

HUMILITY IN TORAH STUDY IS CONSIDERED AS AN OFFERING (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Path To Follow VAYIKRA

177

March 24th 07

5 Nisan 5767

Publication
HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of
RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA
11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS
Tel: +331 42 08 25 40
Fax +331 42 08 50 85
www.hevratpinto.org
Responsible of publication
Hanania Soussan

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Shamor and Zachor

One day a remarkable and esteemed avrech came to see the saintly Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera Zatzal and asked him a question. Though the avrech studied diligently, his memory was sorely lacking, and he was extremely preoccupied. He therefore asked the tzaddik what he could do in order to retain what he learned. The tzaddik answered, "Do you not know, my son, that Shamor and Zachor are mentioned together, and that it is impossible to separate them? Properly guarding the tongue and the eyes guarantees a good memory, for if you properly observe Shamor [guarding] you will certainly see that Zachor [recollection] follows." Our Sages left us a great deal of advice on how to achieve Zachor, which is extremely important for the study of Torah. What we have just related is some of this advice, offered to us by the tzaddik Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera Zatzal.

It is written at the beginning of this week's parsha: "And He called to Moses, and the L-RD spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying" (Leviticus 1:1). Now the letter aleph in the word vayikra ("and He called") is smaller than normal. Furthermore, the word vayikra is an expression of affection, for Hashem's voice emanated from the Holy of Holies, arrived in the Tent of Meeting, and stopped. Rashi explains the meaning of the term "saying" at the end of the verse: "Go and tell them captivating words: 'It is for your sake that He speaks to me.' Indeed, we find that for all 38 years that Israel was in the desert as excommunicated people...the [Divine] word did not come to Moses."

When we examine this verse more closely, some questions automatically arise, namely: What is the significance of the small aleph? Why is it only the aleph, as opposed to another letter in the word vayikra, which is smaller than normal? Also, why did the voice come to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, rather than going directly to Moses' tent? Above all, what did Moses mean when he told the Children of Israel, "It is for your sake that He speaks to me"?

Moses was a man of G-d, and as such he taught us that the Torah cannot be acquired other than by one who yields to it. The Torah is given to a person who is humble, for only he can acquire it. Furthermore, a person must resemble what is mentioned in the next verse: "When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD" (Leviticus 1:2). In other words he must consider himself as an offering, annulling himself and submitting like a simple animal that stretches out its neck to be sacrificed. The goal of Torah study must be to acquire wisdom and the knowledge of G-d's will, not to seek personal glory. Torah study must take place amidst humility and submission. Moses infused us with this idea – that someone who knows how to read the Torah should not think of himself as being important. In fact it is said of him, "The man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). This is what the small aleph in the word vayikra alludes to, for the aleph represents Torah study. Thus a person who wants to acquire Torah and study it must first and foremost be humble and conduct himself with modesty. Only then will he be able to acquire Torah, for Hashem cannot live with the proud in this world.

Here we also see the greatness of Moses, who lived in the presence of Hashem for 40 years and saw things that no other human being ever had, even ascending to Heaven to study Torah without food or drink. Despite all this, Moses told Hashem before dying: "You have begun to show Your servant..." (Deuteronomy 3:24), meaning he felt that he had just begun, at the end of his life, to understand some of Hashem's words. Such was the humility of our teacher Moses, a level of humility evoked by the small letter aleph.

How does this relate to us? Many people tell themselves, "If I know how to study Torah, then I'm important. If I perform mitzvot with my money, I should be honored. If I support those who study Torah and I fund Torah institutions, then I should have a place right next to the Mizrach." Such an attitude is absolutely incorrect! We must learn from Moses that even if we think that we know something,

even if we have studied Torah and possess some wisdom, we must realize that we still have not succeeded in learning anything. We must realize that there is still much that we have to learn and understand, to examine and reflect upon, in order to acquire Torah. Moses proved this to us when, despite his extraordinary greatness, he said: "You have begun." In other words: I am only at the beginning; I am still insignificant, a small aleph. The same goes for us, for we are still at the beginning, and we are still very small.

