



The Path To Follow

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SERVING G-D BOTH INWARDLY AND OUTWARDLY

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "The L-RD will pass through to strike Egypt, and He will see the blood that is on the lintel and the two doorposts. The L-RD will pass over the door and He will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you" (Exodus 12:23). This seems odd, for did the Holy One, blessed be He – Who knows the thoughts of every creature and Who sees deep within the heart – need to see a sign of blood in order to pass over the houses of the Children of Israel and not kill their firstborn? On the contrary! The heart and mind may be hidden from view, such that nobody can know what the other is thinking, but the Holy One, blessed be He, knows the thoughts of every person. Thus when it comes to a house, whose residents are known by all, would it not be obvious that Hashem knows who is inside?

To answer this question, we first note that there are two ways to perform mitzvot. Some people say, "I won't be stricter than necessary, otherwise people might ridicule me. It's enough that I believe in Hashem." On the other hand, some people carry out all the mitzvot, but without conviction. They do so out of habit, performing them only superficially because they are used to doing them in this way.

In response to the first group, those who are afraid of what others might think, Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim Zatzal began his book by citing Yehudah ben Tema in Pirkei Avot 5:20: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven." He explains the specifics of these four things insofar as they pertain to serving Hashem, beginning with "bold as a leopard," which represents a great principle in serving the Creator (see Tur, Orach Chaim 1). In fact a person sometimes wants to perform a mitzvah, but he will hesitate when others are around because he is afraid that they may ridicule him. He should therefore demonstrate boldness against these scorners, not refraining from performing mitzvot on account of them. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai told his disciples, "May the fear of Heaven be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood" (Berachot 28b).

In response to the second group, those who perform mitzvot only outwardly, without paying attention to what they are doing, it is said: "Man sees what his eyes behold, but the L-RD sees into the heart" (I Samuel 16:7). This means that a person sometimes performs mitzvot without being aware of it, like a monkey that is trained to do something without understanding why. When the Children of Israel tied a lamb to their bedposts, and the Egyptians looked into their homes and saw that their idol was tied up in this way, they cried out and asked what they were doing to the lamb. The Children of Israel replied, "Our G-d commanded us to sacrifice this lamb in His honor." In fact the Sages say that when the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to slaughter the Passover offering, Moses replied: "Master of the universe, how can I possibly do such a thing? Do You not know that the lamb is the god of the Egyptians?" Thus we read, "Behold, if we sacrifice the god of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?" (Exodus 8:22). G-d replied: "As you live, Israel will not depart from here before they slaughter the Egyptian gods before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing" (Shemot Rabba 16:3). This is exactly what Hashem did, for on the same night that He struck the firstborn of Egypt, the Children of Israel slaughtered the Passover offering and ate it. The Egyptians saw their firstborn dead and their idols slaughtered, but they could do nothing.

When the Children of Israel rebelled against the gods of Egypt, Hashem's faith entered their hearts in abundance, thereby extirpating idolatry from there.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to put blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes, for blood alludes to inner devotion, the blood being the soul. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to tell them by allusion that the main thing in serving Him is service of the heart, of the soul. Worshipping Hashem in a superficial

way is not acceptable, as our Sages have said: "Torah and mitzvot without fear and love of Heaven cannot endure before Hashem" (Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 10,25b). The Torah commands us to love Him: "You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Exactly how do we love Him in this way? By diligently studying Torah and carefully performing its mitzvot. That is how we love Hashem with all our heart and soul.

It is not acceptable, however, for a person to serve Hashem only inwardly, being ashamed to serve Him in public. By doing so, a person is substituting the fear of Hashem for the fear of men, which is why Hashem wanted the Children of Israel to place blood – symbolizing inner devotion – on their doorposts and lintels, for these are located on the outside. This tells us that we must serve Hashem both inwardly and outwardly; we cannot choose to serve Him in only one way.

