

# וְהָיָה לְךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE L-RD

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)*

**I**t is written, “Moses stretched forth his hand toward the heavens, and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period” (Exodus 10:22).

The Midrash comments as follows: “Blessed be the Name of the Alm-ghty, Who is completely impartial and probes all hearts. Seeing sinners in the midst of the Children of Israel benefiting from the plague and in no way wanting to abandon riches and honors by leaving Egypt, He said, ‘If I strike them in public, the Egyptians will say, “They suffered as we did.”’ This is why He plunged Egypt into darkness for three days. The Children of Israel could thus bury their dead without being seen by their enemies, and they could praise G-d” (Shemot Rabba 14:3). It was during these three days that four fifths of the Children of Israel died.

The plague of darkness aimed primarily at punishing those among the Children of Israel who did not want to leave Egypt. The plague also allowed them to see where the Egyptians hid their treasures (Shemot Rabba 14:3), so that they would be unable to conceal anything when the Children of Israel went to ask them for their possessions. Finally, the plague aimed at bringing the Children of Israel to repentance, for they had witnessed the death of their wicked brothers. The plague therefore did not seek to affect Pharaoh or Egypt, as we have already seen. (The Baal HaTurim writes, however, that the plague of the firstborn is not included among the signs that G-d said He would display to Pharaoh in Exodus 10:1, since the verse “You have not heeded up to now” [Exodus 7:16] already alludes to the plague of the firstborn).

Nevertheless, other questions remain unresolved:

1. How can we imagine that the Children of Israel, greatly enslaved with work, could have continued to trust the Egyptians who spoke to them with a peh rach (“soft mouth,” i.e., pleasant words), to the point of wanting to lengthen their stay with them? Since it was because of them that the Egyptians had ceased to

be a world power, did they not fear that the Egyptians would take revenge on them?

2. Was it not a Divine commandment to leave Egypt in order to receive the Torah and travel to the Holy Land? How could some of the Children of Israel, who in addition witnessed so many miracles that Hashem had performed for them – who saw His awesome power and His mighty hand – dare not carry out such a commandment?

3. The Children of Israel seem to contradict themselves. In the beginning they implored G-d to free them from slavery: “The Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d” (Exodus 2:23), and even their babies were slaughtered so that Pharaoh could bathe in their blood (Shemot Rabba 1:34). Yet even after all this suffering, when after having heard their cries G-d sent His deliverance in the person of Moses, how can we imagine that despite all their gratitude, there still remained among them some who wanted to stay in that land of slavery? Let us recall the passage: “And the people believed, and they heard that the L-RD had remembered the Children of Israel and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves” (Exodus 4:31).

4. After having seen that the Egyptians had remained frozen in place during the plague of darkness (Shemot Rabba 14:3), whereas “for all the Children of Israel there was light in their dwellings” (Exodus 10:23), and after having seen that four fifths of their brothers had died before them, how could the Children of Israel not have desired to immediately do Teshuvah? Did they want to breach the fiftieth gate of impurity?

5. The Midrash relates the following: “Rabbi Yossi said that the plague of locusts gave the Egyptians great hope, for they said to themselves, ‘Let us fill up our pots and bowls with them.’ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, ‘Evildoers! Is the plague that I inflicted upon you not enough?’ Then ‘The

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L-RD turned back a very powerful west wind, and it carried the locust swarm and hurled it toward the Sea of Reeds. Not a single locust remained within the entire border of Egypt' [Exodus 10:19], and even the locusts they had salted disappeared" (Shemot Rabba 13:6). How can we imagine, asks the author of Nachalat Eliezer, that the Egyptians – suffering through the eighth plague – did not comprehend that the locusts could only be harmful to them? Is such a mistaken belief possible? Furthermore, knowing that the Egyptians wanted to salt the locusts and benefit from them, why did G-d inflict this plague on them?