At the same time, two more conditions are required of us in order to acquire Torah. The first is that a person must exile himself to a place of Torah, since it is difficult to study while traveling, for example, and it is only in a place a Torah (a yeshiva or kollel) that we can easily acquire it. The second condition is unity, for as the Sages have said, the Torah is acquired by studying with others, since each person helps the other to learn more effectively.

This is the meaning of the verse, "From the Tent of Meeting, saying" (Leviticus 1:1). In fact the Tent of Meeting alludes to a place of Torah, a place where it is easier to study. If the Gemara speaks of Tannaim and Amoraim who spent the entire year traveling just to spend a single day learning in the Beit Midrash (Chagigah 5b), then what can we say? It becomes obvious that we must also go to a place of Torah in order to study!

The second condition is also alluded to in Rashi's citation of the Midrash. When Hashem saw the humility of His servant Moses, He displayed affection, since it was only for the needs of the Children of Israel that Hashem revealed Himself and spoke to Moses. Now for the Holy One, blessed be He, this is called speaking for the sake of Moses, since he was equal to all of Israel. From Moses' point of view, however, Hashem was speaking to him on account of the Children of Israel's importance (even though He spoke to him on account of his own greatness). All this shows us the importance of humility, for Moses and Israel are one, and all the words addressed to Moses were destined for the Children of Israel. The humility of Moses increased to such an extent that even when Hashem addressed him for his own sake, Moses believed that He was addressing him for Israel's sake! Even if this was because Moses considered himself as a beginner in Hashem's Torah, it spiritually elevated him. Due to the unity of the Jewish people, Hashem spoke to Moses so he could teach them Torah.

Thus the Tent of Meeting signified that Heavenly help and the realization of Hashem's reality are only possible for a person who cleaves to the study of Torah. They are only possible for one who does not depart from the tent, meaning a person who never interrupts his Torah study or performance of mitzvot. At that point a sense of the Creator's presence hovers above him, and He protects His servants. The Torah accompanies and protects them in everything they set out to do, a concept expressed by the verse, "A man who dies in a tent" (Numbers 19:14), meaning that he kills himself for Torah study. If we also act in this way, all our deeds will be like an offering before Hashem, as in the verse, "When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD" (Leviticus 1:2), for Hashem always desires such devotion.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Effort Is Worth It!

It is written, “When a nefesh [soul] offers a meal-offering to the L-RD, his offering shall be of fine flour” (Leviticus 2:1).

This verse deals with a spontaneous offering of one who lacks financial means, namely a poor person. In the description of this mitzvah, there is a word that does appear with the other voluntary offerings, the word nefesh (“soul”). Rashi states in this regard: “Who usually donates a meal-offering? A poor man. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, says: ‘I account it for him as if he has sacrificed his very soul!’” In his book *Lev Eliyahu* (Vayikra, p.13), Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal states that when a wealthy person brings an ox for a burnt-offering, he still owns things that are greater than his offering. Even though his generous offering is favorably accepted by Hashem if he brings it according to His laws and with the proper intent, it is certain that it does not reach the level of self-sacrifice. Now imagine a poor, broken-hearted man coming to the Temple and feeling embarrassed for having brought an inexpensive offering, one consisting of flour. When he asks Hashem, “I beg You, please accept this as if I had brought an ox as a burnt-offering,” the Holy One, blessed be He, will tell him: “Not only is your offering not inferior to that of the wealthy, I consider it as being bound to your own soul, as if you had brought your very life to be burned upon the Altar.” From here we learn that for Torah study, there are people to whom Hashem has given an excellent memory, quick comprehension skills, or both. Fortunate are those who have received these abilities as gifts. However there are those who have not been given these abilities, people who must work hard in order to understand everything they study. When they arrive at a new passage, they have almost forgotten what they have already learned. Therefore they must constantly review their studies until the Torah’s teachings have penetrated their souls. In the same way that the verse does not speak of a nefesh other than for the offering of a poor person (since he has literally given his soul for it), so too with regards to the intellectually poor. Such a person must work extremely hard in order to understand the Torah, and he often meets little success in his studies. The Holy One, blessed be He, tells such a person: It is as if you have offered your soul for the Torah, and I Myself will help you. The book *Beit Rabbi* (p.126) recounts the story of a man who complained to Rabbi Yaakov Israel Kanievsky Zatzal about earning a living. He was so busy that he could only attend one Torah class per night, and even then he didn’t understand what was being taught. The Rav said to him, “You don’t know what incredible importance you have in Heaven, for there is only one requirement there, namely the effort that a person makes in his studies. You have truly done your best!”

