

למה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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HEVRAT PINTO

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GREAT IS REPENTANCE BEFORE PRAYER

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "I implored the L-RD at that time, saying ..." (Deuteronomy 3:23). Most of the commentators have questioned the meaning of the expression "at that time." What time was that? They have explained that it consists of the time mentioned in the passage, "As for me, may my prayer to You, O L-RD, be at an opportune time" (Psalms 69:14). Moses asked that this moment be favorable in G-d's eyes for accepting his prayer. Yet despite this, his prayer was not answered, for G-d had decided that he would not enter the Holy Land.

Regarding this subject, the book Beit Shemuel explains that "at that time" means the present moment, meaning that one shouldn't think of the past or the future, but should only be concerned with the time in which he can correct his behavior. This is why Moses prayed when he could in order to implore G-d. Concerning this, I have heard that the word leimor ("saying") alludes to the fact that a man's prayer (as in the verse itself: "I implored") should always be in his heart and mouth in order that he can say it (leimor) when he begins praying.

In my humble opinion, there is another way of explaining the expression "at that time" and leimor. Concerning this, the holy Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk states in his book Noam Elimelech: "When someone wants to perform a mitzvah, he should begin by repenting of the sins he has committed, for by his sins a man creates accusers and destructive angels (Perkei Avoth 4:13[11]) that prevent him from subsequently elevating his mitzvot. Consequently, if there is no repentance, mitzvot cannot rise up."

May I allow myself to add that not only do mitzvot not rise up in such a case, but that even the holiness that stems from them becomes the victim of the forces of impurity, which feed off of it. The Noam Elimelech affirms that we can remedy this situation by repenting

before performing a mitzvah, for then we eliminate all accusers and destroy them by repentance, to the extent that mitzvot can rise up and we bring satisfaction to our Creator.

Following the same line of reasoning, we may add that we should also repent before praying in order not to be disturbed by these angels and accusers that seek to nourish themselves from prayer. Thus our prayers will be received with favor. This is why the Sages said, "The early righteous ones prepared themselves for an hour before prayer" (Berachot 30b), for they were actually undertaking a self-evaluation in order to repent of their prior sins so that their prayer would be received with favor. In fact it is written, "Know before Whom you stand" (Berachot 28b), yet how can one stand before the King of kings while stained with sins, faults, transgressions, and evil thoughts? This is why, before praying, we should recall all our sins and take it upon ourselves to not fall back into them. And even if one is certain to have not committed any sin – even if a person is righteous to a fault – we know that G-d is extremely demanding with those who are close to Him (Yebamot 121b). If He were to make the holy Patriarchs pass before Him in judgment, even they would not emerge innocent, for He would rebuke them. For what would they be reprimanded? On details so minute that a man doesn't even take note of them. Consequently, it is also good to repent of all our sins before praying.

This allows us to understand the connection between Parsha Devarim and Parsha Va'etchanan. At first, Moses reprimanded the Children of Israel for all their wicked deeds, and he also enjoined himself to repent, in particular for the incident in which he struck the rock twice with his staff (Numbers 20:11). Concerning that, Moses told the Children of Israel, "But the L-RD became angry with me because of you, and He did

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not listen to me” (Deuteronomy 3:26). Then, when he finished and reprimanded himself and repented, he began to pray and implore G-d (va’etchanan). When was this? It was “at that time” – when he repented and there were none of his accusers left. His prayer was continually in his mouth (leimor), and yet it was not granted.

Everything that we have seen up to now allows us to explain the rest of the passage: “Let me please cross and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan” (v. 25). The Vilna Gaon explains that if Moses had said, “Let me please cross and please see the good land” (saying “please” twice), as he had done in his prayer for Miriam his sister (“Please, L-RD, heal her please” [Numbers 12: 13]), his prayer would have been granted, as it had been for Miriam. In such a case Moses would have entered into Eretz Israel and the land would never have been devastated. However the Holy One, blessed be He, immediately stopped Moses and said to him, “It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter” (Deuteronomy 3:26), meaning, “Do not say ‘please’ [na] a second time” (see Imrei HaGra). We see, therefore, that Moses had his prayer so ready in his mouth that if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not stopped him so as to Sanctify His Name in public, his prayer would have been granted.

