

“DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD” – AND ONLY GOOD! (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering to the L-RD from the fruit of the ground. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. The L-RD had respect for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, He did not have respect. Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (Genesis 4:3-5). Cain was the first person in the world to take the initiative of bringing an offering to Hashem. He did this because his heart motivated him, for there were three partners in Cain: Adam, Eve, and Hashem. As the Gemara states, “There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother” (Niddah 31a). Hence Cain decided to bring an offering to Hashem, for he wanted to thank Him for having infused him with the breath of life. Had it not been for Hashem, Cain would not have become a living being.

Upon closer examination, we discover something surprising here. Through his spiritual understanding, Cain realized where he stood and acknowledged the goodness of G-d, Who placed a sign of life on him. He understood that it was only because of G-d that he walked the earth, breathed, ate, drank, and slept, which motivated him to bring an offering of thanks to Hashem. Yet that being the case, why did Cain bring such a poor offering, one composed of inferior crops (Bereshith Rabba 22:5)? Was he forced into doing this? He himself took the decision to bring an offering to Hashem, and nobody forced him or even told him to do it! After all, he was the first person to take this initiative! Therefore why did he not bring a perfect offering by using his best crops? Furthermore, once Cain saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not appreciate his offering, he should have quickly realized his mistake and rectified it by immediately bringing another offering, one consisting of his very best crops. In that case Hashem would have obviously accepted his offering with joy! Yet instead of rectifying his action, Cain became angry. In fact he was so bitter with his brother that he attacked and killed him in the field, as it is written: “Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:8). He ended up committing the most heinous of crimes.

We may say that in Cain, good and evil were constantly mixed together, for his good deeds were infused with evil. True, he constructed an altar and brought an offering to Hashem. Yet evil was infused in this good deed, for he brought inferior fruit as an offering to Hashem. As we know, fruit actually allude to mitzvot (see Bereshith Rabba 33: 1). Thus for every mitzvah, Cain did not know the difference between good and evil. He performed mitzvot that were dominated by evil, failing to do them with the right intention. Instead he acted out of pride and sought honor for himself, for pride and a love for honor were mixed into everything he did. Thus Hashem said to him, “If you do good, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do good, sin crouches at the door” (Genesis 4:7). This means that the way to distinguish between good and evil, and the way to do everything without any mixture of evil, is to devote oneself to the study of Torah. Thus Hashem told Cain: If you do good, if you devote yourself to Torah – which is

called good, as it is written: “I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah” (Proverbs 4:2) – then you will be accepted. The Torah will elevate you, and you will merit serving Hashem in perfection. However in the opposite case, meaning if you fail to study Torah, your evil deeds will lead you to the brink, for the Torah cannot save a person if he possesses bad character traits. The Gemara records a similar situation with Jeroboam the son of Nabat, who sinned and caused others to sin (2 Kings 17:21). Hashem seized Jeroboam by his garment and said, “Repent! Then I, you, and the son of Jesse [i.e., King David] will walk in the Garden of Eden.” Jeroboam asked, “Who will be in the lead?” Hashem replied, “The son of Jesse.” When he heard this, Jeroboam said: “If so, then I refuse [to repent]” (Sanhedrin 102a).

Let us think about this for a moment. Jeroboam, who sinned and caused others to sin, apparently had no chance to repent, or even to have his repentance accepted if he did. Nevertheless Hashem addressed Jeroboam and asked him to change his ways, and in return He promised to accompany him in the Garden of Eden. Is there anything more important or greater than this? The Holy One, blessed be He, personally asked him to repent and promised to accept his repentance. Not only that, but He also promised to walk with him in the Garden of Eden!