Hashem Explains The Torah

It is written, “When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD” (Leviticus 1:2). The Yalkut Shimoni asks what a sinner can do to atone for his sin. This question was put to wisdom (represented by King Solomon’s book of Proverbs), and it stated that nothing could be done. Prophecy was asked what a sinner could do to atone for his sin, and it replied: “Let him die and his sin will be atoned.” This means that atonement can be had, but its price is death. The Torah was asked what a sinner could do to atone for his sin. The Torah replied, “Let him bring an offering, and it will be atoned.” Hashem was then asked what a sinner could do to atone for his sin, and He replied: “Let him repent and he will be forgiven!” Now how is it possible for the Torah and Hashem to say different things, since it was Hashem Who gave the Torah? How can there be a difference between them? The Maggid of Dubno said, “Don’t think that Hashem and the Torah are not saying the same thing! To what can this be compared? It is like a king who sent messengers to all his provincial governors. One of them did not understand the royal message, and so he sent a letter to the king asking for a clarification. The king then sent an explanation as to what he meant. The same applies here. The Torah said, “Let him bring an

offering, and it will be atoned,” and Hashem explained just what bringing an offering means: “Let him repent and he will be forgiven.” This is not a different explanation, but rather a clarification of what an offering is, namely repentance. A person’s offering must express his submission to Hashem, otherwise what would be the purpose of bringing one?

A Remedy for Pride: Examining Yourself Piece by Piece

It is written, “He shall flay the burnt-offering, and he shall cut it into its pieces” (Leviticus 1:6).

The gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz Zatzal was once asked to speak during some Sheva Berachot. The Rav, who at the time was advanced in age, arose and said: “I am one of the greatest tzaddikim of the generation, perhaps the greatest of the generation. I’m an extraordinary talmid chacham and meticulous when it comes to performing mitzvot.” Those in attendance began to feel uneasy, thinking that something was wrong with the Rav. They also wondered why they had to be the ones to witness the Rav making a spectacle of himself. The Rav continued: “You can’t say that I don’t have any special abilities, though it’s equally true that I have some faults. Generally speaking, however, I’m as good as they come.” The Rav concluded by explaining his remarks: “I’ve just voiced what a person thinks of himself!” Citing the *Arvei Nachal*, the *Yalkut Gershoni* states that the problem is that every person knows that he has certain abilities, yet he thinks that he is just as good as the greatest among the people. It is true that we may have faults here and there, but in general we believe that we do everything quite well. Such an attitude is the source of man’s pride, which comes from looking at things “in general.” If we want to rid ourselves of pride, we must do as the verse says, which is to “flay the burnt offering.” We must “cut it into its pieces,” examining one part after another to check its condition, not to look at things “in general.” In other words, we must evaluate one thing at a time. Take for example our tefillin. When was the last time that we examined them? When did we last study the laws of tefillin, and if so, did we check all the details of the laws? How many times have we reviewed these laws from our Bar Mitzvah until our eightieth year? Furthermore, what are our Shabbat prayers like? What is the condition of our prayers, our Shabbat, our Shalom Bayit, our Torah study, and so on?

The Sinner Must Take His Head Out of the Fat

It is written, “The head and the fat” (Leviticus 1:8).

The prophet Amos said, “Therefore they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles” (Amos 6:7), which is a reference to the Ten Tribes. The Maharsha explains that since they were immersed in the desires and pleasures of this world, having committed sin upon sin, they were sent into exile. This is why Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin Zatzal said, “‘Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, the head and the fat’ [Leviticus 1:8]. Once the offering was slaughtered and the head was cut, it was taken by its horns and placed on the Altar. The head was not pleasant to look at, for it was oozing blood. What did they do? They took some fat and placed it where the head was severed, and in this way everything was placed on the Altar. This was done to tell a person that he sinned because his head was immersed in ‘fat’ all day long, meaning in the pleasures of this world. He was therefore being told to think of other things.”

