

THE POWER OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BY THE MERIT OF THE TZADDIKIM (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Path To Follow TETZAVEH

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Their Mouths Attack Heaven

The Gemara cites Resh Lakish as stating, "One who slanders makes his sin reach unto Heaven, as it is said: 'They set their mouths against Heaven and their tongue struts on earth' [Psalms 73:9]" (Arachin 15b). In light of this statement, we may say that such is the way of the evil inclination: At first it encourages a person to speak Lashon Harah against ordinary people, and then it encourages them to speak ill of the tzaddikim, as it is written: "May the lying lips be silent, which speak falsehood about a righteous one with arrogance and contempt" (Psalms 31:19). From there a person will eventually speak against the prophets, as it is written: "They scorned the messengers of G-d" (II Chronicles 36:16). When people are accustomed to speaking against those on earth, they will then speak against Hashem, thereby denying all that is important. Thus the verse, "They set their mouths against Heaven and their tongue struts on earth" means that their tongues, which strutted on earth, led them to attack Heaven with their mouths, thus speaking against Hashem.

It is written, "And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually" (Exodus 27:20). This verse raises some questions. First, why does it begin with the expression, "And you, command"? This is unlike other places in the Torah, where we usually find, "And the L-RD spoke to Moses" or "And the L-RD said to Moses." Second, since this oil was destined for a sacred purpose, namely the lighting of the Menorah, would it not have been better to state, "Let them take for Me pure olive oil," much like the statement in Parsha Terumah: "Let them take for Me an offering" (Exodus 25:2)?

It is written that in all a person's activities and dealing in this world, his intention should not be to seek personal gain. Instead, "All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven, as it is written: 'In all your ways know Him' [Proverbs 3:6]" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 231:1). The Sages have said, "Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven" (Perkei Avoth 2:12), meaning that even things that have no direct connection to a mitzvah – eating, drinking, walking, and all the needs of the body – everything should be seen as part of our service to the Creator, or as something that leads to His service. In other words, we must think solely of Hashem, even in the most material aspects of life.

We need to understand how a person can be expected to focus his complete attention on the Creator of the world all day long, as stated by the verse: "In all your ways know Him." How is it possible for a person, made of flesh and blood, to think only of his Creator throughout the day? Also, how can a person who is closely attached to his evil inclination overcome his natural drives and desires?

Furthermore, someone who is rich and works all day long at trying to augment his business and increase his wealth, how can we ask him to understand that everything he owns really belongs to Hashem? How can we tell him that he shouldn't believe that his own efforts have made him wealthy? Is it really possible to expect people, regardless of the situation in which they may find themselves, to see the utter futility of the world and realize that it has no existence of its own?

Yet may G-d's Name be praised, for He does not seek to trap anyone. According to each person's abilities does the Holy One, blessed be He, put him to the test, meaning that He never sends a person trials that he cannot overcome. Regarding this subject, we have already cited the words of the Chiddushei HaRim on his explanation of the Gemara's statement that "the laws relating to a Hebrew servant are in force only when the Jubilee is observed" (Gittin 65a; Kiddushin 69a), for Heaven never sends a person a trial that he cannot overcome. People have the impression, however, that their trials are arduous and never-ending affairs. This is because the evil inclination, in trying to make people lose hope, attempts to have them believe that their problems are unbearable. When that happens, a person will simply abandon his religious way of life and become filled with doubt.

This is why we are astonished, for do we really have the strength to yield before G-d, to submit our will before His? Can we really connect with Hashem at such a level, all while coping with our supposed trials? This is

why the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "And you, command...that they shall take for you" (Exodus 27:20). In other words, for the Children of Israel to arrive at the level of taking for Me – taking their very selves and devoting everything to the service of holiness, all while removing material desires from their heart – there must first and foremost be the concept of "and you." This means that the Children of Israel must first learn that you have a spiritual influence on them, for you teach them Torah and the fear of Heaven. Because they see you serving Me, it is from you that they will learn to yield before Me. It is from you that they will learn to serve Me with devotion until they have arrived – they themselves – at the level of "let them take for Me." This will happen because, in seeing a holy person serving Hashem, they will learn and be influenced from him. In fact a sacred fire will enter their hearts, they who have a burning desire to be taken by Hashem with all their heart and soul.

