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“EVERYTHING COMES FROM YOU”

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

Commenting on the verse in Parsha Terumah that states, “Let them take for Me a portion” (Exodus 25:2), the author of Degel HaMusar, Rabbi Gershon Libmann Zatzal, cites the Baal HaTurim as follows: “Hashem spoke to the hearts of the Children of Israel because the offering they made to Him cost them money.” The Yalkut Shimoni teaches, “Rabbi Avahu says, ‘The construction of the Sanctuary truly honored Israel and atoned for their sin.’ What would have happened to them if they had been stripped of their money? Is it not true that the Children of Israel were but the slaves and servants of the Egyptians, and that the Holy One, blessed be He, took them out by performing miracles for them? Did He not split the sea for them? Did He not enrich them with abundant spoils? Did He not give them the Torah and make the manna come down to them from Heaven? Obviously, they were ready to generously offer gifts for the construction of the Sanctuary, thus demonstrating their gratitude to Him. It was with the greatest of joy that they prepared themselves to do this. Why then did He need to speak to their hearts?” (Yalkut Shimoni 1:363).

Citing the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Terumah 363), Rabbi Yoel of Satmar explains that the word *li* (“for Me”) always connotes the idea of invariability, of permanence. He then raises the question: “These offerings were destined for the construction of the Sanctuary and the Temple, yet these were destroyed! What then of this idea of permanence?” We may also ask ourselves why the verse stipulates, “From every man whose heart motivates him shall you take My portion” (Exodus 25:2), rather than “From every one of the Children of Israel whose heart motivates him.”

Moses addressed himself to G-d when he experienced difficulties making the Menorah, which was to be fash-

ioned from one solid piece of gold. G-d then showed him a Menorah of fire, and in the end it was fashioned by itself (Tanhuma, Beha'alotcha 3). The question may therefore be raised: Why did Moses not experience difficulties in making the two Cherubim of gold, which also had to be fashioned from one piece (Exodus 25:18)? The Cherubim certainly did not hold fewer secrets than the Menorah, and they were the object of many miracles.

The reason is that G-d wanted to show the Children of Israel that it is He who possesses all the world's silver and gold (Hagigah 2:8). True, the whole world is filled with His glory, but He Who probes all hearts knows that the evil inclination is particularly strong when it comes to questions of money. It is written, “Ki hadam [For the blood], it is the life” (Deuteronomy 12:23), and *damim* (money) is also, so to speak, a part of a man's life. We can well be generous and extravagant, yet money constitutes a great test, especially for the Tzaddikim (Sotah 12a). Pious and upright people experience great difficulty in ridding themselves of all traces of *Kelipah* (impurity) when it comes to making expenses for performing mitzvot. It requires great faith in G-d to completely disregard money, even though in the final analysis such an attitude enables a man to survive. The Children of Israel had no expenses in the desert, and the manna descended to them from Heaven. The fact remains that G-d had to speak to their hearts in order to make them participate financially in the construction of the Sanctuary, for the evil inclination aims at tainting all mitzvot that involve expenditures of money. My very revered teacher, who instilled in me the very foundations of Torah and who spiritually enriched me for years, once came collecting funds for the yeshiva where I had studied, and thanks to which I managed to

Continuation page 2

become what I am today, thank G-d. It goes without saying that I was very happy to see him, but I have to admit that it was not without a certain amount of hesitation that I gave him enough money to provide for the needs of his yeshiva. This is because when it comes to money, we do not remember our past, as glorious as it may have been. We think, rather, of our wallets and our current financial situation. My Rav understood everything that I was experiencing, and feeling that he had acted improperly with me, he began to speak to my heart. Our talk focused primarily on those happy days when I was a yeshiva student. My heart was then filled with joy, and I doubled the amount that he expected me to give.

The verse in question therefore states *ve'yikchu li* ("and let them take for Me") rather than *ve'yitnu li* ("and let them give to Me"), for G-d promises the Children of Israel that if they bring their offering to Him, He will consider it as a loan (not as an offering), which He will repay them from Heaven. As it is written, "You will take My portion" (Exodus 25:2) by means of the Sanctuary, and *shefa* (abundance) will come down on them and strengthen their service of G-d.