Despite all this, Jeroboam refused to accept Hashem’s offer. Why? Because Hashem told him that the son of Jesse would be in the lead! Wasn’t it enough that Hashem promised Jeroboam that He would accept his teshuvah and walk with him in the Garden of Eden? Was this a trivial promise? However Jeroboam was unable to submit to Hashem or yield his royalty before King David’s. It was his ego that prevented him from doing this, for he was incapable of forgoing his pride and quest for glory. It was the same with Cain, for he was infused with jealousy, hatred and pride, which found their way into his good deeds. Therefore even when he understood, from an intellectual point of view, that he should bring an offering to Hashem and thank Him for the benefits that He bestowed upon him, Cain brought his inferior crops. Even when his brother Abel brought a superior offering and Hashem accepted it, Cain failed to learn from this. Instead his hatred continued to simmer. In fact it was difficult for Cain to learn from his younger brother, who had just realized (thanks to Cain) that he should also bring an offering to Hashem.

From here we learn just what kind of benefits a person acquires both for himself and the entire world when his good deeds are untainted by evil and done to perfection, when pride, honor-seeking, jealous and hatred are not found among his good deeds. We also learn just how much evil a person can bring upon himself and the entire world when good and bad are mixed in him. We must therefore always be careful to separate good from evil, ensuring that our good deeds consist only of the good.



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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

A 40-Day Segula

The following segula is mentioned at the end of the booklet Sam Chaim: For 40 consecutive days, practice Shmirat HaLashon [proper speech] for a prayer to be granted for someone. The booklet cites a letter from a family that tried this segula. They had a daughter who was getting older yet couldn’t find a husband, and their son was also waiting in the wings and getting older.

The first time they organized this 40-day plan to practice Shmirat HaLashon, a shidduch was arranged and began to get serious. They were to receive a final answer on the 40th day, but it was negative. Without losing hope, they addressed everyone engaged in the plan and realized that some of them had completely forgotten their commitment. At that point they renewed their strength and again undertook this plan. Another shidduch was arranged after just a few days, and on the 28th day their daughter was engaged! The family undertook another 40-day plan to observe Shmirat HaLashon, and after 30 days their son was engaged.

It would seem that the power residing in proper speech is astounding!

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

A Condition For Receiving

It is written, "The herb of the field had not yet sprouted, for the L-RD G-d had not sent rain" (Genesis 2:5).

Commenting on verse 4, Rashi states: "He had not caused it to rain because there was no man to work the soil...but when man came and understood that [rains] were essential to the world, he prayed for them and they fell, and the trees and the herbs sprouted."

It is written, "Dust shall you eat all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:14).

Out of his love for his subjects, a king decided to give them whatever they wanted, but only if they presented their requests to him. When they presented a request, if it was true and sincere, the king would open his hand and gladly grant it. One day one of the king's subjects rebelled and caused him many problems. He was brought before the king, and after listening to the reasons for his rebelliousness, the king pronounced him guilty. The punishment: Wherever he was, the king would provide him with food. He would never have to trouble himself to go to the palace and make his request."

When the king's servants and subjects learned of the rebel's sentence, they were astonished. How could such a "punishment" be possible? Not only was corporal punishment not administered to the rebel, nor was he sent into exile, but he was also provided with food wherever he went! The king, who understood the people's astonishment, smiled and said: "You should know that I deeply love all my subjects, and I also know that they love me. This is why I am prepared to give them whatever they need, just as long as they request it of me. The need to make such a request is meant to ensure that the bond of love that exists between us is never broken. I know the needs of everyone, and I have the ability to meet these needs, for the royal treasury is at their disposal. Yet were I to let everyone take whatever they wanted without requesting it of me, they would quickly forget both my beneficences and me! However by means of their requests, the bond between us is constantly renewed. As for this rebel, I have no interest in him. However he is still one of my subjects, and as king I am obligated to protect him. Therefore I decided to give him what he needs, just as long as I don't see him, for I never want to see or hear from him again!"

This parable puts into concrete terms the goal of prayer. Hashem prepared an entire universe in which everyone can find what he needs, but only if he prays for it! Hashem tells us: Pray and connect yourselves to Me. Let us constantly renew our love, and I will grant your requests. "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psalms 81:11).

Thus Hashem waited for the prayer of the first man before making vegetation emerge from the ground in abundance, even though it was prepared beforehand. However when the serpent rebelled and brought a curse upon the world, how did Hashem punish it? "Dust shall you eat all the days of your life." How could Hashem provide such a rebel with food wherever it went?

