



THE TRAGEDY OF JOSEPH

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The Path To Follow VAYEISHEV

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Pain of Remaining Silent

When someone finds himself among people who are used to uttering denigrating and slanderous words, he is forbidden to participate in their conversation and speak Lashon Hara. This applies even if he cannot leave their presence, and even if he feels extremely uncomfortable to be the only person not speaking. True, this is not an easy thing to do, for nobody wants to seem foolish or boring around others. However we should remember what one of our Sages said: "Better for me to be called a fool all my days, than to be wicked in the sight of G-d [even] for a moment" (Eduyot 5:6). We also read, "Commensurate with the effort is the reward" (Perkei Avoth 5:21). Insofar as such situations are concerned, they also said that for each moment a person remains silent, he will merit a hidden light that no angel or created being can comprehend.

– Iggeret HaGra

It is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 37:1). Here Rashi cites the Midrash in stating that when Jacob wanted to settle down in peace and tranquility, Hashem said: "Is what is prepared for the righteous in the World to Come not enough for them, such that they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world?" At that point he was struck by the tragedy of Joseph (see Bereshith Rabba 84:3).

This is difficult to understand. Did Jacob ask to live a life of ease and idleness? He certainly wanted some rest from his troubles and worries in order to study Torah and perform mitzvot in tranquility. Yet how could this be considered such a tremendous fault that the tragedy of Joseph immediately struck him?

Furthermore, Jacob was the one who enclosed himself in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber for 14 years in order to study Torah. There, during all those years, he did not rest his head or lie down to sleep. In fact when he left for Haran, the verse states: "He lay down in that place" (Genesis 28:11). Rashi explains: "In that place he lay down, but during the 14 years that he served in the house of Eber, he did not lie down at night, for he was engaged in Torah study." Jacob therefore exemplifies the study of Torah with a minimum of creature comforts. The teaching of the Sages is completely fulfilled in him, for they said: "The words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it" (Berachot 63b). It is certain that even afterwards, for the rest of his life in fact, Jacob killed himself in studying Torah. Therefore his only intention in wanting to settle down in peace was to be free of the worries that surrounded him, this being in order to devote and "kill himself" in the tent of Torah study. That being the case, why was his desire considered inappropriate? To answer this, we must realize that Jacob's deeds were not only evaluated with regard to himself, but also with regard to how they would influence his descendants. In fact the Sages have said, "The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons." Everything the Patriarchs did, and all that happened to them, was a foretaste of their descendants' experiences. As the Ramban states concerning Abraham, "Now Abraham went down to Egypt on account of the famine to dwell there...but the Egyptians oppressed him for no reason [and attempted] to take his wife. The Holy One, blessed be He, avenged their cause with great plagues and rescued them from there with cattle and silver and gold, and Pharaoh even commanded his men to escort them from the land. He thereby alluded to Abraham that his children would go down to Egypt on account of the famine...and the Egyptians would do them evil and take their women from them, just as Pharaoh said: 'And every daughter you shall save alive' [Exodus 1:22]. Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, would avenge their cause with great plagues until He brings them out with silver and gold, sheep and oxen...with the Egyptians pressuring to send them out of the land. Nothing was lacking in all the events that happened to the Patriarchs that would not occur to the children. ... 'Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: "Go forth and tread out a path for your children." Thus you find that whatever is written about Abraham is also written about his children. For Abraham it is written, "And there was a famine in the land," and for Israel it is written, "For these two years the famine has been in the land" [Bereshith Rabba 40:8]" (Ramban on Genesis 12:10).

Now just as what happened to Abraham was a sign that the same would happen to his descendants – nothing happening to the father that would not happen to the son – similarly everything that happened to Jacob, and all that he did, would happen on a greater scale to his descendants over the centuries.

On account of this, Jacob's request to settle down in peace and tranquility was considered inappropriate. Although it was a positive request with regards to Jacob alone (since all he wanted was to serve G-d without difficulty), it was nevertheless not the right path for his descendants to follow. True, Jacob only asked for tranquility in order to study Torah and perform mitzvot in a peaceful state of mind. However since the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons, it is clear that

if Jacob had settled down in peace, his children would have also followed the same path and want peace and tranquilly. They viewed the deeds of the Patriarchs as a sign to their descendants, and they wanted to emulate their deeds and follows in their footsteps. Now with regard to the descendants of Jacob, there was a great danger that if they chose the path of tranquilly, they might think that the Torah could be acquired through peace and tranquility, meaning without effort. Yet the reality of things is the very opposite, as the Sages have said: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" (Perkei Avoth 4:14) and, "This is the path to Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and toil in the Torah. If you do this...you will be happy in this world and it will go well with you in the World to Come" (ibid. 6:4).

