

WE CAN ONLY ACHIEVE COMPLETE FAITH BY RECEIVING THE TORAH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Az yashir [Then sang] Moses and the Children of Israel to the L-RD, and they spoke, saying: 'I will sing to the L-RD' " (Exodus 15:1). The Midrash states, "It is not written that Moses shar [sang] but yashir [will sing], which teaches us that the resurrection of the dead is mentioned in the Torah" (Mechilta).

The Midrash also states: "Another explanation of, 'Then sang Moses' – it is written: 'Then they believed His words, they sang His praise' [Psalms 106:12]. Rabbi Abahu said: Although the people had already believed [in G-d] while still in Egypt, as it is said, 'And the people believed' [Exodus 4:31], yet they lost faith afterwards, for it says: 'Our fathers in Egypt gave no heed to Your wonders' [Psalms 106:7]. As soon as they came to the sea and saw the might of G-d in His execution of judgment upon the wicked – as it says, 'My hand shall grasp judgment' [Deuteronomy 32:41] – and how He drowned the Egyptians in the sea, they at once believed in the L-RD. It was on account of this faith that the Holy Spirit rested upon them and they recited the shira [song]. Hence it says, 'Az yashir Moses and the Children of Israel,' for the word az is always used in connection with faith, as it says: 'And it happened, mei-az [from the time] that he appointed him in his house' [Genesis 39:5], after which it is written: 'He left all that he had in Joseph's hand' [v.6]. For this reason it says, 'Then they believed His words, they sang His praise' " (Shemot Rabba 23:2). We may say that the Children of Israel were only able to sing this shira to Hashem once they believed in Him with complete faith. When they achieved this faith, the Holy Spirit rested upon them, at which point they could immediately sing with Moses as he recited the shira to Hashem. It is not written, "Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang," but rather, "Then sang Moses." Thus Moses sang and all the Children of Israel followed him, which is precisely what the Midrash tells us: "And so it says, 'Then sang Moses.' Note that it does not say az yashiru – that Moses and the Children of Israel sang – but az yashir. This proves, said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, that this section was first recited by Moses, and afterwards it was repeated by our forefathers at the sea" (Shemot Rabba 23:9). How did the Children of Israel achieve faith at that particular time? We cannot say that it is because they saw the marvels of Hashem as He executed justice upon the wicked at the sea, for in Egypt as well the Holy One, blessed be He, executed justice upon the wicked and inflicted ten plagues upon them, and yet of that time it is written: "Our fathers in Egypt gave no heed to Your wonders"! However when they left Egypt, the Children of Israel believed in the Torah, for they only left Egypt to receive it, as we read: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). Since they believed in the Torah, they achieved faith in Hashem. While they were in Egypt, however, they did not have the Torah, as it is written: "You were naked and bare" (Ezekiel 16:7), and the Midrash states: "The time had come for them to be delivered, but they did not possess good deeds; they were 'naked and bare' of good deeds" (Tanhuma, Shemot 12).

This is the meaning of the verse, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). The expression "Moses His servant" designates the Torah, which carries Moses' name, as it is written: "Remember the Torah of Moses My servant" (Malachi 3:22). Rashi also explains, "When someone is called 'Moses,' it means that he is to his generation what Moses was to his" (see Shabbat 101b). In other words, every talmid chacham who teaches a novel Torah concept carries the name of Moses, as it is written: "There is a manifestation of Moses in every generation and in every tzaddik" (Tikkunei Zohar 114a). The Children

of Israel were able to leave Egypt because they believed in the Torah that they were going to receive, and the Shechinah rested upon them because they had faith in Hashem. Thus they were able to join with Moses in singing the shira.

How can we say that when a person studies Torah, he merits for the Shechinah to rest upon him? It is because the Sages have taught that whenever a talmid chacham sits down to study Torah, Scripture, and Mishnah, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him, reading along and repeating with him. Therefore when the Children of Israel believed in the Torah and wanted to receive and study it, they immediately became worthy for the Shechinah to rest upon them.

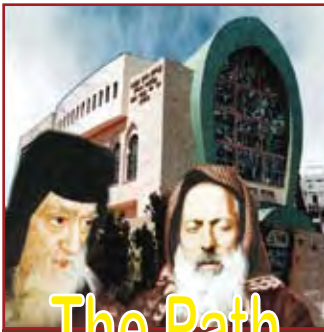
However it is impossible to have faith without having first studied the Torah and performed mitzvot. Signs and miracles are not enough to lead a person into having faith in Hashem, and there is nothing better for this than the study of Torah.