Such a punishment, however, was the worst kind the serpent could have received. The connection to Hashem that prayer provides was removed from the serpent, for the King no longer wanted to hear from it: "Take what is coming to you and do not appear before Me again, for I never want to see or hear from you again!"

Don't forget: "The L-RD is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalms 145:18). All we have to do is to connect with Him; all we have to do is open our mouth and He will fill it.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, "And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering to the L-RD from the fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3).

Cain was the first to realize that man's goal in life is to devote himself entirely to serving Hashem. It was this goal that Cain wished to achieve by bringing an offering. Although he was the first person to bring an offering, when his brother Abel offered the finest animals of his flock and Hashem was

pleased with it, but not with Cain's, Cain became furious. In fact his anger was so intense that he killed his brother Abel. Thus instead of meriting the title of the first person to bring an offering, he became, as the Sages have said, "the first murderer."

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita explains that after having long searched for a way to serve Hashem, and after finding this way to be through offerings, Cain put no effort into carrying this out, for pride had made its way into him. As for Abel, when he learned how to serve Hashem, he perfected this way. Thus he brought the finest animals of his flock as an offering. However instead of rejoicing, Cain became angry because his pride was hurt, so much so that he refused to forgive his brother. All this occurred because there was an element of self-interest, a slight trace of pride, mixed into Cain's service of Hashem. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, reprimanded him: "If you do good" – that is, if you repent of your pride and forgive the slight to your honor – "will you not be accepted?" Thus Cain would be able to elevate himself and his deliberate sins would be transformed into merits. Yield before your brother and learn from him, for he elevated himself to a greater degree in spiritual understanding. However if you fail to repent, pride will drive you completely mad. Do you really need that? Therefore choose the right path now and abandon the way that you have adopted, for I am ready to receive you.

A Few Allusions

It is written, "Bereshith [In the beginning] G-d created" (Genesis 1:1).

The Vilna Gaon said that every Torah mitzvah can be found in the word bereshith. During a Pidyon HaBen ceremony, he was once asked how this mitzvah, the redemption of the firstborn, was found in the word bereshith. The Vilna Gaon immediately replied, "Ben rishon achar sheloshim yom tifdeh [You shall redeem your first son after thirty days]," a phrase whose initials form the word bereshith.

– Peninim MiShulchan HaGra

The last letters of the Torah's first three words – Bereshith bara Elokim – form the word emet ("truth"). Thus we read, "Your very first utterance is truth" (Psalms 119:160), meaning that the beginning of Your words, Bereshith bara Elokim, is really emet, is really truth!

– Aish Dat

The letters of the word bereshith comprise the initials of the expression Bekol ram avarech Shem Hashem tamid ("I will constantly bless the Name of Hashem in a loud voice").

– The Chida

The Store That Created Itself!

It is written, "G-d said, 'Let us make man in our image'" (Genesis 1:26).

Rashi explains: "Even though they [the angels] did not assist Him in His creation, and there is an opportunity for heretics to rebel, Scripture did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the attribute of humility." It is said that Rav Elchanan Kunstadt Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah, once entered a wine store while the merchant was away. A Jew who didn't believe in G-d entered after him and asked, "Where's the merchant?" The Rav replied, "There's no merchant in this store. Didn't you hear what happened? There was an explosion in Haifa, and as a result these wine bottles came together and this store appeared on its own." The non-believer replied, "Sir, I think that you need to see a psychiatrist. Such a well-organized store couldn't run without a merchant, and it definitely couldn't appear as a result of a chance explosion in Haifa!"

The Rav said to him, "I need a psychiatrist? This is a small store, and everyone understands that it couldn't have possibly been created because of an explosion or be run without a merchant. Yet all the scientists who think that the universe and all it contains was created by an explosion, don't they need a psychiatrist?"