From all this, we learn that we may continually pray and think that our prayers are being heard, yet this may not be true if we have not completely repented of our wicked deeds beforehand. This is why we recite, before praying, the passage concerning sacrifices (Shulchan Aruch Orah Haim, beginning of paragraph 48). This is a way for a man to offer himself as a sacrifice before G-d and to repent of all his sins before addressing Him. It is a good way to prepare for prayer, but a great amount of concentration is required for it to be considered as if he had really sacrificed himself, for according to the Ramban (see Leviticus 1:9), a sacrifice replaces a man. Thus all that is done to an animal should really have been performed on a man. When a person realizes this, he will certainly repent, humble himself, and become like a sacrifice before G-d.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “I implored the L-RD at that time, saying ...” (Deuteronomy 3:23).

The Midrash states: The verse says, “With rebukes for iniquity You have chastened man [ish], You have worn away like a moth his precious health. All mankind is but futility” (Psalms 39: 12). The word ish refers to Moses. “You have worn away like a moth his precious health” means that all that was important for Moses was to enter into Eretz Israel, and You wore away this hope of his, like a moth that penetrates into clothing and makes them rot. It is Eretz Israel that is precious. And if this is what the righteous Moses merited, how much more will all other creatures merit it – confronting emptiness and the day of judgment – yet “All mankind is but futility.”

This a fortiori comparison is not logical, since on the contrary, “he who increases knowledge increases pain” (Ecclesiastes 1:18). What this text really wants to tell us is that, by default, by learning the fear of Heaven from Moses’ fate, we should at least acquire a certain amount of humility. We acquire this humility by noting that Hashem is not as severe with us as our minor value and importance would merit, for it is likely that He didn’t show Himself more severe with Moses, but rather less severe with regards to us.

This is exactly like a creditor who comes to reclaim his debts, demanding from each of his debtors an amount proportional to what they can pay. However one of his debtors, who was known to be penniless, is left alone. If this person rejoices in the exemption that he obtained from his creditor, people would be justified in telling him, “What are you boasting about, since you were only exempt because of your extreme poverty!”

That is the meaning of the Midrash. The idea of “With rebukes for iniquity You have chastened man” as being a reference to Moses means that rebukes are doled out in proportion to sins, with perfect exactitude. Now if the righteous Moses deserved such rebuke for a tiny sin, how much more should such justice fall upon others who have committed heavy sins. The expression “for all mankind is but futility” highlights the unique reason for their salvation: Just how severe can one be with such needy individuals?

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI HAIM PINTO HAKATAN

Rabbi Haim Pinto of Casablanca, also known as Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan (to distinguish him from his grandfather, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol), was born in Essaouira in the year 5625 (1865) and left this world on Heshvan 15, 5698 (October 20, 1937). Aside from being the grandson of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol (who is buried in Mogador), he was also the son of Rabbi Yehudah Pinto. The house in which he lived in Casablanca, located at 36 Commandant Provost, has become a place of pilgrimage for the Jews who come to light candles there.

By way of pious habit, he used to collect money from people for distributing to the poor, and after having finished allocating the funds, he would wash the scarf used for the collection. Once he was asked why he did this, and he replied that there was nothing filthier in the world than money: "I wash my scarf, therefore, to cleanse it of this dirt!" Indeed, he lived from the money that people gave, yet he always said, "Money is filthy!"

He had yet another pious habit. Every day he would come to the home of a poor person and ask, "What did you prepare today to eat? I would like to taste what you cooked!" We know very well what a poor person eats: Vegetables, a piece of bread (or else some bread with tea and a salad of vegetables), and that's it. The saintly Rabbi Pinto, may he rest in peace, sat down with them, ate of their bread, brought them joy, and blessed them upon leaving. He didn't always like to eat at the table of the rich. He would say that the Shechinah and blessing reign over the table of the poor more than over that of the rich. He would say that the fear of G-d was acquired precisely in destituteness and poverty, not in prosperity.

Rabbi Haim Pinto was renowned for his modesty and gift of prophesy, as testified by the following personal accounts:

Account No. 1

Once when I was at home, my cousin came to get me and said, "Aziza, you absolutely have to come to our house!" I said, "Good!" and I went and saw that Rabbi Haim Pinto was there. When I saw him, He welcomed me five times.

I answered him, "May G-d bless you," and he told me, "You will give birth! You will have a child in two days. You will bring a girl into the world who will become rich!" (As it turned out, I had a girl two days later). He then said to me, "By the merit of my father and of my grandfather, you will have a girl! You already have a son who is at home. You will have a girl and you will recover easily after giving birth. You will give birth without pain, and then you will have a beautiful naming ceremony!" And really, two days after having spoken to the Tzaddik, I came back home with discomfort. The next day I had a girl, and since that time we've lived better than ever. After that – oh yes, I forgot – he had told me, "After having a girl, you will bring a boy into the world, but please, do not give him the name of your father!" My father had already died, yet I still named my son after him. One year later, my son died. He had yet clearly told me, "The son you will have will be lost!"

