

# FAITH IN THE TZADDIK LEADS TO FAITH IN THE CREATOR

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



## The Path To Follow EMOR

183

May 5<sup>th</sup> 07

17 IYAR 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](http://www.hevratpinto.org)  
Responsible of publication  
Hanania Soussan

**N**ear the end of this week's parsha we read, "The son of an Israelite woman went out, and he was the son of an Egyptian man.... The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed, so they brought him to Moses. The name of his mother was Shelomit the daughter of Divri" (Leviticus 24:10-11). Who was he, and why did he curse? Our Sages said that this man, the son of an Israelite woman, had an Egyptian father whom Moses had killed in Egypt. When this son of an Egyptian came to pitch his tent within the camp of Dan, the members of that tribe said to him: "What are you doing here?" He answered, "I belong to the children of Dan." They said to him, "It is said, 'They encamped by their standards...according to the house of their fathers' [Numbers 2:34]. We do not go according to the mother." They immediately ejected him from their camp, until he began to blaspheme and curse.

This is astounding, for how could a person who had clearly witnessed Hashem's greatness in Egypt, as well as all the miracles He performed, and who heard the voice of Hashem saying, "You shall not take the Name of the L-RD your G-d in vain" – which constitutes an even greater prohibition against blaspheme (G-d forbid) – how could such a person arrive at the point of blaspheming the Name of G-d? From here we learn an awe-inspiring lesson, which is that "the fear of your teacher [should be as] the fear of Heaven" (Perkei Avoth 4:12). The Torah states, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31), meaning that a person can only achieve faith in G-d through a belief in His servant Moses, who represents the Rav or tzaddik of the generation. We can only reach perfection and attain a true fear of Heaven by seeing how the tzaddik unselfishly serves his Creator.

As a result, when this man realized that the tribes were not going to be lenient with him by allowing him to pitch his tent among theirs, he should not have argued with them in any way. Instead he should have addressed his grievance to Moses, the tzaddik of the generation, and asked him for advice on what to do. However this man, the son of an Egyptian, had no faith in Moses whatsoever. He did not acknowledge his authority, and he certainly did not believe in Moses' disciples. Hence he failed to ask for advice, going neither to Moses nor to Aaron or any of the elders of Israel, for he had no faith in the tzaddik of the generation! Since he possessed no such faith in his heart, he had nobody from whom he could learn to serve Hashem. Hence he could not achieve faith in Hashem. Although he witnessed all the miracles that the Holy One, blessed be He, had performed for Israel, he actually denied Hashem and reached such a low level that he blasphemed and cursed.

From here we see just how important it is to have faith in the tzaddik of the generation. The tzaddikim in every generation connect us to Hashem, as the author of Tiferet Shlomo wrote in his commentary on Parsha Nitzavim: "Every Jew is like a simple villager, for whom reaching the king is difficult. However the tzaddik is like the king's minister, a man familiar with the royal palace and who can establish a connection between the simple villager and the king. In this way

the king can see to the villager's requests." If we as Jews believe that we can confront all the problems that life hands us, yet without believing in the tzaddikim of the generation or cleaving to them, we will indeed have a difficult time in coming before the King in our crude attire. We will be immediately thrown out of the palace, and we will have no way to rectify our deeds.

This is what was done by the son of the Israelite woman, the son of the Egyptian man. The Children of Israel took no pity on him at that time, and they refused him permission to pitch his tent among theirs. This is despite the fact that one of the characteristics of Jews is that they are merciful. Why the lack of mercy in this case? The answer is that they knew him well and realized that he did not acknowledge Moses, the tzaddik of the generation and the Rav of the entire Jewish people. They knew this to be so, especially since Moses had killed the man's father in Egypt and hidden his body in the sand. This is why they wanted absolutely nothing to do with him, and they certainly did not want him to pitch his tent in their camp. Thus they showed him no mercy, for as the Sages have said: "It is forbidden to show mercy to the wicked" (Midrash Mishlei 30:16). This is especially true when it comes to a wicked person who reveals his true colors and innermost thoughts by cursing in anger.

