

AND THEY BELIEVED IN HASHEM: FAITH'S POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON THE ENTIRE WORLD (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

The Path To Follow

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We find ourselves in the very midst of Passover. Everyone has removed chametz from their homes, from the depths of their hearts, and has joined with the Holy One, blessed be He, by eating matzah, the bread of healing, and by having performed the mitzvot of Passover. As we know, all this leads to solid faith in G-d. We are approaching the seventh day of the holiday, which is a true foundation of faith. Now if we look closely, we will see that the faith of the Jewish people has an influence on the entire world.

This influence comes from the power of the Children of Israel's faith that Hashem would produce a miracle for them by splitting the sea. In fact the Sages have said that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin zealously sprang into the sea (Sotah 36b), thereby attaining solid faith, as it is written: "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). Their faith was so great that the entire world was influenced by this miracle, to the point that not only Jethro converted, as the Gemara states (Zevachim 116a), but also the Egyptians themselves were affected and said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the L-RD fights for them against the Egyptians" (Exodus 14:25).

This requires an explanation, for did the Egyptians not realize before this point that Hashem fought for the Children of Israel in Egypt? Had the Egyptians forgotten that they themselves had said, "This is the finger of G-d" (Exodus 8:15) as well as, "The L-RD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (ibid. 9:27)? Furthermore, how many times did they fear the effects of the plagues they endured in Egypt, to the point that they even asked Moses to pray for them (Exodus 8:4,24; 9:28; 10:17; Tanhuma Va'eira 33)? Consequently, this means that they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, fought for the Children of Israel in Egypt. Hence why is it only here, at the sea, that they admitted it? Does this mean that up to now they really did not believe it?

This can be fully explained in light of what we said above, for

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Be Careful About How You Say Things

It is written, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

Sometimes we can say the same thing in two completely different ways. At times we can say something that is irritating and insulting, yet at another time we can say the same thing in a way that makes people happy and calms them down. What determines the end result is the tenor of our words. A tone of criticism and accusation is negative, whereas one of polite inquiry is positive. Such is the case with most conversations that people have. The problem is not really the difference that exists between the two parties, but rather the way that this difference is understood. Except for rare cases, with good intentions we can find a way that defines the matter at hand in such a way as to render its insignificance obvious in comparison to the drawback of strife existing between both parties. Imagine an individual wanting to tell a person about a stain on his clothes so he can clean it. He can tell this person, "Your clothes are dirty," or he can say, "It's too bad that you have a stain here." Every listener is sensitive to such a difference, which is why all speakers should be sensitive to it as well.

He, was taking vengeance on them, or whether He was doing everything for the sake of the Children of Israel. Due to the fragile faith of the latter, Hashem hardened the hearts of the Egyptians to administer another plague so they would believe in Him even more, and also for the Children of Israel to awaken themselves to a perfect faith in Him. Proof of this lies in the fact that only one fifth of the Children of Israel actually left Egypt (Tanhuma Beshalach 1; Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, beginning of Beshalach), all due to the fragile faith of those who died in the plague of darkness.

However just before the sea split, as the Children of Israel found themselves being tested at the seashore, the great faith that they demonstrated by zealously springing into the water initiated a miracle, and thus the sea split for them. It follows that because of their incredible faith in G-d, Who performed this miracle for them, they also incited a great awakening among the Egyptians, who had doubts prior to that time. The Egyptians were now affirming with certainty that it was the Holy One, blessed be He, Who had fought against them in Egypt, and not (as they had previously thought) that the Creator's existence was in doubt.