Because the Children of Israel served their Creator with inner devotion, since they repudiated idolatry by sacrificing the Passover offering, they immediately went on to serve Him outwardly as well, without fear of the Egyptians. The Sages tell us that initially the Children of Israel did not want to circumcise themselves in Egypt: "When G-d was about to deliver them, He could find no merit in them. What did He do? He summoned Moses and said, 'Go and circumcise them.' ... Many of them did not agree to be circumcised. G-d, however, commanded that the Passover should be celebrated, and when Moses prepared the Passover lamb, G-d decreed that the four winds of the world should send forth the scent of the breezes of the Garden of Eden. At that point they went and joined in the Passover, for it says: 'Awake, O north wind, and come, O south. Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out' [Song of Songs 4:16]. This scent spread over a distance of a 40-day journey. All the Israelites then came flocking to Moses and said: 'Please give us some of the Passover lamb to eat,' for they were famished on account of the odor. His reply was, 'G-d has commanded that unless one is circumcised, he cannot partake of it,' as it says: 'The L-RD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover...." ' At that point they immediately agreed to be circumcised, and the blood of the Passover offering mingled with that of circumcision" (Shemot Rabba 19:5).

Since they circumcised themselves and offered the Passover offering, they served Hashem both inwardly and outwardly. Their outward service is alluded to in the mitzvah of circumcision, which is external, a drop of blood, whereas the blood of the Passover offering represents their inward service, as we have said. Hence serving G-d must be both inward and outward. A person should not be afraid of those who might ridicule him, and a mitzvah should not be carried out automatically or by rote. This is why the Sages said that the blood of the Passover offering mingled with that of circumcision. The Holy One, blessed be He, passed over all of them, embracing and blessing them, as it is written: "I passed over you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you: 'In your blood [the Passover offering] you shall live.' I said to you: 'In your blood [circumcision] you shall live'" (Ezekiel 16:6). The Arizal (Sha'ar HaKavanot, Derushei HaPesach, Derush 3) wrote that the term Pesach ("Passover") comes from peh sach ("the mouth that speaks"), in accordance with the statement of our Sages: "Pegiah [intercession] means only prayer" (Berachot 26b). The Sages also said, "What is service of the heart? You must perforce say [that it is] prayer" (Ta'anith 2a). In other words, the Passover offering and holiday teach us the importance of serving Hashem with inner devotion, from the bottom of our hearts. However it is not enough for our service to be limited to the heart, for it must also come from the mouth. This is peh sach: The mouth (peh) corresponds to outward service, and speech (sach) corresponds to inward service.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Purify Our Hearts

If someone sees his friend chewing on forbidden food from morning till night, it would certainly disgust him, for Scripture exclaims: "You shall not defile yourselves by any of these things." That person is defiling himself through his own hands. Yet how can a person who hates others not take heed of this commandment? The heart was created to have pure and holy thoughts, and yet he harbors bad thoughts about others in his heart from morning till night! Concealed hatred is infused in his heart, despite the fact that Scripture exclaims: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart." What is better, to eat forbidden food, which defiles the mouth, or to hate, which defiles the heart?

– Ahavat Israel, ch. 4

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Trial of Darkness

Before leaving left Egypt, four-fifths of the Children of Israel died in the plague of darkness. This means that millions of Jews died. Why? We cannot say that it was solely because they were wicked, for even those who left Egypt were idolaters, to the point that the accuser was able to say: “Those are idolaters and so are these” (Zohar II:170b). Therefore why were so many Jews killed? The Chatam Sofer explains that the death of these Jews in Egypt was not a punishment, but rather an extension of Hashem’s mercy towards them. This is because Hashem was going to inflict difficult trials upon the Children of Israel, and He knew that many of them would be unable to overcome these trials. Since Hashem did not want them to perish on account of their wickedness, He took them out of this world before the Exodus so as to prevent them from stumbling in the final trial. The first trial was the plague of darkness. When the Egyptians were engulfed by a deep darkness, a darkness that prevented them from seeing and even moving, the Children of Israel had light in their dwelling places. Not only did Jews have light in their own dwelling places, they could also enter the homes of the Egyptians and see where they placed their valuables. This was their first trial. The natural tendency was to fill their hands with all this wealth, for it was rightfully theirs after having been enslaved to the Egyptians for so many years without compensation of any kind. A Jew could therefore find the valuables of his Egyptian neighbor, knowing that the Egyptian couldn’t see or move, and he might want to take some gold or precious stones in order to leave Egypt with something. However something prevented him from taking it: G-d’s command! The Holy One, blessed be He, told him not to take anything, for he was to control himself.

