

THE OBSERVANCE OF SHABBAT AND PEACE HASTEN THE DELIVERANCE (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "He gave to Moses, when He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two Tablets of Testimony, stone Tablets inscribed by the finger of G-d" (Exodus 31:18). This verse is located between the mitzvah of Shabbat and the making of the golden calf, which does not seem to be the right place for it, as Rashi states. We therefore need to understand why it is found here.

This contains an allusion to what the Sages taught us about the greatness of peace. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, may close His eyes to all sins, but not to a lack of peace. Hence the Temple was destroyed only on account of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). Although the Children of Israel possessed Torah and good deeds, their Torah did not protect them because there was no peace among them. Our Sages say, "The generation of Achav was almost completely idolatrous. However since they did not have informers among them, they were victorious in war" (Pesikta D'Rabbi Kahana 4:2). Baseless hatred is worse than idolatry, and as long as unity and peace exist among the Jewish people, they will defeat their enemies.

Now Shabbat is called "peace," as the Gemara states: "What is the meaning of, 'My soul despaired of having peace' [Lamentations 3:17]? ... This refers to the kindling of the light on Shabbat" (Shabbat 25b). Rashi explains that light always represents peace, and the Zohar states: "The world does not exist except through peace. When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, it could not endure until He came and made peace dwell upon them. What is it? It is Shabbat, which is the peace of the upper and the lower grades" (Zohar III:176b). The Men of the Great Assembly decreed that in the Mincha prayer of Shabbat we must recite, "A rest of peace and serenity" and the Sages explain that this was instituted because of the verse, "My people will dwell in a peaceful domain" (Isaiah 32:18). The Midrash explains, "A song for the Sabbath day [Psalms 92:1] – for the day when demons are prevented from harming the world, the day when they are seated with him in peace, as it is written: 'They are with me in an oasis of peace, a sure dwelling place and a serene rest'" (Midrash Tehillim 72). This is why the passage on the observance of Shabbat, which alludes to unity and peace, appears before the passage on the golden calf, despite being out of chronological order. It is meant to teach us that when peace exists in the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, acts with compassion, even when the Children of Israel deliver themselves to idolatry. When is Hashem filled with anger? When there is no peace among the Children of Israel. Even if they possess mitzvot and good deeds, but there is no peace among them, the Holy One, blessed be He, is filled with anger against them. Our Sages have said, "If the Children of Israel would properly observe one Shabbat, the son of David would immediately arrive" (Yerushalmi, Taanith 1:1). We therefore see that the Children of Israel will not be saved before having observed one Shabbat, which represents peace, and when there is peace in the world, the son of David will immediately arrive.

It is for this reason that the passage on the observance of Shabbat is juxtaposed to Parsha Shekalim, for the Sanctuary was built only through the power of unity. The shekalim that

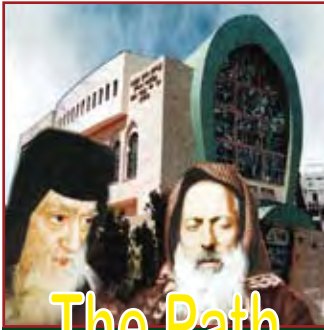
the Children of Israel gave for the Sanctuary brought about unity and peace. Both rich and poor gave only a half-shekel. Although the rich could have given more, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the rich and the poor to each give a half-shekel, not more, thereby demonstrating that they are all equal before G-d. It is for this reason that the passage on the observance of Shabbat is found next to Parsha Shekalim, for the purpose of Shabbat and the shekalim are the same: To bring peace to Israel.

This is why the righteous in former times performed the mitzvah of tzedakah especially on the eve of Shabbat, going from door to door in order to collect money for the poor. It was also the custom of my forefather, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal, who went about collecting tzedakah all day long on the eve of Shabbat, taking what was needed for meals from the wealthy, and distributing it to the poor so as to increase peace among the people on the day before Shabbat.

