

הנהגת THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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BY THE MERIT OF TORAH, THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE ABOVE NATURE

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand; and your enemies will fall before you by the sword" (Leviticus 26:8). We learn from this passage that when the Children of Israel are connected to Torah and mitzvot, they are conferred supernatural power, to the point that five of them can pursue a hundred, and a hundred of them ten thousand. However when they are far from Torah and mitzvot, a single non-Jew can pursue a hundred Jews. Because of our many sins, we saw this occur in Nazi Germany and Poland, when a single German guarded a hundred Jews without any fear, and when only two Germans guarded an entire camp of Jews, who were paralyzed and had no strength to even raise their heads.

When Jews follow G-d's ways, the nations of the world view them with appropriate respect and esteem, which brings about a sanctification of G-d's Name. The nations of the world recognize that it is by the merit of Israel that the world survives and receives abundance (Yerushalmi Gittin, end of ch.5). Yet when Jews leave the straight path, the nations suddenly get the impression that they are numerous. As a result, when Jews attach themselves to G-d and His mitzvot, they are above nature and no one can harm them. One Jew can then pursue a thousand non-Jews, and a hundred of them ten thousand.

If our understanding of this is correct, we may add that when the Jewish people pursue the straight path, G-d introduces a supernatural element into nature and raises Jews above it. In fact it is written, "For even a thousand years in Your eyes are but a bygone yesterday" (Psalms 90:4), a verse that the Sages interpret as meaning that one of G-d's days is equal to a thousand years (Sanhedrin 97a). This should surprise us for two reasons: (1) How do things change if G-d's day is equal to one thousand years or more, be it for Him or for us? (2) If such indeed is the case, why does G-d's day have to be so long? And if it does have to be so long, why is it limited to a thousand years?

This is what we can say on the subject: The Holy One, blessed be He, divided Creation into six days, and each day He manifested Himself as ruler of the world (Otiyot d'Rabbi Akiva 1). G-d revealed himself to all of Creation to show

that He is One and that there is no other. He demanded that every creature recognize Him as the ruler and sovereign of the world, and each day He derived great satisfaction and pleasure from His work. However G-d foresaw that Adam would sin before Shabbat, which in fact was the case (Sanhedrin 38b), and that he would incur the penalty of death. How then was G-d going to destroy the world that He had created, and to which He had given the Torah, the goal of all Creation (Pesachim 68b)? What would become of the world and the Torah? Who was going to study it?

Under such circumstances, Hashem thought it good to lengthen His day to one thousand years. In reality, time has no meaning for G-d. Hence when we speak of one of His days, this means that the immense pleasure He had from Creation was equal to what a man would experience if he could live a thousand years with all his days being filled with pleasure. It is in that sense that G-d's day is like a thousand years to man, for the expression conveys the magnitude of the pleasure that G-d received from Creation (and particularly from the Torah it contained). Even if a person sins, repentance will earn him pleasure equal to a thousand years.

The Gemara evokes this very same idea concerning the verse, "I am the L-RD your G-d" (Exodus 20:2): Every word that came from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, split into 70 languages, an unattainable feat for a mere mortal and only possible with G-d (Shabbat 68b). It goes the same for the day of the Holy One, blessed be He, which although unique, is comparable to a thousand years of a person's life spent in happiness brought about by Torah study and the performance of mitzvot.

To explain this in a more detailed way, we know that there are two mitzvot in the Torah (honoring one's parents and sending a mother bird off before taking her young) about which it is said, "So that it will be good for you and will prolong your days" (Deuteronomy 22:7). On this verse the Sages have stated, "So that you be happy in the world that is entirely good and that your days be prolonged in the world that is entirely long" (Kiddushin 39b). This is not the case with life in this world, which is short and filled with suffering, and in which neither days nor years are prolonged.

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What does a prolonging of days in the World to Come mean? If a righteous person departs from this world and two days later Mashiach arrives, his time in the World to Come will have lasted just two days. Is that what is meant by “prolonging”? Where is the reward, therefore, that G-d has promised a righteous person regarding prolonging his days in the World to Come?

