

הנהגות THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 79 KEDOSHIM 28 NISSAN 5765 MAY.7.2005

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THE HOLINESS OF CHILDREN DEPENDS ON THAT OF THEIR PARENTS *(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

It is written, "You shall be holy, for holy am I, the L-RD your G-d" (Leviticus 19:2), and right afterwards, "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere" (v.3).

Several question arise from these verses:

1. Is it possible to demand that a man, who is but flesh and blood, attain a level of holiness comparable to that of G-d?
2. What connection is there between the mitzvah of being holy and the mitzvah of revering one's mother and father? Note: According to Rashi, the mitzvah of being holy means to distance oneself from impudence and sin (see Vayikra Rabba 24:7), and according to Ramban it means to sanctify oneself in permitted things (see Yebamot 20a).

Concerning the first question, my young son Moché Aharon Yéhochoua replied that even if it is inconceivable to attain G-d's level of holiness (Rambam, Yesodei Hatorah Chs.1-2), a person must make a supreme effort to sanctify himself as much as possible. Concerning this, the Sages have said: "It is written, 'You shall be holy.' Does that mean that you can be like Me [G-d]? This is why it is written: 'for holy am I, the L-RD your G-d' – My holiness is greater than yours" (Vayikra Rabba 24:9). The passage continues: "I am the L-RD your G-d" (Leviticus 19:3), which brings to mind the idea contained in the Zohar: "He who exhales, exhales from within himself," to teach us that all efforts in holiness, no matter how great, are but a wind compared to G-d.

Nevertheless, the Torah teaches us that holiness consists primarily of distancing oneself from impudence, and that a person must invest all his efforts into doing so. In what way can this be done? A person should meditate on the fact that even if he came into the world without clothing, when he leaves the world he is given a shroud to preserve his honor (Ketubot 8b), so that his body is not degraded after he dies. The same applies to the spiritual realm. A person comes into the world devoid of everything, and the best way to improve himself is to flee from impudence and always be covered. If he covers himself spiritually and guards himself from forbidden relations, he will also be covered when he leaves the world without sin (Bava Metzia 107a), so that he is not degraded in the World to Come.

Why, then, is it of capital importance to distance oneself from impudence? It seems to me that with respect to this subject, the power of instinct is such that even when a person conducts his married life in accordance with the laws of the Torah, he must constantly be vigilant, since from a permitted thing he risks ending up with a trivial attitude towards forbidden desires. All this is already present in embryonic form during marriage, which perfectly clarifies the connection between the mitzvah to be holy and that of revering one's father and mother: The root of a child's holiness is found in his parents. If from the very beginning a child reveres his father and mother, this is a sign that the parents have invested greatly in the child's education, demonstrating their faith in the Creator Who directs the world and Who gave the Torah in which it is stated, "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere." It is at that point that the child behaves like them, for "what the

child says in the street is what he hears from his father or mother" (Sukkah 56b; see Rashi), and by his attitude he testifies to the holiness with which his parents conduct themselves in all aspects of their lives.

Consequently, a child who grows up in such a home possesses the strength necessary to attain the level of "You shall be holy" – distance yourself from impudence," and he merits arriving at the holiness of Shabbat (also cited in the same verse), the word "Shabbat" signifying cessation from all work. All depends on the education that the child receives from his parents. By adding the observance of Shabbat – by which he manifests his faith in G-d, the Creator of the world – he may attain holiness and honor, one being dependant on the other. Thus Acharei Mot Kedoshim, even after the death of his parents, he will continue to follow the path of holiness, for everything comes to him from their own holiness and the influence they had on him.