It is true that, despite the wickedness of this son of an Egyptian, the Torah did not record the name of his Hebrew adversary. It refrained from doing so in order to make us realize just how much the Holy One, blessed be He, holds dissension in abhorrence. Even though the Hebrew had a point in not wanting to live near a wicked person, he should have controlled himself and not fought with him. Rather, he should have immediately summoned him to the Beit Din. However since he argued with him, the Torah did not record his name so as to teach us the gravity of strife, especially when the possibility exists to settle things without a dispute. After all, Moses and the elders of Israel were available, and they could have settled things calmly, especially a matter as serious as this.

From here we learn that when someone does not connect himself to the tzaddik of the generation or to his Rav, or if he holds them in contempt, then he cannot achieve faith in G-d – even if he were to witness miracles with his very own eyes. Instead, he will think that everything happens by chance. Faith can only fill a person who has a connection to the tzaddik, a man from whom he can learn to know the Creator and serve Him in truth. This teaches us that if a person has no faith in the tzaddik of the generation, he is liable to end up committing the worst sins possible, until he actually utters blaspheme (G-d forbid), as we see in this week's parsha.

Above all, we learn that a person does not have the right to take matters into his own hands if he can go to the tzaddik instead. This is because a person is liable to make a mistake by handling things on his own. He should instead go to the Beit Din and ask them to render a decision; he must not take justice into his own hands (unless this may cause him to incur an irreparable loss – see Bava Kama 27b). This is especially true if he is liable to enter into an argument that will provoke a Chillul Hashem.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### He Who Disparages Others Will Be Disparaged

It is written, "One who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23). This verse contains some advice and a lesson that applies to everyone. In fact, by distancing himself from Lashon Harah and slander, a person distances his body and soul from troubles and conflicts with others. It is also written, "Who is the man who desires life, who loves days of seeing good?" (Psalms 34:13). That is, what can a person do in order to merit a good life? The answer is given by the very next verse: "Guard your tongue from evil." By guarding his tongue, a person will achieve a life of peace and tranquility, a secure life in which he will be at peace with those around him.

As for one who speaks ill of others and disparages them, he too will end up being disparaged – and that goes without mentioning his punishment in the World to Come. Early authors wrote that we can find an allusion to this idea in the verse, "As he inflicted a wound on a person, so shall it be inflicted on him" (Leviticus 24:20).

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## The Blasphemer and the Murderer

It is written, “The son of an Israelite woman went out...and the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed.... When a man mortally strikes any human life.... They took the blasphemer” (Leviticus 24:10-11, 17, 23).

In his book *Lev Aaron*, Rabbi Aaron Baksht (d. 5601), who served as a mashgiach in the yeshivot of Lithuania, asks why the Torah breaks off its description of the blasphemer in order to introduce laws on physical injuries, as we see in the above passage.

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us an important lesson here. Some people think that man's relationship with G-d and his fellowman can be divided into two distinct domains: Man and G-d, and man and fellowman. Such people think that even if an individual has a long way to go in terms of fulfilling his duties toward G-d, this has no bearing on his behavior with others. Such a view is deeply mistaken, for the Sages have taught: “One who is ungrateful to others will end up being ungrateful to G-d.” When an individual fails to acknowledge the good things he receives from other people, not only will this affect his relationship with others, but his spiritual state as well. When ingratitude becomes entrenched in a person's soul, it will cause him to be ungrateful to the Holy One, blessed be He.

The same also applies in the opposite sense. That is, a person who lacks faith in G-d and does not recognize His immense acts of kindness that inundate all of Creation will end up being ungrateful to his fellowman as well.

This is what the Torah is teaching us here, namely that we must not think that someone who is capable of blaspheming Hashem can have a perfect relationship with others. Not so, for a person without faith in Hashem is liable to fall into the abyss. We already know that a person who lacks faith becomes like an animal when facing the smallest trial; indeed, he becomes a danger to those around him. All the values and feelings that he formulated intellectually go out the window upon his first conflict with another person.

Generally speaking, man's relationship to his fellowman and his relationship to G-d are really one. There is no need to make a distinction between the two.

