

PURITY AMONG JEWS LEADS TO VICTORY OVER THE WICKED

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

On the verse, “Come to Pharaoh...” (Exodus 10:1), the holy Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk states in his book *Noam Elimelech*: “‘Come to Pharaoh... that you may tell...’ It seems that the Creator’s main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make it a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him, in order that not even a single letter would be missing from the Sefer Torah. When Moses went to Pharaoh, it was not of his own accord, for he did not want to look at a wicked man. Therefore Hashem told Moses to ‘come,’ meaning to come and find him of his own accord, for in this way an additional decree of holiness would be added by the extra letters used in the Torah for this purpose. It was therefore not fitting to say ‘go,’ for going may even be against one’s will. That is, even if one disagrees, his legs will still carry him where he goes. As for ‘coming,’ the term applies when one consents of his own free will, which leads him to come. This is what constitutes, ‘So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai],’ a word that evokes otot, the ‘letters’ of the Torah.” This is what the holy Rav said.

We need to understand what the Rav means by saying, “... to make it a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him, in order that not even a single letter would be missing from the Sefer Torah.” Was it necessary for the wicked Pharaoh to complete what was missing in the Torah? Could Moses not have issued an additional rebuke in order for the Sefer to be complete? It would have been preferable for Moses to do so, for the less he spoke with that evildoer, the better. Therefore what is the meaning of, “So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai],” which designates the letters (otot) of the Torah? We may explain it in the following way: Pharaoh was at the head of the forces of impurity, and he clearly knew that in order for the Children of Israel to leave Egypt with a high hand and to receive the holy Torah, which has 600,000 letters, they would also have to number 600,000 souls. The Sages note that the word Israel is formed from the initials of yesh shishim ribo otot la Torah (“there are six hundred thousand letters in the Torah”).

This is why Pharaoh tried to kill as many of the Children of Israel as he could, as well as why he decreed, “Every son that will be born, into the river shall you throw him” (Exodus 1:22). As such the Children of Israel would be fewer in number, and therefore unable to leave Egypt.

Furthermore, by bringing despair upon the Children of Israel, Pharaoh made them lose faith and confidence in the Creator of the universe. Yet the Children of Israel strengthened their faith in the Creator. Through whom? Through none other than the wicked king of Egypt, Pharaoh himself! As a result, it was Pharaoh himself who caused so many extra words in the Torah to be written about him, thus reinforcing the Children of Israel’s faith in Hashem. It was also in this way that number of the letters of the Torah reached 600,000, the same number as the Children of Israel. This is why it is stated, “They could not delay” (Exodus 12:39). Why not? Because once the letters in the Torah reached their full number, and once the Children of Israel strengthened themselves and emerged from the 49 gates of impurity (Zohar, Yitro 39a), the Holy One, blessed be

He, immediately took them out of Egypt. We find this idea in the words of the Noam Elimelech: “The Creator’s main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make this a sign for the Children of Israel. The letters of the Torah would increase by what was said about him.” In other words, what was said concerning Pharaoh represented a sign for the Children of Israel, meaning that there is a tikkun for one Jew after another, and as such the Torah would be complete.

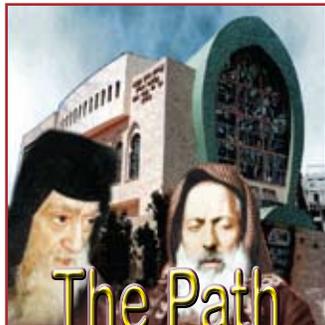
Since we have reached this point, we can understand why Pharaoh often drove Moses from his presence (see Exodus 10:28). Pharaoh did this because he wanted to minimize his conversations with Moses, for otherwise he knew that the extra words they spoke would complete the letters of the Sefer Torah, and thus the souls of the Children of Israel would attain their tikkun. He also knew that many of them would die in the plague of darkness, and therefore they would need to greatly add to their numbers.

