

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## THE WONDERS OF G-D TOWARDS ALL MEN

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)*

**In** our parsha, the poem Haazinu recounts throughout its verses how the Holy One, blessed be He, bestows His beneficial influence upon the Children of Israel, in contrast to the other nations of the world. From the beginning we recite, "Ascribe greatness to our G-d" (Deuteronomy 32:3) and further on, "He would make him ride on the heights of the land ... with honey from a stone, and oil from a flinty rock" (v.13). We also read, "For the L-RD's portion is His people; Jacob is the measure of His inheritance" (v.9). Concerning this subject, Moses exhorts Israel as follows: "Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation" (v.7) in order to tell us that everything stems from the Holy One, blessed by He, Who made everything, and that all the wonders that we witness are due to Him.

Yet because of our many sins, today there are numerous people who look at all of creation without attributing any importance to G-d. They do so because they consider it as natural, as self-evident. In fact they believe that everything is natural and ordinary, yet they don't ask themselves the same questions that Abraham did, who realized that all comes from G-d and that He is the Master of the world (Bereshith Rabba 39:1). Concerning them it is said, "We lead a man by the path that he wants to take" (Makot 10b), and if he wants to invent lies to explain the world, he is not prevented from doing so. However if a man desires to arrive at the truth, he is helped, and not only does he receive his reward, but he also merits sanctifying G-d's Name. This is why it is written, "This emanated from the L-RD; it is wondrous in our eyes" (Psalms 118:23), which means that all wonders stem from G-d because He also created nature.

Yet those who don't look for truth simply say that all is natural and everything is self-evident. To these,

G-d responds measure for measure. Actually, they claim that everything is natural, but we know that hateva (nature) has the same numerical value as the name Elokim. Now this Name represents strict justice (Zohar I:64), which is why such people arouse severity, both in this world and the World to Come. Consequently, nature avenges itself on the wicked, as when all of a sudden a volcano erupts and kills multitudes of people, or when an earthquake causes destruction, or when people die in tempests or violent storms. This is because nature is Elokim, strict justice, and because justice attacks the wicked in order to teach us that everything stems from G-d.

Now when severity increases in the world, it doesn't distinguish between good and bad, and even the good are punished in this world, even if it means that they will receive their reward in the World to Come. Alternatively, it can also happen that G-d performs miracles and saves them from strict justice, which for them turns into mercy. They are therefore saved as a reward for their belief that G-d also created nature. Actually, all men fall under mercy's influence, and they can change justice into mercy by the power of their faith in the Creator.

This summer I was in the mountains, and I saw an extraordinary landscape of high peaks. I was taken with trembling before the glory of G-d's majesty and all that He created in the world by strict justice in order to punish those who deny His existence, not recognizing the truth but rather inventing lies in their heart. I then clearly felt the words of King David: "How [mah] abundant are Your works, O L-RD" (Palms 104:24). The word mah has a numerical value of 45, which means that on one hand King David sees nature as having been created by justice, and on the other hand he says that because he sensed the truth,

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justice transformed itself into mercy. This allows a person to attach himself even more deeply to the Holy One, blessed be He, and this is what is expressed in the poem Haazinu: “Ascribe greatness to our G-d [Elokeinu],” for the Name Elokim represents strict justice. However if we recognize the truth, then “the L-RD’s portion is His people.” The Tetragrammaton (here translated as “the L-RD”) represents mercy, which means that justice transforms itself into mercy – all this when we ascribe glory (even that of nature) exclusively to the Holy One, blessed be He.

While I was standing like this in front of the great mountains and imposing landscape, contemplating on all of Creation that G-d made and gathering faith in Him in my heart, someone approached me and told me that he had heard in the name of the Admor of Belz that the Holy One, blessed be He, brings the pure air of Jerusalem to Europe and the entire world. I then asked myself why in fact the Holy One, blessed be He, had created this magnificent landscape precisely in Europe, and why He had to bring Jerusalem’s pure air to it.

To explain this, we shall digress slightly. Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, “Israel knew perfectly well that there was nothing to idolatry, and they worshipped idols only as a means to permit itself public immorality” (Sanhedrin 63b). Rashi explains that a spirit of indecency seized the Children of Israel and they wanted to rid themselves of it, but a spirit of idolatry did not take hold of them. This is very surprising. Is it possible that the generation of the desert, which heard the voice of G-d speaking to them from out of the fire (Deuteronomy 4:12), and which witnessed all sorts of miracles, was drawn to lewd behavior? How was such a thing possible, especially for that generation, which even in Egypt had maintained all of its purity in this area? They had not damaged the covenant of circumcision, and they had changed neither their names, nor their language, nor their style of dress (Vayikra Rabba 32:5). Furthermore, they had sanctified themselves after passing through the 49 gates of impurity (Zohar Yitro 39a), and they had received the Torah! Did they need to go and make a golden calf in order to permit themselves this lewdness that they had so carefully protected themselves against while in Egypt?