Requirements in Proportion to Abilities

It is written, “When a person offers a meal-offering to the L-RD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil upon it and place frankincense upon it” (Leviticus 2:1).

There is the offering of an ox (given by the wealthy), the offering of a ram (given by the average individual), and the offering of a bird (given by the poor). The above verse speaks of the offering of the poorest of the poor, an offering of flour. Yet which offering is more expensive: Flour and oil, or a bird that can be found outdoors? Obviously flour and oil are more expensive. Despite this fact, the Torah says that the poorest individuals must bring an offering of flour and oil – not birds – because the

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Food of the King

poor receive flour and oil as a gift from the tithes (leket, shikcha, peah, and ma'asser ani) that the Torah allots to them. The Chafetz Chaim asks: If the poorest of the poor can bring an offering, what must the wealthy do? He will tell himself, "Since this offering is valuable, I also want to bring flour!" Is such a thing possible? The Gemara states that a wealthy person who brings the offering of the poor has not performed his duty (Kerithoth 28a; see also Arachin 17a-b). From here the Chafetz Chaim derives a lesson for everyday life: Today we have the duty to give tzedakah in place of offerings, and the wealthy must not try to fulfill their obligation by giving a small amount like the poor. Rather, each person must give according to his means, meaning that a wealthy person does not fulfill his duty of tzedakah by giving a poor-man's offering. We also learn something else from here, which is that many people are content to be just better than others at something. For example, the most diligent student in a class is the one who knows the subject better than others, which is reason enough for him to be content. Yet he is fooling himself in that case, for his abilities and the opportunities given to him are much greater than those given to others, which is why much more is expected of him. The sin of the wealthy will not be forgiven if he brings the offering of the poor, and the same applies to every area. If a person helps the community, he may congratulate himself because his efforts to strengthen Jewish observance may have brought many people closer to Hashem. He may then think that among all the Jewish people, no one does as much as he does. Such a belief, however, is terribly mistaken!

There is a Mitzvah to Speak and a Mitzvah Not to Speak

It is written, "When a person sins in that he hears the voice of adjuration, and he is a witness – either he has seen or known – if he does not say, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Leviticus 5:1).

Why is the word lo ("he does not") written with a vav [lamed, vav, aleph]? The Gemara states, "Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] his household. [If he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens" (Shabbat 54b). This means that if an individual does not warn those over whom he exerts an influence, the sins they commit are considered as his own. At the same time, however, the Gemara states: "Just as one is commanded to say that which will be obeyed, so too is one commanded not to say that which will not be obeyed" (Yebamot 65b). On our verse the Gemara states, "If a person does not speak up, he will bear his sin. Yet there are some situations in which it is better not to say anything. Hence the Torah alludes to this by writing the word lo with two possible meanings: 'He says' [lo with a vav] and 'He does not say' [lo with an aleph]."

Overview of the Parsha

The book of Genesis describes events from the time of Creation until the formation of the Patriarchs' families, which would later constitute the Jewish people. The book of Exodus continues with an account of the formation of Hashem's people, the exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, and the construction of the Sanctuary. The book of Leviticus describes how Israel can come closer to the holiness of Hashem by means of the offerings. It lays out how we must be vigilant in terms of impurity, and describes how all life belongs to Hashem.

Parsha Vayikra begins with a description of the offerings made in the Sanctuary, wherein life is connected to Hashem by means of burnt-offerings (which are entirely dedicated to Hashem), meal-offerings (which come from a person's food), and peace-offerings (which a person and Hashem share). There are also offerings that atone for a lack of closeness to Hashem. Sin-offerings atone for sins that stem from impurity, offerings of a higher or lower value atone for lighter sins that vary in function to the financial situation of the sinner, and guilt-offerings atone for acts that simply cause guilt.