This teaching can be found in the term vayeishev ("and he dwelled"). The Sages have said, "Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates trouble" (Megillah 10b). In the same way, we can interpret the term vayeishev as alluding to trouble: Vai-shev – by settling down in this way, trouble will visit the coming generations because they will err by learning to settle down without difficulty. They will make the mistake of not studying Torah with effort or through adversity.

This is why Joseph was struck by the tragedy of Joseph. What exactly did this misfortune entail? It was that Joseph was sold into Egypt, that he went into exile, and that he endured horrendous trials which he had to overcome. As a result, these experiences rectified Jacob's desire to live in peace and harmony, for here the very opposite was happening: His son was exiled to another land and yet observed the Torah through hardship and suffering.

What's more is that on the verse, "He entered the house to do his work" (Genesis 39:11), the Midrash states that it was Shabbat, so what "work" did he have to accomplish? In fact Joseph had come to study Torah and the Mishnah that his father had taught him (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeishev 146). Joseph had been exiled in order to study Torah. This represented the absolute opposite of Jacob's idea of settling down in peace and tranquility to study. In fact it was the rectification of this idea, for if Jacob had actually settled down in peace and tranquility, his offspring were liable to stray from the Torah because they lived in tremendous comfort, as it is written: "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked" (Deuteronomy 32:15). Instead, Jacob was struck by the tragedy of Joseph, which resulted in his children fortifying themselves in the study of Torah through exile and hardship.

The fact that the Torah is acquired precisely in exile is alluded to in the verse, "If you walk in My statutes" (Leviticus 26:3), which Rashi explains as meaning: "You must toil in the study of Torah." This means that Scripture describes the effort that we must exert in learning Torah as "walking." We must exile ourselves to a place of Torah, not seek to study it in peace and tranquility. We can fully understand why Jacob was struck by the tragedy of Joseph, not another of his 12 sons. Actually, Joseph was the only son to whom Jacob had transmitted the entire Torah that was handed down to him by Shem and Eber, as the Midrash states (Bereshith Rabba 84:8). This goes without mentioning the fact that "everything that occurred to Jacob also occurred to Joseph," as Rashi mentions. Therefore Joseph, more than anyone else, exemplified the fact that "the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons." Hence it was precisely through Joseph that the Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrated that for the future of Jacob's offspring, it was not good for Jacob to settle down in peace. It was far better for them to get used to observing Torah even through hardship and in exile.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Who Would Continue to Study Jacob's Torah?

It is written, "I will go down to the grave mourning for my son" (Genesis 37:35).

The direct meaning of this verse is difficult to grasp, for many fathers have lost children, yet they were still consoled. How is it possible for Jacob himself, the pillar of faith, to mourn for his son without any desire to be consoled?

