

LA VOIE À SUIVRE

No 137
BEHA'ALOTCHA
21 SIVAN 5766
JUNE 17 2006

בס"ד
Publication
HEVRAT PINTO
Sous l'égide de
Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א
11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS
Tel: 01 42 08 25 40 • Fax 01 42 08 50 85
www.hevratpinto.org
Responsable de publication Hanania Soussan

A LOVE FOR FOOD IS VERY DANGEROUS!

Our Parsha recounts one of the sins that the Children of Israel committed in the desert, which we term chet hamitonem ("the sin of the complainers"). While in the desert, the Children of Israel merited having Hashem provide them with everything they required. They had no need to go looking for food during that time, for everything came to them directly, to the door of each person's tent. In the desert they had spiritual nourishment, the manna, which was completely absorbed by all their bodily members (Yoma 75b), and in this food they tasted every flavor that existed.

Yet therein lay their great sin. For 40 years they ate the same nourishment, the same kind of food, yet they wanted something else. What did they say? "We remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt for free, the cucumbers and the melons..." (Numbers 11:5). This was extremely serious. In the manna they tasted every possible flavor, including obviously the taste of cucumbers, melons, and so on. Therefore why did they suddenly want to eat such food? The answer is that those who complained about the manna were certainly not among the tzaddikim of the generation. Those evildoers certainly did not task all the flavors in the world when they ate the manna, and even if they tasted a little in it, they complained for another reason: We don't want to eat food with spiritual flavor! We want to taste material food; we want to see onions, cucumbers and melons with our own eyes. We don't want to believe that there's the taste of melons in the food we're eating. We want real melons! Why? Our physical innards are incapable of containing spiritual food.

Let us think for a moment: What is the difference between someone who devotes himself to Torah and his entire being is oriented toward spiritual endeavors, and someone who is completely immersed in a material life? The one occupied with Torah is not at all worried about his sustenance. He does not even remember what he ate the previous day, and if he does remember, he will not give much thought or ascribe importance to it. Such is not the case for one who is immersed from head to toe in the desires of this world, especially in a love for food. This person deeply contemplates dinner plans, from appetizers to desserts, and perfectly remembers what he ate the previous day, and knows what he will eat on the next day. Such a person constantly demands and asks for

material things, for material nourishment. He wants to see it with his very eyes.

It is not without reason that there have been tzaddikim – and we find such people even today – who when eating during the week would say, "I'm eating to acquire strength to serve the Creator." Then on Shabbat, with each mouthful they consume, they would say, "I'm eating in honor of the holy Sabbath." Such people only speak and concern themselves with spiritual matters, with elevating themselves spiritually.

As for other people, their conversations and concerns revolve around food, around various dinner plans. These people are even capable of selling everything that is precious and holy for "a good meal that is worthy of the name." They are even capable of complaining about the spiritual nourishment that existed in the desert, the "bread of the mighty."

Therein lay the sin of those who complained in the desert, and it was not by accident that they ended up sinning. The same people who complained about the manna in the desert had certainly absorbed the faults of the Egyptians. They were certainly among those who mixed among the Egyptians, going to their theaters and circuses (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 1), and there they certainly saw the "good food" of the Egyptians. This is why, when they arrived in the desert, they saw that there was nothing there. Where had all the good food gone? Where were all the dinner plans that served to feed the body? This is why they arose to demand the same kind of food they had seen in Egypt, for it was only that kind of food that they were inclined to eat.

To our great shame, it is possible to find such people today as well. There exist people today in whom a love for food burns like poison. Base faults, deeply rooted within such people, lead them to focus their full attention on meals, nourishment, dinner plans – on various kinds of food – everything except spiritual matters.

At this point things truly become disgraceful. All 248 limbs and 365 sinews of such people are invested in the food before them, and with what obvious desire do they discuss it! If that were not enough, they seek out appetizing food from morning till night, and if they cannot find it in a certain place, they will unfortunately risk going elsewhere to find such food, which may easily turn out to be unkosher.