Can this really be true, or do signs and miracles lead a person to having faith? Concerning Pharaoh it is said, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying: 'Provide a sign....' Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake" (Exodus 7:9-10). What do we read afterwards? "The heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them" (v.13). We therefore have to admit that signs and miracles do not distance a person from sin, nor do they lead him to having faith, the wicked Pharaoh being the proof of this.

With my own eyes, I have seen many people who witnessed miracles that Hashem did for them. Some people even escaped death, and yet it had no effect on them whatsoever, for they did not mend their ways. Why not? Although they believed in Hashem, because they did not believe in the Torah or study it, their faith in Him was not complete. It was not complete as long as they failed to have faith in the Torah as well.

How did the Children of Israel achieve faith in the Torah? It was by having faith in Moses. Since they believed in the tzaddik, they were able to have faith in the Torah, and through it they achieved faith in Hashem. In fact it is impossible for a person to cleave directly to Hashem, as the Sages have noted (see Sifrei, Eikev 13) on the expression "cleave to Him" (Deuteronomy 10:22). Hence they ask how a person can ascend to Heaven and cleave to Him, since it is written: "The L-RD your G-d is a consuming fire" (ibid. 4:24) and "His throne was of fiery flames" (Daniel 7:9). The answer is that we must cleave to the Sages and their disciples. Since the Children of Israel cleaved to Moses, the words of the Torah attached themselves to them. When a person cleaves to the tzaddik, the words of the Torah immediately attached themselves to him, as it is written: "One who walks with the wise will grow wise" [Proverbs 13:20]. This is like someone who walks into a store that sells perfume. Even if he sells nothing or buys nothing, upon leaving he will carry the smell of perfume on his clothing all day long" (Yalkut, Mishlei 150).

How do we know that the Children of Israel believed in Moses? It is because it states, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant." Since they cleaved to Moses and believed in Him, they achieved faith in the holy Torah, which led them to having faith in Hashem. Thus we read, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant. Then Moses sang" – and shira designates Torah, as it is written: "So now, write this shira for yourselves" (Deuteronomy 31:19). Since they believed in Moses, they were able to achieve faith in the Torah and faith in Hashem. Furthermore, since the Shechinah rested on Moses, it rested on the Children of Israel as well, for they cleaved to him. Hence they were able to recite the shira along with him.



The Path To Follow BESHALACH

274

Feb. 7, 2009

13 Shvat 5769

Publication

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

No Reason for Leniency

A person should not think that if he fails to practice the entire Torah, Hashem will nevertheless be lenient with him by giving him a portion in Gan Eden – just as if he had fulfilled the entire Torah – simply because he sometimes devoted himself to completely fulfilling certain mitzvot. Such is not the case. A person must realize that a spiritual seed is planted with every mitzvah that he performs in this world, a seed from which his portion in the World to Come will blossom, and from which his soul will derive tremendous satisfaction.

Therefore just as it is impossible for vegetables to sprout and grow without first being planted, for that would go against nature, likewise a person who finds grace in the eyes of Hashem is one who performs all that He asks. Hashem does not want to fill his home for free, when nothing is planted and no effort is furnished. When we plant in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes things grow, sending His blessings and bestowing His goodness upon them.

– Zachor LeMiriam, ch. 22

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Moses' Spoils

What were the spoils of Egypt for Moses? The Sages teach, "See how important the mitzvot were to Moses! While all the Children of Israel were occupied with gathering spoils, he was occupied with mitzvot, as it says: 'Moses took the bones of Joseph with him' [Exodus 13:19]."

How did Moses know where Joseph was buried? Serach the daughter of Asher remained of her generation, and Moses went to her and said: "Do you know where Joseph is buried?" She replied, "The Egyptians made him a metal coffin and dropped it into the Nile so that its waters would always be blessed. Also, the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'If you want this people to never leave from here, bury Joseph's bones in a place where they will never be found.'"

Moses went to the edge of the Nile and began to cry out, "Joseph! Joseph! The hour has come concerning which you placed an oath on Israel, saying: 'G-d will surely remember you, and you shall carry up my bones from here' [Genesis 50:25]. Render glory to the L-RD, the G-d of Israel. The Shechinah lingers on account of you, Israel and the clouds of glory linger on account of you. If you show yourself, well and good. If not, we will be exempt from your oath." Immediately the coffin of Joseph began to rise from the depths like a reed, and Moses took it.