We know what the Sages have said, namely that Jacob instituted Arvit, the evening prayer. He was the one who instituted the giving of thanks to Hashem in prayer during times of darkness, when nighttime shadows fall. Our Sages instituted the recitation of *emet ve'yatziv* ("true and certain") during Shacharit and *emet ve'emuna* ("true and faithful") during Arvit, for the morning alludes to a time of light, a time when the truth can clearly be seen. Hence we may recite *emet ve'yatziv* at that time. As for the night, it alludes to difficult times, when the truth cannot be perceived by the senses because the Holy One, blessed be He, conceals His face, so to speak, from the house of Israel. We must nevertheless believe that He watches over us and wants our good, even if it is difficult to understand Heaven's decrees and our suffering in exile. Hence we recite *emet ve'emuna* at night. Now Jacob instituted that we should pray and believe at nighttime – even during the great darkness of the night – in order to fulfill the verse "Your faithfulness in the nights" (Psalms 92:3), for even during difficult times we must not lose hope. Therefore how could it be that Jacob himself refused to be consoled? When Jacob finally saw Joseph after an absence of 22 years, he said to him: "Let me die this time, since I have seen your face, for you are still alive" (Genesis 46:30). Taken literally, this verse makes little sense. How could the fact that Joseph was still alive prompt Jacob to say, "Let me die this time"? Why should he die now, since Joseph was alive? The matter becomes perfectly clear in light of Rashi's explanation on Genesis 37:3: "Whatever [Jacob] had learned from Shem and Eber, he gave over to [Joseph]." Hence Jacob felt that it was Joseph who would perpetuate the Torah after his death, for then Jacob's lips would move in the grave, and it would be as if he were still alive. Yet when Joseph was lost, there was nobody to cite the Torah he had heard from his father Jacob, whose lips would therefore not move in the grave. His death would therefore be a true death, which is why he refused to be consoled, saying that he would go down to the grave mourning for his son. Yet when he learned that Joseph had not died, that he was still alive, Jacob knew that Joseph could still transmit the Torah that he had heard from him, and therefore he could die. It would not be a true death, for each time that Joseph would cite a teaching he had received from his father, the latter's lips would move in the grave. This is why Jacob said, "Let me die this time," for now he could die in peace, since he had seen his son's face and knew that he was alive, for in death Jacob would also be alive and his lips would move in the grave.

– Avkat Rochel

A Pearl From the Rav:

We Can Only Overcome Trials Through Torah

It is written, "Joseph was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (Genesis 39:6).

Rashi states, "As soon as Joseph found himself [in the position of] ruler, he began eating, drinking, and curling his hair. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Your father is mourning, yet you curl your hair! I will incite the bear against you.' Immediately afterwards, 'His master's wife lifted up her eyes.'"

It is obvious that everything Joseph did was not motivated by selfish intentions. Why was he preoccupied with his hair? It was because Joseph, in his great holiness, despised the vanities of this world and wanted to show the Egyptians that it was possible to not view the world as a place of temptation. The Gemara recounts that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva used to scoff at transgressors, meaning that they scoffed at those who did not overcome trials and allowed themselves to be seduced into sin. Now Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva were such great tzad-

dikim that the trials in question did not appear to them as difficult to overcome. Therefore they scoffed at those who fell into sin. The Sages say, however, that the Satan told them that if Heaven had not ordered it to heed them on account of their Torah, it would have made them sin as well (Kiddushin 81a). In other words, the Satan taught them that their scorn was not justified, for it was only through the power of their Torah that they overcame trials. Yet for people who do not have Torah, trials are difficult, for the human mind does not have the ability to realize that the temptations we encounter are really foolish pursuits. It is only by the power of Torah that we can overcome the temptations of the evil inclination. Similarly, Joseph was told by allusion that he should not underestimate trials, and he himself was subjected to a very difficult one.

Where Am I Going?

It is written, "The child is gone! And I...where can I go?" (Genesis 37:30).

This alludes to the fact that sons provide fathers with merit, and conversely if fathers drive their sons away from Torah study in order to engage in foolish pursuits, not only will the sons be lost, but the fathers will also be lost for eternity. In that case, instead of "sons are a heritage from the L-RD," they will drive their fathers to the abyss. This is alluded to in the verse: If the child is no longer here, then I too am no longer here!

– Ateret Paz

How Can I?

It is written, "But he refused and said to his master's wife, '...my master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and whatever he has, he has placed in my hand. ... How can I commit this great evil?'" (Genesis 39:8-9).

The Sages have said, "Most [people are guilty] of theft, a minority of lewdness" (Bava Batra 165a). Thus Joseph reasoned as follows: "How can I – whom my master trusts to not steal – sin by committing immorality?"

– Nachal Kedumim

Distance Yourself from Falsehood

It is written, "How can I commit this great evil ve'chatati [and have sinned] against G-d?" (Genesis 39:9).

Why does the text employ the past tense *ve'chatati*? Also, Joseph explains his refusal by saying that it is a "great evil." Therefore had it been a "small evil," would he have committed it? The answer is that the evil inclination came to entice Joseph by means of trivial matters. It told him that the Sages teach, "The place occupied by repentant sinners cannot be attained even by the completely righteous" (Sanhedrin 99a). Therefore it told him to sin and then to repent, in which case his reward would be enormous. To this Joseph replied, "To repent, I don't need to commit such a great evil. What's more is that already, in the past, I 'have sinned' against G-d, for 'there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he does good and never sins' [Ecclesiastes 7:20]. So in any case, I can repent of the sins that I already committed [past tense], and I don't need to sin a second time."