The passage on the blasphemer contains another lesson that the Chafetz Chaim has elaborated upon. Moses did not know how the blasphemer should be punished, and therefore he was placed in custody. Hashem then declared that he should be stoned. Now when a case is presented to a king for him to render judgment, he can choose to demonstrate severity or leniency, even though everyone hopes that he chooses the latter. In the case of the blasphemer, however, we see that when it was brought before Hashem, He ruled that the blasphemer should be stoned to death. Where was the leniency that people expect of a king? The Chafetz Chaim explains that the very fact he was sentenced to death constitutes an act of kindness and mercy, for death rectifies and atones for a soul that has sinned. Without such a punishment, the soul of the blasphemer would have been lost forever. Therefore his death constituted his rectification and atonement.

## A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them” (Leviticus 21:1).

The Sages explain that the repetition of the word *emor* (“say”) in the verse, “*Emor* [Say] to the priests... *ve’amarta* [and say to them]” is a warning to the elders to watch over the minors (*Yebamot* 114a). In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita explains that this verse comes to warn important figures, the sons of Aaron and those like them, to emulate their fathers and walk in their ways, albeit with great humility, just like Aaron. Even if these people are at a lofty spiritual level and continue to grow in the service of Hashem, they must still remain small and humble in their own eyes, otherwise they will become impure among their people. Now it is only for their closest relatives, meaning their parents, that they have the right to become impure. This means that they can only become impure for the most sacred of things, i.e., their parents, the Torah, and spirituality. Only for

these have they the right to feel proud, as it is written: “His heart was lifted up in the ways of the L-RD” (II Chronicles 17:6). Thus only with regards to Hashem's holiness can a person rightfully feel proud.

## The Resurrection of the Dead in the Torah

It is written, “When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain by its mother for seven days, and from the eighth day on it is acceptable for a fire-offering to the L-RD” (Leviticus 22:27).

The Midrash states that from here we may deduce that the resurrection of the dead is mentioned in the Torah. What is the connection between this verse and the claim of the Midrash? Rav Assad said that man is the crowning achievement of Creation. Yet how does man's life progress? At birth he is incapable of taking care of himself, and he has to be nourished and looked over for years before he can even walk on his own. As for a calf, lamb, or kid, they can move on their own as soon as they are born. Is this what we would expect from the crowning achievement of Creation? When a person grows old, he once again needs help, and so again we may ask how he can be considered as Creation's crowning achievement. We must say that there is something else after death, otherwise how could man be considered as the pinnacle of Creation? This is why we can say that the resurrection of the dead is mentioned in the Torah.

## Don't Worry!

Rabbi Shalom Schwadron Zatzal recounted the story of a youngster who was about to take a turn for the worse. Rabbi Shalom spoke to him and asked, “Who is happier, you or a cow?” The youngster replied, “Me.” Rabbi Shalom then asked him why, and he answered: “Because a cow drinks water and eats grass, but I drink coffee and eat cake. A cow sleeps outside, but I sleep on a bed. A cow gets rained upon, but I stay warm and dry inside my house.” Rabbi Shalom asked, “Have you ever seen a cow go to the doctor because of a backache?” The youngster replied that he had not, at which point Rabbi Shalom said: “Then what good does it do for you to sleep on a bed? What good does it do for you to stay in a warm house during winter, or to eat refined food?” The youngster then began to cry. “Why are you crying?” asked Rabbi Shalom. He said, “Because I'm not an animal.” Rabbi Shalom replied, “Don't worry...you are!”

## Utterly Scorned

It is written, “You shall not profane My holy Name, but I will be sanctified among the Children of Israel. I am the L-RD Who sanctifies you” (Leviticus 22:32).

Commenting on this verse, the Ramban said that our Sages viewed it as a positive mitzvah to sanctify His Name by observing the mitzvot that we must die for rather than transgress. This explains the verse, “That brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d” (v.33), which includes all the mitzvot. This means that it is fitting for us to sanctify His Name because we are His servants, whom He redeemed from Egypt. On the verse, “If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned” (Song of Songs 8:7), the Ben Ish Hai wrote that a person must be willing to give up all his wealth for the sake of the mitzvot. If a person is told to either transgress a Torah prohibition or lose all his money, he must lose all his money. However he must not give up his life except in the case of the three sins that one must die for rather than commit.