However Moses went to meet him by the edge of the river (ibid. 7:15) – where he could return home whenever he wanted – precisely in order to increase their words. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to go willingly to Pharaoh (“come to Pharaoh”), for he would not want to speak if he went unwillingly. The Sefer Torah would therefore be missing letters, which would affect the souls of the Children of Israel.

As we said, Pharaoh was at the head of the forces of impurity, the one responsible for the spiritual descent of the Children of Israel into the 49 gates of impurity (Zohar, Yitro 39a). Pharaoh did this in order to make them feed off impurity. However by the lengthy conversations that Moses had with him, Moses extracted everything that Pharaoh had absorbed, completing what was missing, as in the verse: “He devoured chayil [strength], but he will disgorge it” (Job 20:15). From the mouth of Pharaoh, the leader of the forces of impurity, Moses extracted what he had devoured.

In the Passover Haggadah we say, “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a few. There he became a nation – great, strong, and numerous” (from Deuteronomy 26:5). What connection is there between, “My father was a wandering Aramean” and “He went down to Egypt”?

This can be fully understood in light of what we have said. As previously explained, Laban wanted to destroy everything, and when he realized that he could not defeat Jacob, he used his magic to make the sparks of holiness descend into Egypt. Jacob and his descendants would therefore have to go there in order to achieve a tikkun. However the Children of Israel achieved a tikkun with all the sparks, and therein lay the completeness of the Jewish people. Just as it is forbidden for a Torah scroll to be missing a single letter, which would invalidate it, so too is it forbidden for a single soul to be missing among the Children of Israel. If a single soul is missing, the letters will fly off and a great danger will confront the Jewish people. However through Torah study and unity among Jews, all that is missing will be complete. Therein lies the completeness of the Jewish people, and it is precisely in this way that they can defeat their enemies. It is also in this way that the forces of impurity growing in this world will be defeated and that holiness will increase.



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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Somebody Said Something About You

When a person tells his friend that somebody spoke ill of him or did something against him, this is called rechilut (talebearing). This is a very grave sin because it fills people with hatred and drives them apart.

Examples of rechilut are: “Yaakov told me that you’re not honest in business,” “Miriam told the teacher that she saw you cheating from Tziporah during a test,” “Mr. Miller said that you have no sense of humor,” and so on.

Every person should check his words as if he were sending a telegram, for one who sends a telegram weighs the need of each word in order to avoid unnecessary costs. For each forbidden word that we speak, we will have to pay dearly. Therefore before uttering a single word, we should pay careful attention to considering whether it is forbidden or permitted.

Adapted from Guard Your Tongue

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Groom Who Forgot the Ring

It is written, "It was at the end of 400 years" (Exodus 12:41).

Rashi states, "This tells us that as soon as the end arrived, the Omnipresent did not delay them even as long as the blink of an eye."

The salvation of Hashem comes at the blink of an eye. A person troubled by a problem will sometimes sink in a sea of worries without any hope of escape. All exits appear blocked, and every solution he can possibly think of proves useless. He feels that he is in a dark tunnel and cannot make out any light. Such was the situation of the Children of Israel, who were living under a tyrant and subjected to forced labor. The Egyptians not only tried to break their bodies, but their will as well. Hence the Egyptians gave women's work to men and men's work to women. They also made them slave away at meaningless tasks. Nevertheless, despite their hard labors and the sea of troubles into which they had been plunged, the Children of Israel did not lose hope that deliverance would come soon. The Sages tell us that they possessed scrolls which they loved to read, and in them it was written that the Holy One, blessed be He, would save them. They knew that the salvation of Hashem would come in the blink of an eye, for He would deliver them from there in an instant. This is exactly what happened, for Hashem did not delay when the time arrived. This assurance must accompany us through our journey in life, lest we become discouraged when things don't work out or are delayed. We must be certain that at the right time, the salvation of Hashem will come in the blink of an eye.