The Tablets of the Covenant were also given to Israel by the merit of unity. In fact at the giving of the Torah, the Children of Israel were united, as the Sages said on the verse, "Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2): "This teaches us that they were all as one person with one heart" (Mechilta). Although the Children of Israel had sinned with the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that in the future they would observe Torah and mitzvot, and they would increase peace and unity in the world. The merit of unity was therefore greater than the sin of idolatry, and so He gave the Tablets to Moses.

The Tablets were also given by the merit of Shabbat, which is why the Men of the Great Assembly decreed that in the prayers of Shabbat we are to say, "Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion, for You called him a faithful servant...and he brought down two Tablets of stone in his hand, on which was inscribed the observance of Shabbat." Was it only the observance of Shabbat that was inscribed on the Tablets? Since Moses only merited the Tablets on account of Shabbat, it is the primary thing, and the Sages therefore decided that we should say, "Thus it is written in Your Torah: The Children of Israel shall observe Shabbat." What merit does Shabbat have? It consists entirely of peace, and the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that when a person observes Torah and mitzvot, he increases peace in the world. It was by this merit that He gave them the Torah.

We also find, with regards to the first man when he sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not forgive him before Shabbat came to defend him. The Midrash states that when Adam sinned, he was sent out of the garden on that very same day, and on the next day, Rosh Hashanah, he was forgiven, for Shabbat came to defend him (Pesikta Rabbati 46). Hashem blessed him with light, providing him with light throughout the night and day of Shabbat, 36 hours of light in all. He did this in order for Adam not to suffer, since he had never experienced the darkness of night. Adam was therefore saved from the attribute of strict justice by the merit of Shabbat, which defended him. Hence we read, "It is good to thank the L-RD" (Psalms 92:2). Such is the merit contained in Shabbat, which consists entirely of peace.



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Prohibition Against Listening to Rechilut

Just as it is forbidden to listen to Lashon Hara, likewise it is forbidden to listen to Rechilut [a report that someone has done or spoken against another person]. This prohibition applies even if the one listening to it does not believe what he is hearing. For example, suppose that Yitzchak is extremely upset with Shlomo because he hears him ridiculing Shemuel. The next day, Yitzchak meets Shemuel and immediately begins to tell him how Shlomo ridiculed him. "I don't want to hear it," Shemuel interrupts before Yitzchak can even finish his first sentence. "But you have to be know who hates you," Yitzchak persists. "I'm very sorry," Shemuel says in explaining his refusal, "but what you are telling me will serve no practical purpose. I'm sure that you have good intentions, but what you want to tell me is simply Rechilut, and I don't have the right to listen to it." Shemuel's refusal to listen to Yitzchak is not just commendable – it is his duty!

– Netzor LeShoncha

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Silencing an Accuser and Appointing a Defender