It is not without reason that Hashem chose Moses as an example for the entire Jewish people, for the tzaddik of the generation is as valuable as all Israel. As the Sages have said, "Moses was equal to all Israel" (Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot 18; Tanhuma, Beshalach 10). He had the ability to influence and spread his glory upon them, as well as to be feared by them, just as we are taught: "Let the...reverence for your teacher [be] as the fear of Heaven" (Perkei Avoth 4:12). However in order for everyone to gather around the tzaddik and be influenced by him, there must be "and you." The "and" adds something extra, meaning that it is only when the tzaddik is at the level of "let them take for Me" – only when he is taken by Hashem and loves Him with all his heart – only then will he have the power to influence others. In this way the souls of the Jewish people will cling to him (i.e., "they shall take for you") and make tremendous spiritual progress.

The tzaddik of the generation merits having the Holy One, blessed be He, speak through him. This is because the tzaddik's entire being cleaves to Hashem and exerts an influence on the generation. It is from him that people learn to fear Hashem, for they can see the light of the Shechinah when they look upon his face. It is Hashem's desire that we cleave to him with the burning flame of zealous devotion, for by his influence on the Jewish people the tzaddik of the generation can and will carry them from misery to plenty, from slavery to deliverance. What is the relevant issue here? This Shabbat is Shabbat Zachor, in which we find the commandment to erase the memory of Amalek from under Heaven. What happened to Amalek? Moses summoned his disciple Joshua, the son of Nun, and told him to go out and fight against Amalek. The Torah tells us that "Joshua weakened Amalek and its people by the sword's blade" (Exodus 17:13), meaning that the Jewish people conquered Amalek by the power of the tzaddik of the generation. That being the case, the same applies even today: The tzaddik of the generation can help us conquer Amalek, the evil inclination. However we must attach ourselves to the tzaddik for this to happen. When we do that, we will merit all that is good in both the material and spiritual realms.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Marvels of the Shamir

“The work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shall you engrave the two stones” (Exodus 28:11).

The Gemara states that these stones (found on the ephod and breastplate of the High Priest) had the names of the Children of Israel written on them, but not with ink. This is because it is stated, “Like the engravings of a signet” (Exodus 28:11). The stones were also not to be cut with a knife, for it is said, “In their fullness” (v.20). Instead the stones were marked with ink, and the shamir was shown the written strokes on the outside. The stones then split of their own accord, like a fig that splits open in summer yet loses nothing. The shamir was a creature that resembled a worm and was about as large as a grain of barley. It was created during the six days of Creation, and no substance could withstand it. How was the shamir maintained in order to prevent it from damaging things (since it could break every container it which it was placed)? It was wrapped in tufts of wool and placed in a lead tube full of barley-bran (Sotah 48b). The Rashba explains that the Sages wanted to show us the wonders of Hashem, for although the shamir was very small, the hardest materials could not withstand it. On the other hand, although it had incredible strength, it could be held in soft pieces of wool. The Sages describe man as a “miniature world” because we find marvels throughout his body, just as we find them throughout the world. From these many examples, one will suffice to demonstrate how the Creator’s hand protects and guides us. The stomach is a hollow yet muscular organ. Muscles surround the entry and exit of the stomach, sealing it much like the cords of a sac. One muscle prevents reflux in the stomach from reaching the esophagus, whereas another muscle prevents food in the stomach from reaching the small intestine if there is no room to receive it there. The stomach continues the task of digesting food, a process started by the saliva, as it proceeds to reduce the food into smaller parts by crushing and infusing it with digestive acids. The entire stomach is studded with hundreds of cavities, each of which contains several glands that produce a very powerful mixture of digestive acids. Here the question arises as to how these acids, which are powerful enough to break down solid food, do not damage the stomach itself? This is but one organ in an amazing machine that is the human body!