6. Before the plague of locusts, Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron: "So be the L-RD with you as I will send you forth with your children! Look – the evil intent is opposite your faces" (Exodus 10:10). Was Pharaoh a prophet that he could say such things to Moses and Aaron, and why did Moses keep quiet? Did he agree with Pharaoh concerning what he said? Another question: Why did Pharaoh say this precisely before the plague of locusts? Did anything bad happen to the Children of Israel following this warning of Pharaoh?

7. Contrary to all the tactics of warfare that the nations used, why did the Egyptians carry all their wealth with them when they pursued the Children of Israel? The result was that the spoils at the Sea of Reeds were greater than that of Egypt (Tanhuma Bo 8).

The reason for this is because at every moment of our lives, we must recall the miracles that Hashem performed for us: "You shall know that I am the L-RD your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt" (Exodus 6:7). Actually, given all the difficulties that a man endures in life, he is capable of forgetting his role and goal in this world, and he may even forget his Creator. If a man prospers in his business, he may demonstrate his ingratitude by saying, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17). He will then no longer acknowledge that everything comes from G-d.

The awareness that everything comes from G-d is not built into man. G-d certainly did not create man so that he could indulge himself in the "delights" of this world. Man was created in order to acknowledge, praise, and serve G-d. Thus before praying that his body be completely imbued with Torah, a man should pray that the desire for these "delights" not invade his mind (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba; Tosaphot Ketubot 104a: Lo neheneti).

The Torah constantly reminds a person of the exodus from Egypt in order to develop the virtue of gratitude in him. The goal of this is to prevent a person from behaving as the Children of Israel did, who after having implored G-d to liberate them from the yoke of slavery, refused in the end to leave the land where they had amassed great wealth. They were not sufficiently aware of the fact that it was Hashem Who was their Redeemer, and that all their possessions came solely from Him.

G-d wanted to enrich the Children of Israel in order for them to realize that everything comes from Him, and in order for them to serve Him in prosperity. That is what Moses said to Pharaoh: "... for from it shall we take to serve the L-RD our G-d, and we will not know with what we are to serve the L-RD until our arrival there" (Exodus 10:26). The goal of all wealth is to serve Hashem, and we should not take anything for ourselves, for we are unaware of what G-d requires of us. Perhaps He will "ask of us more than we have in our possession" (Rashi ad loc.).

The phrase, "And you shall know that I am the L-RD" (Exodus 6:7; 10:2, etc.) constantly appears in order to remind the Children of Israel that they benefited from each of the plagues inflicted on Egypt (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayera 182) and that everything comes from G-d, hence they should constantly demonstrate their gratitude to Him. Each of the plagues was to bring about an additional awakening in them and make them aware of His unlimited power. If G-d did not kill the Egyptians in one fell swoop, but rather inflicted ten consecutive plagues on them, it was in order to bring the Children of Israel to a greater level of belief and realization that would enable them to receive the Torah.

However to many of the Children of Israel, all these wonders appeared like a recipe for wealth. Thus blinded by their mercantile gains, they preferred to stay in Egypt rather than to conform to G-d's will.

If the Egyptians had returned to the right path, the plague of locusts would have turned into a blessing for them, and they would have been able to live from this "plague" for many years. They could have acknowledged Hashem, even though they were so far from Him. G-d awaited their Teshuvah, yet when it did not come "the L-RD turned back a very powerful west wind" (Exodus 10:19).

From that plague, the Children of Israel should have drawn the lesson that everything is for the good, and that every ill has its remedy. The plague of locusts could have been a source of plenty, and it was destined to make the Children of Israel recognize G-d's sublime Name. Hashem dispersed the Egyptians' joy and hardened their hearts because they refused to acknowledge His power. He made both the living as well as the salted locusts disappear, the latter of which Pharaoh sought to keep (see Keli Yakar, Exodus 10:17). In the same way, all the wealth of the Children of Israel was in danger of evaporating if they did not do Teshuvah. If they desired to stay in Egypt contrary to G-d's will, it was because all their wealth had been gained illegally and they did not merit it as much as its original owners. Thus instead of praising Hashem and expressing their gratitude to Him, some of the Children of Israel were blinded by their acquisitions. Instead of marveling at the many miracles that G-d performed for them, they considered them as natural events which they were already used to.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

