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HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shelita

11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: (331) 48 03 53 89 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85

8 Morris Road - Spring Valley NY 10977

Tel: 1-845 426 1276 • Fax: 1-845 426 1149

www.hevratpinto.org

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MODESTY BRINGS ABOUT UNITY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

The Torah commands us: “Three times a year all your males should appear before the L-RD your G-d in the place that He will choose, on the Festival of Matzot...” (Deuteronomy 16:16). The matzot remind us of the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate while in Egypt. They symbolize humility, the virtue that helps us unite with our fellowman and brings us closer to G-d, as it is written: “Anyone with whom his fellowmen are pleased, G-d is pleased with him” (Perkei Avoth 3:13[10]).

Our Sages teach that on one hand, the wars that occurred during King Saul’s reign produced many victims, even though his generation was upright. They explain this by the fact that the Children of Israel spoke ill of one another during his reign (Devarim Rabba 5:10). On the other hand, the Sages also teach that during the reign of Ahab, even though the Children of Israel worshipped idols, they were always victorious in battle because they did not speak ill of one another (Vayikra Rabba 26:2). Thus we see just how unity and harmony work to the Children of Israel’s advantage. Commenting on this, the Midrash explains that the passage, “Ephraim is attached to idols; let him be” (Hosea 4:17) means that when harmony reigns among Jews, no nation can conquer them, even if they worship idols (Bereshith Rabba 38:6). The pilgrimage to Jerusalem, “built like a city that is united together”

(Psalms 122:3) – which unites all segments of the Jewish people and makes love reign among them (Yerushalmi Hagigah 3:6), and which unites their hearts together (Mechilta, Yitro 19) – brings this unity about.

In leaving Egypt, the Children of Israel started preparing for Shavuot, the first festival that they were to celebrate. It was this preparation that would help them during the year and throughout the generations whenever they had to ascend to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage. They were thus unanimously prepared to receive the Torah. The verse that states, “Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain” (Exodus 19:2), uses the singular form of the word “encamped,” meaning that they encamped there “as one person, with one heart” (Rashi, ad loc.). It denotes submission and obedience, thanks to which we can bind ourselves in friendship to our fellowman, return to Hashem through the performance of His mitzvot, and attain the Torah.

Several places in the Torah indicate the connection between unity and humility.

Before giving them the Torah, Hashem warned the Children of Israel to become guarantors for one another (Sanhedrin 27b). If a person does not take care of his fellowman or pay attention to what he lacks, but rather hates him, such a person defiles the Torah and does not merit receiving it [for each

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letter of the Torah is directly connected to a Jewish soul]. The commandments that a person performs connects to those that others perform, and what then occurs is that all Jews are considered as having performed all the mitzvot. For that matter, this is why we recite, “In a perfect union in the name of all Israel” before performing any mitzvah.

When harmony reigns among Jews, when kol Israel arevim zeh bazeh (“All Israel are guarantors for one another” – note that the numerical value of zeh bazeh is 26, corresponding to G-d’s Name), Hashem connects to them through their soul, which is a part of G-d (Zohar III:29b). Only a modest man can be a guarantor for his fellow, and only a modest man can honor and respect him. Proof for this is as follows: The numerical value of the initials of kol Israel arevim (?? ? = 20+10+70 = 100) added to the numerical value of zeh bazeh (26) added to the number of words in the expression kol Israel arevim zeh bazeh (5) is equal to the numerical value (131) of anavah (“modesty” – the virtue that counters the Satan [Samakel = 131]).

To the verse that states, “You shall love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), the great Tanna Rabbi Akiva added: Zeh Klal Gadol baTorah (“This is a great principle of Torah” – Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4). Normally he should have said: Davar Gadol (“It is a great...”). Nevertheless, if we love our fellowman as ourselves, we become a part of Klal Israel, and we perform all the mitzvot at the same time as they do. The commandment, “You shall love your fellow” kollel (includes) the Torah in its entirety, and the one who refrains from it distances himself from the Jewish people (G-d forbid).