– Rabbi Israel of Rozhin

Day After Day

It is written, "Just as she spoke to Joseph day after day, so he did not listen to her" (Genesis 39:10).

Rashi states: "[Potiphar's wife] acted with pure motives, for she saw through her astrology that she was destined to raise children from him" (Rashi on Genesis 39:1).

The book Yireim states, "The evil inclination entices a man often, but the good inclination addresses him only once. It is much like a merchant selling top-quality goods, for he needs to advertise his merchandise only once. Therefore when Joseph saw that Potiphar's wife spoke to him 'day after day,' he understood that her intentions were not for the sake of Heaven, and he was not deceived."

– The Chida

Retaining their Customs

It is written, “He entered the house to do his work...and she caught hold of him by his garment” (Genesis 39:11-12).

Joseph thought he could change his traditional clothing and yet remain a tzaddik. When Potiphar’s wife caught hold of his garment and tried to entice him into sin, he remembered the traditional clothing worn in his father’s home, and he quickly left his “modern” garments in her hands and escaped.

– Rabbi Meir of Premishlan

His Father’s Image

It is written, “He entered the house to do his work, and no man of the household was there in the house” (Genesis 39:11).

Rashi cites a discussion between Rav and Shemuel on the meaning of this verse. “One says [it means], literally, his work. The other says that he intended to have his way with her, but his father’s image appeared to him.”

We find an allusion to the latter explanation in the expression ve’ein ish (“and no man”), whose letters form the initials of Ve’demut aviv Yaakov nira el Yosef sham (“And the image of his father Jacob appeared to Joseph there”).

– The Rebbe of Rimanov

His Accounts

It is written, “It was on such a day that he entered the house to do his work” (Genesis 39:11).

Onkelos translates this verse as, “He entered the house to examine his accounts.” The Gemara states that Joseph emerged from prison on Rosh Hashanah (Rosh Hashanah 11a). This allusion is hidden in our verse. That is: “It was on such a day” – the day of Rosh Hashanah – “that he entered the house to do his work.” What work does a person do on Rosh Hashanah? Onkelos reveals the answer: He examines his accounts; he reflects upon his ways and repents. This is why Joseph merited to leave prison in order to rule.

– Ateret Paz

Everything is in the Hands of Heaven

It is written, “The prison warden did not inspect anything in [Joseph’s] hand, for the L-RD was with him, and whatever he did the L-RD made prosper” (Genesis 39:23).

In his commentary the Ramban writes, “The decree is true and haste is falsehood.” He also states that the story of Joseph (including everything that happened to him) teaches us that each time people wanted to harm him, Hashem changed their actions into something positive. Everything Joseph endured led him along the path that the Holy One, blessed be He, had prepared for his good. Thus we read: “The prison warden did not inspect anything in his hand” – the warden saw and recognized that there was nothing “in his hand,” in man’s possession, and that man is incapable of doing anything – for in every circumstance “the L-RD was with him.” Everything that man achieves is only made possible by Hashem.

– Mussar HaBitachon

Overview of the Parsha

The era of Jacob’s children begins in our parsha, which recounts events concerning Joseph and Judah. The unfolding of Jacob’s story starts with his son Joseph and the dreams that he had. When he recounted them to his brothers, they became so jealous that they eventually sold him into slavery. Before continuing with the subject of Joseph (Rachel’s son), the crown of his brothers who was separated from among them, Scripture moves on to the story of Judah (Leah’s son), the leader of the brothers, who fell from greatness due to the incident involving Tamar. The parsha returns to the subject of Joseph, against whom Potiphar’s wife conspired and had placed in prison, where he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh’s servants.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

I Am With Him in Distress

It is written, “Their camels were bearing spices, balm, and lotus” (Genesis 37:25).

