to Moshe, no one has arisen like Moshe."