It is written, "With all your offerings shall you offer salt" (Leviticus 2:13). The Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 119) states that Hashem commanded that salt be added to the flesh and flour of all our offerings. It gives the following explanation: "The mitzvah of the offerings has the goal of making the giver's soul worthy and righteous. Thus to arouse his soul, the offerer is commanded to bring that which he himself finds beneficial and pleasant." From this principle it follows that he must add salt to his offerings. His performance of the mitzvah should be perfect, lacking in no area, so that his heart may fully participate in it. In fact people savor neither the smell nor the taste of food that lacks salt. Thus by adding salt to his offering, a person perfects his action in the smallest detail, for it may be that a slight lack will have a detrimental effect and ruin the entire offering, much like a meal that lacks a little salt. Salt also does something else, namely to preserve food from decay. Similarly, bringing an offering protects man from decay and guards his soul so that it may live forever. The Ramban wrote in his commentary on the Torah, "It is possible that [we are commanded to offer salt because] it is not respectful that the food that is offered up to G-d should have no flavoring, being without salt, similar to that which is written, 'Present it now to your governor. Will he be pleased with you?' [Malachi 1:8]" (Ramban on Leviticus 2:11). Another reason is given by Rabbi David Tevil Zatzal in his book Beit David: We know that every part of Creation has a spiritual component to it, without which it could not exist. When a person brings an offering, the spiritual component detaches itself and returns to its origins, whereas the material component is burned on the Altar. In this way the material component attains perfection. Now in the material world we see four domains: The one who speaks, the animate, the vegetable, and the mineral. How can the material component (in each of these four domains) attain perfection through the offerings? The offering of animal flesh is the animate. The offering of flour, the libations, and the wood to burn them are the vegetable. The priest who slaughters the animal is the one who speaks. The Torah therefore commands that something else be added to the offering, namely salt, which is the mineral.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta

Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta and his wife lived amid crushing poverty, and one day they didn't even have bread in their home. To ease their hunger, Rabbi Shimon traveled outside the city and began to beseech the Creator to save them from their poverty. Hashem heard his prayer, and a hand emerged from Heaven and gave him a precious gem. When Rabbi Shimon's wife asked him where he had obtained the gem, he said: "G-d provided it." She then told him that she wasn't going to use the gem regardless of their situation, and asked him to pray for Heaven to take it back. Rabbi Shimon went and told the story to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, who said to him: "Go back and tell your wife that if anything is lacking from your table, I will restore it from mine." His wife then went to see Rabbi Yehudah and told him that his test in this world was to serve Hashem in wealth, whereas her test was to serve Him in poverty. Her portion in the World to Come was therefore greater than his, and he could not provide her with anything she would lack. Rabbi Yehudah was amazed by her remark, and Rabbi Shimon prayed for Heaven to take back the gem, which it did.

– Adapted from Shemot Rabba 52:2

A TRUE STORY

The Offering of the Poor

It is written, “When a nefesh [soul] offers a meal-offering to the L-RD, his offering shall be of fine flour” (Leviticus 2:1). Rashi states, “Regarding all the sacrifices that were donated voluntarily, the only instance where Scripture states the word nefesh (soul) is in the case of the meal-offering. Now who usually donates a meal-offering? A poor man. The Holy One, blessed be He, says: ‘I account it for him as if he has offered his very soul!’” The Midrash recounts the story of King Agrippa, who wanted to offer a thousand burnt-offerings in the single day: “He sent to tell the High Priest: ‘Let no man other than myself bring offerings today!’ There came a poor man with two turtledoves in his hand, and he said to the High Priest: ‘Sacrifice these.’ Said he: ‘The king commanded me, saying, “Let no man other than myself offer sacrifices this day.”’ Said he: ‘My lord the High Priest, I catch four [doves] every day; two I offer up, and with the other two I sustain myself. If you do not offer them up, you cut off my means of sustenance.’ The priest took them and offered them up. In a dream it was revealed to Agrippa: ‘The sacrifice of a poor man preceded yours.’ Thus he sent to the High Priest, saying: ‘Did I not command you thus: “Let no one but me offer sacrifices this day”?’” (Vayikra Rabba 3: 5). When the High Priest explained the situation to King Agrippa, he said to him: “You were right in doing as you did.”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shneur Zalman – The Torat Chesed of Lublin