Rashi writes, “Why did Scripture publicize their burden? To let you know the reward of the righteous, for it is customary for Arabs to carry only naphtha and tar, whose odor is foul, but for this one [Joseph] it was arranged [that they should be carrying] spices, so that he should not be afflicted by a foul odor.” What difference did it make if this odor was good or bad, since Joseph was being ripped away from his father and sold as a slave in Egypt? Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz Zatzal used a parable to explain: A child was ill and had to undergo an operation. On the day he entered the hospital, his family accompanied him to the front door and gave him gifts and sweets. Only his father and mother went inside and remained with him until the operation was to begin. As he was being wheeled into the operating room, a somber looking doctor told the parents that they could proceed no further. The parents kissed their son, and with their eyes they followed him until the doors to the operating room closed, leaving them alone. The child looked around and saw that everyone was covered in green gowns and were very serious looking. On the table next to him were the tools needed for the operation, and there was a blinding light coming from a large lamp above. It was then that he burst into tears. Yet through a small window in a corner of the room, the calming face of his mother began to emerge. This immediately put the boy at ease, and he stopped crying. In fact he even began to smile. What had changed? The terrifying situation had certainly not changed. However undergoing an operation, even a serious one, is quite another thing when your mother is with you! This parable explains why Joseph was brought to Egypt with camels that carried spices. We already mentioned Rashi’s statement based on the Midrash: “Why did Scripture publicize their burden? To let you know the reward of the righteous, for it is customary for Arabs to carry only naphtha and tar, whose odor is foul, but for this one [Joseph] it was arranged [that they should be carrying] spices, so that he should not be afflicted by a foul odor.” The question then becomes: After all the things that Joseph went through, and after all the suffering and humiliation he experienced when being sold as a slave, what was the value of this good turn on Hashem’s part, namely to send him camels that carried spices? The image of the child who sees his mother during an operation fully explains the situation. As Joseph mounted the camels that were destined to bring him to Egypt, he could smell the fragrant spices they were carrying – a wink from Hashem, as it were – Who was watching through the window.

True, Joseph’s “operation” was a difficult one, for his brothers had sold him into slavery. However to know and sense that you are not suffering alone – that “I am with him in distress” (Psalms 91:15) – is a completely different story. Everything that can ease your pain will certainly be done for you, because your Father is with you and you are not alone. Therefore the situation is completely different!

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik – The Brisker Rav

It is written, “The child is gone! And I...where can I go?” (Genesis 37:30).

The Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Zatzal, was in Poland when the Holocaust began. His wife the Rebbetzin, along with their twin boys and one girl, remained in Brisk and disappeared in the valley of death. The Rav himself was in Otwerk when the war broke out, and since he was in doubt as to whether he should flee or not, he decided to divide his family. The Rav and some of his sons and daughters traveled to Vilna instead of returning to Brisk, while the Rebbetzin and the rest of the children remained in Brisk, where they were trapped (may G-d avenge their blood). They were still alive when the Rav came to Eretz Israel in 5701, near the start of the war. One of his sons lingered in Poland for a month in a desperate attempt to help them escape, but to no avail. After the Holocaust, the Rav said that not even for a single day did he stop thinking of his family, who were left behind in the valley of tears.

One of his students at the time tried to explain to the Rav that his grief was felt by the entire community. The Rav replied, “That’s possible. However I don’t stop thinking about them in any case.” He added, “Jacob wept for Joseph for 22 years. It’s clear that he didn’t stop thinking about his son, or the pain of his absence, for even an instant. Had he done so, a feeling of joy would have come over him, and the Shechinah would have rested on him. And if the Shechinah had rested on Jacob, he would have immediately known that Joseph was still alive. We therefore see that he didn’t take his mind off Joseph for a single instant.” The student, in order to comfort the Rav, said to him: “Jacob’s pain was because one of the tribes had been completely lost. That’s why he refused to be consoled. However an individual loss might perhaps be consoled.” The Rav rejected this remark, and his reaction made it clear that he considered each of his sons as a tribe, for everyone must add to Hashem’s servants in this world.

A TRUE STORY

Recognizing the Truth in Spite of Himself

It is written, “Judah said, ‘She is more righteous than I’ ” (Genesis 38:26).

The following story was told by Rabbi Yosef Haim Zatzal, the leader of the exiles in Babylon, who derived a lesson in truth from this verse. This is what he said:

Two people came before my grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim of Baghdad Zatzal, for a Din Torah. One of the men denied owing the other any money, and he was prepared to swear an oath. In his great wisdom, my grandfather saw that this man intended to make a false oath. He therefore said to him, “You think that I’m going to make you swear by the Sefer Torah? I’m going to make you swear by the Shnei Luchot HaBrit [literally, the two tablets of the covenant].” He immediately told the court official to immerse himself in a mikveh and bring him the Shnei Luchot HaBrit.