On the verse, “And now, leave Me” (Exodus 32:10), Rashi states: “We have not yet heard that Moses prayed for them, and yet He said: ‘And now, leave Me’? But here, He opened a door for [Moses] and informed him that the matter depended on him, that if he would pray for them, [G-d] would not destroy them.” A defender can be so successful that not only will he be able to highlight merits, he will also be able to turn sins into merits. He can do this by proving that the accuser has been mistaken in his perception of sin, and that a more detailed examination would reveal that such sin was actually a merit. In light of this idea, if we examine what Hashem said to Moses, we will see that Moses returned to Hashem’s very accusations in order to defend the Jewish people. Hashem said to Moses: “Your people have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7), a reference to the *erev rav* (“mixed multitude”). Moses alluded to this in defending the Jewish people, for they themselves did not sin with the golden calf. Rather, they simply saw what others did but failed to reprimand them (see Ramban). Thus Moses began by saying: If it was only my people who sinned, why are You angry with Your people, meaning with the holy people of Israel? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Whom you brought up from the land of Egypt” (v.7) – they have forgotten all the miracles and everything that happened to them in Egypt. Moses took this expression and said, “Whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt” (v.11) – there is no reason to accuse them of having sinned, for You took them out of a place of impurity and idols. Hashem said: “They have quickly strayed” (v.8) – if they had remained righteous for at least some time, this merit would have testified in their behalf and they could have argued that with the passage of time they had forgotten the G-d Who saved them. However they quickly strayed. Moses replied that the opposite was true, for this was precisely their excuse: They sinned because they were not yet fully used to the mitzvot, and all beginnings are difficult. You know very well that they were completely immersed in the impurity of Egypt, and that You had to take them out “with great power and a strong hand” (v.11). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (v.9). Moses pleaded that this was to their advantage, and that it was proper to forgive a stiff-necked people. In fact being obstinate was a great characteristic for the Children of Israel to possess. It meant that they would not easily accept anything unless it was clear to them, and that they would be willing to give their lives for the Torah once they properly understood it. The Midrash clearly states that here, Hashem showed Moses what to do by saying that everything depended on him. Moses had to realize that these accusations contained positive things. He had to realize that he should pray for them, in which case his prayer would not be refused.

– Ateret Paz

A Pearl From the Rav: The Consequences of Failing to Reprimand Others

It is written, “Go, descend – for your people have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7). Why did Hashem use the expression “your people”? The Sages said, “Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah’s cow used to go out with a ribbon between its horns, [but] not with the con-

sent of the Sages” (Shabbat 54b). The Gemara states that this cow did not belong to him, but rather to a female neighbor of his. Yet because he failed to reprimand her, it was attributed to him. The Sages add, “Whoever can forbid his household [from committing a sin], but does not, is seized for his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for the whole world” (ibid.). Here too, since Moses did not reprimand them, their sin carries his name, even if he could not have reprimanded them because he was in Heaven. He was their teacher, and a teacher cannot ignore the deeds of his students. The Sages have said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, deals strictly with those around Him, even to a hair’s breadth” (Yebamot 121b).

Similarly, the verse states: “The L-RD struck the people with a plague, for they had made the calf that Aaron had made” (Exodus 32:35). Why is this deed attributed to Aaron? Since he had the opportunity to reprimand them, but failed to do so – even if he did all that he could – Hashem was strict and attributed this sin to him.

The Signs of Shabbat

It is written, “However you must observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies you” (Exodus 31:13).

In His goodness, Hashem gave us the holy Sabbath by saying: “It is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies you,” as well as, “It is a sign between Me and the Children of Israel forever, for in six days...” (v.17). This clearly demonstrates that He bound Himself to us with a powerful bond, one that will never be broken, and that He gave us a sign of it by granting us the day of rest. All this goes against the view held by the generation of Enosh, who believed that the Holy One, blessed be He, maintains no connection whatsoever with His creatures. To eliminate this erroneous view, the exodus from Egypt also took place, along with all its signs and wonders, thereby proclaiming that He watches over every detail of what happens on earth, as the Torah states: “That you may know that I am the L-RD in the midst of the earth” (Exodus 8:18). Shabbat is also a reminder of the exodus from Egypt, as it is written: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L-RD your G-d redeemed you” (Deuteronomy 15:15).

– Shem Olam

Admitting Sin is the First Requirement for Repenting

It is written, “Please! This people has sinned a grievous sin” (Exodus 32:31).

This is surprising, for Moses had come to pray for the Children of Israel and to emphasize their merit, so why was he now mentioning their terrible sin? The truth is that the first requirement for repenting is to admit sin. This means not looking for pretexts or excuses for having sinned, but to acknowledge failure and to regret it with a broken heart. When the first man tried to justify himself by saying, “The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree” (Genesis 3:12), his repentance was not accepted.