Furthermore, even people who care about outward appearances, who are important in their own eyes, are liable to become ensnared by the evil inclination. Do they not remember the last wedding they went to, when they saw how honorable people "pounced" on the best food? It may be that they had not seen such eating habits in a long time, since the time when poverty was prevalent in society.

We must learn a lesson from the sins of those who complained in the desert. First of all, we must realize that our glory does not depend on material sustenance. We must not expend all our energies on material food, nor should we think about it excessively. Instead we must take the decision to follow in the footsteps of the generation of the desert, the ways of the tzaddikim, whose purpose in life was the holy Torah. At that point the food we eat will be like the manna, bread from Heaven. Amen, may it be so.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Lack of Modesty Leads to the Departure of the Shechinah

During the Knessia Gedola of Vienna, at which the great men of Israel were present (including the Chafetz Chaim), the following issue was raised: The Ezrat Nashim (woman's section) at the conference lacked curtains, and there was a doubt as to whether elevated curtains were needed. The question was put to the Chafetz Chaim, and he replied: "What is the greatest tragedy that could befall the community of Israel? It is if the Holy One, blessed be He, were to leave us. And why? Because during all the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, is among us, 'Even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for You are with me' [Psalms 23:4]. However if He leaves us, then 'You hid Your face, I was confounded' [ibid. 30:8].

"Now the Torah states that because of 'a shameful thing' – because of a lack of modesty – the Holy One, blessed be He, leaves us. Therefore everything that is possible to add to 'He will not see a shameful thing among you' [Deuteronomy 23:15], it is a mitzvah to add to it. It is worth every effort."

These words touch the very heart.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Every Jew Has a Role to Play

It is written, “Take the Levites from among the Children of Israel” (Numbers 8:6).

Our Sages taught that each Jew has a role to play on this earth, one that nobody else can fulfill. If a person perfectly accomplishes the task delegated to him, without demonstrating laziness, he will earn his world. In the opposite case, he risks ending up in a situation whereby all the virtues he was given to uniquely fulfill his task will be taken back from him.

This is a basic principle for our entire lives. Sometimes a person feels discouraged when he sees that others achieve incredible results, and he is struck with jealousy. He does not understand that he too can achieve such results, but only if he fully utilizes all the abilities given to him by Heaven. As we said, every Jew has the power and special gifts to reach the summit, and every Jew should derive great encouragement in realizing this.

To make this concept more concrete, we shall recount a story involving a great Rosh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. A respected couple from town came to see him, the husband being a very talented talmid chacham. He held a Torah teaching position, yet because of the diversity of his abilities he was busy throughout the day with the needs of this community. The result was that he was almost never at home. This bothered his wife, and so she told the Rosh Yeshiva, “Growing up in my home, this wasn’t the way things were done. I could talk to my mother as much as I wanted, and my father, who was easygoing, would study Torah for hours each day and then come home and stay there. My husband should do the same. I want him to use his abilities for his family, not to occupy himself all day and night with other things.”

Needless to say, when the husband arrived home, he acted in accordance with all the rules of Halachah, and he conducted himself with fairness and honesty toward all his family members. He put an effort into helping them, yet most of the time he was not at home. His family was very highly regarded in Bnei Brak, and he helped many people in town on all kinds of occasions. He helped many people other than, naturally, his own wife and children.

The Rosh Yeshiva listened carefully to what the couple was saying, and then he turned to the wife and said, “You can clearly see that your husband has special gifts that many Jews don’t have. And with these gifts, he can be one of the pillars of the orthodox community. Have such gifts been given to him for free? Of course not! They were given to him so he could perform his task on this earth. I’m certain that if I were to tell him to stop, he would listen to me. Yet who knows if it wasn’t precisely for this reason that he’s been given such abilities?”

The Rosh Yeshiva continued: “Your husband has a choice: He can stop everything and spend more time at home, just like you want. In that case, however, who knows if you’ll still have a husband? Do you want to be a young widow? And even if we don’t go that far, if he remains at home and doesn’t use his abilities, who’s to say that he’ll remain the same man – with all his dynamism, energy, and talent – that he is today? If he doesn’t fulfill his role in this world, there’s no guarantee that he’ll keep what he possesses.”

