

THE PATH TO FOLLOW



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HUMILITY AND CONFESSING OUR SINS IS WORTHY OF PRAISE

(FROM RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "And he [Jacob] sent Judah before him to Joseph, to show the way before him to Goshen" (Genesis 46:28). The Midrash states that this was "in order to prepare a house of study from which Torah teachings would emanate" (Bereshith Rabba 95:3).

The following questions may be raised:

1. Why did Jacob send Judah rather than another of his children to set up a house of study? It is written, "To learn Torah, a man should see himself as a bull that carries a yoke or like a donkey that carries a load" (Avodah Zarah 5b). Issachar is compared to a "strong-boned donkey" (Genesis 49:14) and "the children of Issachar [are] men with understanding for the times, to know what Israel should do" (I Chronicles 12:33). If such is the case, Jacob could have sent Issachar first. Furthermore, if we want to say that he sent Judah because he had precedence with respect to the kingship (Bereshith Rabba 92:5), and that Judah alone was capable of preparing a house of study for the dissemination of Torah, we should realize that it was not necessary to send someone with the qualities of a king for this specific task. Any son could have fulfilled this mission.

2. We also need to understand why Jacob had to send someone before him to set up a house of study. Apparently, he could have waited until coming to Egypt himself before deciding where the best place to build a yeshiva would be. In such a case, he could have benefited from even greater Heavenly assistance, since G-d specifically promised him: "I shall descend with you to Egypt" (Genesis 46:4). With G-d's help, he could have easily found a place for his yeshiva, even more so since the Sages have said, "During their entire lives the Patriarchs did not stop studying, even when they were in Egypt" (Yoma 28b).

The basis and foundation for acquiring Torah is to realize that if we want to gain wisdom, we must lower and humble ourselves. The Sages say, "Torah is compared

to water. In the same way that water flows from a higher place to a lower one, so too is Torah only acquired by one who lowers himself" (Taanith 7a), meaning that it abandons haughty and arrogant people and remains only with those who are modest and humble. The Torah is figuratively called water (Bava Kama 17a), as it is written: "Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water" (Isaiah 55:1). We have seen that Moses our teacher received the Torah because he was extremely humble (Numbers 12:3), and Mount Sinai had the merit of being chosen for the giving of the Torah precisely because it is a low mountain (Sotah 5a).

Why is the Torah acquired only in humility? When a modest person sees that he has sinned with respect to a particular law or teaching, he is capable of immediately recognizing his sin. He is not ashamed by his lack of knowledge, and with G-d's help he progresses in his Torah study. It is only by admitting his sins that he can rectify them, and his views that were at first erroneous will later allow him to deeply probe the words of the living G-d. It is only by recognizing his sins that he is capable of correcting them, not repeating them again, and sanctifying G-d's Name in public. One of the 48 ways in which a person acquires Torahs is by "knowing his place" (Perkei Avoth 6:6), meaning to recognize his sins. The Sages say, "A person only grasps a Torah concept after having erred in it" (Gittin 43a), and acknowledging errant ways guarantees success.

It is nevertheless very difficult for a person to acknowledge his sins. If this person is a teacher, admitting in public that he has erred is incomparably harder still. If he does not acknowledge it, "his advantage is cancelled by his disadvantage" (Perkei Avoth 5:12), however if he pays no heed to his personal feelings and admits the mistake he committed in his study, his reward will be great in this world and the World to Come. The greatness and importance of the School of Hillel lay in

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the fact that they first taught the opinion of the School of Shammai, and only afterwards did they teach their own opinion (Eruvin 13b). We also find in the Talmud a discussion concerning the status of a person who is half-slave, half-free (Hagigah 2b). The School of Hillel retracted its own opinion and taught the law according to the School of Shammai's decision, something that shows us that they behaved with extreme humility. For having done so, the Sages say: "The law goes according to the decision of the School of Hillel, not according to the School of Shammai" (Eruvin 6b). Besides this, we know that Hillel himself was a descendant of Judah.