# RABBI MOSHE SOFER – THE CHATAM SOFER

**R**abbeinu Moshe Sofer, better known by the name Chatam Sofer (from the title of his book, taken from the words Chiddushei Torah Moshe Sofer), was among the Gaonim and Tzaddikim loved by all people and whose name is considered as holy.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer was born on Tishri 7, 5524 (September 14, 1763) in Frankfurt-am-Main in Germany. His father, Rabbi Shemuel, was a man filled with wisdom and the fear of G-d, and he became known for his work as a scribe. This was a family profession, hence the name Sofer (“scribe” in Hebrew). Rabbi Moshe’s mother was known in town as Reisel the Tzaddiket because of her many acts of charity.

What follows is the story of Rabbi Moshe Sofer’s birth: For twenty years, Rabbi Shemuel and his wife Reisel were unable to have children, and they both multiplied their prayers, fasts, and gifts to Tzedakah. At the end of these twenty years, Reisel conceived and gave birth to a boy. She felt the birth approaching on the day before Shabbat Teshuvah, around nighttime, and she was very much afraid of profaning Shabbat because of it. She sent for the Rav of the town, Rabbi Avraham Abush, and asked him to help her by ordering that they wait until she give birth before welcoming Shabbat in Synagogue, for normally Shabbat was received very early. Accepting her request, the Rav said, “It is certain that the child who will emerge from this Tzaddiket will be among the great men of Israel.” That child, of course, was Rabbi Moshe Sofer.

At the age of nine he began to study with one of the greats of his time, the Gaon and Chassid Rabbi Nathan Adler of Frankfurt-am-Main. Even though he learned Torah from other great rabbanim, Rabbi Moshe Sofer always considered Rabbi Nathan as his principle teacher. He ate and slept by the Rav’s, learning not only Torah from him, but also how to conduct himself.

In his old age he described to his students the dedication he had for his teacher: “I was a faithful disciple of my teacher. I cut wood and drew water for him. And that is what supported me. Serving the Torah is more important than studying it.”

He also told his disciples the following:

“One day I went with my teacher on a long journey during winter. While traveling he wanted to eat some bread that he had, but there was no water to wash his hands with. I got down from the wagon, took my teacher’s glass, and I filled it with ice. I held it with my two hands until the ice melted and became water, enough for him to wash his hands with, and then I gave it to him. I was a faithful student of my teacher, and I received his teachings directly from him.”

Rabbi Nathan did not want Rabbi Moshe to depend on him, but rather pushed him to be independent and known for his brilliant abilities and noble character. Even though he did not want to become a Rabbi, he was a faithful student, and after getting married he became the Rav of the community of Dresnitz in Moravia. He was then 32 years old. From there he moved to Prossnitz, then to the important orthodox community of Mattersdorf, Hungary. As soon as he arrived there, he established a yeshiva that students flocked to from all around.

Rabbi Moshe stayed in Mattersdorf for eight years, and throughout Hungary he became famous as a Rav, Posek, and teacher of Torah. When the renowned Rav of Pressburg, Rabbi Meshulam Igra, passed away, people came to offer his position to Rabbi Moshe Sofer.

Rabbi Moshe became the Rav of Pressburg at the start of 5567 (1806), and he stayed there for 33 years.

In arriving at Pressburg, he opened a great yeshiva from which Torah and its Halachic rulings emerged, as well as many great individuals who illuminated the Diaspora. Except on Tisha B’Av, he never missed giving courses to hundreds of students. He even gave courses on the night of Yom Kippur.

The students that emerged from his yeshiva helped him in his battle against those who wanted to introduce the Reform movement to Pressburg. We know his famous saying: “That which is novel [literally, ‘the new harvest’] is forbidden by the Torah.” According to the Chatam Sofer, the Reform movement disavows the G-d of Israel and His Torah, as well as the Jewish people and their special traits.