This marvelous principle teaches us that every man has a role to play in this world, like the Levites within the community of Israel. If someone does not fulfill his role, he will no longer have anything to do in this world. Therefore we must put an effort into using our abilities as best we can and to act in this world, in order to successfully accomplish our task to the very end.

Pure Education for Jewish Children

It is written, “When you set up the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall they give light” (Numbers 8:2).

This verse alludes to the education of children, who are lamps. Parents must “set up” and light these lamps with the flame of the Torah, until they give off light. We must be careful to educate them in talmidei Torah, in yeshivot that follow the paths of Torah and the fear of Heaven, until they become luminaries among the Jewish people. The book of Psalms explains, “A Maskil by Asaph. Listen, my

people.... He established a testimony in Jacob and a Torah in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, to make known to their sons. So that the final generation may know; children yet to be born will arise and tell their own children” (Psalms 78:1,5-6). A Jew betrays his role as a parent if he does not fulfill what is written, for his children are like a pledge that have been left with him. He must therefore educate them in order that “the seven lamps give light” (Numbers 8:2).

G-d Willing

It is written, “By the order of the L-RD the Children of Israel journeyed, and by the order of the L-RD they encamped” (Numbers 9:18).

The holy Shelah said that from here we learn that with every action and each movement that a person makes, he must always say “G-d willing” or “with G-d’s help.” In fact it is not only in the desert that we journey and encamp according to Hashem’s orders; every step that we take in life must be according to Hashem’s directive. When a person seriously says “G-d willing” or “with G-d’s help” – not just out of habit – it is certain that Hashem will really help him.

The Sages have said that this constituted Joseph’s greatness in the house of Potiphar, as it is written: “His master saw that the L-RD was with him” (Genesis 39:3). Rashi explains that Hashem’s Name was always on Joseph’s tongue, for he was constantly saying, “G-d willing” or “with G-d’s help.” This is why it is written afterwards, “Whatever he did, the L-RD made it succeed in his hand.” We find an allusion to this in the verse, Va’atzat Hashem hee takum (“And the counsel of the L-RD, only it will prevail” – Proverbs 19:21), where the word hee [hei yud aleph] is formed from the initials of Im Yirtzeh Hashem (“G-d willing”). Hence we must always strive to have the name of Heaven on our lips in asking for help. There is a wonderful proverb that states, “Without the Creator’s help, one cannot pass through the doorway of the house; and with Hashem’s help, one can split the sea.”

– The holy Shelah

The Way is Barred to Strangers!

It is written, “The mixed multitude that was among them lusted greatly” (Numbers 11:4).

What was the sin of those who complained? Imagine a country surround by enemies and being heavily besieged, yet it opens its gates to its enemies and thinks, “Everything will be fine. We’re stronger than they are!”

Man is besieged by the evil inclination, as it is written: “Sin is crouching at the door” (Genesis 4:7). How do we judge a man who opens his mind and heart to the evil inclination and lets it in? This was the sin of those who complained. They literally “craved a craving” (hit’avu ta’avah), meaning that they desired to have a craving. They actually wanted and encouraged the evil inclination to enter them. This is why “the anger of the L-RD glowed greatly, and in the eyes of Moses it was displeasing” (v.10).

In reflecting upon this, we see that today we are inundated with a culture that also “craves a craving,” a culture that bears down on us to destroy all that is good within us. It stimulates and provokes sin and impurity. Media and newspapers knock at the door and peddle a culture of spiritual corruption and degradation. Why do we open the door to such things? Why do we need to bring poison into our homes? Have we not enough difficulties with the evil inclination itself, which is rooted in us? Let’s give this some serious thought!

A Just Punishment

It is written, “The mixed multitude...lusted greatly...and they said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish...’” (Numbers 11:4-5).

After this verse, the Torah describes the punishment received by those who complained: While the meat was still between their teeth, Hashem’s anger burned against them and they died. This is surprising, for why were they dealt such a terrible punishment? Why was their complaint deserving of death?

