

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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PRIDE: THE SOURCE OF ALL SINS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a soul among his people" (Leviticus 21:1). What is the meaning of "soul"? We may understand it as referring to the body of a dead person, to his 248 members and 365 tendons, which are called the "people" of his body (see Nedarim 32b). A man should not make this "people" impure through pride.

The Zohar has questions about the proximity of Parsha Kedoshim to Parsha Emor (Zohar III:68a). At the beginning of Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:2), the verse enjoins the entire community of Israel to sanctify itself, which is why in Parsha Emor the Kohanim are commanded to be holy as well. The members of the tribe of Levi are also warned about this in the verse that states, "To the Levites shall you speak and you shall say to them..." (Numbers 18:26). This is in order that everyone be holy and pure, even the great, and that they guard their 248 members that correspond to the positive mitzvot (Makot 23b) and sanctify themselves with a great level of holiness.

We must also explain why the Kohanim and the Levites are addressed separately here in Parsha Emor, since in Parsha Kedoshim the Torah warns all the Jewish people (which includes the Kohanim and Levites) concerning holiness.

The reason for this apparent redundancy is that without the specific warning to the Kohanim and Levites in Parsha Emor, we could have erroneously thought that since they are more holy than the rest of the Children of Israel, they don't need extra safeguards for holiness, and so we can put our trust in them. A special warning is therefore addressed to them. Precisely because they are the holiest ones, they should consecrate themselves lest they arrive at pride, which resembles indecency (see below). And it is precisely they, who are found in the Tent of Meeting, who need extra sanctification, in the spirit of what the Sages have said: "The greater the man, the greater his evil inclination" (Sukkah 52a). This is the explanation given

by the Gemara for the repetition "Say to the priests ... and tell them" (Leviticus 21:1). It is in order to warn both the great and the lesser (Yebamot 114a). This means that the Torah, having warned the lesser (the entire community of Israel) in Parsha Kedoshim, now also warns the great (the Kohanim and Levites) so that they too should guard themselves from the sin of pride.

In Parsha Pinchas we find the following words: "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the priest" (Numbers 25:11). The Sages explain that the tribes were scorning him and saying, "Have you seen that son of Puti, whose mother's father [Jethro] fattened [pitem] calves for idol worship, and he went and killed a prince of a tribe of Israel?" This is why the verse in Numbers states that Pinchas descended from Aaron (Sotah 43a; Rashi ibid.).

The following requires an explanation:

1. Why did the tribes scorn Pinchas? He had killed Zimri ben Salu, prince of the tribe of Shimon (Numbers 25:14), since he was liable for death, and furthermore Pinchas had killed him with Moses' permission! Was this a reason to scorn him?

2. Why did they make Pinchas recall the sins of his maternal grandfather Jethro, since he had repented, converted, and become righteous (Mechilta Jethro)? In fact, Jethro became so righteous that he merited adding a parsha bearing his name to the Torah (Shemot Rabba 27:7). Was it necessary to associate Jethro's previous way of life to his grandson Pinchas?

3. If Pinchas was reminded of his grandfather's sins, why was this done precisely in connection with the incident of Zimri? Why was this not done in another situation?

That which awakened the anger of the tribes against Pinchas was that he was a Kohen, and that by killing Zimri he put himself in danger of becoming impure by a corpse if the guilty party died by his hand (without mentioning the fact that Pinchas himself could have died in the fight). This is why he was not given the benefit of the doubt, and

Continuation page 2

why his jealousy was not attributed to a love of Heaven. Actually, his actions must have been for Heaven's sake, otherwise he would not have thought that he had to act before men greater and better than himself in carrying out G-d's vengeance. And even if this was done with Moses' permission, as the Sages have said (Sanhedrin 82a), the tribes believed that despite everything, killing a prince from one of the tribes of Israel was an act of pride. The simple fact that he entered the tent and saw the heinousness of their sin was for them proof that he was motivated by pride. Now we know that pride contains an aspect of idolatry, indecency, and murder. Pinchas therefore put himself in danger by a pride that resembles idolatry, and he also experienced seeing a shameless spectacle. Why then did he enter the tent, since he risked undergoing all these things?

The tribes then asked themselves from where this pride came, and concluded that it had its root with his grandfather Jethro, who was an idolater before having repented (Shemot Rabba 1:38). This trait had been transmitted to his descendants, and even though later on he became righteous, this root had remained bad. It was in this way that they explained why Pinchas failed to comply with Scripture's warning to the Kohanim to protect themselves from pride, as we have explained on the verse that states, "Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a soul among his people" (Leviticus 21:1).