“If a man would give all the wealth of his house” – all his money must be devoted to keeping the commandments – “he would be utterly scorned.” The word *boz* (“scorned”) is composed of the letters *beit*, *vav*, and *zayin*. The letter *beit* represents the second of the Ten Commandments (the prohibition against idolatry), *vav* the sixth commandment (the prohibition against murder), and *zayin* the seventh (the prohibition against adultery). Hence a person will be utterly scorned for this *boz*, since he must give up his life instead of committing any of these sins.

## A Mavoi, Chanukah Lights, and a Sukkah

It is written, “That your generations may know ki [that] I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths” (Leviticus 23:43).

In his book *Simchat HaRegel*, the Chida states that there are three special occurrences of the word *ki* in Scripture, despite the fact that it appears count-

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes

less times. The Sages have taught that these occurrences of the word *ki* are all connected. They are: “*Ki* [But] we will stay in the street” (Genesis 19:2), “*Ki* [That] I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths” (Leviticus 23:43), and “*Ki* [For] the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23). The Rebbe of Viznitz, the Author of *Damesek Eliezer*, said that these verses allude to the mitzvot governed by size limits between 10 tefachim and 20 amot, with the letter *kaf* in the word *ki* representing the 20 amot and the *yud* representing the 10 tefachim. Thus a *mavoi* (an alley in which one may carry on Shabbat) that is smaller than 10 tefachim or greater than 20 amot is invalid (“But we will stay in the street”). The same restrictions apply to the placement of Chanukah lights from the ground (“For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light”), and the wall height of a *sukkah* (“That I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths”).

### Without Reciting a Blessing

It is written, “You shall count for yourselves, from the next day after Shabbat” (Leviticus 23:15).

Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin was in the United States at the end of the 1920s to collect money for his yeshiva. During that time it was difficult to give public lectures, for most people were religiously uneducated. One day a Jew approached Rabbi Meir and boasted about the way he observed mitzvot. This boastful Jew said to him, “Isn’t it true that we eat dairy dishes on Shavuot, and that the counting of the Omer is a preparation for Shavuot? That’s why in my home, we eat cheese blintzes on every day of the Omer as a preparation for Shavuot.” Rabbi Meir asked him, “What happens if you forget one day?” The Jew replied, “In that case, on the next day we would eat them without reciting a blessing.”

– Aish Dat

## PERKEI AVOTH

### A Completely Different Experience

Rabbi Yaakov used to say, “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come, and one hour of bliss in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world” (Perkei Avoth 4:17).

In his commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, Perek Chelek), the Rambam gives a lengthy explanation on the concept of the World to Come. The Rambam first makes us realize, however, that a fundamental difficulty exists in our ability to understand the subject. As he writes, “Realize that just as a blind man cannot understand the concept of color, nor the deaf the concept of sound, so too is the physical body incapable of understanding spiritual pleasures.” Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (5652-5714), the Mashgiach of the Ponevezh yeshiva and one of the greatest Mussar figures of the previous generation, gave a stunning explanation for the Tanna’s statement in Perkei Avoth. Rabbi Dessler said, “Let us collect the scattered hours and minutes of pleasure and enjoyment of a whole lifetime and concentrate them all into one minute. We shall have an extremely intense experience of joy.... But let us go further and concentrate into that same minute all the happiness and joy experienced by all the people in the city throughout all their lifetimes...all the people in all the cities of that country and of every country.... The intensity of such an experience must truly be beyond description. But this would not be ‘all the life of this world.’ All the life of this world is arrived at only if we add together all the happiness experienced by all generations of men from the beginning of creation until the end of time. If we were to take all this – all the good things of this world, without any exception whatsoever – and give it all to one person at one time, then we should have achieved a degree of worldly happiness which is surely impossible to exceed. And nevertheless, ‘One hour of bliss in the World to Come’ exceeds it.”

The World to Come is not just a more intense version of the joy that we experience in life. Rather, it is a completely different experience. Trying to explain it would be like trying to explain the concept of joy to an inanimate object, or like explaining to a blind person what he would see if his eyes were opened. This would initially be like music to his ears, but later on he would get used to the idea. However the World to Come will constitute a completely different life, not one of silent obscurity. It will be a life lived to the sound of utter joy.