Thus when Moses came to intercede for the Children of Israel, he acknowledged: “This people has sinned a grievous sin.” In other words: They admit their sin and are not trying to justify themselves. They are heartbroken and grieving, and they want to completely repent. That is why they are worthy of forgiveness.

– Nechmad MiZahav

Blot Me Out!

It is written, “If You would but forgive their sin. And if not, please blot me out!” (Exodus 32:32).

The Maggid of Dubno explained this statement by means of a parable: A great king had an honorable dignitary, one whose relative would be accused of petty theft from time to time. Whenever he was caught stealing, this dignitary would intercede for him before the king. At one point his relative stole a huge amount from the royal treasury, and the dignitary had no way to defend him. What did he do? He came before the king and said, “Remove me from office, for in that case my relative will be forced to stop stealing, knowing that he will no longer be able to count on me.” Thus Moses said: “Please blot me out!” – remove all my importance from before You, so the Children of Israel will no longer rely on me, and therefore they will stop sinning.

The Thirteen Middot

It is written, “Let my L-rd go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our iniquity” (Exodus 34:9).

The Maggid of Dubno explained this verse with a parable: A peddler of goods was standing in a wealthy and luxurious neighborhood, a place where princes and barons lived, and he was trying to hawk his merchandise. Throughout the day, he loudly proclaimed that he had plain wooden spoons and forks for sale, yet he failed to sell a single one. Come nighttime, he returned home sad and dejected. On his way, he saw a friend who was coming to meet him, and his friend could see that he was down. When he asked him about it, the peddler began to bemoan his bitter fate, describing what happened to him on that day. “You’re tormenting yourself for nothing,” his friend said. “The merchandise that you’re selling is good for the poor, but what are the rich and powerful of this world going to do with wooden spoons? Go tomorrow to the neighborhood of the craftsmen, and you’ll see how well your merchandise sells!” Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Moses His “merchandise,” His middot: “Compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness...” (Exodus 34:6). Moses replied: “Let my L-rd go among us” – with such middot, You must be with us, for only in this lower world is such merchandise needed, since the angels of Heaven do not sin. Yet this “is a stiff-necked people,” and Your children have a great need for it!

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Ki Tisa begins following the instructions that were given regarding the Sanctuary and Divine service. A half-shekel is collected as the redemption price for every person, with the money being devoted to the Sanctuary. The Children of Israel receive the order to make a basin for ritual washings, to prepare special oil and incense, and to appoint a person to oversee the work, namely Betzalel. They are also warned about observing Shabbat.

When Moses delays in coming down from the mountain, the Children of Israel attempt to concretize Hashem’s presence by means of a golden calf, not by the Sanctuary. Following this incident, Hashem says: “I shall not ascend among you,” although He later reveals Himself to Moses as he stands among the rocks, for Moses had “found favor in My eyes.” Hashem gives Moses a second pair of Tablets to replace the ones he had broken, and He establishes a covenant by announcing the laws regarding the community. The text continues by describing the radiance of Moses’ face.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Sin of the Golden Calf

After the giving of the Torah, Moses spoke in G-d’s Name as he told the Children of Israel: “You have seen that I have spoken to you from Heaven. You shall not make anything with Me; gods of silver and gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves” (Exodus 20:19-20).

The Torah forbids us from making forms of things that contain a spiritual force, such as the form of a man, who was created in the image of G-d, or the form of a celestial body, since the stars and constellations all possess a soul and intelligence (Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah, chs. 3, 9). Hence the Torah prohibited the making of such forms, even for decoration, because people are liable to make a mistake and attribute a Divine force to them (Rambam, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim, ch. 3). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the representation of forces is sometimes meant to concretize and show us just how G-d is close to us. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, is not corporal, and since He cannot be perceived by the senses, a person tries to perceive Him through concepts taken from life. In fact he cannot speak of supernal concepts other than through imagery that is accessible to him. In The Kuzari, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi states that this error stems from the unrest of the generation of the desert, who made the golden calf. They did not deny the divinity of G-d, Who led them out of Egypt. They simply wanted to have a constant, concrete reminder with them, one that they could address indirectly, in the same way that we point to heaven when mentioning G-d, for it symbolizes something that was created by Hashem’s will, with no intervention on the part of man or any other creature. The Torah therefore warns us: “You shall not make anything with Me; gods of silver and gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.” We are not to make anything that man needs to represent the concept of divinity. As the prophet cites Hashem in saying, “To whom can you liken Me, that I should be his equal?” (Isaiah 40:25).