This can be compared to a man who travels overseas, leaving his son behind with a farmer. The farmer reduces the son to slavery and feeds him garlic, onions, and melons. When the father finally returns home and sees his son in such a

state, he forcibly takes him away from the farmer and purchases a large home and arranges an honorable marriage for him. At that point, however, the son begins to cry. When his father asks him why, he says: "I remember the garlic, onions, and melons that I used to eat with the farmer." Is this what we call a son? He's nothing but a rebellious child!

This is what happened with the Jewish people. The Egyptians reduced them to slavery for 210 years, making them eat garlic and onions. However Hashem brought them out of Egypt, gave them the Torah, and wanted to bring them into Eretz Israel. Yet at that point, instead of thanking Him for all the miracles that He performed for them, the Children of Israel began to weep and wanted to eat garlic and onions as they had in Egypt! Is this what we call a chosen people? They were rebellious children, and instead of singing G-d's praises, they wanted to eat garlic and onions! This is why those who complained were so severely punished.

This teaches us that every Jew must contemplate his spiritual condition in order to improve it. He must not place great importance on the vanities of the world or his cravings, which resemble nothing but garlic, onions, and melons.

– Kol Yehudah

The Truth at All Costs

It is written, "Not so is My servant Moses. In all My house he is faithful" (Numbers 12:7).

Moses was a man of truth, to the point that the Holy One, blessed be He, testified that he was among the faithful in His house. How does a person reach such a state?

The Chazon Ish Zatzal used to hold a Mincha service in his home every day, both during the week and Shabbat, at 12:30 in the afternoon. One day it was very difficult to organize a minyan, and it was only at 12:45 that a tenth man arrived.

Rabbi Shemuel Greineman Zatzal approached the Chazon Ish, his brother-in-law, and said to him: "I have a worker coming to my home at 1:00 to repair something in the house. If I wait and pray here, I'll arrive home after 1:00, and he'll have to wait, contrary to what we agreed upon."

The Chazon Israel replied, "One who adheres to the attribute of truth does not even consider this a question. Let the minyan be cancelled, but let a word of truth not be transgressed!" In fact the men dispersed, and Mincha was recited without a minyan. It is impressive to see what a man of truth is really like.

– Moreshet Avot

A TRUE STORY

Renouncing One's Natural Desires – Just to What Point?

It is written, "Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

One day Rabbi Chaim and his brother Rabbi Shlomo Zalman of Volozhin were on a journey. When they arrived at a certain inn, the innkeeper spoke to them harshly, humiliating them and refusing to give them a place to sleep. They were therefore forced to leave and continue on their journey. During the night, as they were still traveling, Rabbi Chaim noticed that his brother Rabbi Shlomo Zalman was weeping bitterly. He said to him, "Rabbi Zalman, why are you crying? Are you upset by what we were told at the inn?"

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman replied, "I'm not crying because of that. Instead, I felt a slight pang in my heart when we were being insulted, and I realized that I haven't yet reached the level described by our Sages: 'Those who are insulted but do not insult, hear themselves reviled without answering, act through love and rejoice in their suffering' [Sanhedrin 88b]. I didn't feel joy from being insulted, which is why I'm crying now and painfully asking myself, 'When will I merit to reach that level?'"

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

True Humility – Not Pride in Disguise

It is written, "Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person" (Numbers 12:3). Moses wrote this about himself, saying that he was humble. At the end of tractate Sotah, we have the following: "WHEN RABBI DIED, HUMILITY AND FEAR OF SIN CEASED. Rabbi Yosef said to the Tanna, 'Do not include [when reciting this Mishnah] the word "humility," because there is I.' Rabbi Nachman said to the teacher, 'Do not include "fear of sin," because there is I'" (Sotah 49b). Imagine being told of a certain rabbi who was praising the numerous virtues of the leader of the community, yet the leader of the community interrupted the rabbi in the middle of his speech and said, "You forgot to mention that I was humble"! On the face of it, this would seem to be the complete opposite of humility. However if we look at the matter more closely, it may be that for a man of truth, this is precisely his way of expressing humility.