According to the preceding, we understand that the day of the Holy One, blessed be He, is like a thousand years of experiencing infinite pleasure, like a day that will be extremely long, without limit. Consequently, when a person is in the World to Come for two days, even if Mashiach comes almost immediately afterwards, he will have enjoyed pleasure in the World to Come tantamount to having spent two thousand years enjoying infinite pleasure, analogous to: “No eye has seen it, G-d, if not You.” And even if he spends only a few hours in the World of Truth, that will also be satisfying to him and a source of pleasure equal to many years, for in that world the sense of the Holy One’s majesty and holiness is so enduring and substantial that a person has the impression he is experiencing a pleasure that is absolutely infinite.

In addition, a person’s reward in the World to Come is proportional to his work in this world multiplied a hundred fold and more, so that it be as great as possible. For example, when someone lives 60 or 70 years in this world while studying Torah and performing mitzvot, it is as if he studied 60 or 70 thousand years, of which the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards him for every instant. Concerning such a reward, it is said, “Mah rav tuvecha [How abundant is Your goodness] that You have stored away for those who fear You” (Psalms 31:20).

We may explain that man is of the aspect of mah (the word adam [“man”] has the same numerical value as mah [“what”]), and the Tetragrammaton also has that same numerical value when written with alephs – Zohar Ruth 102b). The Holy One, blessed be He, has reserved a reward for man that can be designated by mah, a reward that he can neither imagine nor describe. If he studies Torah, G-d greatly multiplies his reward, and since the day is divided into hours, minutes, and seconds, how many millions and indeed billions of seconds of infinite pleasure will a man thus receive in the World to Come! The Sages have clearly said, “There is no reward for a mitzvah in this world” (Kiddushin 39b), for the Holy One, blessed be He, multiplies the reward for performing a mitzvah in the World to Come.

Reward is therefore above nature and logic, for the Children of Israel are also above nature when they occupy themselves with Torah and mitzvot and walk in the straight path. They are then stronger than the nations of the world, and abundance also comes into the world by their merit.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

THE RULING OF RABBI YITZCHAK LEVI OF BERDITCHEV

A case was once brought before Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. It involved a member of the Jewish community who had just died and left behind his children, now orphaned, and a warehouse filled with barrels of wine. A good friend of the deceased asserted that these barrels belonged to him, and although he had no clear proof of this, it was known that he would usually use his friend’s warehouse. Because of their good relationship, he never bothered to obtain an official document proving that he owned the barrels.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak stood in a corner and began to pray. On one hand, it was forbidden to dispossess orphans without clear proof, yet on the other hand the friend of the deceased was obviously correct, and the barrels of wine clearly belonged to him. All of a sudden the friend approached Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and said, “I remember now. I remember now!”

What did he remember?

He recounted the following story: “Some 50 years ago, when I was a small boy, my father died and left a similar number of wine barrels in his warehouse. My father’s friend – who just happened to be the grandfather of these orphans here – claimed that the barrels belonged to him, but he had no clear proof of this. At that time as well, the case was brought to the local Rav, and he decided that it was forbidden to wrong my siblings and I, then fatherless, without clear proof. Although the barrels of wine really belonged to these orphans’ grandfather, the Rav decided that they should remain with us. Now 50 years later, the Holy One, blessed be He – Who is the Father of orphans – found a way to give back to these orphans the property of their grandfather.”

When a person firmly believes that his entire income for the coming year is determined at Rosh Hashanah, he has no reason to be surprised at this, as it is said: “No one can touch by a hair’s breadth that which is destined for his fellowman.” Nevertheless, if someone believes that he has succeeded in doing so, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make sure to return to a person what rightfully belongs to him. G-d acts in such a way that everyone will have exactly what has been determined for him according to his conduct, and so it does a person no good to try to scheme or make extraneous efforts to increase his income.

The wisest of all men said, “Once more I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned; but time and death will happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). The reward of all a person’s efforts and schemes is that he will receive nothing more than what was determined for him at Rosh Hashanah, which is a function of his deeds. All his extraneous efforts will be useless, and he can even go to court and lose, for “Whoever has bread in his basket and says, ‘What am I going to eat tomorrow?’ belongs to those who are little in faith” (Sotah 48b).

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI MATITYAHU STRASHUN OF VILNA

Rabbi Matityahu Strashun was granted all the innate talents that a person could dream off. He had an extraordinary memory and did not know what it means to forget. His intelligence was prodigious and deeply penetrating. He immediately understood matters and reflected upon things in detail. From his early youth to the day he died, he was immersed in Torah study with great diligence, studying anywhere from 10 to 15 hours a day. His library constituted the largest Jewish collection of books in his generation, and in addition to all this he was wealthy and descended from a family whose lineage was greatly respected. There is nothing surprising about the fact that he became a tremendous personality, in perfect possession of all the Torah. His home was open to Torah scholars, and from far and near philosophers and scientists came to him with various questions, ones to which his answers were accepted by all as if given by Urim and Turim.