To support this idea, we may cite the Mishnah of the Tanna Akavia ben Mahalalel: "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: ... 'From where you came' – from a putrid drop; 'and to where you are going' – to a place of dust, maggots and worms; 'and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting' – before the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He" (Perkei Avoth 3:1). To distance oneself from impudence and to be sanctified in permitted things, one must recall this drop that comes from one's father, evoking the verse: "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere," as well as the end of all men, which is death (Berachot 17a). This leads a person to holiness, in passing "before Whom you are destined to give an accounting," which is equivalent to "My Sabbaths shall you observe" (Leviticus 19:3). This consists of observing everything in order to have an answer to give to G-d. Concerning this, Rabbi Avraham Azulai wrote that one must observe these three things simultaneously so as to be protected from sin, for if a person observes only one or two of them, he will not be able to conquer his instincts and will fall back into sin. However the three together can make us holy for our entire lives.

Along the same line of reasoning, we may explain the verse, "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere" as applying to the parents themselves. When they unite in holiness and purity, they should be careful to revere their father and mother, meaning Hashem and the holy Torah (Berachot 35b; Bamidbar Rabba 10:9). In such a case, the body and soul of the baby is formed under the best conditions, and it may easily attain holiness and a love for G-d and Torah. In addition, even after the death of a person's father, he will continue to respect him, as it is said: "the son rises in the place of his father" (see Eruvin 70b). Not only does he recite Kaddish for the elevation of his father's soul, but through his every deed he sanctifies G-d's name in public.

Unfortunately, because of our many sins, today children have no respect for their parents, which was predicted for the period preceding the coming of Mashiach (Sotah 49b). In my humble opinion, this stems from

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the fact that parents themselves show no restraint, neither for conjugal relations nor for anything else that happens in the home, to the extent that their children revolt because they have neither admiration nor respect for them. Even after the death of their parents, such children continue to behave poorly and fail to show more respect for them than when they were alive, to the point that they end up revolting against G-d as well. All this holds true. At the beginning, one must accomplish "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere," and this leads to "My Sabbaths shall you observe," which is as important as observing the entire Torah and all the mitzvot (Shemot Rabba 25:16), for being the foundation of faith in G-d, this mitzvah can lead to holiness. This is why the Torah in Parsha Kedoshim enjoins us to distance ourselves from impudence and tells us of the severe punishments incurred by those who give themselves over to it. Furthermore, the Torah warns us against the consumption of forbidden foods (in Parsha Shemini) as it is written: "Lest you become nitmetem [defiled] through them" (Leviticus 11:43). On this the Gemara states: "You will become nitamtem [insensitive]" (Yoma 39a), for these things obstruct the heart, being contrary to an acceptable level of holiness and purity. Each person should be careful not to be ensnared by it, otherwise he will behave like an animal. It is not by chance that all the nations which are devoid of Torah and fail to observe the seven Noachide laws (Bava Kama 38a) are considered as animals, or even worse, as it is written: "Stay here by yourselves with the donkey" [Genesis 22:5] – meaning, 'You are like the donkey' " (Yebamot 62a).

I saw this with my own eyes this week when taking a train with my assistant. In front of me were a father and his two sons, non-Jews, who began to spew forth the worst obscenities. The father was enjoying what his sons were saying, and for that matter all the other non-Jews in the cabin were enjoying it too, even though at first they were shocked by what they heard. After a certain time, they too began to laugh at this spectacle, while my assistant and I were in agony because we had nowhere to escape.

Despite all this, we managed to block our ears and not listen to them (see Ketubot 5b), and with some effort we were able to study Torah. It was really an act of the Satan that instead of spending two hours of study in peace, we were given two hours of study in suffering, as with the case of Jacob, who wanted to settle down in peace when the problems caused by Joseph's disappearance began to assail him (Bereshith Rabba 84:1). At that point I thought to myself, "Now you should say the blessing, 'Who did not make me a non-Jew' without G-d's Name, and tomorrow you'll say it with concentration using G-d's Name." Everything that we saw and heard was truly appalling, and they will end up dying like animals. G-d will erase their memory, and their future punishment will be harsh.