Humility does not mean denying one's virtues or considering them useless. Nor does it mean being ungrateful for having received them. The word anav ("humble"), said Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, comes from the same root as the word ania ("respond"). A humble person does not attribute what he does or thinks to his own personal initiative. He acts only as someone who responds to what Hashem expects of him. This is why he does not attribute his virtues to his own abilities or strength, for he recognizes that everything is a gift from G-d. The sages of Mussar explain the meaning of true humility by the fact that everyone recognizes that a person to whom Hashem has given two hands should not feel proud vis-à-vis a person who only has one hand, since such things depend solely on Hashem's will. Similarly, a humble person sees Hashem's will manifested in all things, even for important things that one values. It is not only wisdom and righteousness that he sees as valuable components of his being, but humility as well. This is why Rabbi Yosef could state in all humility that he was, in fact, humble.

It is precisely expressions such as, "I am nothing" that may stem from pride disguised as humility. The story is told of a person who came to

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Restraining Your Mouth to Prevent it From Sinning

The author of Divrei Chaim recounts that there was once an uneducated, yet sincere Jew who knew absolutely nothing about the laws of Shabbat. In spite of this, the man was afraid of transgressing Shabbat. Come every Friday toward sunset, he ordered his wife to bind him to his bed so he would be unable to move. In this way he was sure not to transgress Shabbat. The Divrei Chaim said with regards to this, "True, he didn't desecrate Shabbat, but he transgressed the mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat – having pleasure on Shabbat – for it is certainly not enjoyable to be attached to your bed for an entire day."

This applies to the observance of Shabbat, which entails the mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat. It does not apply, however, to ordinary conversations. A person who does not know the laws, in all their details, regarding the prohibition of Lashon Hara, and who fails to fully master the book Chafetz Chaim, better for him to restrain his mouth and make himself mute, saying absolutely nothing!

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Praying for the Sick

It is written, "O G-d, please heal her, please" (Numbers 12:13).

The Gemara learns from Moses' prayer for Miriam that whoever prays for others does not need to mention their name, since Moses prayed without mentioning Miriam's name (Berachot 34a). The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 119) cites the Maharil (Rabbi Yaakov Moellin) in stating that this only deals with the case of a sick person who happens to be in your presence. In the opposite case, we must cite the person's name and that of his mother. The Zohar states that we learn a principle of prayer from the verse, "Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau" (Genesis 32:12), which is that whoever prays must express himself in a precise manner, clearly stating the name of the person concerning whom he is asking for Divine mercy.

In his book *Sukkat Shalom*, the gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher writes that a person who prays for the sick must state the name of his mother, not his father, because the mother's name is better known, for we know that so and so is the offspring of such and such a woman. However when we mention the name of a departed soul, we cite the name of the father, for the souls of fathers and their children are connected to one another at their root. In the book *Ben Yehoyada* on tractate *Berachot* (55), it is written that the reason we mention the name of the mother is because she has more merits than the father, for she is exempt from performing positive, time-dependent mitzvot, and she is also sinless regarding neglect in Torah study. Consequently, there is a greater chance that a prayer mentioning her name will be accepted. If we do not know the name of the mother, we mention the name of the father, and if we do not know either name, we say: So and so, the son/daughter of Chava (the mother of all the living).

The Chida cites ancient sources in stating that when Moses was in Heaven, a secret was given to him: If a person says na ("please") twice in prayer, his prayer will be accepted. This is why Moses said, "O G-d, please heal her, please" (Numbers 12:13). It is also why Hashem told him, "Speak no more to Me of this matter" (Deuteronomy 3:26), for Moses had asked Him, "Let me pass over, please, and see the good land" (v.25), and if Moses had added another na ("please"), his prayer would have been granted and he would have crossed the Jordan into Eretz Israel.

From Moses' prayer we also learn that we must not recite an excessively long prayer for a sick person, so as not to give the impression that we are indifferent to their suffering. This is why Moses simply said, "O G-d, please heal her, please." However if a sick person asks us to recite a long prayer for him, then we are permitted, for in that case there is no reason to worry that this will upset him. Rabbi Israel of Rozhin asked why Moses had to ask Hashem, "Tell me if You heal her or not," whereas Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa knew right away if the sick person he prayed for would be healed. Does this mean that Moses was at a lower level than Rabbi Chanina? The answer is that Rabbi Chanina engaged in long prayers, and by the way that his words came to him, he knew how the sick person would fare. As for Moses, his prayer was short (so that the Children of Israel would not say that he was stretching out his prayer despite his sister's suffering), which is why Moses did not have time to sense if the words came to him easily. He therefore asked Hashem for an answer regarding his sister's condition.