ESHET HAYIL

All Glorious is the Princess Within

Who is called “a great man of the generation”? Is it an extraordinary tzaddik? Someone who studies Torah day and night, an expert in Halachah, and a person of noble character? How did he acquire the attribute on which the righteousness and greatness of a woman is based? Concerning the tzaddik, it is said: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.” Palm trees are very tall, and they can be seen from far away. Similarly, the personality of a tzaddik is brilliant, and everyone comes to him for advice. The palm tree also has another characteristic: The larger the tree, the deeper its roots. Thus for a woman, “All glorious is the princess within” (Psalms 45:14) – she is judged by her roots, by what is on the inside. The strength of a woman lies in modesty and prayer, great yet inner things. A great Rav once said at a funeral for a certain woman, “We normally say that a man is a ‘great tzaddik.’ But realize that a righteous and great woman is hidden from the eyes, for her righteousness is within.”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shlomo Alfandri – The Saba Kadisha

Rabbi Shlomo Alfandri, known as the “Saba Kadisha” (holy grandfather), was born in Constantinople. He was famous for his resolve concerning everything dealing with holiness. He fulfilled the verse, “You shall fear no man” in all his battles for the sake of Hashem.

At the age of 24, he decided to leave Damascus and settle in the Holy Land. At first he lived in Haifa, but as he became famous, and the secluded residents of Sefat invited him to come and live among them, he was crowned as the head of the rabbis and appointed as the Av Beit Din of the town’s Sephardic community.

His fame spread in Sefat, and many came to him seeking the view of the Torah and the word of Hashem, meaning the Halachah. Kabbalists, both Ashkenaz and Sephardic, came to study the secrets of the Torah with him.

Whoever met him sensed a reverential fear of the elderly gaon, who was always vigorous and firm, and man whose Torah knowledge was amazing. Everyone respected him, and even Muslims feared him, perceiving him to be a man of G-d, an “angel,” since they realized that G-d’s Name was upon him.

The Sages of Sefat said that during Nissan of the year 5674, when they finished reciting Kiddush Ha-Levana, his eyes remained fixed on the sky. He then let out a great sigh as he struck his hands together, and tears could be seen in his eyes. When his disciples asked him what all this meant, he replied: “I see that a terrible war will soon break out.” World War One began that very same year.

He moved to Jerusalem in the year 5685, and the greatest talmidei chachamim frequented his home. Hundreds of letters filled with questions were sent to him, ones that he would answer according to the breadth of his understanding and his vast knowledge in every field of Torah and Halachah. He remained in Jerusalem until his final day, and he appointed Mashgichim to collect tithes, which today are still in effect as he directed. He was 112 years old when he passed away, although he was always filled with vitality.

It is said that on the morning of Tuesday, Iyar 22, 5690, the Saba Kadisha asked his students to wrap him in a tallit and to place two pairs of tefillin on his arm and head. He then began to recite Shema. When he reached the word *emet* (truth), he hinted to his students to remove his tefillin. He then said, “Enough, enough! The main thing is *emet*. I can no longer continue.” Shortly afterwards, his soul departed in purity and holiness.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Perceiving and Yearning for Holiness

It is written, “Achav sent [orders] among all the Children of Israel” (I Kings 18:20).