The Rav continued: "Why did they invent such an illogical theory? It is because they want to do whatever they have in mind. Their pride does not let them accept that someone else should dictate their conduct. Yet how can a person not obey

the instructions of his Maker? This is why they invented a theory which states that everything was created on its own because of an explosion. In that case they don't need to obey anyone."

That is what Rashi is teaching us concerning this verse, namely that the root of non-belief is pride. Therefore even when Hashem left an opening for heretics to err by saying, "Let us make man in our image," He is still teaching us to be humble. If non-believers were to adopt this trait, all their theories would fall apart on their own.

A Helper Against Him

It is written, "I will make him a helper against him" (Genesis 2:18)

Rashi states, "If he is worthy, she will be a helper. If he is not worthy, she will be against him."

A wife's objective is to push her husband to constantly progress in his service of Hashem, encouraging him to pray with a minyan, fix times for Torah study, and so on. Hence if he, as a young man, *zacha* ("merited," a term that can also mean "he purified himself"), and if growing in Torah has become second nature to him, a wife's role is to become his helper. However if he does not accomplish this purification as a young man (i.e., if he does not usually pray with a minyan, recite Shema at the proper time, or fix times for studying Torah) then when his wife asks him to do these things, things that he is not accustomed to doing, she will appear to be against him.

My Name is Among Them

It is written, "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called *isha* [woman] because she was taken from *ish* [man]'" (Genesis 2:23).

As long as he was alone, man was called *adam*, which evokes flesh and blood (*dam*). However when the Holy One, blessed be He, created a helper for him, he was called *ish* and she was called *isha*. Hashem placed two letters from His Name – *yud* and *hei* – in theirs: The *yud* in *ish* and the *hei* in *isha*. Hashem says: If they follow My ways and observe My mitzvot, My Name will be among them to protect them from all harm. However in the opposite case, I will reclaim these letters and their names will become *aish* and *aish* – two fires that will devour one another.

– From Perkei D'Rabbi Eliezer

Overview of the Parsha

The book of Genesis describes man and the earth as the backdrop to the creation of the Jewish people, who later appear in the book of Exodus. Parsha Bereshith deals with the creation of the world and humanity until it becomes corrupt, meaning from Adam until Noah. During the first three days of Creation, G-d establishes the foundations of the universe, the heavens, the earth, and the seas, and then He fills them in the following three days with all their hosts. At the end of His work, Hashem rests on the seventh day. He blesses and sanctifies it as the day that gives life to all the other days. The development of Creation begins with man, the earth, and Eden. By giving names to all the living creatures on the earth, man finds none that can help him as much as the woman that Hashem forms from his side. The seduction by the serpent through the intermediary of the woman leads to the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, a failure that damages the bond between man and the earth. Lest man eat from the Tree of Life, he is chased from the garden. Adam and his wife have Cain and Abel, and following the murder of the latter, the bond between Cain and the earth deteriorates even further – a consequence of the first human confrontation. Cain is exiled, and men begin to fashion tools and construct cities from his time until the time of Enosh, when they begin to profane Hashem's Name. Scripture lists Cain's descendants, followed by the descendants of Adam (from whom Israel would emerge) up until the time of Noah, who consoles people regarding the desolation of the earth. In Noah's time, man's evil becomes so great that Hashem wants to destroy man and the whole world.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Source of Blessing

It is written, "G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:3).

The Ohr HaChaim Hakodesh cites the Zohar in stating that Shabbat spreads abundance to all the days of the week. Thus the meaning of "G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" is that Hashem grants blessings through Shabbat. Let us think about this: We all depend on Hashem's generosity in granting us blessings, and in His Torah we are commanded: "Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is Shabbat" (Exodus 20:9-10). Since we have already said that Shabbat spreads abundance to all the days of the week, it follows that everything a person does to avoid observing Shabbat (such as by reducing its length so as to hasten its end) only ends up depriving him of blessings. In fact, all he is really doing is reducing the abundance that Shabbat spreads to all the days of the week for him.