The city of Pressburg would henceforth be known as “the Jerusalem of Hungary.” Wherever they were in Pressburg, the eyes of Jews turned to the Chatam Sofer’s Beit Midrash. The great of his generation sent him Halachic questions, and community heads and leaders traveled to Pressburg to get the Chatam Sofer’s advice and directives. Furthermore, Rabbi Moshe Sofer considered himself not only as the Rav of the city, but also pushed himself, according to the needs of the hour, to take care of far-off communities, some of which were thousands of miles away. During that time people said, “From out of Pressburg comes the Torah.”

In 5593 (1833), the government accepted to give Jews equality under the law. The joy of the masses was immense, and the leaders of the city’s Jewish community asked their Rav to express his views on it. The Chatam Sofer stepped up to the podium and said: “In my opinion, not only is there no reason to rejoice in this, but on the contrary, this is a decision that we should regret. To what can this be compared? It is like the son of a king, whom his father exiled. After a certain time, the king sends him some builders to construct a palace for him abroad, but to the great surprise of the builders, the son bursts into tears and says, ‘Now I believe that I will stay in exile even longer. Otherwise, my father would not have taken the trouble to build me a palace here in exile.’” The Chatam Sofer continued and said, “Now I am afraid that the King of kings wants to leave us in exile even longer.” He then burst into tears, he and the entire community with him.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer’s greatness in Torah was equaled, if perhaps surpassed, by his great humility. Responsum numbering 1,370 were published in his name, without counting his commentaries on the Talmud (in several volumes) as well as books filled with his discourses, all of which were published after his death. This is because he did not allow his responsum to be published while he was alive. What follows is the marvelous way in which he explained his decision to those who asked for one of his works: “I have heard, your greatness, that you learned that I wrote a discourse and desire that I should send it to you. My heart does not yet allow me to do this. Actually, you and most people – who are greater and better than myself, or at least at the same level – do not need me. As for the small number of those who are at a lower level, why should I trouble myself for such a tiny minority? I write whatever G-d inspires me to write in books, and they are at everyone’s disposal. Whoever wants to copy one may do so. That is what our ancestors did before there was printing, and I am not obligated to do more.”

On Tishri 25, 5600 (October 3, 1839), Rabbi Moshe Sofer cried out with a powerful voice Shema Israel, and his soul departed in purity. At his funeral, more than 90 manuscripts in book form were carried by his students as they followed his casket.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

**I**t is written, “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (Exodus 12:2). The Midrash states: “ ‘It shall be for you the first of the months’ – the Holy One, blessed be He, is called ‘first,’ as it is written: ‘I, the L-RD, am the first’ [Isaiah 41:4]. Zion is called ‘first,’ as it is written: ‘Like the Throne of Glory, exalted from the first, is the place of our Sanctuary’ [Jeremiah 17:12]. Esau is called ‘first,’ as it is written: ‘The first one emerged’ [Genesis 25:25], and Mashiach is called ‘first,’ as it is written: ‘The first one to come to Zion [will announce]: ‘Behold! They are here’ ’ [Isaiah 41:27]. The Holy One, blessed be He, Who is called first, will come and build the Temple, which is called first. He will punish Esau, who is called first, and Mashiach, who is called first, will come on the first of the months, as it is written: ‘This month shall be for you the first of the months’ [Exodus 12:2].”

Let us illustrate this concept with a parable:

Two poor men used to travel from town to town. One of them was in good health and very energetic, never in his life knowing what sickness was. The other was completely the opposite. He was covered with wounds and afflicted with ills from head to toe. The healthy one scorned the other, making fun of his ills and not stopping to boast about his own health to his face. Yet the sick man trusted in Heaven to do him justice, saying: “Hashem, remember how this good-for-nothing has shamed me. May I live to see the day when his strength will be his downfall, and when my weakness will be the cause of my salvation!” G-d then answered the sick man’s prayer.