When we hear that someone has fallen ill, it is a great mitzvah to pay him a visit, especially if the sick person is close to our age, for we remove a sixtieth of his illness. When we visit a sick person, we must not sit on the bed or on a chair, but instead one "must wrap himself about and sit in from of him, for the Shechinah is above the sick person's pillow" (Shabbat 12b). This only applies when the bed is lower than the chair. If the bed is higher, we may sit on a chair. Rabbeinu Yona writes in *Sefer HaYirah*: "We should pray each day in a language which we are familiar with to ask for the healing of all the sick among the Jewish people, as well as for those who are in good health, to prevent them from falling ill and protect them from all harm...and for women in childbirth to experience an easy delivery." One who does not visit the sick, it is as if he spilled blood.

EISHET CHAYIL

Modest Clothing is An Asset on the Day of Death

It is written in the book of Proverbs: "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she joyfully awaits the last day" (Proverbs 31:25). The last day is the one in which a person ends his life and prepares to give an accounting for all his deeds. This is the great and terrible Day of Judgment, when people are judged without pity on their actions in life. King Solomon is telling us: Who is the woman who will be able to joyfully await that day, having a smile on her lips? It is she who fulfilled what it written at the beginning of the verse, namely a woman whose "strength and dignity are her clothing." The word oz ("strength") evokes the word azut ("courage"). She wears modest clothes with courage and bravery, not feeling shame before anyone, be it at home or at work. She goes everywhere with strength and pride in her glorious and decent clothes. What exactly does hadar ("glory") signify? It evokes the word hidur ("adornment"), meaning that she adorned her manner of dress more than necessary, wearing clothes that were more than appropriate. She is the woman who will joyfully await the last day!

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

The Gaon Rabbi Yehuda Assad – Author of Responsa Mahari Assad

Rabbi Yehuda Assad was among the most famous Torah giants of Hungary. He was the greatest disciple of the gaon Rabbi Mordechai Benet, the Av Beit Din of Nickelsburg and the region. In the Beit Midrash of his teacher, Rabbi Yehuda became known and famed for his great character traits, to the point that he could not but hold the same opinions as his teacher. He also made himself many disciples in his teacher's Beit Midrash. When Rabbi Mordechai learned of this, he placed his two hands on Rabbi Yehuda and gave him permission to do so, saying: "Rabbi Yehuda learns Torah with completely unselfish motives, and his intentions are accepted in Heaven."

At the beginning of his career, he served as the Av Beit Din of the small town of Rette, and from there he went to the city of Samenitz. It is said that while Rabbi Yehuda served as the Rav of Samenitz, the Slovaks revolted and even tried to attack Jews in the middle of Shavuot as Hallel was being recited. The faithful were frightened, but when the head of the rebels raised his hand over Rabbi Yehuda, his hand was severed. This was considered to be a great miracle.

Afterwards Rabbi Yehuda left Samenitz and went to the city of Sardali, where he built a yeshiva that had thousands of students, many of whom became guides for the Jewish people. In his city, he vigorously fought against those who assimilated and blamed the Torah for their problems. He even came before the emperor to ask that he abolish the program of secular studies in Jewish schools.

On Sivan 23, 5626, Rabbi Yehuda Assad departed for the Celestial Academy. May his merit protect us all.

When we pray for a sick person, we may modify the expression for a male and say, "O G-d, please heal him, please." The Zohar states that we would normally ask for Divine mercy for the sick when opening the Ark, for this is a time of grace.

– Sources: *Yalkut Me'am Loez*, Beha'alotcha; *Yalkut Yehuda* 7; *Meorot HaDaf*; *Kashrut HaShulchan*;

and *Yabia Omer* 2:11, where this subject is discussed at length