Concerning this, it must be explained that the generation of the desert arrived at this terrible situation because it neglected Torah study. Now we know that idleness leads to boredom, which leads to indecency (Ketubot 59b) and a degree of depravity that cannot

even be imagined. This is why the Children of Israel pretended to deceive Heaven by saying that they needed a leader as powerful as Moses, and that for him to be accepted by everyone (even according to Aaron), it had to be done by sorcery, which is why they made the calf. Yet inside their hearts they knew very well that all this wasn’t true, and that if they had wanted to, they could have destroyed it without anyone preventing them. They only wanted to allow themselves to behave lewdly because that’s what they had in mind given their negligence in Torah study and the boredom that ensued, and they were not able to save themselves from this desire.

This shows us the seriousness of neglecting Torah study, for even with as great a generation as that one, it leads to depravity, and even to idolatry, forbidden relations, and murder. Consequently, it is forbidden to take a break from the holy Torah. The goal of relaxation should only be for soul-searching in order to continue to attach oneself to G-d and to become aware of one’s responsibility in the world. Everything that G-d created in His universe is designed so that man doesn’t remain idle for a single moment, so that he doesn’t arrive at boredom and committing grave sins. Yet when he rests, he should renew himself in his service of G-d and contemplate Creation. He should say, “How abundant are Your works, O L-RD” (Psalms 104:24). He will then know and understand Who created all of this, and his love for his Creator will increase. When he finds himself in the mountains, the pure air will inspire wisdom in him.

This is complete understandable, for G-d did everything for the Children of Israel, not for the delight of those who reject His yoke and claim that everything is natural. Such people want to allow themselves everything that is forbidden, arriving at indecency, idolatry, violence and murder. They obey all their instincts and transgress laws by even crossing some animal species with others, still thinking that G-d will continue to allow things to be, without realizing that He can also destroy everything and reconstruct everything.

This is why, in reality, even when Israel is in exile, G-d ensures that he enjoys the splendors of nature. This is due to the simple fact that contemplating the beauty of nature leads Israel to “ascribe greatness to our G-d” (Deuteronomy 32:3) and realize that everything comes from Him, contrary to those who believe that everything is natural and self-evident. In Parsha Haazinu we learn to see G-d in everything, to become aware that everything stems from Him, and to realize that we should not slacken in Torah study.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

# RABBI DAVID SEGAL HALEVI – THE TAZ

**R**abbi David Segal Halevi, the son of Rabbi Shmuel, was born in Ludmir, in the region of Volhynia in 1586. Still very young, he was known for his sharp mind and the depth of his intelligence. His reputation as a brilliant child prodigy spread quickly. At the age of 7, he knew Bava Kama, Bava Metzia, and Bava Batra by heart. His brother, Rabbi Yitzchak Halevi, took him and taught him Torah. His reputation reached the ears of Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, author of Bayit Chadash (Bach), who was then the Rav of Brisk in Lithuania, and he invited him to study in his renowned yeshiva. There he began to study with great diligence and progressed immensely, making a name for himself among the students of the yeshiva.

The Bach had a daughter named Rivka, a young educated girl who knew Tanach inside and out. One day, the Bach was with his students and told them that in the Rambam (Laws of the Sefer Torah: Chapter 7, Halachah 6), there is an allusion to the fact that in the Torah there are words that are 10 or 11 letters long. The Bach asked where such a long word in the Torah was, but no one had the answer. By chance, his daughter Rivka was in the room and heard the question. She jumped up and said, "In the book of Esther there is an 11-letter word. It is והאחשדרפנים [and the satraps]" (Esther 9:3).

The Bach, delighted by his daughter's scholarship, said to her with a smile: "My dear daughter, you are lovely like the moon." His student Rabbi David replied, "If she is lovely like the moon, the time has come to sanctify the moon" (a play on words between the sanctification of the new moon and marriage, which are designated by the same word). The Bach, who had his eye on Rabbi David for a long time, laughed at the joke and took him as the husband for his daughter Rivka. After the wedding, Rabbi David left his father-in-law's house and settled in Krakow. In 1618 he became the Rav of the Potlitsha community, yet because it was a small town whose residents were poor, he himself lived in great poverty. After a few years, he became Rav of the city of Posen, where he stayed some 20 years.