Everything has its set time in Heaven, and when that time has not yet come, we experience delays. The Brisker Gaon Zatzal was once at a wedding in Jerusalem, and when the bride and groom were brought under the chuppah, they realized that the groom had forgotten the ring at home. Some people suggested that the groom use another woman's ring in order to perform the ceremony, but the Brisker Rav refused. The atmosphere was very tense, and the Rav said that someone should take a taxi to get the wedding ring. A quarter of an hour later, the ring arrived, but when the groom announced, "You are consecrated to me," it fell to the ground, which only added to the tension. Among those in attendance, some were saying that this didn't bode well for the future, since the groom first forgot the ring, and then he dropped it! The Brisker Rav said that the set time had apparently not yet come, and a few more minutes were needed. Now that he picked up the ring, however, that time had come. Why should people worry that this wasn't the right time, for precisely now was the time. Such are the reckonings of Heaven, which extend to the minute. Therefore we should not be bothered when delays take place. Instead we should have faith that the salvation of Hashem will come in the blink of an eye, and even now we should rejoice in that thought.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, "There was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for three days...but for the Children of Israel there was light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22-23).

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks what we can learn from the fact that the Children of Israel had light in their dwellings. That is, was it not enough of a miracle that the Children of Israel could move, while the Egyptians could not?

The answer is that Hashem did this in order to teach the Children of Israel how to prepare themselves to receive the Torah. Even if a person has the impression that Hashem does not perceive his actions, such is not the case, for Hashem sees through the darkness. Just as the Children of Israel perceived that the Egyptians could not see, so too does Hashem perceive and know all the secrets of the heart. This may be why, at the giving of the Torah, all of Creation remained silent and still, for the Torah had been given, and there was no longer any reason to teach them this.

I Hardened His Heart

It is written, "The L-RD said to Moses, 'Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants'" (Exodus 10:1).

The Rashbam asks why Hashem, with regards to every other plague, did not tell Moses that He had hardened Pharaoh's heart.

The book Divrei Ta'anugim replies that the word bo ("come") has a numerical value of three. Hashem hinted to Moses that he should warn Pharaoh of the three last plagues (locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn). However Rashi, commenting on Exodus 10:22, explains that Hashem caused the plague of darkness for the good of the Children of Israel, for in the darkness they would not see the death of the wicked, and they would also be able to amass treasures. It was therefore difficult for Moses to issue a warning about the plague of darkness, for even if Pharaoh agreed to send the people away, the plague still had to occur for the sake of the Children of Israel. In such a case it would have appeared that Moses was a prankster. Hence Hashem told him not to worry, for He had hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he certainly would not send them away.

Like a Merchant

It is written, "Moses said, 'With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go. With our sons and with our daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go....' [Pharaoh] said to them, '... Not so. Let the men go now...for that is what you seek'" (Exodus 10:9-11).

Since Moses specifically mentioned the release of young and old, sons and daughters, and flock and cattle, how could Pharaoh claim that what he really wanted was the release of the men only? The Pardes Yosef explains that Pharaoh believed that Moses had come to him like a buyer, who is used to a vendor selling his wares at an inflated price. The buyer therefore offers to pay a lower price, at which point they haggle until they arrive at a price that both of them thought was fair from the very beginning. Hence Pharaoh said, "Not so. Let the men go now...for that is what you seek." In other words: What you really want is the release of the men only, but you are asking for more so you can at least obtain that much.

What Didn't the Locusts Touch?

It is written, "They ate every herb of the land" (Exodus 10:15).

No tree grew back once the locusts stripped it bare. They not only stripped the produce of the field and the trees bare, but also clothing, jewelry, and everything else they loved. This was not limited to their fields, but included their houses as well, their hiding places and most secluded rooms. Not only that, but they even blocked up their springs and stole their lights.