Account No. 2

The story that I will recount to you occurred in Casablanca 37 years ago [this account was taken in 1974], just before the passing of Rabbi Haim Pinto. The majority of those in the Moroccan community knew this holy man, and the most part of these were still alive at that time and spoke of his merit. They say that before his departure from Mogador to Casablanca, people in the city were used to going to his home on Saturday night for Melava Malka. On that night rabbis, elderly people, and women & children could be found

there. After Saturday night prayers, he got out his violin and began singing the poems of his holy grandfather and Rabbi Israel Najara. It happened several times that he forgot himself and, without noticing, played until dawn. Afterwards he would say to his listeners, "I'm tired, and you should be too. Go to sleep, for you have to get up for morning prayers!" They replied to him, "Day has already arisen. It's time to pray!" They performed the morning service, had breakfast, and left. The rabbis of the city looked for an explanation to the following puzzle: Sometimes, certain verses of the poem that Rabbi Haim Pinto sang made him tremble, and all his listeners felt this emotion as well. The saint gave no explanation for this, and when people insisted that he speak, he got upset and said, "If you ask me once again, I will continue to refuse and no longer agree that you assemble in my home on Saturday night!" The rabbis asked his forgiveness and left. No one asked him any more questions about these things. They had understood the greatness of the saint.

Account No. 3

Once, he received a letter (I'm speaking of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan) from a rich man living in Rabat who asked him to find a young man who was honest and well-versed in Torah to marry his daughter. Rabbi Haim Pinto asked himself who would be a suitable young man in town, one that was honest and learned. Days passed and he still hadn't decided on a candidate. Then one night he couldn't sleep, and so he went out with his servant in the middle of the night to the Mellah [the enclosed Jewish district of the city], and there he saw people leaving a synagogue. He entered and found a young man sitting down, studying Tractate Yebamot (a tractate in the Talmud) with great diligence. The saint said to his servant, "Let's leave the synagogue so as not to disturb him. If he sees us, he will stop studying and we will be responsible for this interruption of Torah study!" They walked along the Mellah and encountered a Jew who invited them to have coffee in his home. The saint (may he rest in peace) accepted and they entered his house. Some time later, they left and went to the synagogue to see what was happening with the young man. As soon as they entered, they saw him lying on the floor, sleeping the sleep of the righteous. The saint said to his servant, "This young man is accomplishing the word of the Tanna [a Sage of the Mishnah]: 'Sleep on the ground.' Don't disturb him. Tomorrow morning you will bring him to me!" The next day he questioned the young man: "Have you no place to sleep?" He replied, "I'm an orphan and my friends at the yeshiva bring me food to eat. I come from another town." He asked him his age, and he replied, "Twenty-six years old." The saint said to him, "You are old and you should get married!" The young man replied, "I can't even meet my own needs. How can I get married?" The saint gave him some money to buy new clothes and sent him to Rabat, where the rich man married him off to his daughter. The couple brought forth boys and girls into the world, and the young man pursued his studies. Today he lives in Amsterdam. I paid a visit to him there and it was he who personally told me this story.

The Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto is Heshvan 15. May his merit protect us all. Amen.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

BRINGING HEARTS TOGETHER

The author of Birkat Avraham recounted the following story concerning Rabbi Shimshon, the Rav of Zivlin: One weekday, the Rav's wife went shopping for household items, and despite her poverty she decided to buy a large, magnificent fish in honor of Shabbat. As the Rebbetzin proceeded to make her purchase, another woman (the wife of one of the wealthiest men in town) also arrived at the market and wanted to purchase the same fish. To insure her purchase, this woman paid extra for it and insisted that she be allowed to buy it. The two women then began to have a heated argument, and the wife of the wealthy man treated the Rav's wife in a very insulting manner. Rumors of this argument – that the wife of so and so had insulted the honor of the Torah – quickly spread around town. Now a Talmid Chacham's wife should be considered as her husband, and because of that, the other woman displayed a terrible amount of disrespect. Word of this reached the leaders of the community, who decided to defend the honor of the Torah and to punish the guilty women without giving any consideration to the wrath of her husband, since the Torah states: "You shall not tremble before any man" (Deuteronomy 1: 17). It was obvious to them that it was important to respond to such an insult. However, since they had made an agreement with the Rav they would not do anything without his approval, and since they had also agreed that they were to leave him alone to study Torah during the entire week – and only to come to him with questions at the end of Shabbat – they had no chance to discuss the situation with him before Shabbat ended. Hence they went to find the Rebbetzin and explained the situation to her, requesting that when the Rav came home for Shabbat, that she find a way to present the situation to him in order to "lay the groundwork" for the talk that they wanted to have with him after Shabbat ended.