Concerning this, let us recall the story of the gentile who came before Shammai and asked him to be converted on condition that he teach him the Torah while standing on one foot. When Shammai rejected this gentile, he went to Hillel and was told: “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and study it” (Shabbat 31a). No

doubt the gentile wanted to know which mitzvah all the others were founded upon, like a foot that supports the entire body.

It remains to be understood why Shammai rejected the gentile. Shammai was also aware of this principle, but he knew that the stranger before him, who wanted to learn but one Torah mitzvah, was very ignorant. He was incapable of understanding the essence of the Torah, which is to love one’s fellow as oneself, to be sure to supply what he is missing, and to save his life as if it were one’s very own. Only the diligent study of Torah allows a person to eliminate his negative traits and reach a level of genuine love for his fellowman.

The reason that Hillel did not reject him was because he knew that even a gentile could understand the negatively-phrased principle that he gave him to follow. If he were to make it a basic principle in his life, he would arrive at loving his fellowman and thus demonstrate his humility. He taught him this on one regel (foot), which alludes to the regalim, the three festivals during which time Jews were to ascend to Jerusalem as one.

The Midrash teaches, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘I would have preferred that the Children of Israel forget Me rather than they forget My Torah, whose light brings a man to the right path’” (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:7). The destruction of Jerusalem and the holy Temple were brought about by baseless hatred (Yoma 9b) and by the neglect of Torah study and its fundamental principle: “You shall love your fellow as yourself.”

As we saw above, if Ahab’s soldiers were victorious despite the fact that the entire generation worshipped idols, it was primarily because in his modesty, Ahab honored the Torah (cf. Sanhedrin 102b). Humility leads to unity and the study of Torah.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RABBI ISRAEL LIPSCHITZ – THE AUTHOR OF TIFERET ISRAEL ON THE MISHNAYOT

Whenever a person enters a Beit Midrash, be it during the long nights of Tevet or the blazing hot days of Tammuz, he sees Jews sitting around a table, or perhaps in a corner, studying a chapter of Mishnayot or discussing the words of the Tannaim. Who has made the Mishnah such a popular book, understandable by all? Without a doubt, it has been Rabbi Israel Lipschitz, the renowned commentator of the Mishnah. It was he who spread its teachings to all Jews.

The son of Rabbi Gedaliah, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz was born in 1782 in the city of Hazdeutsch. He was the grandson of Rabbi Israel Lipschitz, the Av Beit Din of Kliva, known for the get that he established in Kliva and who in his lifetime become very famous.

From his earliest years, the boy distinguished himself by the scope of his intelligence and his profound humility. Among other languages, he learned Greek and Latin, which he used to explain difficult words in the Mishnah.

When Rabbi Israel Lipschitz married, he assumed the rabbinate and became the Rav of the following cities: Dessau, Schotland, Weinberg, Langfurt, and finally Danzig and its province near the end of his life.

Rabbi Israel was always immersed in the depths of Halachah, and he studied Torah day and night. His son Rabbi Baruch Yitzchak testified concerning him: “From the time he became the Av Beit Din of Dessau, he studied incessantly and fasted often, sometimes for three days and nights in a row, enwrapped in his Tallit and wearing his Tefillin under his coat, without anyone noticing. He studied constantly, making his nights into days of Torah study.” Rabbi Israel wrote many books: Commentaries on the Rambam, responsum on all domains of Torah, and especially – more than anything else – his commentary on the Mishnah.

His book Tiferet Israel on the six orders of the Mishnah shines by its clarity and simplicity, and it represents a considerable study aid for all who study the Mishnah. His commentary is greatly esteemed and has often been reprinted, in abridged format and in its entirety, under the names Yachin and Boaz. With time, his work has become almost an integral part of the Mishnah. As with the commentary of Rabbeinu Ovadia Bartenura, which has become inseparable from the Mishnah, Tiferet Israel accompanies almost every edition of the text. Rabbi Israel also added commentary entitled Hilcheta Gavrata, which explains Halachic decisions.