– Midrash Hagadol, Bo

Where We Could Learn to Serve Hashem

It is written, "Our livestock will also go with us...for from it shall we take to serve the L-RD our G-d, and we do not know with what we must serve the L-RD until we arrive there" (Exodus 10:26).

In the book Eretz Chemda, the Malbim cites the Gemara (Eruvin 100b) in explaining this verse: "If the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, [the prohibition against] theft from the ant, chastity from the dove...." Hence it is said: "From it shall we take" – we shall take animals – "to serve the L-RD our G-d," for "we do not know," as of yet, "with what we must serve the L-RD until we arrive there" – on the mountain of G-d, where we will receive the Torah. For now, we will learn from the animals and the birds of the sky.

The Worst Darkness of All

It is written, "They did not see each other, and no one rose from his place" (Exodus 10:23).

The worst darkness is when we fail to see the pain of others or offer to help. When one person ignores the distress of another, the result is that he himself cannot move from his place, as it is written: "No one rose from his place."

– Chiddushei HaRim

I Was Overcome With Fear

It is written, "Na [Please] speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow..." (Exodus 11:2).

The Gemara states, "The word na [please] always indicates a request...[so that] this righteous man [Abraham] should not say, 'He kept His word concerning "they will enslave them, and they will oppress them" [Genesis 15:13], but He did not keep His word that "afterwards they will leave with great wealth" [v.14]' " (Berachot 9ab).

The Maggid of Dubno asks: Even if Abraham said nothing, should Hashem not have fulfilled His promise? He explains the situation with a parable: Two kings were at war with each other for years, but neither of them could attain a clear-cut victory. They therefore agreed that each king should choose a warrior who would represent his side in a one-on-one fight. The side whose warrior lost would surrender to the other. On the set day, the kings' servants dug a pit, and it was agreed that the warrior who threw his opponent into the pit would be the winner. Thus the two warriors began to fight, until finally one of them was pushed from behind and landed at the edge of the pit. At the last possible moment, however, he managed to get back up and throw his opponent into the pit.

The victorious king was ecstatic, but upon arriving at the palace he said to his warrior: "The truth is that you caused me a great deal of anxiety. When you let your adversary push you to the edge of the pit, all seemed lost. I was overcome with fear and suffered tremendously at that point!"

The moral of the story is that Hashem could have fulfilled His promise by providing the Children of Israel with the spoils of the sea, which as we know were greater than the spoils of Egypt. Yet in order for Abraham not to say that Hashem had not kept His promise, the command was given as the Children of Israel were about to leave Egypt: "Please, speak..." In this way Abraham would not suffer from the time they left Egypt until they reached the sea.

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Bo describes the final plagues that befell the Egyptians, the exodus from Egypt, and the mitzvot that ensued.

The parsha describes the plague of locusts and the plague of darkness, the last ones brought about through an intermediary. Hashem then declares that He will send still one more plague upon Pharaoh and Egypt, and He commands the entire community of Israel to offer the Passover sacrifice, the blood of which will serve as a sign to protect them from the last plague. The Children of Israel are also commanded to make their bread unleavened, to offer the Passover sacrifice, and to eat matzah for the generations to come. Beginning with the plague of the firstborn, the exodus from Egypt continues until the next morning, after 430 years of the people developing without a territorial base, the time since the father of the nation had left Ur of the Chaldees. Finally, the Children of Israel are told to envision the exodus from Egypt in their minds and in the Haggadah.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Mother of the Alter of Kelm

It was not without reason that the mother of the Alter of Kelm was the matriarch of the kingdom of Kelm. Her son, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, drew his inspiration from his mother the tzaddeket, and from her he absorbed a love for Torah and noble middot.