Consequently, without Torah and holiness, it is impossible to dominate one's sensual desires. Now since most of the Torah's great principles depend on this parsha of holiness (Vayikra Rabba 24:5), and since there can be no holiness without it, it was stated before the entire community. This was done so that all the Children of Israel could hear it, for the person who takes precautions even in what is permissible will end up becoming holy and pure. We already find this concept concerning Rabbeinu Hakadosh (Shabbat 118b), who was called kadosh ("holy") because he never placed his hand below his waist. If he paid attention to such a thing, it is obvious that he was meticulously observant in all things. Despite his great wealth, when he was about die he raised his hands toward heaven and said to G-d, "You know very well that with these ten fingers I put all my effort into Torah, and I never rejoiced in this world even with my little finger" (Ketubot 104a). Thus we see how the attention that he put into distancing himself from sin at all times led him to not profit from anything, even from those things that were permitted, including food, for he only ate radishes and lettuce (Avodah Zarah 11a). In other words, he only consumed plain food that the poor ate, all because he was immersed in Torah, which led him to the summit of holiness.

The expression, "You shall be holy ... Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere," has a double meaning. It refers to both one's biological parents and spiritual parents, meaning Hashem and His Torah. A man

should feel that his origins are holy and thus act accordingly. Now all this depends on the restraint and holiness of his biological parents.

It is not by chance that the verse states, "You have distinguished the L-RD ... and the L-RD has distinguished you today to be for Him" (Deuteronomy 26:17-18). Rashi explains this passage as follows: "It appears to me that the word denotes setting aside, distinguishing: You have distinguished Him, from the alien gods, to be your G-d, and He set you aside, for Himself, from the peoples of the earth, to be His treasured people," as it is written: "You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples" (Exodus 19:5). All this stems from the fact that the Children of Israel distanced themselves from impudence, not taking the example of the other nations, which is why G-d separated them to be a people of choice among all others. (Note that the word segula ["choice"] evokes the word segol, the Hebrew vowel formed by three points. It is possible that these three points teach us of the three who are involved in a person's creation: G-d, father, and mother).

After having written all this, I found wonders written in the holy book Chiddushei HaRim by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger on Parsha Bechukotai. He states, "Each person should strive to sanctify his house, as it is written, 'If a man consecrates ["sanctifies"] his house' (Leviticus 27:14). Only afterwards will he be able to arrive at holiness. In fact [in the blessing after meals] we recite, 'for Your covenant that You sealed in our flesh,' and only afterwards, 'for Your Torah that You have taught us,' for that is the main thing, the foundation." This idea is in wonderful agreement with what we have said up to now, meaning that everything depends on the holiness of parents in the home, this being essential in Judaism.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

He Who Hates Gifts Will Live

It is written, "...if so much as a thread to a shoe strap, or if I shall take from anything of yours. So you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich' " (Genesis 14:23).

During the last winter of his life, Rabbi Israel Salanter lived in Koenigsberg. One day a wealthy, G-d-fearing man visited him. When the guest saw Rabbi Israel's home and the way he lived, he very much wanted to help him. However Rabbi Israel did not want to hear of this, accepting nothing from the man. When the man went to the Beit Midrash, he saw Rabbi Israel enwrapping himself with a very old Tallit. He asked him to at least accept a small gift, because he wanted to buy him a beautiful new Tallit. The man then asked those close to Rabbi Israel to try and convince him to accept a new Tallit, but this proved fruitless and he continued to pray with his old one.

During the course of his numerous trips throughout Russia, the Chofetz Chaim also never accepted anything for free. He paid the real price for his lodging, his food, and so on, to the very last cent. When he was invited to eat with his good friends, he agreed only on condition that they fix the actual cost of the meal for him, which he would pay them. If they did not agree, he would not accept their invitation. Once he was invited to the home of Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, the Rav of Kovno, but he refused the invitation because he knew that Rabbi Elchanan would not accept payment for the meal.