Because of all of this, the verse mentions the fact that he descended from Aaron, which means that even though he also descended from Jethro, his actions had their source in Aaron, who along with Moses said, "What are we?" (Exodus 16:7). In Pinchas there was nothing but humility, which is why many miracles were performed for him on that occasion and why he was saved from all harm (Sanhedrin 82b).

All this occurred because of Aaron's merit. It is true that a man who demonstrates pride has certainly inherited a portion of his ancestor's faults. Yet but because Pinchas carried within himself the virtues of Aaron, who was humble and never acted other than for the love of Heaven, the ancestry of Jethro did not manifest itself in him, to the point that the Torah testifies concerning Pinchas: "He jealously avenged Me among them" (Numbers 25:11). He did so without any ulterior motives, but rather solely for the love of Heaven.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

Trusting in Hashem

One of the Chassidim of the Tzaddik Rabbi Michal of Zlotchov often complained about his poverty, and when the Rabbi encouraged him to put his trust in G-d, this was simply not enough for him. He had the impression that no answer had been given to his qualms. One day during which he greatly complained about his poverty, the Rabbi told him, "Go find [so and so] of Berditchev. He's rich and has great confidence in G-d. Live with him for a certain amount of time. See how he lives, and you will learn from him what true trust in G-d is."

This man welcomed the Chassid with joy, and he stayed with him to see how he lived. Very quickly, he realized that the man had many business dealings that were very complex. Enormous sums of money passed through his hands. He collected money on one end and paid off his debts on the other. The Chassid was astonished. If he himself had so much money, he certainly would have been able to live peacefully and trust in G-d.

More than anything else, he marveled at his host's acts of generosity. Never did he brush aside an outstretched hand, and he distributed enormous sums in tzedakah. The Chassid had never in his life seen anything like this. After a few days he asked to speak to the rich man. He explained to him the reason for his visit and said, "I've looked with admiration at the scope of your dealings and all your generosity, but I haven't understood what my Rabbi wanted to tell me by sending me here. In reality, what can I learn from a man as rich as you on trusting in G-d?" The man began to laugh and said, "You've certainly noticed that when I have to pay a great amount of money, I go into a certain room and isolate myself there. What is there, according to you, in that room?" The Chassid simply replied, "It must be where your treasure is, where you take out the necessary funds." The man replied, "You're right! My treasure is indeed found in that room. Come with me." The Chassid followed the man and was shocked by what he saw: The room contained but a chair, a table, and bare walls. "Here is where my treasure is," said the man. "Each time that I have a payment to make or a certain amount to give to tzedakah, I come here, sit near the table, and beseech the Holy One, blessed be He, to send me help. And He, as you yourself have observed, has never failed me." He was still speaking when one of his servants brought him a bill for 3,000 rubles to pay by nightfall. As was his habit, he entered into the room, isolated himself with his Creator, and then came out. He had barely left when a Jewish officer asked to speak with the master of the house. "I'm leaving for the war," he said. "I beg you, take all my savings, 10,000 rubles, and keep them. Invest them as you wish, and take 1,000 rubles for your trouble."

"And so, you have seen how G-d instantly sends me help," the rich man said to the Chassid. "Go back home, and from now on begin trusting in G-d and don't worry about a thing."

PIRKEI AVOTH

Actions and their consequences

It is written, “Ben Azzai said, ‘Run to [perform even] an easy mitzvah, and flee from transgression; for one mitzvah brings about another, and one transgression brings about another, for the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the recompense of a transgression is a transgression’” (Perkei Avoth 4:2).

Why did Ben Azzai say that one mitzvah brings about another? It is because “the true reward for a good deed cannot be imagined in the present world” (Kiddushin 39b). Our Sages have compared this to a king who entrusts a delicate assignment to one of his servants. If the servant carries out his duty in a satisfactory manner, his master will entrust other jobs to him and will assure him, as well as his family, of a decent living. However his true reward will be reserved for later, in the form of a substantial payment.

Hashem acts in this way towards His servant, the one who has performed a mitzvah. He gives him the possibility of performing others, with each new mitzvah being in some way the reward for the previous one, and the capital thus accumulated is reserved for the world to come.

It is the same for a sin. Each wicked act distances us from Hashem, which brings about other sins, leading finally to perdition.

Rabbi Alsheich proposes yet another explanation of this Mishnah. Man, he says, has always tended to be satisfied with himself. It is easy for us to be proud of our behavior, of our good deeds. And yet, few of these alleged good deeds would withstand critical examination. Most often, they are inspired by impure motives: Pride, vanity, sometimes even egotism. Even if there remains some selfless deeds in our behalf, how little do they weigh in comparison to all the good that Hashem has lavished on us? On the other hand, our sins are in general wicked at their inception (in thought) and wicked at their completion (in deed). This is why Ben Azzai

tells us: Don’t think that you have done so much good that you can forgo performing a mitzvah, easy though it be. On the contrary, become accustomed to run in front of every mitzvah, and to flee from before every sin, harmless though it may appear. For each mitzvah that is carried out creates a protecting angel that helps a man to progress in the path of good, and each sin is, on the contrary, an encouragement to his Yetzer Hara, his evil inclination.