Rabbi Matityahu Strashun was born in the autumn of 5578 (1817) to the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Shemuel, the wise and wealthy man of the village of Strashun known as the Rashash.

When Matityahu was six years old, people began to discover his exceptional talents. He could repeat by heart – literally letter for letter – everything that he learned and read. People said that he was “a little Sha’agat Aryeh,” and thus it was difficult to find a teacher for him. Seeing that he needed a great Rav to teach his son, Rabbi Shemuel entrusted Rabbi Menashe of Ilya, a disciple of the Vilna Gaon, to teach him Gemara and the Poskim. Rabbi Shemuel devoted himself as well to Matityahu’s education and studied Torah with him, and for a short time the boy also studied with Rabbi Israel Salanter.

At the age of 13 he was known as a child prodigy, and one of the wealthiest individuals in Vilna took him as his son-in-law. After his wedding, his father-in-law bought him a business that dealt in silk, and his wife, who was a woman of valor, took charge of the business to allow Rabbi Matityahu to remain immersed in Torah study with great regularity.

He published his first literary work at the age of 14. He had a remarkable style, similar to those of intellectual giants of times past, and he knew how to express his new and original ideas in a few lines and with only several words. His books earned him great renown, and everyone considered him to be a foremost expert in every field. During his time there was a great disagreement among Torah scholars concerning the division of times and the precise moment for the new moon. The debate continued for several years until Rabbi Matityahu expressed his opinion, which was accepted by all sides, thus calming the disagreement.

In 5617 (1857), he undertook a long journey outside of Russia to acquire holy books and manuscripts of great worth for his library. He spent a great amount of money and erected the most important library in the Jewish world. There was practically no book in print that he had not purchased, yet he never placed a book in his library before having read it from cover to cover and in detail. The Strashun library existed until 1940, when it was destroyed at the hands of the accursed Russians.

During that trip, he personally encountered the great Torah scholars that he had been corresponding with for years. He met Rabbi C.I. Rappaport (the Rav of Prague), Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chayut (the author of Chiddushei Maharatz Chayut on the Tal-

mud), and Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (the author of Haketav Vehakabbalah). Wherever he went, Rabbi Matityahu was received with great honor, however it was in Berlin that he was welcomed with especially great warmth. In fact the leaders of the Berlin Jewish community wanted to name him as their Rav, but Rabbi Matityahu declined.

In 5625 (1865), the community of Vilna chose him as their leader. At first he refused, fearing that this would prevent him from studying, but he finally allowed himself to yield at their insistence. He put all the community’s affairs into order, enacted new decrees, and annulled several obsolete customs. Thanks to him, the community of Vilna became an example for others by its efficient administration and charitable institutions.

Rabbi Matityahu’s greatest achievement, however, was that he saved 58 men from the draft. Each year Vilna had to provide 58 men as soldiers to the army or pay 800 rubbles for each exemption. All the eligible men from 40 to 60 years of age fled from Vilna for a few months before the draft and came back once the quota was reached. Many families suffered greatly from hunger during those times, for there were no providers there to support them. Heart-wrenching scenes played out in many Jewish homes, and the fate of the men who were caught fleeing was equally horrendous, for army abductors tormented the recruits like wild animals.

Rabbi Matityahu took upon himself the task of delivering the Jews from this shame. He organized a large assembly and proposed that 50,000 rubbles be collected to obtain certificates of exemption for the conscripts. He himself was the first to give a sizeable amount, and together with generous donations from the residents of Vilna, he was able to free all 58 men from serving in the army. With that, the community of Vilna was jubilant, and it organized a celebration in Rabbi Matityahu’s honor. His achievement was inscribed in the city ledger as the greatest deed ever undertaken by a director in Vilna.

He held this position for several years, until he had solidly established the foundations of the community. He then resigned, handed over the community’s leadership to another person, and returned to studying Torah.

Rabbi Matityahu had produced no books of his own up to that time. When he was asked why he never wrote any, he replied that a person has to study a great deal in order to write a book, and the more a person studies, the more he realizes that he has not studied enough. It was only after the age of 60 that he decided to give the Romm brothers, printers in Vilna, his commentaries on some tractates of the Talmud to publish.

