

THE PATH TO FOLLOW



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TORAH STUDY IN EXILE (FROM RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "And Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 37:1). Rashi relates the statement of the Midrash on this: "Jacob wanted to settle down in peace. It was then that he was struck by the tragedy of Joseph" (Bereshith Rabba 84:1).

The following questions may be asked:

1. It is difficult to believe that Jacob could have made the mistake of wanting to live in peace, for in fact Jacob is described as "a wholesome man, abiding in tents" (Genesis 25:27), meaning "in the academy of Shem and Ever" (Bereshith Rabba 65:15). The word **תָּם** (wholesome) is formed by the same letters as **מָוֵת** (death), in the sense of labor, as it is written: "Only one who labors [literally "kills himself"] to learn Torah retains its teachings" (Shabbat 83b). Thus if Jacob "killed himself" in the house of study, without respite, how is it possible to say that he sought peace, and why would he be struck by such tragedy and punishment? How much more is this in question, since the Sages said of him, "Jacob grew old while in the house of study" (Yoma 28b)? Thus up to his old age, he never stopped studying Torah with devotion. How then can we say that he sought peace?

2. Is it possible to believe that Jacob desired peace in order to devote himself entirely to study? If such is the case, why would he be punished for wanting to study in tranquility, free from all worry?

The study of Torah consists of two things. The first is putting effort into study, as it is written: "If you follow My decrees" (Leviticus 26:3), which the Sages deduce as referring to laboring in study (Torat Kohanim ad loc.). The second is the pursuit of Torah study in exile, as the Sages say: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" (Perkei Avoth 4:14). The one who exiles himself in order to study elsewhere demonstrates just how precious the Torah is to him, for he has taken the trouble to go to such a point to study it. Actually, most students exile themselves in order to study, and they end up seeing the results because they retain what they have struggled to learn.

Jacob sinned by looking for peace at that time, for during his entire life he had exiled himself in the tents of Shem and

Ever. Commenting on the verse that states, "Jacob arrived whole at the city of Shechem" (Genesis 33:18), the Sages have said: "Whole in his body, in his possessions, and in his Torah" (Shabbat 33b). This shows that he exiled himself to a place of Torah in order to perfect his character and to progress spiritually. Yet now he desired to settle down in peace in the land of his father's sojournings, and to study Torah in peace and holiness there! Someone like Jacob should be a model of behavior for his children and all those who study Torah. In fact, Jacob is called the most perfect of the Patriarchs because he acquired the Torah through strenuous effort and withdrew himself to a place of Torah.

Jacob's desire to settle down in peace was a mistake, for his descendants would also want to settle down and study in comfort, and then the Torah's priority would be lost. Even if Jacob did not need to exile himself (for he knew how to dominate his evil inclination, and he would never have arrived at the point of abandoning the path of Torah), his children, descendants, and all the Jewish people would have sought tranquility and not put in the effort necessary to adhere to the Torah. Such is not the way of the Torah; it is not acquired in comfort, but rather through effort. As it is written, "This is the way [to acquire] Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation and toil in the Torah" (Perkei Avoth 6:4).

Joseph was exiled from his father Jacob's house for the same number of years as Jacob himself was absent, against his will, from his father Isaac's house (Megillah 17a). It was precisely by means of Joseph that Jacob was punished, for it was to Joseph that Jacob had transmitted the greater part of his wisdom (Bereshith Rabba 84:8), and everything that happened to Jacob also happened to Joseph (Bamidbar Rabba 14:16). Joseph was exiled precisely in order to fulfill the Torah in exile, a place where he was harshly tested. Joseph overcame these tests, and he attained a great spiritual state, as the Sages have said several times. Let us cite some of these.

(1) "Joseph had the merit of secretly sanctifying the Name of G-d in exile, and one of the letters in G-d's Name

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was added to his, as it is written: 'He appointed it as a testimony for Joseph when He went out over the land of Egypt' [Psalms 81:6]" (Mechilta Bo 12). In that passage of Psalms, Joseph's name is written with the extra letter *hei*.

(2) "Joseph will expose the sins of the wicked on that great day, for if someone wants to plead before the Celestial Court that 'I was bothered by temptations, I was too good looking,' he will be told 'Were you bothered more, or better looking than Joseph?' " (Yoma 35b).

Joseph's greatness is confirmed by the fact that Moses personally carried his remains out of Egypt (Sotah 9a). It is said, moreover, that "the 12 Tribes could have descended from him" (Sotah 36b), and "the descendants of Esau fall prey only to the descendants of Joseph" (Bava Batra 123b). In addition, Joseph "observed Shabbat before G-d gave this commandment" (Bereshith Rabba 92:4), as it is written: "Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work" (Genesis 39:11). Now this day was Shabbat, so what work did he need to do? Actually, "he entered the house to review what his father had taught him" (Yalkut Shimoni Vayeishev 146).