Rabbi Yaakov Rosenheim, who was a close friend of Baron Rothschild of Frankfurt, ordered all the Chofetz Chaim's books for the Baron, and he sent him 50 marks for the purchase. The Chofetz Chaim prepared all the books that he had written up to then, using a more ornate binding than usual, to send to the Baron. He then calculated the exact cost (which was no more than 14 marks) and sent the books with the change, explaining that they had a fixed price and that he could not take more, even from wealthy individuals. Rabbi Yaakov Rosenheim gave the Chofetz Chaim back the money and said that the Baron did not want to accept it from him, and that he had the right to distribute it to the needy, which the Chofetz Chaim did.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

from the Maguid of Doubno

It is written, "Every man: Your mother and father shall you revere and My Sabbaths shall you observe – I am the L-RD" (Leviticus 19:3).

The Gemara states: "Can it be that the honor due to one's father and mother is more important than Shabbat? No, for it is written, 'and My Sabbaths shall you observe – I am the L-RD.'"

To better understand this, let us take the example of a famous parable:

There were once three friends who decided to take a distant voyage to learn new crafts. They jointly agreed to each go to a certain place, for perhaps there was something new to be learned only in a given place. At the end of a year, they would meet at a fixed location and discuss what they had learned.

The three did as they had planned, and when they met a year later one of them said: "I learned how to make a telescope by which a person can see things thousands of miles away!" They were astounded. The second said, "I learned how to build a vehicle that can travel great distances instantly!" The third one said, "I learned to make a drug that is more effective than all other drugs in existence, and which can heal all types of illnesses!" They then decided to travel to where providence would lead them. When they arrived at an inn, one of them took out his famous telescope that could see great distances. Looking through it, he saw that in one of the cities of the kingdom there was a great uproar because the king's daughter was desperately ill, and the doctors could not find a cure for her. The second of the three friends said, "I'll build a vehicle that will bring us there in the blink of an eye," and the third friend added: "I'll give her the medication that I made and she'll be immediately healed." When the three friends arrived at their destination, the king's daughter was given the medication and was cured in an instant. There was great rejoicing in the king's court, and the royal ministers bubbled with admiration for the three great men who managed to save the princess. The king then called for them and said, "How can I reward you? If I open the doors of my treasury to you all, it would not be enough to thank you for what you've done. Therefore decide amongst yourselves to which of you I shall give the hand of my daughter in marriage."

At these words the three friends began to argue with one another. The first said, "I should have priority here, since I first saw what was happening by using my telescope." The second said, "Without the vehicle that I built, nobody could have done anything," and the third said, "Even with your telescope and your vehicle, without my medication, what could you two have done?" When the king's daughter heard them arguing, she wisely said, "You are all correct, for you all are meritorious because nothing could have happened if one of you had been absent. It is impossible to reach a decision if we speak of the past, for in that case you are all equally deserving. However if we talk about the future, we can quickly clarify the situation, for what do I need with a telescope or an ultra-rapid vehicle? However, I will definitely need a powerful elixir because I am delicate and frail. Therefore the one who possesses it is more deserving in my eyes than the others."

Our Sages have said, "There are three partners in the creation of a man: The Holy One, blessed be He, the man's father, and his mother" (Kiddushin 30b). It is impossible to escape the fact that without any of these three, a person would never come into the world. However if we examine the future instead of the past, it is not difficult to realize who among those three it is best to serve. Actually, once a person is born,

his need for his father and mother is not so great. It is therefore the third partner Who is the most important, for a person needs Him at all times to remain alive and obtain his sustenance. This is the question asked by the Gemara: "Can it be that the honor due to one's father and mother is more important than Shabbat? No, for it is written, 'and My Sabbaths shall you observe – I am the L-RD.' " It is G-d Who is at the origin of everything that exists, and Who continuously maintains the life of the universe.

THE PATH OF THE JUST

HUMILITY - PART VII

The faults of a humble man are quickly forgotten. In fact, people desire to honor such a man, one who has many people ready to help him. A parable will help us to explain this.