It is essentially through unity and love for neighbor that we manage to observe the Torah. Hashem commands us, "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), which is a great principle of the Torah. In the final analysis, G-d is only seeking the good of the Children of Israel. The Sanctuary, which they were to build, was designed to strengthen their service of G-d. The fact remains that to make them participate in that mitzvah, He had to speak to their hearts. When it is our turn to do so, let us act as Hashem did: In asking for a loan or a gift from our fellow, let us speak gently to his heart, with the maximum of tact.

One who engages in Torah study is as if he "gave" something to G-d, Who has nothing in this world other than four cubits of Halachah (Berachot 8a; Baal HaTurim *ibid.*). The study of Torah must be for G-d's sake only. The verse stipulates *mei'eit ish* ("from every man" – Exodus 25:2) because the offerings must reflect the aspect of Torah *emet* (which is formed from the same letters as the word *mei'eit*).

The Sanctuary and Temple were indeed destroyed, but the concept of the Sanctuary alludes to one who devotes his life to serving G-d. In the word *Mishkan* (Sanctuary), we find the letters that form the word *nimshach* ("following"), meaning that a man should be drawn toward G-d. He should serve Him with all the parts of his body. If a part of a lamb that is to be sacrificed falls off the altar, it is placed back on it. Similarly, a man who has sinned

through one of his body parts should repent and correct his behavior. He should then put that part back on the altar and "sacrifice" it to Hashem.

G-d also needs to speak to the heart of the one who, despite all the enticements of the world, chooses to diligently engage in Torah study and make an offering to G-d. Hashem tells him, "Take *terumati* ['My offering' – the Torah]. You will then get your *temurati* ['my equivalent' – I will repay you]." In other words: The one who studies My Torah – instead of going to work to earn money – will be given a double reward.

Let us therefore refrain from harming the one who studies Torah to the detriment of his income, and let us help him with all our hearts. This is the reason why the verse states, "From every man whose heart motivates him," rather than addressing itself collectively to the Children of Israel, for this is a mitzvah where a person must stand out.

The Talmud teaches that on the first of Adar an announcement is made regarding the Shekalim (Shekalim 1:1). Why do we not go from town to town, from district to district, collecting all the necessary funds? It is because we must first speak to the hearts of the people before coming to ask for their contribution. The word *shekalim* has the same letters as *mishkali* ("My balance") meaning that charity makes G-d's balance sway in favor of a man's merits, for in giving charity a man masters his greed and gives his money to a good cause. The Shekalim also allude to unity and love for neighbor, for the half-Shekel offered by the one joins with the half-Shekel offered by the other, and together they form a whole. At Purim, we are enjoined to send gifts to one another (Esther 9:19). Why should we not give them to our friends and acquaintances instead?

In our humble opinion, charity is certainly very precious in the eyes of Hashem, but it is much better to willingly send *Tzeddakah* anonymously to someone we know (or to send it to someone we don't know), so that the recipient does not find out who sent it and does not ask us about it. That is truly charity *par excellence*. Who do we call *ish* (a man)? The one who shares the pain of his fellow and helps him without having been expressly asked. This deed that we perform in the month of Adar should encourage us to continue acting in such a way throughout the year.

The Talmud states, "When Adar begins, we should double our joy" (Taanith 26b). When a person who feels ready to spend money for holy causes hears of the Shekalim (at the beginning of Adar), he becomes filled with joy.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

### RABBI YAAKOV TZVI MECKLENBURG – THE AUTHOR OF HAKETAV VEHAKABBALAH

**R**abbi Yaakov Tzvi was born in 5545 (1785) in Lissa, in the province of Posen, Germany. This city was renowned as a center of Torah scholarship, as well as for its great rabbanim. The father of Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, Rabbi Gamliel, was a nurse. It seems that Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi began his education in the city of his birth by studying Torah with the local Rav. At that time the Rav of Lissa was the Gaon Rabbi Zechariah Mendel, the son of the Gaon Rabbi David Tebla (the previous Rav of Lissa). Rabbi Zechariah Mendel was a friend of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, whom he corresponded with.

We know little about the childhood of the young Yaakov Tzvi. There is one thing, however, that we do know, which is that he was extremely diligent and almost never stopped studying Torah.