For having controlled this temptation, he attained the heights of perfection (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 817). How did he succeed? He exiled himself to a place of Torah where he studied day and night. He strived to understand Torah laws in order to practice them, and he had the merit of being emulated by future generations.

When we find ourselves in the presence of good people, their influence makes us inclined to behave properly and honestly. The true test occurs when we are far from a good environment and without support in withstanding temptation. In such cases, if we succeed in following the ways of Torah, we elevate ourselves to the highest degree and enjoy great prosperity. Thus exile has two advantages, one being that it accentuates the importance of Torah study (since we have exiled ourselves to study it), and the other being that in exile a man becomes accustomed to overcoming his evil inclination by himself because he has nobody to help him do so. There in exile, he strives to put into practice everything that he has learned while in his father's house or in yeshiva. If he performs the commandments in exile and keeps himself from yielding to temptation (like Joseph, who practiced what he learned from his father after having left home), he thereby proves himself. This is also the reason why Jacob was not punished physically or through his possessions for having wanted to study in peace, but rather in that Joseph was exiled to Egypt. This is because Jacob should have wanted his sons to exile themselves to a place of Torah, where they would be able to perfect their traits, not to stay at home where they would have been unable to perfect themselves as required.

We may now explain what the Sages have said, namely: "If a person sees that he is being assailed by troubles, he should review his conduct. If he has reviewed it and has not found a reason for his suffering, he should attribute his troubles to an abandonment of Torah study" (Berachot 5a). This is because all kinds of suffering result when we

abandon the Torah. Such abandonment "brings pestilence into the world and causes the death of young children" (Shabbat 32b, 33b). When we are afflicted with suffering, we must first of all check to see if we have not abandoned the path of Torah. If we have examined our deeds and concluded that we have not abandoned the Torah, there should be no reason to suspect that this suffering stems from a slackening in Torah study.

In such a case, suffering is caused neither by sins (since we have behaved corrected) nor by a lack of Torah study (since we have continued to study), but rather by the fact that we have not put enough effort into study and have not exiled ourselves to a place of Torah. It is in these things that we have "abandoned" the Torah.

When Jacob was stuck with the tragedy of Joseph, as well as by many other tragedies (Tanhuma Mikeitz 10), he examined his conduct and was able to note that he remained whole in his body, in his deeds, and in his Torah. The tragedy involving Joseph struck him because he did not exile himself to a place of Torah and did not send his children away to perfect themselves. This is why Joseph was exiled from his father's house.

If a man does not exile himself to a place of Torah, circumstances will bring him to exile, for without exile he will come to abandon the Torah (G-d forbid). We may add that in the time of the Patriarchs, the sparks of holiness that Adam rendered impure had still not been repaired, and it was the Patriarchs' task to effect such a repair. It was therefore necessary for Jacob to go down into Egypt to repair these sparks of holiness and to restore them to their supernal source (Ohr HaChayim Bereshith 49:9, among others). If Jacob had stayed in the land of Canaan and studied in peace, these sparks of holiness would have remained scattered in Egypt. It was only after repairing them – after chasing the reign of evil from this world – that Jacob could settle down in peace. These sparks still remained in Egypt, and Joseph went down into that land before Jacob to start effecting this repair. Thus Jacob and all his family could then go down into Egypt to carry out the work of repairing the sparks of holiness, as it is written: "Like a rose among thorns, Israel in Egypt was to blossom and make the sparks blossom, to make the flowers bloom, and to restore them to their source" (Zohar II:189b). It is only through exile, meaning by the pain of finding oneself in a land which is not one's own, that a person can refine his character traits and attain perfection. How? Solely by exiling himself to a place where he is not known, and there to elevate himself in acquiring Torah in 48 ways (Perkei Avoth 6:5[6]), studying Torah through toil and thus correcting himself and bringing the entire world to yield to G-d's sovereignty. Amen.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

RABBI ARYEH LEIB GINSBURG, AUTHOR OF SHAAGAT ARYEH

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginsburg was like his name (*aryeh* means "lion"). He had a large head like a lion, eyes bright like glowing embers, and his hair was long and scattered. His appearance aroused fear and respect.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib was born around 5455 (1695) in the region of Minsk. At first he was the Rav and Rosh Yeshiva of Minsk, but by nature he was a man of truth. He had firmly set ideas, and he did not try to win the support of community leaders, which is why he was forced to leave the city.

Some time afterwards, he was named Rav of Volozhin. There he directed the yeshiva and had many students. However Rabbi Aryeh Leib lived poorly in Volozhin. His entire salary amounted to very little, and his wife had to work in a bakery kneading dough in order to earn a loaf of bread as her pay. The Rav had only one suit that he wore on Shabbat as well as on the week.