Rabbi Israel Lipschitz served as a rabbi for 50 years. He was a faithful shepherd of G-d’s flock, and in his mouth was the Torah of truth. He brought many people back to the right path, be it by using harsh words or by a gentle approach. According to his son Rabbi Baruch Yitzchak in his introduction to Tiferet Israel, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz could utter severe reprimands that burned like fire, or he could say things that were pleasant and sweet like honey.

The love that Rabbi Israel had for every Jew was exceptional. He explained the phrase, “Do not judge your fellowman until you have stood in his place” (Perkei Avoth 2:4) as follows: “When you lead the community and judge a man who has committed a sin, treat him with mercy. Do not put him to shame, but rather make him regret the

failings that prevented him from overcoming his temptation, for you have not yet arrived at his place to succeed where he failed.”

Non-Jews also cherished and respected him. On the Mishnah that states: “He [Rabbi Akiva] used to say: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d]” (Perkei Avoth 3:14), Rabbi Israel added: “This includes a non-Jew, who was also created in G-d’s image.” And at that point he demonstrated his great understanding of history by listing an entire series of people “who did great good for the entire world, such as Jenner, who invented the smallpox vaccine, which saved tens of thousands of lives from sickness and death; Drake, who brought the potato to Europe and saved millions from hunger; Guttenberg, who invented the printing press; and finally the righteous of the nations, Reuchlin, who gave his soul to save volumes of the Talmud from being torched when Emperor Maximilian – through the evil influence that the renegade Pfefferkorn (cursed be his name) had on certain priests – ordered them burned in 5269 (1509). Reuchlin had put his life in danger, and by his arguments he pushed the Emperor to renounce his decree. Can we honestly say that these righteous of the nations will not have a reward in the World to Come?” This is why Rabbi Israel arrived at the conclusion that honest non-Jews are equally created in the image of G-d and that the Holy One, blessed be He, cherishes them.

Rabbi Israel practiced charity throughout his entire life. He went from house to house collecting funds to help poor Jewish women get married and to help other Tzedakah causes. A few days before his death, while he was quite old, people saw him going from street to street, and even climbing stairs to the highest floors, to collect money for the poor.

Rabbi Israel observed mitzvot with great exactitude, and he put as much attention into performing easy mitzvot as he did into performing more difficult ones. He carried out the mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah without changing a thing: He wrote it with his own hand, and on the day he completed it he also finished a cycle of Talmud study, thus uniting both portions of the Torah, the written and the oral.

During the Fast of Gedalia in 5621 (1860), he went to the Beit Midrash as usual to pray. After reciting Selichot, and after having given his daily courses, he fainted and rendered his soul to his Creator, enveloped in his Tallit and crowned with his Tefillin. The synagogue officials placed his saintly body in the “Chair of Elijah,” the seat that he always used as the Sandek for circumcisions.

An enormous crowd attended his funeral, and his son Rabbi Baruch Yitzchak, the Rav of Lansburg, gave the following account: “Great honors were bestowed upon him after his death. When his body was brought to its final resting place, everyone gathered together from the communities of Danzig and other cities in the region – young and old alike, the greatest to the least of the people – to follow the casket of this Tzaddik, and everyone wept.”

Even though he passed away more than 100 years ago, and that other, more recent commentaries have been written on the Mishnah, the brilliant star of the Gaon Rabbi Israel Lipschitz, the author of Tiferet Israel, continues to shine in the firmament of Israel for all generations.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples ... And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).

Besides the fact that the entire phrase, “And you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” is superfluous, the words, “And you” present a great difficulty. It would have been more precise to state: “You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples and a kingdom of priests.”

Let us explain by using a parable.