Deliverance is Delayed Because of Negligence in Study

“And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually” (Exodus 27:20).

The Ohr HaChaim said, “This verse alludes to a teaching of the Zohar Chadash, according to which the Children of Israel would be delivered from each of the four exiles through a particular merit. They were delivered from the first by the merit of Abraham, from the second by the merit of Isaac, and from the third by the merit of Jacob. The fourth depends on the merit of Moses. This is why the exile is prolonged, for as long as the Children of Israel do not study Torah and perform mitzvot, Moses has no desire to save them.” The phrase, “that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil” contains an allusion to the Torah, for “pure, pressed olive oil” has no sediments, meaning no interests besides the Torah for

its own sake.

Being a Man Means Barring Your Mouth

It is written, “You shall make the robe of the ephod entirely of turquoise wool. Its head opening [literally ‘mouth of its head’] shall be folded over within it. Its opening shall have a border all around of weaver’s work – it shall be for it like the opening of a coat of mail – it may not be torn” (Exodus 28:31-32).

The Yid HaKodesh (Holy Jew) of Pshischa said that a lock is needed for the mouth to prevent it from saying forbidden things. The Talmud states that the toilet facilities for the priests serving in the Temple (located under the Temple mount) had a lock (Tamid 26a). If someone arrived and found it locked, this meant that there was someone inside. If it was unlocked, it meant that nobody was inside. The Yid HaKodesh of Pshischa said, “When we see that it is locked, it means that there is a man inside. One who puts a lock on his mouth demonstrates that he is a real man. If it is unlocked – if his mouth is open – it means that there is nobody inside.”

Sometimes Silence, Just Like Lashon Harah, Requires Atonement

“A gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate on the hem of the robe, all around” (Exodus 28:34-35).

The Sages said that the robe, which made a noise, atoned for the sin of Lashon Harah that occurred through speech. If such is the case, asks the gaon Rabbi Hoenig of Brueghel, then why were there pomegranates to muffle the sound? Let there be only bells! He answers by saying that just as the sin of Lashon Harah is manifested by speech, so too is it sometimes manifested by silence. When someone needs some important information for business, a shidduch, or for Torah learning – information that is permissible, and even a mitzvah to give so as to prevent someone from harm – yet the person with this information remains silent and uses the excuse that “Lashon Harah is forbidden,” this too a sin. Such a sin is expiated by the pomegranates that muffle the sound.

Punishment that Did Not Prevent G-d’s Presence

“I shall rest My presence among the Children of Israel, and I shall be their G-d. They shall know that I am the L-RD their G-d, Who took them out of the land of Egypt to rest My presence among them” (Exodus 29:45-46).

The Chatam Sofer explains this passage by means of a nuance in the verse, “Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunter’s snare; the snare broke and we escaped” (Psalms 124:7). Since the verse states, “Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunter’s snare,” why is the statement, “the snare broke and we escaped” needed? The Chatam Sofer explains that whoever causes another person to be punished is not allowed into the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He (see Shabbat 149b). Therefore since Israel was the reason behind Egypt’s punishment, they should not have merited to have the Shechinah dwell among them. This is why they protested, “Not for our sake, not for our sake” (Pesachim 117a) – do not punish the Egyptians because of us, for it is enough that we are saved. However Hashem replied, “For My own sake, for My own sake will I do it,” since it was impossible for the Shechinah to reside among the Children of Israel unless Hashem brought all His legions out of Egypt. Now the text is clear: “Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunter’s snare” – and not only that, but “the snare broke” (they were punished) “and we escaped” (they were

not punished on our account), for Hashem punished them “for My own sake.” According to this view, the Chatam Sofer explains that G-d said, “I shall rest My presence among the Children of Israel” despite the fact that the Egyptians were punished on their account and the Children of Israel should therefore have not been allowed into Hashem’s presence. The answer is that I, Hashem your G-d – Who brings you out of Egypt to dwell among you – it is for My sake that I did this.