At the beginning of the year 5646 (1885), he felt that his days were numbered and began to prepare his will. He bequeathed his great library to the community of Vilna, as well as a large building that was a source of revenue used to maintain the library. The only child he left behind was an orphan girl, a close relative of his wife, whom he had adopted in childhood. It was to her that he left a great part of his inheritance.

Rabbi Matityahu died on Tevet 6, 5646 (Dec 14, 1885), and the community of Vilna prepared a large funeral for him, the likes of which had never before been seen in the city. Dozens of rabbis, among others Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, the Rav of Kovno, gave eulogies for him.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “If you will follow My decrees” (Leviticus 26:3). The Midrash states: “Thus it is written, ‘I considered my ways and I returned my feet to Your testimonies’ [Psalms 119:59]. King David said, ‘Master of the universe, I made plans every day. I said that I would journey to such and such a place, and my legs brought me to houses of prayer and houses of study, as it is written: “and I returned my feet to Your testimonies”’ (Vayikra Rabba 35).

This text must be seen in light what our Sages have said: “Whoever greets his neighbor before having prayed is as if he made him into a place for idolatry, as it is written: ‘Withdraw from man ... for with what is he deemed worthy?’ [Isaiah 2:22]. Shemuel said, ‘He is deemed unworthy and not godly’ ” (Berachot 14a).

Let us illustrate this with a parable:

A person was in the habit of buying his merchandise from a certain shopkeeper. One day the shopkeeper noticed this person leaving another shop with some purchases, which made him very angry. Now this person may have had the excuse that his normal supplier (the shopkeeper in question) did not have what he needed. However if the shopkeeper is well stocked, he will be greatly irritated and feel justified in demanding, “What is there that I don’t have in my store which you found in another one?”

Similarly, there is nothing in the world that does not have its source in Torah, as it is written: “It happens that a man purchases fields but not vineyards, or vineyards but not fields. However this possession [the Torah] contains both vineyards and fields, as it states, ‘Your fields are vineyards of pomegranates’ [Song of Songs 4:13]” (Shemot Rabba 33:1), for Hashem fulfills all a person’s desires through the merit of Torah. This is why Shemuel – like the shopkeeper in the parable who asked what could be found in another store – said in astonishment, “He is deemed unworthy and not godly.” This

is exactly what King David says: I go to the house of study not only to find Hashem, His paths, and His testimonies, but also to satisfy the desires of my body. Thus, “I considered my ways and I returned my feet to Your testimonies” – each day I determined that I needed go to such and such a place, and my thoughts always brought me back to the same point: In that which concerns such things, it is better to seek out Hashem and His Torah, for His right hand will help you.

THE PATH OF THE JUST SHAME - PART II

Shame is an iron wall against all sins, for if a man is capable of sinning in secret, he nevertheless is ashamed to do so in public. Our Sages said that shortly before the death of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, his disciples asked him to bless them. He told them, “May your fear of Heaven be equal to your fear of men.” They responded, “Is that all?” He then added, “If only you could attain that! Know that when a man sins in secret, he still hopes that no one sees him” (Berachot 28:2). A man avoids sin because he is ashamed of being seen sinning. He repents of his sins because he experiences shame before men, for self-interest ultimately leads him to act for more noble reasons.

The fact remains that a higher level of shame consists of feeling restraint before Hashem, as it is written, “My G-d, I am embarrassed and ashamed to lift my face to You, my G-d” (Ezra 9:6). And if you think that it is not in any way necessary to feel restraint before the One Who is unseen, know that, even though G-d is hidden from everyone, He is present in our hearts and revealed in our thoughts. A man could reach a higher level of shame by isolating himself to contemplate the greatness of the Alm-ghty and by being conscious that the Holy One, blessed be He, sees all his actions, examines all his decisions, and observers all his thoughts. A wise man said concerning this, “If you have guarded yourself from sin all your life, do not be proud of this, for a man begins to forsake sin because he feels shame before men.”

Consequently, when a man avoids sin, he should be careful not to do so because of the shame felt before others. It is thus essential for a man to know his Creator and recognize His power. He should be aware of Whom he serves and Whom he should fear – the One Who commanded him to keep the laws and Who forbids sin – as David told his son Solomon: ‘Know the G-d of your father and serve Him’ (II Chronicles 28:9). Through this effort, a man will be able to feel shame only before G-d