Even though Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi was great in Torah and very learned in Hebrew, he did not want to become a Rabbi. He went into business and did quite well in it, yet even then he did not neglect his Torah study, which he practiced assiduously. As it turned out, the wheel of fortune changed and his business deteriorated. It was at that time that he was offered the rabbinical position in the city of Koenigsburg, at which point he realized that Heaven desired that he should become a Rav. Thus he accepted the position, which he assumed in 1831 at the age of 46.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi believed that he could find peace and quiet in the tent of Torah, but as it turned out he plunged himself into the fight against the Enlightenment movement and various currents of the Reform movement. All of a sudden he was thrown into a new world, one different from the one he had lived in all his life. In his hometown, Jews studied Torah and the spirit of tradition reigned supreme. However in Koenigsburg, strange winds had already begun to blow, and the Enlightenment movement desired to take the place of traditional Jewish life.

Far from enclosing himself in the tent of Torah, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi placed himself in the first wave of those fighting the assimilationists and Reformers, calling upon people with fiery words to be vigilant and defend the holiness of Israel. He was very determined, and since all Jewish tradition was sacred in his eyes, he defended it with all his strength.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi would normally not attend a wedding unless he knew that the young couple would conduct themselves in accordance with Torah laws. One day, an important man who had become distant from Judaism invited the Rav to officiate at the marriage of his daughter. Knowing that the young couple did not observe Halachah, the Rav refused. However the man, who was very influential, went to the authorities and obtained an order that obliged the Rav to marry his daughter.

Constrained and forced to comply, the Rav officiated at the wedding. Yet instead of saying, "According to the law of Moses and Israel," he said in a loud voice, "According to the law of Frederic the Great."

During those difficult times, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi wrote a commentary on the Torah. True, there had been several Bible commentators in Germany before him, but their analyses had not been accepted by faithful, orthodox Jews, for the spirit of the Enlightenment movement hovered over them. That is what drove Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi to write his own commentary on the Torah, which he entitled Haketav Vehakabbalah. The goal of this work was to show how Scripture (Haketav) and the Oral Law (Vehakabbalah) formed

a whole, and that both were given by one single shepherd, Moses our teacher. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi's explanations connected the direct meaning (pshat) to the hidden meaning (drash).

In his commentary, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi followed the steps of the Vilna Gaon. One day, Rabbi Israel of Shklov, a disciple of the Gra, was asked wherein lay his teacher's power. In response, he took a Bible out of the library and said, "This is the power of my teacher and Rav the Gra. He was in full possession of this book to a degree that is unimaginable, knowing its every letter." Rabbi Israel continued and said, "My teacher the Gra believed that 'There is nothing which is not alluded to in the Torah,' and he knew how to discover and show how all the Oral Law was hidden within the written Torah."

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg walked in the paths of the Gra, and he strived with all his might to meld the written text with oral tradition. His commentary is a tremendous work in which we can see his eminence in Torah. It also demonstrates his tremendous scholarship, knowledge of the Hebrew language, and his sharp, clear, and irrefutable logic.

Haketav Vehakabbalah was well received throughout the Diaspora, and that alone makes it worth transcribing the following letter. It is an excerpt from a reply that Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi gave to the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher, the Rav of Greiditz. In it he states: "The Rav's great desire to see my work on the Torah is in my opinion inappropriate, for it is not intended for a Gaon such as himself, but for people of lesser stature, for it seeks to repair the breach of ungodliness that has the audacity to ascribe falsehood to our teachers, the Sages of the Oral Law. I thank G-d that this explanation [given by my commentary] pleased our brothers in Poland and Russia. I have heard that in certain communities, instructors now teach it to young boys, and that in certain places a person has been placed in the Beit Midrash to explain the parsha of the week with this commentary every Shabbat. May the study of Torah return to all its initial glory! However for the Gaon, this commentary is useless" (Sinai, vol. 65, bk. 5-6).

This letter shows the modesty of the author of Haketav Vehakabbalah, a man who believed that he was writing not for the great of his generation, but for "people of lesser stature." He was a man who rejoiced in the fact that teachers in Poland and Russia were using his book. This letter also shows that groups were being formed each Shabbat to study the parsha of the week alongside his commentary. It is therefore not surprising that over the years, there have been five editions of the abridged version published.