The War Against Amalek is a War of Faith

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, as you came out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut down all who straggled behind you, when you were weary and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).

Why does the Torah underline that Amalek “happened upon you”? Rashi states that Amalek did not fear G-d, which is difficult to understand, for isn’t it natural for the wicked not to be G-d-fearing? In the war against Amalek it is written, “When Moses raised his hand, Israel was stronger” (Exodus 17:11). The Sages ask, “Was it the hand of Moses that won or lost the war?” During the war of Amalek, Moses told Joshua: “Choose people for us,” people whom Rashi identifies as tzaddikim. This too is difficult to understand, for is a miracle like the one of Chanukah (“the wicked into the hand of the righteous”) needed to win a war? To answer these questions, we need to understand what concepts motivated Amalek’s actions. Amalek’s motivation was eternal renown, and his attitude was, “True, I know that the sea split, but to learn that the world has a Creator from that fact? Certainly not! It’s something that happens once every 6,000 years, a thing that occurs once in history.” This is the meaning of the words, “he happened upon you.” To Amalek, everything happened by chance. Everything is haphazard. “True, I don’t know how it happened,” Amalek believed, “but there’s one thing that’s certain: There is no G-d!” Such was the message of Amalek. Now we can answer the questions that were raised earlier. According to what we have said, the war against Amalek is a war over faith in Hashem and His guiding hand. This is why tzaddikim were needed for this war. Hence when Moses raised his hand and the Children of Israel looked above and placed their hearts in the service of their Father in Heaven, they were immediately victorious, for faith was their victory. This is why the Torah stresses that the fault of Amalek was that he did not fear G-d. Everything else was but the consequence of that fault. This is also why the Torah highlights that “he happened upon you,” which denotes haphazardness.

– Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

After having given the order to build the Sanctuary and its vessels in Parsha Terumah, Parsha Tetzaveh continues with the orders concerning the accessories needed for the service of the Sanctuary. The order is given to take oil for illuminating the Sanctuary, as well as to make the garments that set the priesthood apart. These included the ephod, breastplate, and robe (the regal garments of the High Priest), without mentioning the High Priest’s headplate and the garments worn by the ordinary priests. The vessels for the service of the Sanctuary are described, as well as the altar for the daily sacrifices to Hashem, meaning the daily burnt-offerings. Furthermore, the altar of incense was needed to make its fragrance permeate the Sanctuary.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

In the Corner of a Suitcase

It is written, “Remember what Amalek did to you” (Deuteronomy 25:17).

We are always to remember Israel’s victory over Amalek, the first who dared to attack the chosen people. In trying to explain the verses related to this commandment, we encounter a certain redundancy. After commanding us to remember, the Torah states, “You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under Heaven. Do not forget” (v.19). What is the meaning of the Torah’s additional “do not forget”? The Maggid of Dubno explains by citing the Midrash: “Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, concerns Himself with the praise of the righteous, to publicize it throughout the world, so He concerns Himself with the blame of the wicked, to publicize it throughout the world. He made Pinchas famous and Zimri infamous. Of them it says, ‘The memory of the righteous shall be a blessing, but the name of the wicked shall rot’ [Proverbs 10:7]” (Bamidbar Rabba 21:3). Why must the acts of the wicked be publicized? The Maggid replies with a parable: It is like a loving mother who sends her son to a far away land. She does not stop working as she prepares enormous suitcases that are filled with everything imaginable, including clothes for every season of the year. In the corner of one suitcase, she also places a tiny bag that contains costly medicines, for her son sometimes falls ill on account of a rare ailment.