When the man heard this, he was very frightened, for he had never heard of a book called Shnei Luchot HaBrit (which was written by the holy Shelah). Instead, the man naïvely believed that Rabbi Moshe Haim was referring to the two tablets of the covenant that Moses brought down from Heaven, and which were inscribed by the finger of G-d. He thought that perhaps the Children of Israel had carried them to Babylon when they were exiled there. Hence he was terrified and exclaimed: “I’ll pay! I won’t take an oath!”

Rabbi Moshe Haim said to the man, “No, you’ve already committed yourself. Despite what you’re now saying, you have to take an oath!” The man instantly got up and admitted that there wasn’t a shred of truth in his entire testimony.

– Niflaim Maasecha

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Acts of Tzeddakah

Benjamin the tzaddik was a supervisor of a charity fund. One day a woman came to him in a year of scarcity and said to him: “Sir, assist me.” He replied, “I swear, there is not a penny in the charity fund.” She said, “Sir, if you do not assist me, a woman and her seven children will perish.” He accordingly assisted her out of his own pocket. Some time afterwards he became dangerously ill. The angels addressed the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: “Sovereign of the universe, You have said that he who saves one soul of Israel is considered to have saved the entire world. Therefore should Benjamin the tzaddik, who saved a woman and her seven children, die at so early an age?” Straightway his sentence was torn up. It has been taught that 22 years were added to his life.

It is related of King Monobaz that he gave away all his own riches and the riches of his fathers in years of scarcity. His brothers and his father’s household came...and said to him, “Your father saved money and added to the treasures of his fathers, and you are squandering them.” He replied, “My fathers stored up below and I am storing above.... My fathers stored in a place that can be tampered with, but I have stored in a place that cannot be tampered with.... My fathers gathered treasures of money, but I have gathered treasures of souls.... My fathers gathered for others, but I have gathered for myself, as it says: ‘For you it will be an act of righteousness’ [Deuteronomy 24:13]. My fathers gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the future world, as it says: ‘Your righteousness will precede you and the glory of the L-RD will be your reward’ [Isaiah 58:8].”

– Bava Batra 11a

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

The Garments of the Soul

It is written, “Sing and be glad, O daughter of Zion” (Zechariah 2:14).

We need to realize that just as the body needs clothing and cannot go without garments, so too does the soul. As long as the soul exists in this world, its clothing is flesh and blood. Since such clothing does not last forever, Hashem gave us the Torah so we could perform mitzvot, for by doing so we create glorious garments for the soul. When a sinner dies, his soul will return to G-d (Who gave it to him) in order to render an accounting. The soul will obviously want to be let into Gan Eden. However angels of destruction will beat it down and clothe it with repulsive and impure garments, ones created by its sins. Who can imagine the intense shame that the soul will endure? It will then be forced to descend into Gehinnom, a place of darkness and death, where it will be cleansed of its sins. What can this be compared to? It is like a groom who is being accompanied to the wedding ceremony by his close friends. On the way, he encounters some scoundrels who sling mud at him, covering him from head to toe. The groom’s friends will shout at them and say, “You rotten scoundrels – what you doing? Why are you throwing all this mud at him?” The mud-throwers will then tell everyone that the groom is one of their own, that he was the one who prepared all this mud for them to throw. The same applies to the soul: It is the person himself who, through his sins, creates his own vile and impure garments. He dons such garments in spite of himself, and he cannot get rid of them because he himself was the one who prepared them.

All this is alluded to in Scripture concerning the High Priest Joshua, the son of Jehozadak. As we read in the Haftorah, “Then He showed me Joshua, the High Priest, standing before the angel of the L-RD, and the Satan was standing on his right to accuse him. ... [He said,] ‘Remove the filthy garments from upon him’ ” (Zechariah 3:1-4). Filthy garments denote the impurity of sin, which is as repulsive as excrement. The Torah briefly mentions this, as it is written: “You shall not defile yourselves with them, lest you become unclean through them” (Leviticus 11:43). – Shmirat HaLashon