Other than Haketav Vehakabbalah, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg wrote a commentary on the Siddur called Iyun Tefillah. This book was printed with his commentary Derech HaChaim, which also enjoyed great success and was republished four times.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg was the Rav of Koenigsburg for 34 years. Following a short illness, he died at two o'clock in the morning on Thursday, Nissan 10, 5625 (April 6, 1865). He was 80 years old.

Before his death, he ordered that no eulogies be given at his funeral. In his will, he expressed his desire that his commentary be read in public three times a week, after the Torah reading, during the first 30 days of mourning that followed his funeral.



## THE STORY OF THE WEEK FROM PUNISHMENT TO TESHUVAH

**W**hat follows is a story that occurred during the time of Rabbi Avraham Antebi Zatzal. The Gaon Rabbi Avraham Antebi, the leader of the Jewish community of Aleppo, Syria some 170 years ago, was great in Torah and wisdom. Despite his knowledge and position as leader of the rabbanim, however, he would personally go to the market and purchase what he needed for Shabbat and the holidays, since “a mitzvah is greater if a person does it himself than if he sends his messenger to do it for him.”

Before one Shavuot he went to the market as usual, and there he encountered a group of thugs who had nothing in their mouths but abominations and nonsense. The Rav shuddered, and addressing the one who appeared to be their leader – a huge insolent man with a bad reputation by the name of Abu Shachud – he reprimanded him sharply: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? How can a Jew disgrace himself with his mouth and shame his soul as you are doing?” The thug was rattled and kept quiet, and the Rav went on his way to do his shopping.

The other gang members began to make fun of their leader. The great Abu Shachud, who everyone was afraid of, was helpless before the Rav! One single reprimand from the mouth of the old Rav had shut him up and turned him into a mute!

These scornful insults pierced to the heart of his pride and vanity, and also harmed the blind loyalty that he demanded of his lackeys. He decided to act, to strike the Rav who was so revered, and to prove that he was not afraid of anyone. And not only to strike him, but to straight-out kill him!

He lay in wait for the Rav on the way to the Beit Midrash, and when he passed by, Abu Shachud sprung from his hiding place brandishing a dagger. Yet just as the dagger was uplifted in the air, the attacker’s hand withered. It became paralyzed and stayed upraised in the air, his fingers clenched around the knife, as if it had become a pillar of salt. The man tried to lower his arm, to move it, or to open his fingers, but it was useless. The Rav continued on his way toward the Beit Midrash, and the attacker – who did not have a choice at this point – was forced to make his way through the streets of

the city with his hand in the air holding the dagger. He made it like this to the entrance of the Beit Midrash, and there he humbly asked for permission to enter. When he came before the Rav, he threw himself to his feet and wept bitterly, begging him to forgive his sin and evil intentions, and to heal his hand. The Rav cast a glance at him and asked, “Did you really think that you could kill me?” His answer consisted of nothing other than sounds of sobbing and moaning. When the Rav saw that his remorse was sincere, he approached him and grabbed his paralyzed hand, lowering it easily. And wonder of wonders, his fingers also began to move normally – at which point he shamefully concealed his dagger. His hand was simply a little twisted as a reminder of this extraordinary event, and it remained that way for the rest of his life. In a conciliatory tone, the Rav said to him, “Your offense is forgiven and your sin discharged.” He then reprimanded him harshly for his wicked behavior. The man listened humbly as his head was lowered, and the Rav instructed him on how to do Teshuvah. He placed his hand on his head and gave him the priestly blessing so that he should succeed in his new way of life.

How do we know of this incredible incident? In the holy city of Sefat, the Gaon Rabbi Yossef Yedid Halevi Zatzal saw an elderly man who frequented a yeshiva there and diligently studied Torah. When he began to speak with this man, the latter showed him his twisted hand and recounted everything that had happened to him years earlier. He also told him that the priestly blessing he had received from the Rav had been fulfilled in him, and that this blessing had accompanied him throughout life. He had totally returned to Torah, had settled down in Eretz Israel, and had lived there to his current ripe old age.

Every year at the holiday of Shavuot, this man would recount to the synagogue faithful the incredible incident he experienced. He did this so that they could hear with their ears, see with their eyes, and repent completely.

This story appears in the introduction to the book of the Gaon Rabbi Avraham Antebi, *Chochma U’Mussar*.