From everything that has been said, we may learn a lesson of paramount importance concerning the great influence exerted by a person who wholeheartedly studies Torah with passion and diligence for the sake of Heaven. This approach has the power to create a spirit of holiness that can influence others who do not share this view, bringing them closer to G-d and arousing their desire to learn Torah. How many good things does the Holy One, blessed be He, constantly shower upon us, solely through the power of this awakening! All this comes through the power of a person who diligently studies Torah. It is not without reason that before performing a mitzvah we say, "With fear and love, in the name of all Israel," for this awakens love in the hearts of others to perform the mitzvah as well. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. When someone harbors doubts in his heart, this can cause others great harm, for he introduces a spirit of doubt in their hearts as well.

We may reason that if a Jew with doubts about his faith is liable to harm the faith of other Jews like himself, then he is all the more likely to instill doubts in the hearts of non-Jews. Due to our sins, this may unfortunately lead to non-Jews hating us, for when we begin to have doubts with regards to the Torah and mitzvot, even non-Jews feel its effects, and their hatred for us increases.

This can be understood in light of what we have said. The Egyptians began to truly believe in Hashem, with a sincere and unhesitant faith, only when the Children of Israel themselves "believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). This faith led the Egyptians to start asking themselves some serious questions, prompting them to say: "Let us flee from Israel, for the L-RD fights for them against the Egyptians" (v.25). In addition, the Children of Israel incited the same fear among the nations of the world through the power of their faith, as it is written: "Peoples heard, they were agitated...all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved" (Exodus 15:14-15). All this was brought about by the Children of Israel's sacred service of G-d, for if we as Jews strengthen the purity of our faith, it will have an influence of holiness on the entire world.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Internal Order Before External Order

There is a popular saying concerning the Seder night that goes as follows: “There is no seder [order] in Israel, and if once a year we have a seder, people immediately ask, ‘Why is this night different from all other nights?’”

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin Zatzal wrote that this saying contains a kernel of truth. According to the Sages, “This people is likened to the dust and it is likened to the stars. When they go down, they go down to the dust; and when they rise, they rise to the stars” (Megillah 16a). Now we know that Israel and the Torah are one, therefore the Torah also has no “order,” as it is stated: “There is no chronological order in the Torah” (Pesachim 6b). This applies not only to the written Torah, but to the oral Torah as well: “There was no precise order in the Mishnah” (Bava Kama 102a). On the other hand, it is asserted that the power of the Torah resides precisely in order. For example, “You shall set up the Sanctuary according to its manner, which was shown to you on the mountain” (Exodus 26:30) refers to a given order, and on this verse the Yerushalmi asks: “Is there a ‘manner’ for the beams? However a beam that was placed on the north should not be placed on the south. A beam that was placed on the south should not be placed on the north” (Yerushalmi, Shabbat 12:3). The beams had a certain order, each with a fixed position “according to its manner.”

The same concept of order in Israel is found regarding the laws dealing with money. Theft, oppression, and so on represent a form of disorder, for in such cases an object or money is not where it should be – being with the thief instead of the rightful owner. When what has been stolen is returned, the verse “He shall return the robbed item that he robbed” (Leviticus 5:23) is fulfilled, meaning that order is restored. Thus the entire Torah is called “the decrees of Hashem,” for it is entirely an instructional manual on how to conserve proper order in the world of the Holy One, blessed be He.

The masters of Mussar stress that we must distinguish between internal and external order. For example, there are some people whose things are perfectly placed in order according to size, color, and so on. However when they have to find something whose size or color they are unfamiliar with, they cannot. Alternatively, there are some people whose things are in a huge mess, yet they can find whatever they need because they know where to start looking. The same goes for the kind of order that is demanded of the Jewish people. Certainly external order is also required of them, for “this is my G-d, and I will adorn Him” (Exodus 15:2). However the main thing is internal order, an example of which is showing hospitality. Some people, because they are constantly paying attention to the external order of things for their guests, have great difficulty in fulfilling this mitzvah. It is said that the Chafetz Chaim did not want to have a tiled floor in his home, for he did not want people to be upset with guests who dirtied the tiles by walking on them. The most important thing for the host to remember is that his guest should feel at home, not that he be considered as someone being “ordered” about.