Judah possessed this trait of "acknowledging his sins without shame" (Sotah 7b), especially after Joseph's rebukes. This is why he was sent beforehand to look for an appropriate place to set up a yeshiva where students would acknowledge all their sins and not be ashamed to have their opinions scrutinized. This would allow them to attain a level of perfection in the study and practice of the commandments, similar to Judah, who admitted his sins without shame and retained the teachings of the Torah.

It is possible to say that this is precisely the sense of the verse: "He sent Judah before him to Joseph," meaning that each Jew, a descendant of Jacob, should feel that there is always someone "before him" in yeshiva, one who is greater than him. The one who learns Torah or teaches it, who acknowledges "his sins without shame," and who knows that others are greater than himself, acquires Torah and puts it into practice with all humility. This is an eternal teaching from our holy Patriarchs.

We must add that by Jacob having sent Judah before him to Egypt, we learn an essential principle for a person's spiritual well-being, wherever he may be. When someone wants to live in a certain town or country, he should first of all make an effort to see if there is a place of Torah, a mikveh, and a religious school in that town or country. He should not settle down first and then try to find a place of Torah, for before actually finding a place of Torah to quench his soul (which thirsts for spirituality), he risks falling prey to multiple temptations. A place lacking a synagogue and house of study is no doubt without the Divine Presence, for the Divine Presence abides only in a holy place (see Perkei Avoth 3:6).

A person puts himself in great danger by living in an area devoid of Torah study. This is why, even before going there, a man should determine whether the Divine Presence is found there, and only then should he go. As for children's education, if that place has no Jewish school, the situation is even worse. Rabbi Yosai ben Kisma said, "I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah" (Perkei Avoth 6:9). We learn from Jacob that a man should first concern himself with his spiritual life,

and only then should he worry about his material needs. Before leaving for the land of Goshen, which was the most fertile of lands in Egypt – as it is written, "I will give you the best of the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:18), and we know that this refers to Goshen – Jacob first concerned himself with setting up a place for Torah where he would immediately be able to go. If he were to have looked for a place of study once he got there, several days would have passed, perhaps even months, and it is wrong to waste even a single moment. Moreover, that would have put Jacob's descendants in danger of coming to a prosperous and pleasant area that was devoid of Torah, an area where they would partake of the good things of the earth, and this could have had a negative influence on them. As the Sages said, "The wine of Perogaisa and the waters of Diomisis were the ruin of the Ten Tribes" (Shabbat 147b), for they were led astray by the pleasures of this world.

We know that "if you encounter that scoundrel [the evil inclination], drag him to the house of study" (Sukkah 52b). Yet for this to happen, we must live in an area where there are houses of study to which we can drag the evil inclination and subjugate it. Jacob feared for his children in Egypt, a land of immorality and perverted individuals (Shemot Rabba 1:22). He feared that some of them would be swept away by the evil inclination.

Today there are people who are concerned first and foremost with a beautiful, spacious home. They care primarily about living in a place where the air is clean and pure, even if no mikveh or house of study is found nearby. It is impossible to describe the danger that this represents, for when entrapped by the evil inclination, that detestable scoundrel, to where can they escape?

Even during vacation time, a period when we travel to areas of rest and relaxation, we must try to spend them in towns where there are houses of study, and to set ourselves six times for Torah study. Rabbi Elazar ben Aruch, who went to Perogaisa and Diomisis and allowed himself to be seduced by its wine and waters, ended up forgetting what he had learned (Shabbat 147b). It is certain that by going to a place of Torah, we can conquer the evil inclination.

What is the right path to follow?

The Torah is acquired by humility, which is why one should learn how to appreciate a person who is greater than himself, and to acknowledge his own sins. Similarly, wherever we decide to live, we must make certain that a place of Torah study exists there, and that we live in a place filled with holiness. Even when on vacation, we must look for a town with a place of Torah study, one that we can go to and subjugate the evil inclination, that scoundrel, and conquer him at all times.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

RABBI TZVI HIRSCH LEVIN, THE RAV OF BERLIN

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Levin, author of Tzvi L'Tzaddik, was one of the greatest scholars of his generation. He was endowed with a sharp mind and understood things very quickly. He succeeded in responding to the objections of the Maskilim, who wanted to destroy all Jewish tradition. Providence placed on him the responsibility of leading the Torah's fight against all kinds of atheists and ungodly people whose activities then raged in the city of Berlin.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch was born in 1721 in Rzeszow, a small town in Poland. From his childhood, his lively mind and shining character were quickly recognized. Once on Rosh Hashanah, before the blowing of the shofar, his father found him sitting down and eating.