Rabbi Nathan said, "He was buried among the graves of the kings, and Moses went and stood by the graves of the kings and exclaimed: 'Joseph, the time has come of which the Holy One, blessed be He, swore: "I will deliver you...."' At that moment Joseph's coffin shook, and Moses took it and carried it with him."

Some say that he was buried among the graves of the kings and that Moses could not identify his remains. Jochebed, who also remained from that generation, said to him: "I will show you the man whom you seek." When he saw his remains, he immediately sensed the fragrance of Gan Eden that was still in the coffin.

– Sefer HaToda'ah, ch. 23

A Pearl From the Rav: Resorting to Prayer in Every Situation

It is written, "The Children of Israel went out with a high hand" (Exodus 14:8). What does this teach us? It cannot be saying that they left by force of arms, for it was already said: "It happened on that very day, the L-RD took the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies" (ibid. 12:51). However we read something interesting right afterwards: "The Children of Israel raised their eyes, and behold – the Egyptians were pursuing them, and they were very afraid. The Children of Israel cried out to the L-RD, and they said to Moses: 'Were there no graves in Egypt, that you took us out to die in the desert?'" (ibid. 14:10-11). This teaches us that a person may sometimes attain a higher spiritual level as he serves his Creator and nourishes his soul. What does the Satan do at that point? He brings a person down from his level and discourages him. That is what caused the Children of Israel to say, "Were there no graves in Egypt...." It is why we first read, "The Children of Israel went out with a high hand," followed by: "Were there no graves in Egypt...." The Torah is therefore telling us: Be careful when the Satan tries to discourage you – don't listen to it! If you start saying that it made you fall from a higher spiritual level, and that you can no longer serve Hashem, He says in response: "I have a good gift that is called prayer. Even if you cannot serve Me because the Satan robbed you of a higher spiritual

level, then cry out to Me! You just have to cry out! Although you may be unable to pray in a proper way, you can still cry out, in which case I will listen!"

The Meaning of Miracles for the Generations

It is written, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31).

People who do not believe in Hashem can often be heard saying, "If open miracles were to happen today, in our time, we would certainly do teshuvah!" Why then are no miracles seen today, miracles such as the splitting of the sea? Commenting on Exodus 13:16, the Ramban answers this question by stating: "The Holy One, blessed be He, will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic. He therefore commanded us that we should always make a memorial or sign of that which we have seen with our eyes, and that we should transmit the matter to our children, and their children to their children, for the generations to come.... He has further required us to inscribe upon our arms and between our eyes all that we have seen in the way of signs and wonders, and to inscribe it yet upon the doorposts of the houses, and that we remember it verbally in the morning and evening.... [He further required] that we make a sukkah every year, and many other similar mitzvot, which are a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. All these mitzvot are designed in order that we should have testimonials to miracles for all the generations to come, so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny a belief in G-d."

In concluding, the Ramban states that miracles are not only meant to make us realize that Hashem is behind the miraculous, but that He is also behind everything that happens in the world. Nothing is a "natural" process, for everything is but one great miracle. He writes, "Through the great open miracles, one comes to admit the hidden miracles that constitute the foundation of the entire Torah, for no one can have a part in the Torah of Moses unless he believes that all our words and events are miraculous in scope, there being no natural or customary way of the world in them, whether affecting the public or the individual. Instead, if a person observes the mitzvot, His reward will bring him success, and if he violates them, His punishment will cause his extinction. It is all by decree of the Most High...."

Protecting Precious Moments

It is written, "There He established for [the nation] a decree and an ordinance" (Exodus 15:25).

Rashi states, "In Marah, He gave them some sections of the Torah so they would busy themselves with them, namely the Sabbath, the red cow, and laws of jurisprudence."

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, whose opinion is cited in Kedushat Levi on the verse, "Do not awaken or rouse love before it desires" (Song of Songs 8:4). The Ramban understands this to mean that when a person experiences a spiritual awakening, being aroused to fear and love the Creator, he should immediately seek a vessel for it, meaning that he must perform a mitzvah right away. For example, he should give tzedakah or start learning Torah and the like, for we know that a spiritual awakening comes upon a person without warning, and a light from above called neshama shines upon him. A person must therefore give it a bodily cover so it can have a foundation and be strong. This is the meaning of, "Do not awaken or rouse love before it desires [techpatz]," for the word chefetz ("desire") can also designate an actual object. In other words, the awakening that comes upon a person immediately needs a vessel to contain it.