The Miracle of the Exodus from Egypt: The Exodus from Impurity

In his book *Pachad David*, our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks the following question: As opposed to the promise made to Abraham concerning the exodus from Egypt, no promise was made to him concerning the splitting of the sea. It would seem that the splitting of the sea was an even greater miracle, and therefore it should have been mentioned even more than the exodus from Egypt, which had been promised! Rabbi David Pinto replies that since the Children of Israel had breached the 49 gates of impurity, the promise made to Abraham no longer applied. However in His great mercy, Hashem took them out of Egypt even though they

acted as a generation of idol worshipers. Furthermore, He did not allow their impurity to affect the mitzvot that they had already performed, which was what brought about other miracles. Therefore the greater miracle was the exodus from Egypt, meaning their exodus from impurity, the merit of which brought about the miracle at the sea and others too.

The Two Extremes in Mitzvot Observance: The Servants of Hashem and the Servants of Pharaoh

It is written, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt” (Passover Haggadah).

There are two extremes in the work that people do in fulfilling mitzvot. Even if two people perform mitzvot with the same meticulousness and individual intention, it is still possible that they are further apart than heaven and earth when it comes to general intentions. For some people, their entire inner being is wholeheartedly devoted to holiness and the joy of the mitzvah. For others, “They flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongues. Their heart was not constant with Him” (Psalms 78:36-37), meaning that their deeds reveal no inner devotion. They are done automatically, “learned by rote” (Isaiah 29:13). Now insofar as G-d’s influence on people is concerned, there exists a principle of reciprocity, much like “water reflects a face back to a face” (Proverbs 27:19). For some, “The L-RD shines His face on you and shows you grace” (Numbers 6:25), while for others “I will conceal My face from them” (Deuteronomy 31:17). As the Mishnah states, “In the measure with which a man measures, it is meted out to him” (Sotah 8b). Now the letters of *paro* (“pharaoh”) are the same as those of *oref* (nape), meaning that he does not draw his sustenance from the “face” of G-d’s holiness. Instead he draws his sustenance from the nape – from the other side of the face – which is the opposite side of holiness. That is, his entire essence lies in the external. It is in this way that we can understand the statement, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt,” meaning that we were slaves to the side of the nape; we were spiritually “reversed.” Nevertheless “Hashem brought us out,” and we were saved in order to receive the Torah and draw our vitality from the side of holiness. As the Haggadah states, “Just as we merited to perform this Seder, so too may we merit to perform it in the future” – just as we merited to perform the Passover Seder, which led us from impurity to purity (as the Rav Shlita explained above), so too will we merit to continue, during all the days of the year, performing mitzvot with the utmost devotion, internal as well as external.

Dimitich Ra’ayati – I Reduced You to Silence, O Israel

It is written, “May fear and terror befall them. At the greatness of Your arm, may they be still [yidmu] as a stone” (Exodus 15:16).

The word *yidmu* has two meanings. It may be connected to *dimyion* (likeness) or *demama* (silence), for silence also constitutes unqualified approval.

The first meaning is that the nations will resemble a stone by the speed of their descent. The second is that they will be silent as a stone when they fall due to the greatness of G-d’s power. Rashi understands the verse, “Dimitich ra’ayati [I compared you, My beloved] to a steed of Pharaoh’s chariots” (Song of Songs 1:9) as being addressed to the assembly of Israel, and he explains it to mean: Do you remember the horses of Pharaoh, and how you feared them as they pursued you? You were surrounded on all sides, with the desert and its ferocious animals to the left and right, the Sea of Reeds in front, and Pharaoh’s horses behind. You were afraid and began to cry out, “Were there no graves in Egypt, that you brought us to die in the desert” (Exodus 14:11), and you were told, “The L-RD shall fight for you, and you shall remain silent” (v.14). That is precisely what happened, and we may interpret the verse in the Song of Songs as follows: Dimitich ra’ayati – “I reduced you to silence” by My response, *dimitich* thus evoking *demama* (silence).