One day, he asked the leaders of the community for a small raise. They sat down to discuss it, but they found no reason to increase his pay. He then became angry and left Volozhin.

Difficult times began for Rabbi Aryeh Leib, who wrote the book entitled *Shaagat Aryeh*. He began a period of self-imposed exile, going from town to town like a poor beggar, and carrying a sack upon his shoulder that contained his Tallit, Tefillin, and a book by the Rambam.

What follows are accounts of this period in Rabbi Aryeh Leib's life.

A villager once had pity on him and gave him a place to sleep in his attic for a few weeks. One night after a meager dinner, Rabbi Aryeh Leib was studying Torah by the light of a tiny oil lamp, while his wife was sitting by a warm stove knitting socks. All of a sudden he began to cry bitterly. "Leib, why are you crying?" his wife asked. "Look at how comfortable we are," he said, "here in this warm home, with me studying Torah by the light of a lamp while you are sitting by a warm stove knitting socks. Who knows if now we're not using up our share in the World to Come while in this world?" He then continued to cry.

He usually acted in the following way: Wherever he traveled, he stayed at the "inn" of the poor to spend the night there. Once during the course of his numerous wanderings, he arrived in the town of Breslau in Germany, whose Rav was Rabbi Yechaya Berlin. He went directly to the Rav's home, entered the kitchen, and gave the Rebbetzin a pan and some barley in which to cook it for him. Rabbi Aryeh Leib was very strict when it came to the prohibition concerning *Chadash* (the new harvest), which is why he only ate barely. The Rebbetzin was not used to such a guest, so she immediately spoke to her husband concerning this strange visitor. Rabbi Yechaya came to meet him, and a simple look was enough to tell him that this was not an ordinary man. He began to discuss Torah with him, and from what he said, Rabbi Yechaya Berlin realized that he was speaking to the Gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leib. Before leaving town, Rabbi Aryeh Leib addressed himself to him and said, "I am surprised to see a Rav who lives in wealth and honor, yet who knows how to study nevertheless. This is one of the wonders that I have been allowed to see during my life."

Meanwhile, he published his book *Shaagat Aryeh*, which accorded him great renown and revealed him to be one whose insight and intelligence were without equal in his generation.

Once, the author of *Shaagat Aryeh* was in Koenigsberg, whose Rav was Rabbi Aryeh Leib Epstein (the author of *HaPardes*). Without revealing his identity, he went to the Rav's home and began to discuss Torah with him.

He dominated the discussion, and so the author of *HaPardes* went to his library and took out the book *Shaagat Aryeh* to prove one of his points. Rabbi Aryeh Leib smiled and said, "The Rav knows my book, but he doesn't know its author." Rav Epstein looked at his guest and trembled. He saw before him a man with the head of a lion and eyes of glowing coals, and he realized that he was speaking to the Shaagat Aryeh himself. He asked for forgiveness in not having welcomed him in an appropriate manner, and he prepared a special room in his home for him. Rav Epstein enjoyed every day that he spent with him discussing Torah.

At around that time, the people of Metz had offered a contract to Rav Epstein to be their Rav. Rav Epstein took this contract and gave it to the Shaagat Aryeh, which is how he became the Rav of Metz at the age of 70.

The people of Metz were very happy to merit having such a great Rav, but their joy was not complete because he was 70 years old at the time. Sensing that their joy was mixed with sadness, the Shaagat Aryeh spoke to them and said, "The days of my life have been miserable. I have been harassed and I have lived a life of wandering, which is why I have become old before my time. Yet I promise you that, G-d willing, I will remain with you as your Rav for at least 20 more years." His promise was fulfilled, and he remained the Rav of the noble town of Metz for 20 years. The great lion found tranquility there. He studied Torah day and night in holiness and purity. He did not sleep in a bed and consumed no animal products except on Shabbat and during holidays.

He lost his sight when he became very old, and so he studied Torah by heart. His disciple, Rabbi Gedaliah Rothenburg, wrote out his commentaries and published them in a book entitled *Turei Even*. He also published the book *Gevurat Ari* in the same way.