The gaon Rabbi Shneur Zalman Zatzal, the author of the book Torat Chesed, was among the greatest men of Torah in his generation. He was born in the town of Ladi (hence his family carried the name “Ladirer”) and he frequented the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe of Chabad. After his marriage, a fire broke out that destroyed everything his wealthy father-in-law owned. Rabbi Shneur Zalman was thus forced to accept a rabbinical position, becoming the Rav of Plotsk. When his reputation began to spread, he was appointed as the Rav of Lublin. All the great men of Torah testified that never in his life did he forget anything he learned. Doctors were utterly amazed by his prodigious memory, saying that his brain capacity was twice the norm. He could, in fact, review 18 chapters of the Mishnah in 18 minutes. Many Halachic questions were put to him, the answers to which he assembled in his great work entitled Torat Chesed. In 5652 Rabbi Shneur Zalman left every honor behind in the exile when he went to live in Jerusalem, where he remained until his dying day. All the great men of Torah, as well as all the people, respected him as a king. His holiness was legendary in the land, and miraculous stories are told of him. His life ended on Nissan 5, 5662, as his soul ascended to the celestial academy to bask in the hidden light reserved for the tzaddikim. On the day of his death (which occurred in the spring), the heavens erupted with lightning and thunder, and a torrential rain fell upon the earth. Rabbi Shneur Zalman is buried on the slopes of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Thinking, Not Guessing, When Trials Arise

It is written, “When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD” (Leviticus 1:2). In his commentary on the Torah, the Ramban explains the reason for the offerings: “All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life” (Ramban on Leviticus 1:9). We can understand this statement in two ways: The first is that the offerings contain some element of justice in order to cancel out sin, as in the case of the punishments meted out by the Beit Din. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch interprets the word nekama (“retribution”) as hakama (“restoration”), since the act of retribution – as when a murderer is executed by the sword – restores the justice that was flouted by the murderer’s action. This consists of establishing the rule of justice – not acts that distort it – as being dominant in the world. The second way of understanding the Ramban’s remarks is that when a person brings an animal offering and sees what happens to it, his soul will suffer and encourage him to return to the right path. The masters of Mussar explain that trials arise so as to turn people away from the vanities of this world, for people change their ways when they realize that it makes no sense to live a life that leads only to trials (see Ohr Yehel and Michtav Me’Eliyahu). In accordance with these two views on the Ramban, we can also evaluate and explain the disagreement between Rabbi Meir and the Sages concerning the offerings (cited in Bava Metzia 3b). Here we must stress an important point regarding how people view their trials, for they should not lose sight of the message behind them (otherwise they will have been futile). Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz Zatzal recounts the story of a woman who opposed the shidduch of her daughter to a great man because he walked with a limp. One day this woman was bringing a bowl of milk to her ailing husband in the morning, when she suddenly tripped and broke her leg. She attributed the accident to the fact that she had given her husband something to drink before his prayers. She did not see how it related to her opposition to her daughter’s shidduch. When trials arise, we are quick to attribute their cause to some convenient reason, just as long as we don’t have to learn a hard lesson from them – just as long as we don’t have to acknowledge a deeper, underlying sin on our part! It is a shame to waste trials in this way.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

A Pound of Shells

It is written, “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall proclaim My praise. Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob” (Isaiah 43:21-22).

What can this be compared to? It is like a man who went out in search of a job or some business opportunity. Upon seeing a merchant selling nuts at \$5 a pound, he thought: “Half a nut is made up of its shell. So a buyer is really paying \$2½ for a pound of shells. It’s worth my while just to collect shells in the garbage and sell them at \$5 a pound. I’d really make a profit that way!” This is exactly what he did, opening a stall in the marketplace to sell his “wares.” All sorts of people quickly gathered around him and openly mocked his odd “commodity.” “You fool,” people said to him. “It’s because of what’s inside the shell that people buy the whole nut! Who would ever think of buying the shell by itself!” Similarly, the prophet Isaiah said in the name of Hashem: “This people have I formed for Myself” – I created this people and provided them with all their material needs, but that was solely with one goal in mind, that “they shall proclaim My praise.” Yet in the end, “You have not called upon me, O Jacob.” Therefore what good is a shell without its contents?