On Friday night, when Rabbi Shimshon came home from synagogue, he was surprised to see that his wife was not at her usual place by the table she had prepared, but rather took refuge in a corner by another table. He asked her what she was doing, and she replied: "Given that I am not worthy of being the Rav's Rebbetzin and to sit at his table, I prepared my own table to sit at." Surprised, he asked her why she said that she was not "worthy" of being his Rebbetzin. She responded, "So and so, the wife of the wealthy man, treated me in the following way..." The Rav became angry and asked, "She insulted you like that, and everyone kept quiet? What happened to the honor of the Torah? And what will the community leaders say?" She replied by telling him that everyone was in shock, and that the leaders of the community had wanted to impose a fine on her. However, they could not do so because their hands were tied due to the fact that he, the Rav, had bound them not to do anything important without his approval or before speaking to him after Shabbat.

After calming the Rebbetzin and convincing her to take her normal seat at the table, the Rav relaxed, recited some prayers before the meal, and prepared to recite Kiddush. Then with his glass in hand, and just before beginning to recite the blessing, a thought came to him. He asked his wife, "When did all this happen?" She replied, "Last Tuesday." Taken aback by this, Rabbi Shimshon exclaimed in a loud voice as if in shock: "Since Tuesday? And since Tuesday up to now you've kept a grudge in your heart toward this Jewish woman and have not yet forgiven her?" The Rebbetzin was terrified by the Tzaddik's accusation, and she immediately said, "I forgive her! I forgive her!" The Rav, however, was not convinced. "That's not enough," he said. "One who keeps a grudge in their

heart from Tuesday until Shabbat against a member of the Jewish people is duty-bound to personally ask for that person's forgiveness." The Rebbetzin began to feel tense. Was it not enough for her to suffer humiliation in public, that now she had to ask for that person's forgiveness? Nevertheless the Rav's words were sacred to her, and so he immediately put on his coat, and the Rebbetzin hers, and together they went out in the dark of night and walked to the wealthy man's house. The Kiddush cup remained on the Rav's table, its contents untouched.

When they arrived at the man's house and knocked at the door, they could hear a voice from inside asking, "Who is it?" The Rav identified himself, as well as the Rebbetzin, and those inside immediately realized that they had come because of the unfortunate incident between the wealthy man's wife and the Rebbetzin. Since they understood the greatness of his piety, the residents were filled with fear and dreaded that he might scorch them with his words, for who could withstand his curse? They opened the door and fell to his feet with tears in their eyes. They begged that he forgive them, for their sin was inexcusable. Shocked by this, the Rav exclaimed, "Is it you who needs to ask for forgiveness? Rather, is it not we who should ask that you forgive the grudge that was kept in my wife's heart against the lady of this house since last Tuesday!" They heard this with incredulity and exclaimed, "Should you be asking for forgiveness, since it was from us that an affront to the Torah's honor originated? It is we who should be asking for it, not you!" Each party cried in front of the other, and each asked forgiveness of the other, until their voices became indistinguishable. Each one said, "I forgive everyone" and the hearts of all were brought together without a shadow of dissension. Only then did Rabbi Shimshon Zatzal agree to go back home with the Rebbetzin and sit down at the table to recite Kiddush and continue celebrating Shabbat.

THE PATH OF THE JUST

LOVE PART IV

Love for parents should be directed as follows: A man will keep in mind the fact that his parents raised him and made efforts to teach him the ways of Hashem, educating him in Torah and the commandments. A man's parents give him the ability to perform the Creator's directive to "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). With respect to his brothers and sisters, as well as other members of his family, a man should have the following sentiments: He should know that they make efforts to help him ascend in his level of serving G-d, a level which they themselves have reached, and in turn he should teach and reprimand them when necessary, without yielding to favoritism. This watchfulness will earn him a great reward, as it is written, "nor [does he] cast disgrace upon his close one" (Psalms 15:3). A man can derive great benefit from his family. In fact, we see that Lot was saved by Abraham (who waged war for him) and was also delivered from Sodom by Abraham's merit. A man will love his friends and all other Jews with his whole heart in order to perform the mitzvah, "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). This refers to an essential principle of the Torah, namely: "That which is contemptible to you, do not do to your fellow" (Shabbat 31a), and more importantly still: "For in the image of G-d He made man" (Genesis 9:6).