The second trial occurred during the Seder night, the night when the plague of the firstborn took place. All of Egypt was upended, and there were cries throughout the land. Would the Children of Israel know well enough to not leave their homes to see what was making so much noise? Would they be able to stay inside and not look at vengeance being carried out on their Egyptian enemies? Despite everything taking place on that night, they were to stay behind closed doors!

The Holy One, blessed be He, Who probes the heart and mind, knew that four-fifths of the people would be unable to overcome this trial. They would be unable to prevent themselves from leaving their homes and seeing the downfall of their enemies. Hence they did not merit to survive that historic night.

– Pirkei Emunah

A Pearl From the Rav: He Who Studies Torah and Abandons it is the Worst of All

It is written, “The L-RD said to Moses: ‘Come to Pharaoh’ ” (Exodus 10:1). The Zohar asks why it is written, “Come to Pharaoh” rather than “Go to Pharaoh” (Zohar II:34a).

The Zohar replies that Hashem led Moses into a labyrinth in order to protect him from Pharaoh. We need to understand this, for if Moses was afraid of Pharaoh, why did Hashem not accompany him when he went before Pharaoh to announce all the plagues? Why did He only accompany him when he went before Pharaoh to announce the plague of locusts? According to our Sages, “If you will not listen” (Leviticus 26:14) refers to a person who knows his Creator and yet deliberately

rebels against Him (Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 2:2). We also read, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the L-RD” (Genesis 10:9). It is only written “before the L-RD” to designate one who knows his Master and yet deliberately rebels against Him. Likewise, “The men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners before the L-RD” (ibid 13:13), the expression “before the L-RD” meaning that they knew their Master and yet deliberately rebelled against Him.

Pharaoh belonged to the same category. He knew his Master and yet deliberately rebelled against Him, for with regards to the plague of hail Pharaoh said: “The L-RD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked” (Exodus 9:27). Nevertheless he hardened his heart and did not let the Children of Israel go. Our Sages have said, “He who has studied and then abandoned [the Torah is the worst] of them all” (Pesachim 49b). Pharaoh belonged to the same category, for he persisted in his wickedness despite knowing that Hashem was righteous. When did Pharaoh state, “The L-RD is righteous”? It was during the plague of hail. When that plague ended, Hashem said to Moses: “Come to Pharaoh,” for Moses began to fear Pharaoh because he had seen the truth and yet distanced himself from it more than ever. Hence Hashem said to Moses: “Come, for you and I shall both go together. You have nothing to fear from him.”

Next Year, Free Men

It is written, “They shall eat the meat on that night, roasted over fire, and unleavened bread. With bitter herbs shall they eat it” (Exodus 12:8).

We have been commanded to eat the Passover offering roasted, for it was the custom of kings and dignitaries to eat roasted meat because of its fine taste. However the rest of the people would only fill their stomachs with a little meat, which was boiled. As for us – who eat the Passover offering in remembrance of becoming free men, in order to become a kingdom of priests and a holy people – it is obvious that we should act like dignitaries and free men, demonstrating that others have no hold over us whatsoever.

– Sefer HaChinuch, Ohr HaChaim

Hidden within the order to eat roasted meat is a symbolic message. In fact roasted meat differs from boiled meat insofar as the former is entirely edible, despite the fact that water or spices are not used in cooking it, contrary to meat that is simply half-cooked or cooked entirely in water. Boiled meat is cooked through an intermediary, through the addition of water or other liquids. This is why roasting properly symbolizes the deliverance of the Jewish people, who merited complete liberty by the hand of Hashem and therefore do not need to add anything that comes from man. This is the symbolic characteristic of the Passover offering.

The way that roasting takes place also reflects the characteristic of deliverance: Without standing, no firm ground under its feet, swinging to and fro, not roasted in a pan, but hanging on a spit; this is how the Passover offering is to mature to a state fit for use. Without standing, driven to and fro, no right to the ground under their feet – this is literally the condition of aliens, in which this people, now rising to freedom and independence, had to be matured for their ultimate goal. Roasted meat, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs symbolize this concept, to imprint upon their consciousness the realization that only Hashem could liberate them, though they had no ground or foundation beneath their feet.

– Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

It is stated, “Leaven rises...which is why we separate ourselves from it...in order to say that all who are proud are an abomination to Hashem” (Sefer HaChinuch; Reshith Chochma, Sha’ar HaAnavah

3, citing the Midrash). Hence, “The prohibition against chametz [leaven] applies to even a small quantity, it being forbidden to benefit from it, for it alludes to the proud, especially to those who boast of their ability to take action. It is a warning not to benefit from the fact that people praise and complement you, a fact that you should not rejoice in.”

– Rabbi Moshe HaBavli, Ta’amei HaMitzvot

The Symbol of the Evil Inclination

It is written, “No leaven shall be seen of yours, and no leaven shall be seen of yours throughout all your borders” (Exodus 13:7).

Chametz that rises, and which makes dough rise after kneading, symbolizes pride. The Torah teaches us that with regards to pride, there is no middle ground. Even the smallest amount of it must be removed, for there are no half-measures on this issue. Therefore we have matzah – simple and humble – which we are commanded to eat. From here we learn that we must be as uncompromising with pride as we are with chametz, which the Torah completely banned and which is called an abomination like idolatry. We must be suspicious of even the smallest amount of pride, as we are of chametz.

– Commentary of the Chida, Chasdei Avot 4:4

The Departure from Egypt was a Departure from Pride

The reason why it was precisely during Passover that we received the prohibition against chametz is because it alludes to the vile characteristic of pride. The impurity of Egypt is pride and vanity, for “the ministering angel of Egypt is Rahav [large, inflated].” One of the reasons that the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt is because pride infused their hearts at the time: They did not want to yield to those who reprimanded them, and they refused to have leaders that befit them. Hence measure for measure, the calamity of slavery and forced labor came upon them. Placed under the authority of Pharaoh, the proudest of the proud (so proud, in fact, that his ego drove him into making himself into a god), the Children of Israel were humbled. Since the reason for their exile and enslavement in Egypt was pride, it followed that they had to act in the opposite way, meaning to be humble and flee all forms of vanity, in order to merit deliverance and liberty.

– Bina LaItim

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Bo recounts the final plagues that befell the Egyptians, the exodus from Egypt, and the mitzvot that ensued. It describes the plague of locusts and the plague of darkness, the last plagues to occur through an intermediary. Hashem declares that He will send still one more plague upon Pharaoh and Egypt, and He commands all the Children of Israel to offer the Passover sacrifice, the blood of which will serve as a sign to protect them from the last plague. They are also commanded to make unleavened bread, to offer the Passover sacrifice, and to eat matzah for the generations to come. Starting with the plague of the firstborn, which strikes at midnight, the exodus from Egypt continues until the next morning. Thus the Children of Israel establish a culture without a territorial foundation, 430 years after the father of the nation had left Ur of the Chaldees. They are also commanded to recount the story of the exodus from Egypt and to safeguard it as a memorial.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Lesson of the Passover Offering

It is written, “So shall you eat it: Your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste; it is the Passover offering to the L-RD” (Exodus 12:11).

The haste needed to eat the Passover offering is meant to symbolize the salvation of Hashem, which occurs in a flash. This was how Joseph’s release from prison took place, as we read: “They rushed him from the dungeon” (Genesis 41:14). It is also how the Holy One, blessed be He, will act in the future: “The L-RD, Whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple” (Malachi 3:1). By virtue of this mitzvah, every broken heart can take comfort and gain confidence. Just as the Passover offering was eaten at night and in haste, likewise when a person’s situation appears grim and dark, as if it were night, he should not lose hope. Instead he should have faith that Hashem will soon deliver him from all his troubles.

Roasting the Passover offering testifies to the fact that we are eating it for the sake of the mitzvah, not because we want to eat. Eating meat that is not (“partially roasted”) is an indication of gluttony, an attempt to satisfy one’s desire quickly and voraciously, such that one cannot wait for the meat to be entirely roasted. Such people eat like pigs, quickly devouring their food before it is even fully cooked. The Torah prohibits us from eating the Passover offering boiled, indicating that we must eat it for the sake of the mitzvah. In fact when cooking meat, we normally add water, spices, and other things to it, thereby demonstrating that we are not content with what Hashem has given us, and that we are looking for ways to make it suit our desires. Such is not the case when roasting meat over fire. The meat stays as it is, which demonstrates that we are content with what Hashem has given us. This applies to everything concerning the matters of this world. We must learn this lesson in order to know how to act when eating, drinking, and the like, so that everything we do is for the sake of serving Hashem.