The Midrash states, “When Eliyahu told the followers of Baal, ‘Choose for yourselves the one bullock and prepare it first’ [I Kings 18:25], the 450 prophets of Baal and the 450 prophets of Ashera assembled, but could not move the bullock’s feet from the ground. What had Eliyahu done? He had said to them, ‘Select two bullocks, equal in all respects, coming from the same mother and reared on the same pasture. Then cast lots for them, one for the L-RD and one for Baal, and choose for yourselves one bullock.’ Elijah’s bullock followed him immediately, but as for the bullock assigned for Baal, all the prophets of Baal and Ashera gathered around it, yet they could not move its foot. At last Elijah began to speak to it and said, ‘Go with them.’ The bullock replied by telling him in the presence of all the people, ‘My fellow and I have both come from the same womb, from the same cow, and have grown up on the same pasture. However his lot fell to the Omnipresent, and the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is sanctified by him, while my lot fell to Baal, and I shall have to provoke my Creator!’ Elijah said to it, ‘Bullock, bullock, fear not! Go with them, and let them not find any excuse for their failure. Indeed, even as the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, shall be sanctified by means of the bullock that is with me, likewise it will be sanctified by you!’ The bullock answered him: ‘Seeing that you give me such advice, I swear that I will not move from this spot until you give me over into their hand’” (Tanhuma, Massei 8).

We can understand this with the help of the *Messilat Yesharim* (ch. 1), which states that if a person is attached to his Creator and uses this world only to help him serve the Creator, he will elevate himself and the world along with him. Thus the stones that Jacob took and placed under his head all gathered together, with each of them saying, “I am the one on whom the tzaddik will rest his head.” Thus next to Jacob, even stones became elevated and were no longer lifeless, for they perceived holiness and yearned for it. Similarly, next to Eliyahu, when the time came to sanctify the Name of Hashem, even a bull was elevated and perceived its goal in the world, for “all that carries my Name, I have created for My glory” (Isaiah 43:7). It therefore yearned to sanctify His Name.

A TRUE STORY

Everything for the Sake of Education

The gaon Rabbi Raphael Baruch Toledano Zatzal, the Rav of Meknes in Morocco, learned that in the city of Ujda, near the Algerian border, there were no religious schools for Jewish children, and that parents were sending their children to secular schools. Very distressed by this news, he decided to travel to the city and encourage the leaders of the community to establish a religious school. He set up a meeting with them for a Sunday, and since Ujda was a half-day away by train, he decided to leave just after Shabbat. During Shabbat, however, Rabbi Baruch fell ill and was confined to bed. Because of his illness, he decided to abandon his plans to take the long and arduous train ride.

After several hours, however, Rabbi Baruch suddenly jumped out of bed. How could he allow himself to be sick while Jewish children were not studying Torah or being educated in the Jewish faith? He announced that he was feeling better and decided to leave as planned! Imploring him to stay was useless, and he summoned a carriage and paid the driver extra to quickly drive him to the train station. This enabled him to catch his train at the last minute.

He felt feeble in the train and trembled with cold, shivering all night long. However with daybreak, as the train arrived at Ujda, his illness and fatigue disappeared and he felt invigorated with the strength of youth. He assembled the leaders of the community and spoke words that went straight to the heart, explaining the need for an education that is rooted in Torah. His listeners agreed, and in the meantime they begged him to eat something after such a long trip. Rabbi Baruch, however, made it quite clear that he would eat nothing until a decision on a religious school had been taken. The leaders began to argue that nobody knew what the future held, and that now was not the time to establish a new school, and that they should wait a little.

Rabbi Baruch listened to all this without reacting. Then, all of a sudden, people could see tears flowing from his eyes.

“Rabbi, what’s the matter?” they asked with apprehension.

He replied, “Since my words have not been heard, I’m afraid that I lack sufficient fear of G-d, for the Sages say that anyone who fears G-d, his words are heard.”

Those assembled were astonished, and at that instant they decided to build a school where the Torah would be taught!