The Hilloula of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes takes place around this time of year. Rabbi Meir was among the greatest Tannaim of the fourth generation, being the main disciple of Rabbi Akiva. When the Mishnah gives a Halachic opinion without citing its source, it comes from Rabbi Meir, one of the first to organize the mishnayot. His work served as the basis for the Mishnah compiled by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.

The Talmud states that he was not called Rabbi Meir, but Rabbi Nehorai (Eruvin 13b). Why do we know him as Rabbi Meir? It is because he enlightened (*meir*) the eyes of the Sages in Halachah. Concerning his greatness, the Talmud recounts a statement by the Amora Rav Acha bar Chanina: “It is revealed and known before Him Who spoke and the world came into being, that in the generation of Rabbi Meir there was none equal to him. Why then was the Halachah not fixed in agreement with his views? Because his colleagues could not fathom the depths of his mind, for he would declare the unclean to be clean and supply plausible proof, and the clean to be unclean and also supply plausible proof” (*ibid.*). In other words, when Rabbi Meir gave the Halachah that something was clean, he explained it in such a way that his colleagues could not maintain another view. They were thus positively convinced that he was right. Yet when he explained the same Halachah by giving the opposite view, ruling that what he had initially stated to be unclean was really clean, he also reasoned in such a way that everyone agreed with him. This is because he explained everything in a logical and realistic way. Hence his colleagues could not follow his reasoning to the very end. The reason why he was surnamed “Baal Hanes” comes from a story found in the Talmud. There it says that the sister of Rabbi Meir’s wife had been imprisoned by the Romans, and so Rabbi Meir took a sack full of denarii and went to free her. The prison guard, however, was afraid to accept it. Rabbi Meir told him to take the money, and if he should ever find himself in trouble he should cry out, “O G-d of Meir, answer me” and he would be saved. The guard therefore released the woman and was saved by the words that Rabbi Meir had taught him to say (Avodah Zarah 18a).

Reciting “O G-d of Meir, answer me” has become a tradition among the Jewish people as a *segula* in difficult times. This custom is mentioned in the book *Midrash Talpiot* by Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir, who under the subject of Avodah U’Metzia wrote: “I know by tradition that when someone loses something, if he promises to donate some money for the elevation of Rabbi Meir’s soul, he will find anything he loses, as long as not much time has passed. However if it was money that he lost, it may have already been found and spent, and if it was clothing that he lost, it may have been carried away or used to such an extent as to render it unrecognizable. In such cases, making this promise serves no purpose.”

In the book *Petah Enayim*, the Chida says the following on Avodah Zarah 18a: “From here we have the custom, which has spread to all our provinces, that for every misfortune we encounter, we recite in prayer, ‘O G-d of Meir, answer me’ and promise to give oil or *tzedakah* for the soul of Rabbi Meir.”



## A TRUE STORY

### Peace of Mind in Order to Know

It is written, “That your generations may know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths” (Leviticus 23:43).

From this verse the author of Chiddushei HaRim deduced that a person who would suffer by being in a sukkah is exempt from this mitzvah. This is because he will regret being there, in which case he will have no peace of mind (yishuv hada’at). Therefore how can he fulfill the mitzvah “that your generations yeidu [may know]”? The story is told of a person who happened to be spending Sukkot with Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna. The gaon wanted to eat with his guest, but he excused himself by saying, “Please eat in the sukkah that is in the yard. I’ll be in the house because I’m ill and not feeling well. I’m therefore exempt from eating there.” The members of Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s family presented the guest with a full-course meal in the sukkah, when suddenly the elderly gaon appeared at the entrance, having gone to the effort of coming down in his honor! His guest was surprised: “Why did you change your mind and force yourself to come down here?” Rabbi Chaim Ozer explained that he had thought it over, and although he was exempt from the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah, he wasn’t exempt from demonstrating hospitality, for even Abraham did this when he was ill. It is not proper for a guest to remain alone in a sukkah while his host is in the house, for that is not the way to treat a guest!

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### The Rewards of Loyalty

It is written, “But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok who kept the charge of My Sanctuary when the Children of Israel strayed from Me, they shall draw near to Me to serve Me” (Ezekiel 44:15).