During the time of the Chafetz Chaim, there was a wealthy man living in Moscow who had the unfortunate habit of trying to deceive (so to speak) Heaven. That is, he would add mundane time to the hours of Shabbat, for on the eve of Shabbat he would close his shop late, and near the end of Shabbat he would open his shop much too early. To him the Chafetz Chaim applied the following parable:

There was a peasant who wanted to sell his wheat to a Jewish merchant. The peasant and the merchant agreed that for every bag of wheat that they weighed on the scale, the merchant would draw a line on a chalkboard. Thus after all the bags were weighed, they would count all the lines and the peasant would be paid accordingly. One day the peasant decided that this way of counting his wheat was dangerous, for the merchant could just erase a line while he wasn't looking and cheat him out of money. Therefore the peasant proposed that for every bag of wheat they weighed, the merchant would deposit a coin into a plate, and afterwards they would count up all the coins. The merchant agreed to this new procedure, and so they began to count the peasant's wheat. However during the process, the peasant couldn't control his love for money, and he took some of the coins while the merchant wasn't looking! When the time came for the peasant to be paid, it ended up that he had cheated himself out of money!

The Chafetz Chaim used this parable to explain how the wealthy man in Moscow was really only cheating himself. With every moment that he removed from Shabbat, he was depriving himself of blessings from each day of the week.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

As the Waters Cover the Sea

It is written, "The L-RD desired, for the sake of His righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious" (Isaiah 42:21).

The prophet Isaiah is speaking of the future by saying, "The earth will be as filled with knowledge of the L-RD as the waters cover the sea" (ibid. 11:9). The Rishonim (early rabbinic authorities) explain that this does not mean that everyone will know Hashem in the same way or to the same degree, for it is impossible that a Torah scholar, who invested his time and energy into studying Torah in this world, will know Hashem in the same way as someone who was completely uneducated, one who made no effort to acquire Torah. The expression, "As the waters cover the sea" means that although the waters of the sea seem to be at the same level everywhere, in reality there are places that are much deeper, much more filled with water, than others. So too with the knowledge of Hashem, for although everyone will possess it, those who put a great effort into studying Torah will know Hashem much more deeply, even if it will seem that everyone knows Him to the same degree.

This is the meaning of the expression, "The L-RD desired, for the sake of His righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious." That is, when Hashem desires to make the world righteous and give knowledge to everyone, then He will "make the Torah great" – so that everyone knows it – "and glorious" – much deeper for those who devoted themselves to it beforehand with great toil and effort.

– Torat HaParasha

EISHET CHAYIL

Cluttering Up the House

When the gaon Rabbi Shlomo Kahaneman Zatzal served as the Av Beit Din of Ponevezh, a resident of the city came to see him for a divorce. When the Rav asked him why he wanted one, the man explained that it was very difficult for him to tolerate the clutter that permeated his home. His wife was unbelievably disorganized, and maintaining a tidy home went completely against her nature. The Rav accepted this explanation and invited the man to come to his home in an hour so he could write a get. When the Rav got home, he asked his wife to completely clutter up the house. Now the Rav's wife always kept a very tidy home, and she would have been embarrassed for people to see it otherwise. Yet she always did what her husband asked, and this time was no exception.

When the man arrived at the Rav's home for his get, the Rav encouraged him to look at the clutter that permeated his own home. The Rav's wife had done her "work" to perfection, for when the Rav began to write the get, the man thought: "I've never seen such a mess before! If the Rav can get along with his wife despite such clutter, then I can do the same. Especially since my wife has never left our home looking like this!"

The Rav said that it was extremely difficult for his wife to do such "work," for by nature she was a well-organized person, and furthermore she was embarrassed for people to see her home turned upside down.