A king who lived with many people would himself get up at night to fix the lamp in order that its light not go out. He was asked, "Why didn't you give the order to one of your servants to do this?" He responded, "I was king as I arose, and I have remained king after I got down. The fact of having arisen has not detracted from my glory."

The Sages say, "People are jealous of all virtues except modesty" and "the one who considers himself as insignificant is great in the eyes of others." Yet if a person possesses this characteristic, he should nevertheless abstain from demonstrating it before sinners. Concerning this subject, the verse states, "Like a muddied spring and a ruined fountain, [so is] a righteous one who bows before the evildoer" (Proverbs 25:26). If he has the possibility to do so, a modest man should even punish the wicked for the sake of Hashem's honor, multiplying his rebukes against the wicked and facing up to them, like a lion, to save the victim from the hands of a thief. He should teach men the way in which to serve Hashem and endeavor to use his wisdom to encourage them. At the beginning he should proceed gently, but if this is not effective he should put them to shame. By his words and in accordance with his wisdom, he should encourage others to do good and warn them against committing evil, and he should hasten to reestablish justice without yielding or submitting.

There is a type of humility that is as reprehensible as pride, such as the "humility" adopted by the false prophets who donned the clothes of authentic prophets. Their goal in doing this was to sustain their own lies, as it is written, "they will no longer wear the fur cloak in order to declare their lies" (Zechariah 13:4). Thus, those who adopt the clothes of modest individuals; those who speak gently and take on the appearance of pious and righteous people in order for us to believe and accept their words; those who flatter individuals whom it is forbidden to flatter; and those who sin in secret, being only concerned about performing the commandments in public so as to deceive others – these are men who, more than anyone else, profane Hashem's Name. It is because of them that people no longer trust pious men, but rather suspect them and say, "Perhaps these are like the others?" If we know of such deceivers, we are obligated to publicly denounce them, as our Sages have said, "One must publicly denounce flatterers" (Yoma 86b).

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI NAHUMKE OF HORODNO (GRODNO)

Many previously unfamiliar cities are famous today because of the Rabbis, Gaonim, and Tzaddikim that lived in them, yet Horodno (Grodno) is the only city to have become famous because of a Gabbai. This Gabbai was Rabbi Menachem Nahum, or as he was affectionately known, Rabbi Nahumke of Horodno.

Rabbi Nahumke was one of the greatest Tzaddikim of his generation, as well as one of the most generous. Not wanting to draw any profit from his studies, he was content with being the Gabbai of Horodno.

In all of Russia, there was no such thing as a Jewish child who had not heard of Rabbi Nahumke. With respect and veneration, children told one another marvelous stories about this Gabbai who was a Tzaddik. People spoke of his birth, his childhood, his youth, as well as his greatness in Torah, his integrity, and his humility. Stories abounded concerning his extraordinary qualities, his goodness, and his heart filled with compassion for all.

We will describe this exceptional man, who in a semi-miraculous way and with unrivaled persistence reached the greatest spiritual heights.

Rabbi Nahumke was born to Uziel and Maida in 5572 (1812). His parents were simple, yet G-d fearing people who loved Torah. They lived in a tiny village near the city of Beissigola, part of the Schabel region in the province of Kovno. His father was poor and earned a living by working as a day worker in a distillery, and what he earned was barely enough for his family to live on.

Nahum was a beautiful, charming, and healthy child like all the other children in the village, but more intellectually developed than those of his age. When he grew older and needed to be taught Torah, no tutor could be found for him in the village. Hence his father Uziel brought him to the distillery, and with each spare moment he taught him how to read the prayer book. The child learned the prayers and the beginning of the Chumash very quickly, but his father could not teach him more because that was all the Torah he knew.