In 1644 Rabbi David returned to Volhynia and became the Rav of the city of Ostrog. There he founded a large yeshiva, and numerous students from every corner of the country rushed to him. In Ostrog, he could live in tranquilly and write his great work Turei Zahav (Taz) on the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah. As soon as it was published, this book immediately spread to all yeshivas and was recognized as authoritative, which earned him universal recognition in the field of Halachah. Even to our day, the Taz is studied in all yeshivas and houses of study. All yeshiva students who want to receive Smicha (ordination) to become a Rav must know the commentary of the Taz on the Shulchan Aruch.

During that time, great catastrophes struck all the Jews of Poland. In 1648, the Cossacks and their cruel leader, Chmielnicki, rose up against the nobles of Poland. The first thing they did was to massacre Jewish men, women, and children.

When the murderers approached Ostrog, Rabbi David and all the Jews fled towards the Olik fortress and barricaded themselves behind its high walls. Because the town was in a state of siege for a long time, and because the enemy had already begun to breach its walls, all the inhabitants assembled together, with Rabbi David at their head, in the synagogue to pray and offer supplications there. Rabbi David prayed so much that he ended up collapsing from exhaustion and fell asleep. In a dream, he heard the following pas-

sage being read before him: "I shall protect this city, to save it, for My sake and for the sake of My servant David" (II Kings 19:34). Rabbi David awoke and said, "People of G-d, strengthen yourselves in prayer and supplication, for today G-d will show us wonders." Hence the miracle occurred. All of a sudden the old canons inside the fortress, which had been completely out of service up to then, began to open fire and launched cannonballs on the enemy camp, terrifying them and making them flee for their lives.

Because of the troubles caused by the war, Rabbi David was forced to wander about, suffering greatly during his wanderings. He was he obliged to sleep with his family under the open sky more than once. Also during this time he encountered the Gaon Rabbi Shabtai Hacoen, author of the Shach, and stayed with him for three days. Even though the Shach had expressed different opinions than his own, and had contested his Halachic decisions, they made peace between themselves. The Shach wrote, "I welcomed him with great honors, truly considerable, and he also demonstrated very great respect for me, to the point of kissing me on the head."

When the Cossacks' rioting had abated, the Taz returned to the land of his birth and settled in Lvov, of which he became the Rav. His renown spread throughout the country.

Rabbi David wrote a commentary on the entire Shulchan Aruch. Several great rabbanim wrote their views and commented on his books, the best such commentary being by Rabbi Yossef, the son of Rabbi Yosef Teomim of Lvov, who in his book Pri Megadim explained all the difficult sections of Rabbi David's work.

At the end of his life, Rabbi David still studied Torah day and night, this being more important to him than the entire world. One day a woman came crying to Rabbi David and begged him to find a cure for her only daughter, who was sick and dying. The Taz told her, "I am not a doctor, and I don't perform miracles, but I can do this for you: Since today I explained a particularly difficult passage of the Tosaphot, I allot this explanation to her so that its merit may protect her." The girl immediately began to feel better, and little by little she recovered completely.

Other than his works on the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi David wrote another book entitled Divrei David, which explains Rashi's commentary on the Torah.

Rabbi David was greatly respected by the people of his time and the scholars of generations that followed. Yet he himself did not seek honor, and in his responses he signed his name as David Hakatan. He respected everyone and paid great attention to not embarrassing even the simplest of men. People say that for his entire life, on Shabbat and festivals he kept to the practice of reciting Kiddush out of a prayer book. One day, Rabbi David revealed why he held so firmly to this practice. It was because among the guests that were sometimes at his home, there were some who didn't know Kiddush by heart, and they could have felt hurt by having to read it out of a Siddur. Yet if the head of the household did so, there was no shame in imitating him.

Rabbi David lived more than 80 years. He died on Shevat 26, 1667.

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson, the Rav of Lvov, recounts that in his time, more than 200 years after the death of the Taz, his tomb was opened by mistake, yet his body was found to be intact, without a trace of decomposition.



## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### YOM KIPPUR

### FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

**I**t is written, “For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before the L-RD shall you be cleansed” (Leviticus 16:30). We may explain this verse by the following Talmudic passage: “It is written, ‘Seek the L-RD when He can be found’ [Isaiah 55:6], and furthermore, ‘whenever we call to Him’ [Deuteronomy 4:7], which appears to be contradictory. In reality, one case refers to an individual and the other refers to the community” (Yebamot 49b).