– Tuvcha Yabiu

A TRUE STORY

Annulling Your Will Before His

In his youth, Rav Hillel of Horodna was among the students of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. He was also fatherless. One day his mother came to visit him at the yeshiva, and she also paid a courtesy call on Rabbi Chaim's wife. When Rabbi Chaim learned of this, he said to the Rebbetzin: "This woman has a son at the yeshiva who is suitable for our daughter. Therefore it's worthwhile to propose a shidduch." The Rebbetzin did so, but the widow did not agree. She then departed and left for home. On the way, however, several things happened to her. She therefore immediately returned to Volozhin and went to see the Rav. She struck the table and exclaimed, "Do you want to take him by force?" Rabbi Chaim replied, "No, certainly not. Go in peace." She again left, but this time without incident. Some time later the Rebbetzin had to travel to the widow's town. However before leaving, Rabbi Chaim said to her: "Go visit that widow and propose the shidduch again. This time she'll agree and you can conclude the arrangement."

The Rebbetzin was surprised by this remark. She asked, "You clearly saw that she didn't agree to it the first time. What makes you think that she'll change her mind?"

Rabbi Chaim replied, "When she first refused the shidduch, I believed that it was apparently Hashem's will. I therefore annulled my will before His. Yet afterwards I thought that her refusal might have stemmed from her own free will. Because I annulled my will before Hashem's, she will now accept the shidduch so that the teaching can be fulfilled: 'Annul your will before His, so that He may annul the will of others before yours' [Perkei Avoth 2:4]." As it turned out, that is exactly what happened.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Blessing of Rain

Once it happened that the greater part of the month of Adar had gone and yet no rain had fallen. The people sent a message to Honi the Circle Drawer: "Pray that rain may fall." He prayed but no rain fell. He then drew a circle and stood within it in the same way as the prophet Habakkuk had done.... He exclaimed, "Master of the universe, Your children have turned to me because [they believe] me to be a member of Your house. I swear by Your great Name that I will not move from here until You have mercy on Your children!" Rain then began to drip, and his disciples said to him: "We look to you to save us from death. We believe that this rain fell just to release you from your oath." He then exclaimed, "This is not what I prayed for, but rain for cisterns, ditches and caves." The rain then began to come down with great force, every drop being as big as the opening of a barrel. The Sages estimated that no single drop was less than a log. His disciples said to him, "Master, we look to you to save us from death. We believe that the rain came down to destroy the world." He then exclaimed, "This is not what I prayed for, but for rain of benevolence, blessing and bounty." The rain then fell normally until the Israelites were forced to ascend the Temple mount because of the rain. [His disciples] then said to him, "Master, just as you have prayed for the rain to fall, pray for the rain to cease." He replied, "I have it as a tradition that we may not pray on account of an excess of good. Nevertheless bring me a bullock."

They brought him a bullock for a thanks offering. He laid his two hands on it and said, "Master of the universe, Your people Israel, whom You brought out of Egypt, cannot endure an excess of good or an excess of punishment. When You were angry with them, they could not endure it. When You showed them an excess of good, they could not endure it. May it be Your will for the rain to stop and for relief to come to the world." The wind immediately began to blow, the clouds dispersed, the sun shone, and the people went into the fields and gathered mushrooms and truffles.

– Taanith 23a

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yosef Engel – The Author of Gilyonei HaShas

Rabbi Yosef Engel was born in 5619 in Tranov. He lived for a certain time in Radin, and from there he moved to Krakow, where he studied Torah until the First World War. He was known as a phenomenal gaon, an expert in every domain of Torah, for nothing in the Torah escaped him. At the same time, Rabbi Yosef knew Kabbalah and Chassidut, and he even taught these subjects to others. When war broke out in 5674, he fled Krakow for Vienna, where he remained until his dying day. There he wrote several books that became famous in the yeshiva world. In these works we can clearly see his immense intelligence and scholarship in every area of Torah. Numerous young men from every yeshiva that existed at the time relied on his books, a trend that has continued to the present day. Today his works are recognized throughout the Diaspora and used as a solid foundation for reasoning and a source of scholarship. Among his works is Gevurot Shemonim, in which he gives 48 different solutions to a single problem. It is a book that has been warmly received and acclaimed in Jewish communities around the world. He wrote many books, including 36 works that have yet to be published. His life came to an end on Heshvan 1, 5680, and his soul departed for the celestial academy. Rabbi Yosef Engel is buried in Vienna. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.