However the child's yearning for Torah study knew no bounds. Having no other choice, Nahum left the village and traveled nearby to the tiny city of Beissigola, and there he entered the Beit Midrash in the hopes of finding a Jew who wanted to teach him Torah. That same day a famous Chazan, accompanied by a choir, arrived in town. Since Nahum had a nice voice that was pleasing to the Chazan, he brought the boy with him. It was in this way that he left the region of his birthplace and traveled throughout the country. With the Chazan, he passed by different towns until one day he arrived in the city of Mir. There, he left the Chazan and his choir and ran to the great yeshiva. He opened the door slightly and saw hundreds of young people studying Torah with a pleasing melody. He was filled with jealousy for not being able to enter and learn, swearing at that point to someday return and study Torah there.

After a few years, he returned to the Mir yeshiva and immersed himself entirely in Torah study, to the extent that he ended up becoming a great Talmid Chacham. He was the best in the yeshiva by virtue of his noble character and upright conduct. In him, everyone saw a marvelous combination of scholarship and sublime character traits. The Rosh Yeshiva said of him, "He studies Torah with us, but as for character traits, we should be his students."

One day, a wealthy Jew from the city of Nischwitz arrived in Mir, and he chose Rabbi Nahum to marry his daughter. When he arrived at his father-in-law's place, a special room was reserved for him where he could devote himself to Torah as much as he wanted without disruption. Rabbi Nahum devoted the greater part of his time to Torah study, and for several hours each day he occupied himself with charitable causes. He used to say, "Whoever spends their time solely in study, without paying attention to the suffering of those around him, will not succeed in his study. It is only when a person devotes himself both to Torah study and good deeds that he will develop a taste for Torah, which is a Torah of life and a Torah of man."

In the meantime his father-in-law lost his fortune, and so Rabbi Nahum went to live in Horodno. Many towns wanted him as their Rav, but he decided not to take up any offers, for he considered that his only role in life was to demonstrate generosity to others. Hence a Rav, who depends on other people's opinion of him, can encounter difficulties in this area. He therefore offered his services as a servant and Gabbai in the Chevrat Shas synagogue in Horodno, saying: "By being a Gabbai, I will be able to get closer to everyone. I will know what concerns them and be able to help them." However his wife protested rigorously with his decision, and one day she told him: "Nahum, for how long will we live in poverty? Become the Rav of a community so that we can earn a good and honorable living."

"I'm telling you," replied Rabbi Nahumke, "that here in Horodno everyone knows me. They know that I have neither Torah nor wisdom, but they still believe that I have the required qualifications to be a Gabbai. That, however, is not the case if I go to another place and become a Rav there, for people will come to me with their questions and problems to decide, and they will immediately realize that I am devoid of Torah and wisdom. I will then be viewed with shame, and I will even lose the possibility of becoming a Gabbai!"

Rabbi Nahumke devoted himself entirely to acts of generosity and to the needs of the community. He was concerned with the education of children from poor families, and all day long he would hurry from one house to another collecting money for the needy. By his behavior and faultless character traits, Rabbi Nahumke himself served as an example for his Jewish brothers.

People say that once on a winter night, a person entered the hall of the great synagogue and saw a man sleeping on the floor. When he leaned over him, he saw that it was Rabbi Nahumke!

"Rabbi," the person said in shock, "what are you doing here?"

"The Beit Midrash is closed," Rabbi Nahumke replied. "Those who study Torah are sleeping, and I didn't want to wake them up. I couldn't go home either, because people are sleeping there as well. I therefore decided to spend the night here, but sleep overwhelmed me."

On Shabbat, the 8th of Heshvan 5640 (1879), Rabbi Nahumke rendered his pure soul to his Creator. The loss was great for all the Jewish people. Rabbi Nahumke died several weeks after the Malbim, and Rabbi Israel of Salant in his eulogy for both of them said, "When I will come before the Celestial Court and be asked why I was not like the Malbim, I will answer that Heaven did not grant me his intelligence. However when I will be asked why I was not like Rabbi Nahumke of Horodno, I do not know what I will say, for Heaven granted me a heart."