When the book *Shaagat Aryeh* was first published, it was filled with abbreviations because the author was poor at the time and did not have enough money to purchase more paper. He therefore wrote as much as he could using abbreviations. Later on, publishers reprinted it and explained all the shorthand notation, making it easier to read. From his work, it emerges that he bases his Halachic decisions on his own conclusions drawn from the Gemara and the Commentators, without taking into account the opinions of other Poskim. Furthermore, according to the Vilna Gaon he was capable of going through the entire Talmud in only an hour to find a proof that he was looking for.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib died at an advanced age on Tammuz 25, 5545 (1785) at the age of 90. Legend has it, however, that he did not die of old age, but because of the following incident:

One day he was alone in the Beit Midrash where he was studying. At one point he wanted to refer to a book, and so he went towards the library to take it off the shelf. However the shelf and its entire contents of books fell upon him. When it was finally raised off, he said with a smile: "All the books that I was not in agreement with, and whose words I rejected, fell on me. And while I was buried under these books, I made peace with them. Yet Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, the author of *Levushim*, did not want to forgive me, and it is because of him that I am now leaving this world." At that moment, he passed away.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, "And he said, 'What pledge shall I give you?' She replied, 'Your signet, your wrap, and your staff that is in your hand'" (Genesis 38:18).

Judah's question shows that he did not think that he had anything with which to give as a pledge, and that Tamar believed that his signet and wrap would suffice. Why did Judah not give them to her right away? The rest of the passage also raises some questions: "Judah sent the kid of the goats through his friend the Adullamite to retrieve the pledge from the woman, but he did not find her. ... So he returned to Judah and said, 'I did not find her.' ... So Judah said, 'Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I really sent her this kid, but you could not find her'" (vv.20-23). This last sentence seems completely unnecessary.

The Midrash allows us to easily understand what this was all about: "His signet and his wrap – this is the Tallit that he enraptured himself in and the Tefillin that he carried on his head."

Let us try to understand what happened with the following explanation:

When we give something as a pledge for a loan, in order for the pledge to guarantee the loan, it must have a value greater than what has been loaned, for in this way the lender is assured that the borrower will come back and get it. Yet it may happen that the lender will accept a pledge that is less valuable than the loan itself, if it is something that the borrower cannot go without for a long time, such as his seal or the keys to his shop. Even though such things do not have a market value in and of themselves, they constitute an acceptable pledge because the lender is certain that they cannot be left with him for long. The difference between these two types of pledges is that if the borrower cannot reimburse his loan and realizes that he has forfeited his pledge, if the pledge has an objective market value, the borrower alone loses but the lender wins. Yet if the pledge is a personal item with no objective market value, both the borrower and the lender lose out, for the pledge is essential to the former and completely useless to the latter.

Judah thought that Tamar was interested in a pledge that was worth at least as much as the price of a kid. Now he had no such thing on him, which is why he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" (Genesis 38:18). She then responded, "Your signet, your wrap, and your staff that is in your hand" (ibid.). As the Midrash explains, this consisted of his Tallit and Tefillin, for she knew very well that Judah cared for them like his very life and would certainly not let her keep them. This is why, when afterwards he sent a kid to Tamar but she could not be found, Judah preferred to "let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock" (v. 23). It was better to lose big than to expose himself as a laughingstock to witnesses if he undertook a more thorough investigation. Besides that, however, he was worried about Tamar, who also lost what was owing to her because the pledge that she possessed was useless to her. This is why he added, "I really sent her this kid, but you could not find her" (ibid.).

THE STORY OF THE WEEK WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO COUNT ON MIRACLES

During the time of Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin, there were many rebels in Israel. The *Maskilim* (followers of the Enlightenment Movement) raised their heads and introduced streams of thought into Judaism that were foreign to it, and these ideas began to appear in Jewish life. In the face of this danger, Rabbi Yitzchak attempted to try different methods to head off damage. Yet those who were fanatically opposed to change and professed orthodoxy were against him.

Filled with bitterness, Rabbi Yitzchak gave the following speech:

"At the end of Tractate Sotah, the Mishnah says that according to Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, since the destruction of the Temple, the rabbanim are embarrassed and ashamed, men of good deeds have lost their authority, nobody cares about Israel or takes up their cause, and we can rely on nobody but our Father in Heaven. We also find the following text in Tractate Sotah: 'Near the time of Mashiach, insolence will reign ... we can rely on nobody but our Father in Heaven.' We should be surprised at this. Why does the Mishnah come back to the same phrase ('we can rely on nobody but our Father in Heaven') more than once? It should have cited it once at the end of the entire passage! The reason for this repetition is that preceding the arrival of Mashiach, this phrase itself will be one of the negative manifestations of that generation. Instead of taking measures against the deterioration of their spiritual environment, people will say, 'It is better to fold our hands and do nothing, for we can rely on nobody but our Father in Heaven.'"

What Man Has More

One of the great men of Jerusalem noticed his luck changing for the worse, and he was struck by many ills. Life became bitter for him, for there was almost nothing wrong that *didn't* happen to him. Yet despite everything, he was always smiling and his face was pleasant looking, as if he was living the happiest life in the world. When he was asked to explain his good mood, he answered with a smile: "It is written in Torah, 'A donkey bends under its burden, but a man does not bend under his.'"

– Chad VeChalak