The Four Expressions Are Related to the Four Stages

The Gemara asks why the Sages instituted the drinking of four glasses on the night of the Seder, since a person must not eat or drink two of anything (or a multiple thereof) because demons lie in wait for this (Pesachim 109b). The Gemara replies, “Our Rabbis instituted four cups as symbolizing liberty, and each one is a separate obligation.” This means that the glasses from which people freely drink have nothing to do with one another and are not considered as a group of four (a multiple of two), but rather as four separate units. The Chida said that the exodus from Egypt comprised four stages:

Stage One: Before the departure from Egypt, since the plagues lasted 12 months. During that time the enslavement abated, for slaves were no longer beaten.

Stage Two: Rosh Hashanah of that year, for the Sages have said that the enslavement completely stopped at that point (Rosh Hashanah 11a).

Stage Three: The plague of the firstborn, the departure from Egypt, and the splitting of the sea, meaning the deliverance of the Children of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh during Passover.

Stage Four: Fifty days after the departure from Egypt, when the Children of Israel received the Torah.

The Chida connects these stages to the four expressions of deliverance found at the beginning of Parsha Va'eira:

Expression One: “Vehotzeti [I shall take you out] from under the burdens of Egypt” (Exodus 6:6). They would work, but no longer suffer.

Expression Two: “Vehitzalti [I shall rescue] you from their service” (ibid.). Their enslavement would stop completely.

Expression Three: “Vega’alti [I shall redeem] you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments” (ibid.). This refers to the deliverance and all its wonders.

Expression Four: “Velakachti [I shall take] you to Me for a people” (v.7). This is the giving of the Torah, which made us G-d’s people.

We can understand the Gemara in light of the above. Given that the glasses represent liberty, they were instituted in a liberal way, in four separate stages. Hence there is no reason to fear a “multiple of two.”

We must also note that this “liberal way” ends by “Veheveti [I shall bring] you to the land” (Exodus 6:8), meaning that the redemption is not complete until we are living in that land. Thus if we view all these as a group, it is a group of five. However if we do not view them as such – because a fifth glass was never instituted by the Sages, since we were still far from settling the land – then we no longer have a group per se, and each glass is to be considered on its own.

EISHET CHAYIL

By the Merit of the Righteous Women

The Sages have said that the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt by the merit of the righteous women of that generation. The Sages describe their devoted efforts to help their husbands in providing them with all they needed, without mentioning the fact that they bore and raised children at a time when they themselves were feverishly working under the Egyptians. From this we learn that even if greater importance seems to be attributed to the role of men, in terms of true, inner importance – which is precisely what influences the direction taken by Divine Providence and Hashem’s miracles – it is the role of women that is the determining factor. Thus the sacred service of women more closely resembles one of complete unselfishness and purity, for they do not receive outside compensation. It is also possible that this is why their service is of greater purity, their reward being their merit. The fact that a woman realizes this will enable her to fulfill her role with even greater enthusiasm and energy.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Shabbat Chol HaMoed – The Difference Between Passover and Sukkot

We recite the complete Hallel on each day of Sukkot, whereas on Passover we only recite the complete Hallel on the first night (Arachin 10a, Sofrim 20:9). The Gemara explains the difference between the festival of Matzot and the festival of Sukkot with regards to the recital of Hallel. The seven days of Passover differ from the seven days of Sukkot, for during Sukkot there are a different number of offerings required on each of its days, and each day has its own distinct level of holiness. However for Passover, all its days are equal to the first with regards to their offerings, as stated in Parsha Pinchas: “Like these shall you offer daily, throughout the seven days” (Numbers 28:24). This is reflected in the reading of the Torah during Chol HaMoed, for on Sukkot we speak of the particular offerings of each day, whereas on Passover we read the same thing each day in reference to the offerings. This is why all the days of Passover are secondary with respect to the first, and they are not considered as festivals with inherent holiness.