The two men arrived in the capital, and at that very moment one of the king’s warrior’s (whose strength was legendary) died. The greatest doctor in the kingdom also died at that time, and the king was greatly distressed by these two losses. In every part of the kingdom, he ordered that people be found to replace the royal physician and warrior who had died. Two possible candidates were found, and they were presented to the king. Now the king wanted to put these two candidates – one for the position of royal physician, and the other for supreme warrior – to the test. The one vying for the position of warrior told the king, “Bring me a man who is very healthy, strong, and energetic, and I will send him off to the next world with the flick of my wrist!” As for the candidate for royal physician, he said to the king: “Bring me a man afflicted with all sorts of wounds and ills, and I will do my best to heal him completely. He will become as healthy as anyone else!”

The king consented to these proposals and had people look for some suitable test cases. His messengers then encountered the two poor men and took them in a carriage to see the king. The strapping one said to his companion: “Just look at this! These messengers have come just for me. The king himself wants to honor my strength!” The sickly one kept quiet, confident in Hashem. They were brought before the king, and he declared them to be acceptable as test cases for his star candidates. The strong man was brought before the warrior, and he did to him as he had boasted. The sick man was brought to the doctor, and he healed him of all his ills.

The world has never lacked people who, foolish and filled with arrogance, exclaim: “Who is Hashem?” As it is written, “The degraded one says in his heart, ‘There is no G-d!’ ” (Psalms 14:1). Yet it also happens that prayers are very quickly granted, and in a way

that impresses even the most skeptical of people. As we say in the Rosh Hashanah service: “May the glory of G-d be revealed and all creatures know that You have created them.” How will G-d’s glory be revealed to all the peoples? How will they know the power of His kingdom? The only way is for Hashem to do things that are outside the realm of nature (for example, to crush the arrogant to the ground and to elevate the humble to heaven). The Holy One, blessed be He, will take the nation that reigns at that time and drag it into the dust. Furthermore, He will take a people who are scorned, who are used to being ridiculed and crushed, and He will elevate them to the heights. These two wonders will witness to, and be a sign that Hashem is one and His Name is one.

This is what the Midrash says: “The Holy One, blessed be He, Who is called ‘first,’ will come.” The days are coming when the Holy One, blessed be He, will proclaim the power of his Divinity and reveal Himself to be the First of all firsts. How will His Oneness be expressed? He will “build the Temple, which is called ‘first,’” and which is now fallen and destroyed, and “He will punish Esau, who is called ‘first’.” These two events will prove and demonstrate that it is Hashem Who acts – that He is the Master over all events; that He is the First of all firsts – and it is Hashem Who has the last word on all things.

### THE STORY OF THE WEEK G-D IMPOVERISHES AND ENRICHES

This is a story concerning Rabbi Shlomo Hacoen of Radomsk. One day, the price of wheat began to climb without stop, becoming so expensive that a seah of wheat cost ten, twelve rubbles and up. Wheat merchants, who were the wealthiest among Rabbi Shlomo’s entourage, were not content with having put all their money into purchasing wheat. Thus they began to borrow money from their friends in order to invest even more in this commodity, one whose price was increasing every day. Not long afterwards, the boats of merchants bringing wheat from abroad began arriving, and prices began to change in the opposite direction. Eventually the price of wheat was as low as could be. The wealthy merchants, realizing that they were in a very bad situation, assembled together and went to see their Rav. They said to him, “May the Rav have pity on us. May he pray for us! May the price of wheat come back to normal so that we may get out of this situation without becoming financially ruined and indebted!” Rabbi Shlomo replied, “Know that we do not pray for prices to rise, and we do not beg Heaven’s mercy to abolish a good thing.” They responded, “Our teacher, if the price of wheat does not climb back up, we will become completely ruined, and in addition we will ruin our friends.” The Rav said to them, “Calm down, my children. The One Who helped the poor by providing for them when prices were high will help you and insure your sustenance now that prices are low.”