In the future, when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea, everyone will understand the great importance of a priest who offers sacrifices in the Temple. There is no doubt that people will be ready to forgo all their wealth in order to participate in the sacred service. Nevertheless this honor is reserved solely for the Levitical priests who descend from Zadok, for they were the ones “who kept the charge of My Sanctuary when the Children of Israel strayed from Me.” The value of a mitzvah is determined by the environment, meaning by the situation and era in which a person accomplishes it. This is what constituted the greatness of Zadok’s descendants, “Who kept the charge of My Sanctuary when the Children of Israel strayed from Me,” when people revolted against Heaven and many allowed themselves to stray. Zadok’s descendants remained loyal, and notwithstanding the general environment, they maintained their loyalty and devotion to Hashem. Hence they are the ones who are worthy to serve in the future as well.

The Chafetz Chaim said that in peacetime, a soldier needs a great deal of time to advance in rank. However in wartime, an ordinary soldier who performs a daring feat for his king and country will be immediately promoted. Similarly in our time, when to our great regret people revolt against the King of the universe, the spiritual level of a person who remains faithful to Hashem and His Torah becomes greatly elevated.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Yechezkel Landau of Prague – The Noda B’Yehuda

The gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Landau Zatzal was born in the city of Apt in 5474 to Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi. His father was a wealthy official, being a leader of both the community and the Vaad Arba Aratzot (“Council of the Four Lands”). Rabbi Yechezkel learned Torah from Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik Segal of Ludmir, and from an early age he became known as a great gaon from whom nothing in Torah was hidden. After his marriage he went to live in Brody, a city filled with Torah scholars and scribes. However Rabbi Yechezkel was not intimidated, and he was able to answer these gaonim in all areas of Torah. He was known as a Torah giant as early as the age of 24, and he was accepted as the Rav and Av Beit Din of Brody’s four rabbinical courts. In 5505 he became the Rav of Yamapoly, and in 5515 (being only 40 years old) he became the Rav and Av Beit Din of the great city of Prague, where he lived until his dying day. While continuing to study Torah, Rabbi Yechezkel diligently defended his people, both in Prague and throughout the region. He enacted decrees in all areas of spiritually, as well as decrees regarding weddings. For example, he placed a limit on the number of guests that could attend, in order that non-Jews would not be gripped by jealousy.

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau was loved by all, including Emperor Joseph II. One day while he was with the Emperor, the latter asked him to write something in the royal ledger. Rabbi Yechezkel wrote, “Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him” (Genesis 42:8).

On Iyar 17, 5553, at the age of 79, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau’s soul departed for the celestial academy, and his body was laid to rest in Prague. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### Taking Back The Gift

In his book Midrash David, Rabbeinu David (the grandson of the Rambam) tells the story of a poor man who earned just enough to feed his family. However he was always grateful for what the Creator gave him, be it little or much. Every night after eating with his family, he thanked Hashem for the kindness that He showed him, at which point he and his children sat down to sing. One of his children played a string instrument, the second sang, and he took a tambourine in hand as they all rejoiced. One night the king was passing near his house and could hear the sound of singing coming from within. He heard these melodies on the following night, as well as the night after that! The king therefore had the poor man summoned. When he appeared before him, the king asked: “How much money do you have?” He replied, “Sire, I’m a poor man. I only have what I earn each day to feed my family, but I’m happy with what the Creator gives me. That’s why I rejoice with my family every night.” The king then ordered his servants to fill a sack with gold coins and to give it to the poor man. When he returned home, he placed the coins into a box and realized that it wasn’t completely full; it was still missing a little. He and his wife agreed to go and work until the box became full, and from then on their lives became very stressful. Each day they would put whatever they earned into the box, but it never seemed to fill up. Their singing disappeared, along with the joy they used to have every night. Some time later the king again passed near his house, but now he saw that all was dark and they were asleep inside. Nothing could be heard coming from the house. The king summoned the man once again and asked him why he wasn’t as joyous as before. The man replied, “Sire, I was happy when I didn’t have any money, since I never really wanted anything. But now I’m filled with stress and anxiety because I’m constantly worried about filling up my box!” At that point the king took back his money, and once again the poor man was happy.