Hence right after the sea split for the Children of Israel and they saw something that the prophet Ezekiel did not merit to see, Hashem gave them some sections of the Torah to study. In this way, they would have a vessel in which their spiritual awakening could occur.

– Ouva HaLevi

Should We Go to Doctors?

It is written, “He said, ‘If you hearken diligently to the voice of the L-RD your G-d and do what is just in His eyes, give ear to His commandments, and observe all His decrees, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I placed upon Egypt, for I am the L-RD Who heals you’ ” (Exodus 15:26).

The Ramban believes that “one who perfectly carries out G-d’s will” does not need to see a doctor. However in the Rambam’s commentary on the Mishnah (Pesachim ch. 5), he greatly opposes such a view, comparing the remedy for the sick to food for the hungry. The Rambam also writes that a foolish pious man who refuses the help of a doctor and only relies on Hashem is like a starving man who refuses to eat bread because he thinks that Hashem will protect and heal him of this illness called hunger. It seems clear that according to the Ramban, there is no reason to compare illness to hunger, for hunger and eating are part of the natural order of Creation. That is how Hashem created man, his life being dependent on food and drink, and therefore a person cannot refuse to eat and drink in the hope that Hashem will save him. However illness is not part of the natural order, and on the contrary it goes against the very fact of Creation. It comes as a result of sin, being an aspect of Divine punishment. Hence the Ramban believes that just as illness is a result of Hashem’s will, likewise healing is a result of Hashem’s will. Therefore when the cause of illness – meaning sin – disappears (or if illness serves as an atonement, when a person’s teshuvah is complete), then the illness will disappear. Hence there is no reason to compare illness to hunger or healing to eating.

– Yachel Israel

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Beshalach continues in describing the process by which the Children of Israel develop into G-d’s people. The Children of Israel left Egypt in the previous parsha (Bo), and they would receive the Torah “on this mountain” in the next parsha (Yitro). Moses had been told of this in Parsha Shemot, when he was appointed as Hashem emissary and charged with bringing His children out of Egypt. At the beginning of Parsha Beshalach, the people march from Egypt to the sea, and there they complain when Pharaoh and his army catch up with them. They are promised that Hashem will fight for them, and that they will be saved when the sea splits. When the people actually experience these miracles, they sing the Shirat HaYam (Song of the Sea). Moses then leads them from the Sea of Reeds to the desert of Sin by way of Marah (whose bitter waters were sweetened for them) and Elim (which has an abundance of water and palm trees). When they arrive at the desert of Sin, they begin to complain about a lack of bread and meat, at which point Hashem announces that it will rain bread and quail for them. Hashem then gives them mitzvot regarding the manna and Shabbat. As they continue traveling through the desert of Sin, they complain at Rephidim over a lack of water, after which time the war with Amalek begins.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Who Heals the Sick of His People Israel

It is written, “For I am the L-RD Who heals you” (Exodus 15:26).

In his commentary on the Torah, the Ramban states: “When Israel is in perfect [accord with G-d]...their affairs are not conducted at all by the natural order of things.... [T]hey do not need a physician and do not have to observe any of the rules of medicine, just as He said: ‘For I am the L-RD Who heals you.’ And so did the righteous ones act at the time when prophesy [existed], so that even if a mishap of iniquity overtook them, causing them sickness, they did not turn to the physicians, but only to the prophets.... And what part do the physicians have in the house of those who do the will of G-d, after He has assured us: ‘He will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from the midst of you’ [Exodus 23:25]?” (Ramban on Leviticus 26:11).

This means that a person does not need to see a doctor in order to be healed. If an illness has been decreed for him, he should go to a prophet, determine his sin, and repent. Those who go to the doctor are simple people who are afraid of their illness.

However in another place, the Ramban writes that it is a duty to be healed, as well as a mitzvah because of the requirement that one must be careful with his life.