On the day of the boy’s departure, his mother becomes very emotional. She gives him some final instructions as he is about to leave, telling him: “Here are the delicacies and sweets that I packed for you. Don’t hesitate to eat them! If it’s cold, wear one of the sweaters that I packed for you. In fact use everything that I’ve put in these suitcases.” Then, pointing to the bag that she placed in a corner of one suitcase, she says with a tear in her eye: “These are your medications. I pray that you won’t need them.”

The lesson is clear. The Holy One, blessed be He, prepares delicacies and sweets for our trip – the acts of the tzaddikim and the reward that they receive for their acts – so that we too should want to follow in their footsteps. However there are also “medications” in case one of those who received the Torah falls ill on account of a spiritual ailment, one that manifests itself as a desire to commit sins like Korach and Zimri. If that happens, they just have to look at the punishment and suffering that occurred to those sinners, and in this way they will be vigilant.

These are the words of Parsha Zachor: “Blot out the memory of Amalek,” this erasing is made possible through recollection. If you are completely healthy in the service of Hashem, you will not need to recall the deeds and evil character traits of Amalek, like those who fight by remembering the punishment of the wicked. However “do not forget” the medications that are in a corner of the suitcase. If you unfortunately fall ill and the evil inclination incites you to stop serving Hashem, then do not forget the punishment that is the destiny of those who choose evil, for in this way you will save your soul from evil.

EISHET CHAYIL

Queen Esther

Esther was the daughter of Mordechai’s uncle. Since she was an orphan, Mordechai took her into his home and raised her. Esther was also called Hadassah. Why is Esther compared to a hadass (myrtle)? Of all plants, only the myrtle does not wither in summer or in winter. Similarly, Esther always guarded her righteousness, be it in the home of Mordechai or in the palace of King Achashverosh. With the latter, she did not partake of any of the food that was brought to her, eating only fruits and vegetables. When Esther learned that the wicked Haman wanted to kill all the Jews, she sent Mordechai the message: “Go, assemble all the Jews that are to be found in Shushan and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day, and I with my maids will also fast” (Esther 4:16). Esther prayed to Hashem for deliverance during that time, and her fasting and prayers saved the Jewish people.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Slowing His Fall

It is written, “He said, ‘I have sinned. Now, please honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel. Return with me and I shall prostrate myself to the L-RD your G-d’ ” (I Samuel 15:30).

Saul had received the order to wipe out Amalek, yet he did not fulfill this mitzvah in the way that Samuel had transmitted it to him from Hashem. Following this sin, kingship was removed from Saul, as Samuel said: “The L-RD has torn the kingship of Israel from upon you this day and has given it to your fellow, who is better than you” (v.28). Upon hearing this, Saul asked Samuel: “Honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel.” We need to understand Saul’s intention in having made such a request. Scripture says of him, “Though you may be small in your own eyes, you are the head of the tribes of Israel” (v.17), therefore what purpose could fictitious honors serve once Hashem no longer wanted him as Israel’s king? Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz Zatzal said that Saul did not make this request simply for his own honor. Instead, this request saved him from falling from being the “anointed of Hashem” to being “rejected by Hashem.” Saul asked Samuel to brake his fall, and to at least demonstrate some respect for him before the elders of the people and Israel. He made this request in order to become stronger, even in his lowly state, so as not to be crushed by his descent. It was meant to help him maintain his dignity, to prevent the evil inclination from inciting him to kill himself.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shemuel Strashun – The Author of the Rashash

The gaon Rabbi Shemuel Strashun was born in Saskowitz in the year 5554. The son of the gaon Rabbi Yosef, he studied Torah from his earliest years in prosperity, and he was always known as being devoted to the community. He faithfully saw to the needs of the public and had a desire to help all who were in need. He fiercely battled the sect of “kidnappers” who tried to take children away from Jewish homes for the king’s service, and with his great wealth he saved and brought them to the study of Torah. In his learning, Rabbi Shemuel Strashun followed the method of the Vilna Gaon, having always detested using *pipulim*. All he wanted to do was to use the written word to clearly explain all the difficulties of the Talmud, in order that everyone could fully understand it and find their way in the maze of its different versions. In fact it was with this goal in mind that he wrote his commentary entitled *HaGaot HaRashash* on the entire Talmud. This commentary was accepted as authoritative by all Torah scholars. It offers guidance in the study of *Gemara*, enabling the reader to understand most of its different versions.