"Hirscheleh," his father said, "don't you realize that it's forbidden to eat before the Tekiot?"

"I know father, I know," the boy immediately replied. "But since the mitzvah of sounding the shofar has the main goal of bothering the Satan so that he doesn't begin to accuse, I myself wanted to bother him. The Satan definitely knows that it is forbidden to eat before the Tekiot, and when he sees me eating he will tell himself, 'Surely the Jews have already blown the shofar' and he will not start accusing." The boy was only four years old at the time.

Still very young, he became known throughout the entire region as a young genius. A rich widow heard of him, and gave her daughter to him in marriage. She provided her with a nice dowry and promised to take care of her so that Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch could study Torah in peace. After the wedding, he began to study in the town of Gluna, a place where he also taught.

Several years later, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch's mother-in-law passed away, leaving the family without financial support, and with three children already. His wife did everything possible so that he could continue to study. She sold her jewelry and silver cutlery, and she exchanged her silver candlesticks for copper ones.

Upon returning from the Beit Midrash once, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch found his wife in tears. When he asked her, "Why are you crying?" she replied, "I've already sold everything in the house. All that's left is a small spoon, which if sold will allow us to have breakfast." Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch told her, "Sell the small spoon as well, and after eating we will think of what to do." That same day, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch received a letter from London offering him the position of Rav. His wife burst out in joy, thanked G-d, and called her children over to kiss their father, who was as great in faith as he was in Torah. Yet Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch himself saw no reason to rejoice over such a position. He interpreted the passage "Love work and hate the rabbinate" to mean: Love the work of the rabbinate and Torah study, and hate those things in the rabbinate that cause Torah study to be neglected.

In London, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch was satisfied insofar as he earned a good living, yet nobody wanted to study with him,

and he found nobody to teach. This is why he did not delay in moving to Halberstadt, where the Jewish community invited him to become their Rav. The leaders of the London Jewish community tried their best to get him to stay, telling him: "Compared to London, Halberstadt is like a dwarf compared to a giant. The town of Halberstadt is small and poor, whereas the Jewish community of London is large and rich. Many Jews come and go (ovrim ve'shavim) through London for their business, and they also contribute to the Rav's salary."

"Yes," Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch responded, "in London there are actually many sinners (ovrim), and those who repent (shavim) are far too few!"

His wife's supplications were useless as well, and he went to settle in Halberstadt. There his star rose and began to shine. Many students gathered around him in the large yeshiva that he founded there, and those who studied in the town were happy at his presence, and he at theirs. Despite everything, however, he remained the Rav of Halberstadt for only five years, and from there he went to Manheim to replace his friend Rabbi Shemuel Hillman.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch became famous in Manheim. Even non-Jews recognized him as being a wise and intelligent Rav, and the Duke of Manheim greatly respected him. He once asked the Rav, "Is it not written in the Torah that your G-d is a jealous and vengeful G-d, whereas ours is one of love and goodness?" The Rav replied, "I am in complete agreement: Our G-d took jealousy and vengeance upon Himself, and He left us love and forgiveness, whereas yours took love and forgiveness, and gave you jealousy and vengeance."

In 5532 (1772), Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch was appointed as Rav of Berlin, which at the time had a very large Jewish community and was respected for its great number of scholars. With great pomp Berlin welcomed its new Rav, whose name was known the world over.

However Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch did not find the tranquility he sought. Reform Jews, who were numerous in Berlin at that time, rose up against him, and he faced them head on. Without regard for anyone in particular, he spoke harshly to the community's rich and the Maskilim, and more than once, when he was overtaken by feelings for the good times that he had enjoyed as Rav of other communities, he said: "In London I had money but no Jews, in Halberstadt and Manheim I had Jews but no money, and in Berlin I have neither one nor the other!"