The explanation is similar to what the Sages said on the verse, “You shall gather in your grain” (Deuteronomy 11:14), namely that every person must work in order to earn a living. In the view of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, when Israel performs the will of G-d, others do their work for them (Berachot 35b). In his Torah commentary on Parsha Chayei Sarah, Rabbi Yitzchak Zeev Halevi states that a person can act in one of two ways: The first way is to act as everybody normally does, which is fitting for the overall public. The second way is to act as did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who did not concern himself with his worldly needs, but only with the Torah. This way is only fitting for a few exceptional individuals.

We can understand the need to see a doctor in a similar way. Those who fulfill G-d’s will to perfection do not need to be healed by natural means, just as they do not concern themselves with other worldly needs. However the great majority of people are not at this level. Therefore they must see a doctor in order to be healed, just as they must work in order to earn a living, except that the requirement to care for oneself is even stricter because of a person’s duty to be careful with his life. We can also read what the Chazon Ish wrote on this subject: “I think that looking to natural means with regards to health is a mitzvah and a duty.”

– Yachel Israel

ESHET HAYIL

The Blessing of Your House

Where do people keep their gems? Deep inside a safe. Where do they keep their most valuable possessions? In a secret location, far from prying eyes.

It is written, “The daughter of the king is all glorious within” (Psalms 45:14) and, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home” (ibid. 128:3). The name of Queen Esther – who charmed all who saw her – testifies on her behalf, since the name Esther comes from haster (“to conceal”). As Rabbi Yehudah said, “Why was she called Esther? Because she concealed [masteret] the facts about herself” (Megillah 13a).

The Talmud recounts a shocking story about the holy Rabbi Yossi of Yokereth. One day he saw a man boring a hole in a fence so he could catch a glimpse of his beautiful daughter. Rabbi Yossi said, “My daughter...return to the dust so that men may not sin because of you” (Ta’anith 24a), which is precisely what happened, for his daughter died! Rabbi Yossi saw that the pinnacle of his daughter’s role in this world consisted of remaining concealed within the home. Lest she not fulfill the task for which she had been created, although it was unconscious and completely inadvertent on her part, he thought it best that she die.

– Bein Adam LeKono

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid – The Author of Sefer Chassidim

Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid was among the great Torah scholars of Germany and one of the Ba'alei HaTosaphot. He was also a pious man and a Kabbalist. On account of his great holiness, his name was evoked with tremendous reverence and trembling by the greatest of his disciples, as well as by all the generations that followed. He taught Torah and made many disciples, devoting all the days of his life to the faultless service of G-d and to distancing himself from all the pleasures of the world. In his own generation he was already considered to be one of the Rishonim. People spoke of his greatness, and everything that emerged from his mouth was viewed as being tremendously important.

With regards to Sefer Chassidim, the Torah scholars of his generation were the first to note: "If he had lived in the time of the Amoraim, he would have been an Amora. If he had lived in the time of the Tannaim, he would have been a Tanna. If he had lived in the time of the prophets, he would have been a prophet." Included among his disciples were the Ohr Zarua, the Rokeach, the Samag, and others. Rabbeinu Simcha of Spire addressed him as follows: "My teacher, light of my eyes, the lamp of Israel, from your mouth we live!"

Rabbi Yehudah stated (Sefer Chassidim 47) that whoever speaks the truth and does not want to contemplate falsehood, then even things that he says and thinks – even without intention – will be fulfilled. Thus it is written, "You shall decree a thing, and it shall be done" (Job 22:28). There he also writes that a person should not let anything escape his mouth unless he knows that it is in accordance with Hashem's will, in which case "you shall decree a thing, and it shall be done."

When Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid passed away on Adar 13, 4977 (which was Shabbat Zachor), it is said that despite his grave illness, he answered Halachic questions on that same day. In fact during his final moments, he signaled to his disciples that his funeral procession should pass by a certain city gate. The non-Jewish residents of the city hung a clock at that gate, as was their custom, in order for it to ring whenever a funeral procession made its way past there. Thus Rabbeinu HaChassid said, "If I merit the World to Come, this gate will fall after my death." As it turned out, when his coffin was being brought through the gate in question, the gatekeeper hurried to do what he normally did, and the gate crumbled along with the clock, killing the gatekeeper. When the non-Jews saw this, they said: "Now we know that he was a saint!" His book Sefer Chassidim contains instructions in the area of Mussar and Halachah, and it has been republished many times along with commentaries from the sages of Israel. To the present day, his famous "Last Will and Testament" is a model of behavior for the Jewish community to follow. – Koreh HaDorot

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Pride and Arrogance

It is written, "Awake, awake, O Deborah. Awake, awake, utter a song" (Judges 5:12).

Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, "Whoever is boastful, if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him. ... [We learn this] from Deborah, who congratulated herself by saying: 'Until I, Deborah, arose; I arose as a mother in Israel' (Judges 5:7). G-d's spirit then left her, and she was told: 'Awake, awake, O Deborah. Awake, awake, utter a song.'"

"He charges His angels with folly" (Job 4:19). These are the angels who were sent to Sodom and said, "We will destroy this place" (Genesis 19:13). Because they grew proud and made it sound as if the matter depended on them, they were banished from His Presence for 138 years. In fact they were not sent on another mission by the Holy One, blessed be He, until the time of Jacob. They returned on a mission to him, as it is written: "Behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending" (Genesis 28:12). There was a span of 138 years from the destruction of Sodom, when Abraham was 99 years old, until these angels of G-d came to Jacob. Hence it is written "ascending and descending," meaning that those who ascended when Sodom was destroyed were now descending, and during all that time they were punished by not being sent on any mission. From here we realize the great punishment that awaits one who attributes the honor of Hashem to himself, for the entire world and everything it contains were only created for the honor of Hashem. It is therefore not fitting to ascribe it to anyone else. – Rabbeinu Bechaye on Genesis 19:13

A TRUE STORY

For I Am Hashem Who Heals You

There was a certain skilled doctor who knew how to treat patients so well that in the eyes of many, he could revive the dead. This man had an only son whom he loved with all his heart, and he wanted to teach him about medicine. His son, however, did not want to obey him. He therefore left for Aram Naharayim and Egypt in order to learn from a doctor from another people, one who did not even come up to his father's ankle in terms of medical skill. The man's son eventually returned home and became ill. Because he loved him, the man obviously wanted to treat him in the best possible way. His son, however, was suspicious of his methods and questioned his procedures in light of the woeful medical knowledge he had gained from the other doctor, the one not of his own people, who knew only a fraction of what his father knew. The son therefore took some bitter roots from a poisonous plant, and despite his father's warnings he tried to heal himself according to his woeful knowledge. The son acted criminally against himself and was responsible for his own life, for he did more harm than good, without mentioning the fact that he poisoned his system and disregarded his father's remedies. By depriving himself of a real cure, his death would be his own fault.

From here we learn what Hashem says to man: "I am the L-RD Who heals you. I am better than you at healing your soul through Torah and mitzvot, though you refuse to learn from Me. You trust in your own destitute wisdom as you try to heal your soul with bitter roots."

– Sefer HaBrit

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

True Love

True love between friends is one that increases to such a degree that they are certain their love will never fade, that it will never end for all eternity. In fact even death cannot separate people who are so connected to one another. Describing this love, King Solomon said that it is as strong as death, so strong in fact that even death cannot break it.

The story is told of two friends in Syracuse who held this kind of love for one another. One of them was sentenced to death by the authorities. Imprisoned in the capital and awaiting execution, he made a request to the cruel king to be allowed to return home in order to set his affairs in order, write down what he owed to whom, and what he was owed by whom, and to give final instruction to his wife and children. The court informed him that the king had allowed him to return home, but only if could provide a pledge. This pledge, however, was to be nothing less than another person, one who would be executed if he did not return. A friend of this man came and served as this pledge, and thus he was taken captive and held in prison. The man was then able to return home, set his affairs in order, and give final instructions to his family. After doing so, he quickly set off for the capital and made his way to the prison where his friend was being held. Not finding him there, the man asked about his whereabouts, and he was told that 15 minutes earlier his friend had been taken away for execution. The man immediately ran to the gallows and began to scream aloud: "Wait! I'm here!!" When he saw his friend, he fell upon his neck, and they stood there hugging and embracing one another. His friend was crying because he had returned, and he said to him: "I wanted to die in your place!" The entire town was stunned by the extraordinary love that existed between them, news of which reached the royal palace. The king was told, "The man sentenced to death has returned, and he and his friend embraced one another. Although his friend has been released, he wants to remain and have the sentence carried out on himself!" Hearing this, the king replied: "Free the man as well, and send him home in peace. He is so attached to his friend that if he were to be executed, his friend would also die! Why should we kill both of them?"