At the same time, Rabbi Shemuel Strashun oversaw the Jewish community of Vilna. His private library comprised 5,580 works, being one of the five largest private libraries in the world. To the very end, Rabbi Shemuel devoted his life to the good of the Vilna community, until on Adar 11, 5632 he departed for the celestial academy, having left behind his marvelous commentary on the *Gemara*. May the memory of the *tzaddik* be blessed

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

The Value of Practical and Theoretical Education

The command to “make an Ark” (Exodus 25:10) came before the command to build the Sanctuary. This is despite the fact that, as Rashi points out, on a practical level the Sanctuary was to be built first, followed by everything that it was to contain (see Rashi on Exodus 38:22). The command to make the Ark came first because “the main purpose of the Sanctuary was to contain a place in which the Divine Glory rests, this being the Ark” (Ramban on Exodus 35:1). Thus even when occupied with building the Sanctuary (which began with the tent), the thoughts of the Children of Israel were always to be directed towards the Sanctuary’s goal, namely the Ark of the Covenant.

In the area of education as well, there are always two levels: The practical and the theoretical. In order to teach, it is necessary for action to be accompanied by an awareness of the idea constituting the objective of that action. True, in order to acquire the correct social conduct for the community to live in peace, the practical component of behavior is the main thing. With regards to the community, it is important that people not steal, regardless if they avoid stealing because they regard it as repugnant or because they are simply afraid of being punished. Insofar as the individual is concerned, however, education is not meant to produce robots who simply avoid disrupting society. The goal of education is to produce noteworthy individuals, people who are righteous and upright due to their vision of the world. Because the term “we will do” comes before “we will hear,” the gaon Rabbi Povarsky said that greatness resides in the fact that “we will hear” – which comes after “we will do” – is a completely different kind of hearing, one that penetrates to the depths of a person who takes action by demonstrating the way of the practical choice.

Although it is possible to use the concept of *lo lishma* (unselfishness) as an intellectual incentive for the one who needs it, such an approach is only secondary to educating towards the truth that action must contain. For example, at first we teach a child to respect others because they rightfully deserve it, and only then do we add that he will be rewarded for it.

The story is told of someone who arrived home one Friday night and saw that the covering over the *challah* was not properly arranged. He began to give his wife an entire lecture about the honor of Shabbat and the respect due to the *challah*. He told her that we must not shame the *challah* before the wine, meaning that it must be properly covered. The man’s guest tugged on his sleeve and said to him, “Excuse me, but you’re explaining the honor due to the bread, which feels nothing, yet to that end you’re shaming your wife? Her honor should come before your own!” The fact that he became angry over how the bread was covered means that he had lost sight of how to properly respect the various parts of Creation.

A TRUE STORY

Nothing Was Done

It is written, “The king’s attendants, his ministrants, said, ‘Nothing was done for him’ ” (Esther 6:3). When Achashverosh asked his servants what Mordechai had received for having saved the life of the king, they replied that he had received nothing. During one session of Poland’s parliament, one deputy gave a speech in which he tried to explain that Polish law did not make Jews second-class citizens, and that everything which had been done for the Jews of Poland was more than enough. Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin interrupted the deputy’s speech and said, “When Xerxes asked his servants what had done been for the Jew Mordechai, they said that nothing had been done. It seems that this answer bordered on treason against the king. However they really answered his question accurately because, prior to that time, whenever Mordechai the Jew passed by the king’s gate, people jeered at him, grabbed the hem of his garments, and even spit in his face. Yet now that the king wanted to honor Mordechai because he had saved his life, people decided that nothing should be done to him. In other words, nobody jeered at him or spit in his face, and to them that was more than enough for having saved the king’s life.”