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch began to feel constricted in Berlin, which is why he eventually left the city. He waited until having actually departed before sending a letter to leaders in Berlin informing them of his decision. This departure made waves throughout the city, and the community did everything they could to make him come back as their great Rav, the last Av Beit Din of Berlin. In fact he did return, and he carried the yoke of Torah and public service until the day of his death, Elul 4, 5560 (1800).

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. ... Thus G-d has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d” (Genesis 45:5-8).

These verses seem to contain some unnecessary remarks, yet ones that can be explained by examining the general structure of the text.

A parable will suffice to help us understand:

A prince possessed a diamond of great value. However a small defect, a slight scratch, appeared on its surface. He asked the most expert diamond cutters in his kingdom if they could fix it, but they were of the opinion that whatever was done, the scratch would remain. One day, however, a renowned jeweler arrived and gave the following advice to the prince: “However valuable this diamond may now be, it can become a thousand times more valuable and assure your renown. If I engrave on the diamond a very fine branch with buds and flowers, using as my starting point the scratch that troubles you, I can transform the scratch into a main stem from which all else blossoms.” Thus the diamond’s small defect actually ended up doubling its value, for once it was worked on and modified, it became even more precious and rare.

We find this very same process occurring in the story of David and Bathsheba. The Gemara affirms that “King David was not at the level of committing such an act, but it happened to him so that he could teach the individual how to repent” (Avodah Zarah 2).

Hashem therefore deliberately incited the entire incident in order that David would be the one who teaches the individual how to repent. Not only did that not diminish him, but he was made greater still, since in showing the way for those who want to return to G-d, his deed became the source of tremendous good for all humanity. Not content in being forgiven, in the verse that states “Display for me a sign for good” (Psalms 87:17), David also asked that the good which his deed contained be publicly revealed, and that everyone realize that it was meant to teach the individual how to repent.

Along the same line of thought, Hashem used the sale of Joseph by his brothers as a pretext to bring Jacob and his entire family down to Egypt. This is the meaning of Joseph’s remarks: “And now, be not distressed, nor

reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. ... Thus G-d has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance” (Genesis 45:5-7). He did not want them to feel, deep down, that this entire incident constituted an evil deed that had been rectified, in which case the beginning of the incident would have been entirely evil. He wanted them to realize that the Holy One, blessed be He, used this incident to bring about good. This is why he added, “And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d” (v.8). In other words: Since now everyone can discern what your deed led to, it is unquestionable and obvious that Hashem, not you, was the sole and unique cause behind all this.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK BECAUSE OF A SINGLE MEAL

The author of Divrei Yoel, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum Zatzal, the first Satmar Rav, was extremely intelligent. He possessed a marvelous combination of finesse and peacefulness, joy and cheer, and he was a genius in all fields of Torah, which is why his remarks are particularly relevant.

He once saw a Jew who was eating in a place whose kashrut was questionable. The latter was ashamed upon seeing the Rav, but he soon calmed down and said, “This is only a chance occurrence, since I was hungry. It’s not so bad – I always eat kosher food – and I observe all the laws of Shabbat. I pray, and I also attend Torah classes. So it’s not so terrible if I eat a small meal here once.” The Rav smiled upon hearing the words of this man, who had already “arranged” that his sins should be forgiven, and he said to him, “Listen my son. Our Sages say that when Moses ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, the angels became jealous of him and wanted to prevent the Torah from descending to earth. They wanted it to remain with them in Heaven, and they wanted to fulfill it spiritually, to the depths of its intentions and secrets. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He gave Moses the features of our father Abraham and said to the angels, ‘Look at him. Did you not stay with him? Did you not eat meat and milk with him, as it is said: “And he took butter and milk, and the calf that he had prepared, and placed it before them, and he was standing by them under the tree, and they ate” [Genesis 18:8]? Now the Torah forbids eating milk and meat together! It is true that he mistook you for Arabs that prostrate themselves before the dust of their feet, and that Arabs have the right to eat forbidden food. Yet you – angels who want to observe the Torah and keep it in your possession – how could you have eaten something forbidden?’ The angels were ashamed and could not reply, and so the Torah was taken from them and given to Israel. That is what the Midrash says. What did the Sages want to teach us by this? It was that because of a single non-kosher meal, a man risks losing the entire Torah!”