The Maggid of Dubno illustrates this for us with a parable:

One of the king’s provinces committed a serious offence against him, and he became outraged as a result. Even though the inhabitants of the province knew very well that the king was at his residence, far away from them, they hurried with trembling to assemble and send to the king a group of men who were wise, shrewd, and well respected in the king’s palace. They would neither be stopped nor slowed down by any guard before pleading their case to the king and obtaining forgiveness for the entire province. Now if a single man had committed an offence against the king (and moreover, if that man had been poor and without means), he definitely would not have had any hope, for how could he have presented himself to the king since the road to the palace was strewn with obstacles? And that goes without mentioning the fact that he wouldn’t have any hope of making the king yield! On the other hand, if it happens that the king comes to a town and proclaims that he will receive anyone who has a request to present to him, even a private individual will be able to summon the courage to do so, for in such a case there will be neither guards nor obstacles.

During the entire year, Hashem’s presence is found in Heaven and sometimes the doors of prayer are closed. In addition, there are guards there to prevent the penitent from presenting himself to pray, for an individual’s prayer and his repentance are far from perfect. This is not the case with a community, for it comprises people that Hashem considers as important by virtue of their Torah and their generosity. No obstacles will come and stop them, and their prayer will rise up and be appreciated by the King. Nevertheless, during the 10 days of Teshuvah – and even more so during that holy day in which Hashem makes His Presence rest among us and proclaims, “Return, children, to your Father in Heaven, and nothing will prevent you” – at that moment even the individual can return to Hashem.

The verse that states, “Return, Israel, unto the L-RD your G-d” (Hosea 14:2), is addressed to the individual, to whom it is said: Know that your days are numbered. It is only “unto the L-RD your G-d” – as long as He is found with you and desires your repentance, meaning during the 10 day of Teshuvah – “for you have stumbled in your iniquity” (ibid.). You have been tainted by your sins, to the point that you

can no longer be confident that you will repent and weep for your sins during the other days of the year, for you will be confronted with great barriers and obstacles. However to the community it is said, “Take words with you and return to the L-RD” (v.3), without giving them a time limit, for at any time of the year the community has the power to take words of supplication and good deeds and return to Hashem. Yet perhaps the righteous will be tempted to say, “We will only ask for ourselves, not of others.” Concerning this, it is written, “Say to Him, ‘May You forgive all iniquity and accept good’ ” (ibid.), which is to say that we are not to look with whom the sin lay, or with whom the good lay, for we are all like a single individual.

## THE STORY OF THE WEEK

### *A Lesson in Repentance*

An elderly Jew came to find the Tzaddik, Rav Issachar Dov the Admor of Belz, and said to him, “Rabbi, thank G-d I have had the merit to reach an advanced age. Yet though I lack nothing, I still worry about the sins of my youth. I have come to ask the Rabbi that they be forgiven.” The Tzaddik responded, “If you sincerely regret these sins, that constitutes their forgiveness.” The man then asked, “How much should I regret them? What degree of regret is sufficient in the eyes of the Rabbi?” He replied, “I will tell you a story and you will understand.”

“A great merchant hurried to arrive early at an immense trade fair being held in Leipzig, bringing with him several carts loaded with merchandise. It began to rain heavily that same day, and the downpour led the other merchants, who had not yet arrived in town, off course. Our merchant was already at the market, surrounded on all sides by numerous buyers. Since he was the only merchant there (nobody else having managed to get into town because of the strong rain), he could have asked any price for his products. Yet instead he told himself, ‘I’ll wait a few days until there’s still more buyers who will attend the market. I’m the only vendor here, and my merchandise is in great demand, so I’ll be able to earn even more than.’ Consequently, he refused to sell his products and rejected the buyers day after day. Time passed and no other merchant arrived in town, yet he who had been the first one there still refrained from selling. Then all of a sudden, in a single night, the rain stopped. By next morning the market was filled with merchants who had just arrived. In the wink of an eye, the price of goods dropped because there were so many vendors who wanted to sell all they had.”

The Tzaddik concluded by saying, “And now, imagine the sorrow and regret that filled the heart of the merchant who could have earned so much, yet instead lost everything in an instant. If the regret you feel for the follies of your youth is as great as the merchant’s, know that this itself constitutes forgiveness, and that you have nothing to worry about.”