Rabbi Simcha's mother would collect money for the sick and the poor. In order to get donations, she even took advantage of the fact that a regular train passed through Kelm, bringing with it a large number of people. It is said that the tzaddik Rabbi Mendel of Tverig once passed through Kelm's train station. When he was told who this woman was, he demonstrated his respect and appreciation by offering her special wine-soaked cakes. When someone saw the great honor that was shown to her, he offered her a substantial donation. Although she used this donation entirely for the poor, she so bitterly regretted the honor shown to her that she burst into tears.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Speak of All His Wonders!

It is written, "So that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son what I have done in Egypt" (Exodus 10:2).

Why is this statement made specifically with regards to the plague of locusts?

The Ramban cites Rabbeinu Chananel as stating, "From the time that Moses our teacher prayed [for the removal of the locusts] until now, the locusts had not caused damage to the entire land of Egypt, and if an attack of them does occur in the land of Israel and they proceed to enter within the border of Egypt, they do not devour the produce of the land. ... It is of such a phenomenon that Scripture says, 'Speak of all His wonders' [Psalms 105:2]." According to this view, the Kli Yakar explains that since the plague of locusts left a tremendous impression on all the generations, a son would question his father about it, and the father would recount all the miracles that were done for our ancestors in Egypt.

From here we learn that we have a duty to recount the marvels of the Creator. It is said that during the first months of 5619 (a Shmita year), seeds planted for animal feed before the Shmita were now growing in the fields of Moshav Komemiyut. One Friday, a large number of locusts arrived at one of the neighboring villages. The residents of Komemiyut were frightened by this, and they went to see their Rav and told him that all the produce was in danger of being eaten by the locusts. He said to them, "We will see the salvation of Hashem in the Shmita." A huge cloud of locusts then arrived at the edge of Komemiyut, but once they reached that point they immediately turned around. Not one of them remained anywhere in Komemiyut, nor did they eat anything there. When this story was told to the Brisker Rav, he said: "We must recount this miracle, for it is written, 'Speak of all His wonders.' People get used to seeing the Creator's wonders, even when they constantly happen each day. Their mouths should be filled with praise and thanks to the Creator for the immense good that He bestows upon us! This will lead us to great joy, for we will realize that Hashem stands above us and offers help and support."

This advice also applies to making peace between man and fellowman, or between man and wife. When a person takes note of the good things and kindnesses that he has received from the other, his way of seeing the other changes, which prompts him to love that person.

The book Tuvcha Yabiu tells of a man who went to see Rav Elyashiv Shlita for a get. The man explained that his wife, after having brushed her hair, left some strands behind in the brush, which bothered him. Needless to say, the Rav was stunned. He said, "It seems that things are going too well for you!" The man had barely left the Rav when he fell and broke his arm. Yet the only person who helped him during his entire recovery was his wife, whom he wanted to divorce! People reach such a point because they don't consider the good that others do for them. Similarly, when we fail to consider the good that Hashem does for us, we end up becoming ungrateful to Him. Hence we must always "speak of all His wonders."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shlomo Lutzker – The Maggid of Skuhl

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Lutzker Zatzal was among the greatest disciples of the great Maggid of Mezritch, the holy Rabbi Dov Ber. He began his life in Lutzk, and after his marriage he became a maggid in the towns of Skuhl and Koretz. He was greatly respected by his teacher the holy Maggid of Mezritch, who later entrusted all his Torah writings to him. Since Rabbi Shlomo also owned a print shop, he published the writings of his Rav.

Rabbi Shlomo also wrote the introduction to his teacher's book Maggid Devarav LeYaakov. The holy Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov Zatzal said that people should show him great respect, for Rabbi Shlomo was "intimately familiar with all the secrets of the holy Maggid."

He also published ancient books on Kabbalah, thereby spreading the Torah of Kabbalah into the vast world. He made many disciples, foremost among them being the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Sar Shalom Rokeach, the founder of the Belz dynasty.