Hence we find a difference between Passover and Sukkot with regards to the last blessing for the Haftorah that we read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed. For Sukkot, we mention the festival of Sukkot itself in the blessing: “For this day of the festival of Sukkot” and at the end we say, “which sanctifies Shabbat, Israel, and the festivals.” However for Shabbat Chol HaMoed of Passover, we do not even mention the festival of Matzot in the blessing of the Haftorah, for at the beginning we do not say: “For this day of the festival of Matzot.” Furthermore, at the end we only say, “which sanctifies Shabbat.” This means, as we have said, that each day of Chol HaMoed Sukkot has intrinsic importance. Therefore it is proper to mention Sukkot in the Haftorah of Shabbat, which we do not do in the case of Chol HaMoed of Passover.

There exists a difference, therefore, between the nature of Passover’s seven days and those of Sukkot. For Passover, it is like “seven multiplied by one,” meaning that the seven days constitute a single entity composed of seven pieces, and we celebrate that day and its holiness for seven days, as stated at the end of Parsha Re’eh: “You shall sacrifice the Passover offering. . . seven days shall you eat unleavened bread with it” (Deuteronomy 16:2-3). This means that the seven days prolong the beginning of the holiday with the Passover offering (as it states, “shall you eat. . . with it”). However the festival of Sukkot is like “one multiplied by seven,” meaning that although it is the same festival, it is divided into seven separate parts.

The reason for this is that during Passover we recreate the time of our departure from Egypt, which was a unique event. This is why the entire holiday is a single entity. However during the festival of Sukkot, when we celebrate the abundance that Hashem bestowed upon the Children of Israel (since He enabled them to dwell in sukkahs and gave them crops and abundance throughout the year), such abundance was not a unique event, but rather a daily one. That is why it is proper to celebrate it in seven distinct parts.

A TRUE STORY

At a Time of Awakening – Take Action!

The gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz Zatzal said that his father told him of an incident that occurred during the time of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. The story goes as follows: While he was in the middle of a meal, the brightest student in the Volozhin yeshiva was being questioned about something that was explicitly stated in Tosaphot, yet he could not come up with an answer. Feeling utterly dejected, he finished his meal without reciting Birkat Hamazon, and instead he went to a secluded place and studied there for seven years with extraordinary diligence, eventually becoming a great Torah scholar. When Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin was asked if the student had acted correctly, he replied that on one hand he had obviously acted incorrectly, for it is forbidden to finish a meal without reciting Birkat Hamazon. Yet on the other hand, if he had observed the din and recited Birkat Hamazon, he would not have gone to study Torah with such great diligence for seven years. He would therefore have not become a great Torah scholar. We must not derive from this, however, that we can act flippantly with one of the Halachot because of some possibility for spiritual gain.

From this incident Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz learned that we must be very careful when it comes to interruptions, distractions, and tardiness in the accomplishment of mitzvot, for such things greatly diminish our willpower.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Menachem Zemba of Poland

The light of the gaon Rabbi Menachem Zemba Zatzal began to shine in 5644. Born in the Polish capital of Warsaw, he was known as a child prodigy from his earliest years, surpassing by far the other children of the cheder. His renown was such that the greatest Torah scholars of the generation came to see his father in order to discuss Torah with the boy. After his marriage, Rabbi Menachem Zemba continued to devote himself to Torah and Chassidut, as the light of his Torah spread to all corners of Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. The Torah greats of the generation also wanted to see him, including the Avnei Nezer of Sochatchov, the Brisker Rav, and the Rebbe of Ostrova. Whoever was knowledgeable in Torah knew that during that time, the citadel of Torah was found in the home of Rabbi Menachem.