A rich man had lost his wife. Rather than taking a second wife from his own social circle, he decided to marry a young girl who worked as a servant in his home. “Be aware, my child,” he said to her, “that up to now you were like all the other servants, but today you have become the lady of the house, since you are now my wife. This does not mean, however, that your lot is better than theirs. One could even say that you lost some of the advantages that you had before. When you were my servant, you had but one task to perform, be it doing dishes, washing clothes, or other work – whatever was assigned to you. But now that you are my wife, you must supervise everything, and you are responsible for the entire house and everything in it. When one of the servants will fail to perform a task, it is to you that I will complain. And if you say, ‘Under such circumstances, what have I gained by becoming your wife,’ I will explain. Everything is shared between us, and you are very important in my eyes. I will treat you with goodness and honor you as much as possible, as a lady of the house should be respected. However for your part, you should ignore all that. On the contrary, with respect to yourself you should be twice as much a servant and consider your work as having been doubled, since you must watch over everything that we own. That is what will make you great. However if you become filled with pride and intoxicated with the idea that you have become the lady of the house, and if that leads you to neglect your duties, you will have exchanged your honor for shame.”

G-d said to us, “I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine” (Leviticus 20:26), and also “if you hearken well to Me” (Exodus 19:5). This means that if you decide to truly obey G-d without exception, the consequence will be that “you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples” (ibid.), and G-d will elevate you and guard your glory. At the same time, “you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests” (v.6), means that you will be responsible for all the work, as the prophet says: “And you will be called ‘priests of the L-RD’; ‘ministers of G-d’ will be said of you” (Isaiah 61:6). The expression “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6) means, according to the Ramban, “a kingdom of servants.”

THE STORY OF THE WEEK THE REWARD FOR HELPING YOUNG NEWLYWEDS

We know that wearing a Tallit effectively protects a person against evil spirits. However during the time of Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, the inhabitants of his town believed that even the merit of giving a beautiful Tallit to someone enables a person to arrive in peace in the hereafter, in a world that is completely good. Here is that story:

One day Rabbi Chaim of Sanz set aside his Torah study in order to accomplish the mitzvah of helping a young woman to get married. With that in mind, he went with his friend Rabbi Moshe Rappaport to make the rounds of the well-to-do in town. While on route they stopped by the place of a wealthy man who was hospitable to neither G-d nor men, for he took Torah mitzvot lightly and was not among the orthodox of the community. Yet despite this he respected the Rabbis, and the visit of these two Torah greats gave him immense satisfaction.

When Rabbi Chaim explained their reason of their visit, the rich man inquired as to the sum that they still lacked for the wedding. “We still need money for the shtreimel and the Tallit,” the Tzaddikim told him.

Such items were considered to be expensive during those times, and not everyone could easily afford them. Yet the rich man did not hesitate, and he gave them the entire amount that they lacked. The two Rabbis were very pleased by this kindly act, and Rabbi Chaim above all kept this matter in mind so that he could repay him measure for measure when the time would come. However the rich man remained wealthy for his entire life, and so the Rav never had an opportunity to pay him back for his good deed.

Many years passed, and the rich man left this world. However Rabbi Chaim had still not forgotten his good deed for the impoverished bride. He ordered his assistant to inform him when the rich man’s funeral would take place, for he wanted to be in attendance.

To everyone’s surprise, during the funeral Rabbi Chaim stayed close to the casket at all times. People were astonished because Rabbi Chaim was known for his great diligence in Torah study, yet now he had left his studies to accompany a deceased man whose life was filled with rumors of impropriety.

Their surprise increased when they saw Rabbi Chaim waving his hand in all directions, as if he felt something there. Yet there was nobody next to him. When the funeral procession arrived at the cemetery and the deceased was about to be lowered into the grave that had been dug for him, Rabbi Chaim once again waved his hands to the four cardinal directions, and he also waved the cane that he was holding in his hand. That being done, Rabbi Chaim went home. One of those close to Rabbi Chaim asked him to explain his strange behavior during the funeral. Rabbi Chaim told him of the deceased’s noble act when he was collecting funds for a poor bride, and because of that deed he wanted to attend his funeral. “Then,” Rabbi Chaim said, “when I was following the deceased, I saw a great number of destructive angels who wanted to steal his soul away, claiming that it belonged to them. Seeing that, I began to wave my hand and I chased them away. However at the cemetery they returned and assembled together to remove him, so I again tried with all my strength to chase them away, and I succeeded. He therefore merited being laid to rest in peace in a world that is entirely good, all because of the mitzvah of the Tallit that he purchased with his own money for the groom.