Rabbi Shlomo wrote the Torah commentary Divrat Shlomo, which follows the Pardes. It is interesting to cite his views concerning what language one should speak in the Holy Land: "Since the essence of the words and letters have their root in Eretz Israel, those who live there must speak the holy tongue, through which the worlds were created." Rabbi Shlomo Lutzker's life came to an end on Shevat 11, 5573. He is buried in the Ukraine. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

The Frail Rooster

It is written, "Though I shall make an end of all the nations where I have dispersed you, yet I shall not make an end of you" (Jeremiah 46:28).

A king once asked a certain Rav how we are to understand that Mashiach will establish his control over the entire world. Since the peoples of the world have no desire to be dominated, how can a single man control them all by natural means only?

The Rav asked the king for several days to think about this, which were granted to him. At the set time, the Rav returned to the king and asked, "Will the king agree to buy 70 large and robust roosters, as well as a small and frail one?" The king agreed, and the birds were obtained. The Rav asked that they be placed in a closed room and left alone for an entire day without food or water. The next morning, the Rav and the king went to see what had become of these birds. They opened a window into the room and threw grain inside, at which point all 70 of the robust yet starving roosters threw themselves upon it. A ferocious struggle ensued, as each bird tried to push and peck the other. Before long, blood began to spill.

Now while these roosters were fighting, the small and frail rooster stood to the side. However once they had been injured and were exhausted, it made its way to the grain and began eating without being disturbed.

"You see, Sire," said the Rav, "this rooster is like Mashiach. Hashem will create animosity among the 70 nations of the world, and when they succumb to their injuries, Mashiach – who is but a single man – will come and save us."

– Torat HaParasha

A TRUE STORY

The Dogs Didn't Even Bark

It is written, "But against the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue" (Exodus 11:7).

Located near the city of Vilna was a wealthy family whose members feared G-d and donated large sums of money to tzeddakah. They lived just outside the city itself, and to protect themselves from thieves they had ferocious guard dogs that stayed outside to protect the house at night. These dogs were so effective that every stranger who approached was greeted by vicious barking. Since some thieves were known to throw poisoned meat to dogs, the family members were forced to have weapons nearby as they slept. One evening after midnight they heard the sound of knocking at the door, but were surprised that the dogs hadn't barked. Because they suspected that thieves had poisoned the dogs, they took their weapons and approached the front door. "Who's there?" they asked. To their utter surprise, they heard a very familiar voice: "It's me, Elazar Moshe Horowitz" This was none other than the great gaon known as the Re'em Horowitz, the Av Beit Din of Pinsk! They immediately opened the door and saw the tzaddik standing there, surrounded on all sides by their dogs, which didn't make a sound! The Re'em Horowitz excused himself, explaining that the purpose of his late visit was to ask them to participate in the mitzvah of redeeming prisoners. The family immediately gave the Rav the money he needed, and he left. As for the guard dogs, they accompanied the tzaddik all the way to the edge of their territory!

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Look to the Ant and Learn!

It was said that Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta was an experimenter in all things. ... Why was he called an experimenter? Rabbi Mesharsheya said, "It is written: 'Go to the ant, you sluggard. See its ways and grow wise: Though there is neither officer nor guard nor ruler over her, she prepares her food in summer and stores up her food at harvest time' [Proverbs 6:6-8]. He [Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta] said: 'I shall go and find out whether it is true that they have no king.' He went at the summer solstice and spread his coat over an anthill. When one came out, he marked it, and it immediately entered and informed the others that shadows had fallen, whereupon they all came forth. He then removed his coat and the sun beat down upon them. Thereupon they set upon this ant and killed it. He then said: 'It is clear that they have no king, for otherwise they would surely have been required to obtain royal permission!'"

Rabbi Acha, the son of Rabba, said to Rabbi Ashi: "Yet perhaps the king was with them, or they had royal permission, or it was during an interregnum [when they were under no law], as it is written: 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did that what was right in his own eyes' [Judges 17:6]?" Instead, you must take Solomon's word for it.

– Chullin 57b