– Derech Pikudeicha, Noam HaMitzvot

The prohibition against chametz differs from the mitzvah of eating matzah and the Passover offering, for the obligation to eat the latter applies to a single night only, whereas the prohibition against chametz lasts for seven full days. This demonstrates to the Jewish people that during our 70 years on earth, we must annul our evil inclination and base desires. The Sages have said that a person should consider himself to have personally left Egypt, for the exodus from Egypt and the Passover holiday, along with all its laws, allude to every person in each generation. Hence the exodus from Egypt is at the root of all Hashem’s holidays and mitzvot, a lesson that applies to all the days of our lives. – Abrabanel on Exodus 12

ESHET HAYIL

How to Pray

When asking a human being for something, we must specify what we want and how we want it, for otherwise the person we are addressing will not know what we really want, nor what we need or what can help us. Yet when asking G-d for something, we do not need to provide Him with details. The soul should remain silent before Hashem, not choosing which way to achieve our needs, for He knows best what is good and useful for us. Sometimes we may think that there exists a certain way that we can achieve honor, reach a certain level, or be saved from our problems, though in reality the opposite is true. This is why we must pray to Hashem in general terms and have faith in Him. Thus the Psalmist states, “Commit your way to the L-RD. Rely on Him and He will act” (Psalms 37:5). Hashem will do what is good and beneficial for us, for He knows what is in our best interests. He knows, far better than we do, how best to honor and save us. When we place our trust in Him, He will choose what is good, right, and fitting for us.

– Sefer Halkarim, Ma’amar Revii ch. 24

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi – The Rif

Our teacher the Rif was born in Fez, Morocco. He studied in Tunis and Kairuan, in the yeshivot of Rabbi Nissim and Rabbi Chananel. He later became the Rosh Yeshiva of Fez, where he had many students.

At the age of 75, the Rif was forced to escape for Spain following the denunciation and destruction of the Jewish center of Fez. He arrived in the Spanish city of Lussina, where he founded a spiritual counterpart to what existed in Mayence, Germany.

It was to Spain that the Rif brought the Torah of Babylon and North Africa. He lived at the same time as Rashi and Rabbi Nathan Ba'al HaAruch, though he never met them.

The Rif's main activities were in rendering Halachic decisions. His primary work is known as Hilchot HaRif, which are Halachic responsa and decisions that are clear and unambiguous. The Halachot HaRif are almost like a summary of the Talmud, also being known as the "Little Talmud" and "Halachot of Rav Alfasi." They are organized according to the order of the Talmud, and they summarize the opinion of the Sages of the Talmud and the Geonim who came after them, though without presenting their arguments. The Chida cites 13 of the Rishonim who wrote commentaries on the Rif, including the Maor, the Raavad, the Ran, the Ramban, and others.

The volumes of Halachot HaRif exert a tremendous influence in various areas: For talmidei chachamim, this work summarizes the Halachot of the Talmud and the decisions of the Geonim. For new students, it offers an abridged version of Talmudic issues, as well as explanations on difficult passages and definitions of certain terms. That goes without mentioning the fact that it helped to spread the Babylonian Talmud and the Torah of the Geonim of Babylon to Spain and other countries of the exile. The Rif's most famous disciples are Rabbi Yosef ibn Migash, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, and Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi.

In the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, the Rambam writes: "The Halachot formulated by the great Rav, Rabbeinu Yitzchak Zal, surpass all other works...for they encompass all decisions and dinim...and they explain all the errors that he encountered." Rabbeinu Yitzchak HaZaken, among the Ba'alei Tosaphot, wrote: "A man would wear himself out in trying to compose a similar work if the Shechinah did not rest upon him." – Toldot HaDorot

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Punishment in Full, Punishment in Measure

It is written, "I will make an end of all the nations where I dispersed you, but of you I will not make an end. I will punish you in measure, but I will not completely destroy you" (Jeremiah 30:11).