Rabbi Menachem Zemba was a Ger chassid, and he clung to his holy Rebbe the Sefat Emet of Ger, and later to his son the Imrei Emet. Along with his friend the gaon Rabbi Avraham Luftbir (the son-in-law of the gaon Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk), Rabbi Menachem wrote Zera Avraham, which created a great stir upon its publication. At the same time, he was constantly corresponding with the Torah greats of the generation.

Rabbi Menachem Zemba later devoted himself to community matters, and he helped as many people as he could. He was among the Jews in the community of Warsaw, suffering greatly when the Nazis took the city. He was arrested several times under various pretexts, yet immediately released. On Nissan 19, 5703, during Chol HaMoed, he escaped from his home when a fire broke out in the Warsaw ghetto. It was then that a bullet struck him in the street, and there he died for the sanctification of the Divine Name. May Hashem avenge his blood, which was shed before our very eyes. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed for life in the World to Come.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

The Torah is a Remedy for the Evil Inclination

Although Israel's existence as G-d's people began with the exodus from Egypt, its goal was the giving of the Torah. As Moshe Chaim Luzzatto explained, "The Holy One, blessed be He, created the Torah as the only remedy against the scourge of the evil inclination, as the Sages have said: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: "My children! I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its remedy [literally "spice"]. If you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand" ' [Kiddushin 30b]" (Messilat Yesharim ch. 5). That the Sages described this remedy as "its spice" means that it transforms the evil inclination into an inclination for good, just as spices make bland food tasty. It does not mean that the Torah obliterates the evil inclination. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, commenting on the end of Parsha Bereshith, explains that the evil inclination is not an external force, but rather the consequence of a person's choices.

For every correct choice that a person makes, he facilitates the bestowal of good upon himself. The same applies in the opposite case, which is what constitutes the evil inclination. The Torah indicates the proper choices that a person should make, thereby allowing him to transform his inclination from evil to good. The war waged against man is not only a physical one, but also a mental one, such that he must be courageous, especially at the beginning of the conflict. Concerning this subject the Sages have said, "It may be likened to a band of robbers shut up in a prison. One of them made an opening and they all escaped, except for one who did not escape. When the governor arrived he began to strike him with a rod, saying, 'Ill-starred and hapless wretch! There was an opening before you, but you did not escape!' " (Kohelet Rabba 7:15§1). A prison only prevents a criminal from further crime; it does teach him the right path. That depends on the person himself. Therefore the robber who stayed behind proved that he still needed his prison, not having learned enough to be on his own. This is why, even at the beginning of the road of education – when we must act with firm resolve – we must realize that our goal is to completely eliminate evil from our inclination and transform it into good by means of the Torah.

IN LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

The Body of the Jewish Nation

It is written, "The hand of the L-RD was upon me.... Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live' " (Ezekiel 37:1,4-5).

More than a century ago, in the year 5656, Rabbi Mendel Hirsch Zatzal commented on the prophetic vision of Ezekiel in exile. Rabbi Mendel said, "As long as breath is missing in the body of the Jewish nation – a breath that alone is the physical life of the people – it will remain dead. If today the land of Israel were given to Jews through miraculous events, and if they could settle in the land of their forefathers and establish an independent Jewish state, they will have gained absolutely nothing as long as they had not removed the cause behind the destruction of the state and the Temple. In reality, we may say that this destruction was necessary to save Judaism, and thus Jews. A Jewish national body without a Jewish soul was, and would continue to be, a dead body. A Jewish state that does not get down to fulfilling the Torah of Hashem and carrying out its eternal laws – a state that appears to us as solely an ideal of justice and brotherhood based on the concept of moral correctness – such a state is not viable and would be destined to perish, as it did more than a thousand years ago.

"We must ensure that the destiny of the Jewish people – for which it was delivered from Egypt – is that it be judged by its moral progress. This is why it is forbidden for us to deny our lofty roles or bury our heads in the sand like an ostrich, for we are still far from safely reaching our goal."