“And the recompense of a transgression is a transgression.” This last part of our Mishnah represents a difficulty that none of the commentators mentioned above has been able to explain in a satisfaction manner. Perhaps we can reason in the following manner: Ben Azzai’s third proposition is a justification for the second, which itself is a justification for the first.

Ben Azzai tells us that one mitzvah brings about another because the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, which is to say that it gives us the material that we need to perform another mitzvah. Concerning the verse that states, “*Asser tihasser [remove the tithe]*” (Deuteronomy 14:22), our Sages have said, “*Asser bishvil shetitasher [Give a tithe and you shall become enriched]*” (Taanith 9). As a reward for the tzedakah that we have given, Hashem will provide us with riches, which in turn will help us to perform other mitzvot.

We can explain the remainder of the statement in a similar way: The one who has become rich by deceiving his fellow, or by transgressing other commandments of the Torah, will seldom use this ill-gotten gain to do good. On the contrary, a type of curse attaches itself to this *Sechar Avera* (“salary of sin”) and he will easily be brought to commit other sins. Therein lies the meaning of *Sechar Avera*: The profit drawn from a sin – this ill-gotten gain – will lead to other sins.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI ISHMAEL BEN ELISHA

Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, the fellow student of Rabbi Akiva, was for most of the time his opponent in Halachic discussions. He descended from a princely family, and his grandfather, who like him was named Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, was one of the last High Priests, dying a martyr's death with Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel the prince.

As a boy, Rabbi Ishmael was brought to Rome in captivity. Later on when Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania came to Rome, he was told that there was a Jewish boy in prison of great ability and wondrous beauty. Rabbi Joshua managed to get to the prison and cried out, "Who delivered Jacob to plunder and Israel to looters?" (Isaiah 42:24). Then the boy responded with the rest of verse: "Was it not the L-RD, He against Whom we have sinned? They did not wish to go in His ways and did not listen to His Torah." When Rabbi Joshua heard that, he said, "This child will surely become a great teacher in Israel. I will not stop before redeeming him, whatever the ransom demanded for his release." And that's exactly what he did. He took the boy away with him into his country, and before long Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha became one of the greatest teachers of Israel (Gittin 58a). He was 13 years old when Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah became his teacher. Later on, he was among the great scholars that assembled at Yavneh around Rabban Gamliel the prince.

It is to Rabbi Ishmael that we owe the "Thirteen Rules of Interpretation" that we recite in our daily prayers. Rabbi Akiva and he are called "the fathers of the world." Both of them were very experienced in medicine. They traveled together often across the country and healed sicknesses. Rabbi Ishmael's charity is greatly praised, as he provided poor girls with clothes and finery so that they could more easily get married. When he died, all the girls of Israel wept for him. He fed women whose husbands had to go off to war, and everywhere that he saw Talmudic scholars in need, he provided them with everything they required. His mother venerated him to such a point that she wanted to drink the water that he had washed his feet in, but he did not allow her to do so. We have already mentioned above that he possessed great beauty, yet his wisdom exceeded even his physical splendor.

THE PATH OF THE JUST HUMILITY - PART VIII

Wake up and don't let yourself go! Correct the temptation to boast and deceive men. Don't give in when seeing many of your generation acting in this way, neglecting to distance themselves from arrogance and deception, and saying to those who rebuke them, "Does there exist a man who is completely without pride? Is there a single man who is perfectly honest in all his affairs, who never deceives others and who performs all his deeds in the most proper way? If men who are greater than I act in this way, I can therefore do the same. What will be good for them in the world to come will also be good for me!"

Those who think in this way are complete fools. To illustrate their reasoning, let us take an example of a man who suffers with his eyesight. Imagine that he possesses a remedy to heal his condition, a remedy that is tried and tested. It would be foolish on his part to say, "I don't want to use any cure for my eyesight. What difference does it make if I become blind? There are many blind people in this world. What they endure, I will also endure."

Is there not in this reasoning a foolishness that incurs the scorn of everyone? Therefore examine yourself well and push yourself, in every way possible, not to follow the example of those who are inferior to you in wisdom and their service of G-d, for this will inevitably bring you to bend in your resolutions. Observe those who are greater than you. Draw encouragement from them and push yourself, according to your abilities, to follow and catch up to them. Concerning this subject it is written, "Let us know, let us strive to know the L-RD like the dawn whose emergence is certain. Then He will come to us like the rain, like the late rain that satiates the earth" (Hosea 6:3).