This seems difficult to understand for two reasons. The first is that if the Children of Israel had committed numerous sins, then they too must answer for them, for whoever says that Hashem discounts sin will be severely punished (see Bava Kama 50a). Even if they did not commit sin, we know that Hashem does not even punish idolaters for nothing. Therefore what is the prophet saying here, that the Children of Israel have nothing to fear? The explanation is simple: A person who errs against another will have to compensate for it little by little, in order to tolerate his punishment without being destroyed. However an enemy must pay compensation all at once. This is why Hashem does not judge idolaters until they have gone too far, at which point He destroys them. Such is not the case with the Children of Israel. Since Hashem loves them, He pays them back little by little, in a way they can tolerate and therefore survive. Thus it is written: "I will make an end of all the nations" – which is not the case for the Children of Israel, for of them Hashem states: "I will punish you in measure, but I will not completely destroy you." – Arvei Nachal

A TRUE STORY

The Highest Degree of Holiness

It is written, "This month shall be the beginning of the months for you" (Exodus 12:2).

Baron Wilhelm de Rothschild, Reb Shimon Wolf, a member of the wealthy Rothschild family, became famous by his devotion to fulfilling every mitzvah of Judaism. It is said that when he wished to fulfill the mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah, he did not have faith in the Soferim of Germany because they were not experts in all fields of the Torah. What did he do? He brought in a Sofer from Russia, a man who was known to be G-d-fearing and a great scholar. This Sofer stayed with the Baron for an extended period of time as he wrote the Sefer Torah in holiness and purity.

Finally, his work was done. The Sefer Torah was ready, and the Sofer went to see the Baron for his wages.

"Did you already receive some money in advance?" Baron Rothschild asked him. "Yes," he replied. He then took out a notebook from his pocket and began to read from it: "In April I received this amount, in May I received this amount..."

At that point the Baron interrupted him. "What did you say?" exclaimed the Baron in a loud voice. "Does a G-d-fearing Sofer count using Gentile months, not the months of the Jewish calendar or the parshiot of the Torah? Is a Sofer who spends his life writing Sifre Torah transgressing what is written in it: 'You shall not mention the name of other gods, nor shall your mouth cause it to be heard?'"

As he was saying this, Baron Rothschild took out his wallet and paid the Sofer what he was owed. He then said to him: "When you leave, take the Sefer Torah that you wrote with you."

– Mashal LaParasha

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Greatness of One Who Overlooks Insult

Our Sages recount the following story in the Zohar:

Rabbi Abba was once sitting at the gate of Lydda when he saw a man come by and sit on a ledge overhanging the ground. Being weary from traveling, he fell asleep. Rabbi Abba saw a serpent glide up towards the man, but before it reached him, a branch fell from a tree and killed it.

The man then woke up, and catching sight of the serpent in front of him he stood up. No sooner had he done so, the ledge gave way and crashed into the hollow beneath it. Rabbi Abba then approached him and said, "Tell me, what have you done that G-d should perform two miracles for you?" The man replied, "Never did I fail to make peace or forgive anyone who harmed me. And if I could not make peace with him, I did not rest before I forgave him, as well as all who vexed me. Nor was I at any time concerned about the evil that a man did to me. Even more so, from then on I put an effort into showing kindness to that man."

Rabbi Abba then wept and said: "This man's deeds exceed even those of Joseph. For Joseph showed forbearance towards his own brothers, upon whom it was natural for him to have compassion. Yet this man did more. Therefore it was fitting for the Holy One to work one miracle after another for him" (Zohar I:201b).

The Need to do Teshuvah During One's Lifetime

In his youth, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish belonged to a group of armed robbers. However he returned to Hashem with all his heart through fasting and prayer. He studied Torah and performed mitzvot for the rest of his life, and his teshuvah was accepted.

On the day that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish died, two robbers who had been his friends also died. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish was taken to Gan Eden, and his two friends were taken to Sheol. They said, "Master of the universe, do you respect persons?" He answered, "This one did teshuvah during his lifetime. You two did not." They replied, "Allow us to do teshuvah!" He said to them, "Teshuvah can only be done up to the day of death."