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LA VOIE
A SUIVRE

THE GOAL OF PROSPERITY IS MITZVOT OBSERVANCE (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit” (Vayikra 26:3-4). Scripture seems to be telling us that the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards man in this world when he observes mitzvot. Therefore how is the teaching in the Gemara fulfilled, namely: “There is no reward for mitzvot in this world” (Kiddushin 39b)?

We may explain this according to Rashi, who said: “If you walk in My statutes... It means that you must toil in the study of Torah; and observe My commandments – you shall toil in the study of Torah in order to observe and fulfill.” From the fact that the Torah placed the study of Torah before the observance of mitzvot, we learn that it is impossible for a person to fulfill mitzvot unless he puts time into diligently studying the Torah. When one puts an effort into studying Torah, one ends up observing mitzvot. This is why some people observe certain mitzvot but not others, for they fail to put an effort into Torah study and instead they focus all their efforts into this fleeting life. Hence they take pleasure in this life, but not in observing Torah mitzvot. Yet one who puts an effort into learning Torah will find great pleasure in it, as well as in the mitzvot, and he will end up observing them in great detail, for that will be the fruit of his labors.

Going Further and Further in Torah Study

An indication that Torah study enables a person to fulfill all the mitzvot lies in the fact that the word *amal* (arduous study) is composed of the same letters as *ma'al* (using something sacred for a mundane purpose). In other words, one who studies Torah will not betray it, betrayal consisting of appropriating something that is holy for oneself, for example by appropriating Torah mitzvot by accomplishing some of them while rejecting others, as a person does with something that belongs to him. Yet when someone puts an effort into studying Torah, he fulfills “If you walk in My statutes” – like someone who walks with his face turned towards a specific place, and who goes from place to place in order to arrive at his goal without getting tired on his journey, for he knows that he will be able to rest when he reaches his destination. Thus one who studies Torah in this world will not grow tired from all his effort, for he

goes further and further in the rungs of Torah. Our Sages have praised the talmidei chachamim by saying, “Talmidei chachamim have no rest either in this world or in the World to Come” (Berachot 64a). Here Rashi explains that “if you walk in My statutes” means going from yeshiva to yeshiva and from Beit HaMidrash to Beit HaMidrash. In fulfilling “If you walk in My statutes,” we merit to arrive at “observe My commandments,” meaning the fulfillment of all the mitzvot. As for one who concerns himself with this fleeting life, that habit will prevent him from fulfilling the mitzvot of the Torah, which constitute eternal life, for he puts no effort into them.

What our Sages meant by saying, “The reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah” (Pirkei Avoth 4:2) is that when a person fulfills the mitzvah of Torah study, the Holy One, blessed be He, enables him to perform all the mitzvot, and in this way his reward in the World to Come will increase. Thus Rabbeinu Yona Zatzal explained in his commentary on Pirkei Avoth: “Not that this is the reward, for how could it represent a reward? This is not so, for the reward is in the World to Come. In this world, however, we benefit from the result of the mitzvah, insofar as it helps us to perform other mitzvot. Thus the capital grows in the World to Come.”

Hashem Gives Generously

How can a person arrive at observing all the mitzvot? It is by studying Torah with the goal of putting it into practice, as Rashi states. The Holy One, blessed be He, also gives abilities to a person in this ephemeral world, enabling him to perform all the mitzvot, easy or difficult. In fact many mitzvot depend upon physical things, mitzvot such as *leket*, *shikcha*, *peah*, *masserot*, and *bikkurim*. The Holy One, blessed be He, gives man the study of Torah in order for him to observe and accomplish, for otherwise how can he fulfill mitzvot without material goods?

Hashem gives him all this so he can fulfill them. One who studies Torah merits to fulfill all the mitzvot, and it is therefore fitting for him to receive the possessions of this world, not as a reward, but as a means of performing all the mitzvot. This is what constitutes, “I will provide your rains in their time” – “your rains” constituting of materiality. The Holy One, blessed be He, gives man material possessions in proportion to what he needs to fulfill mitzvot. Once He opens His storehouse, He gives in abundance, as it

is written: “I will pour out upon you blessing without end” (Malachi 3:10). In other words, a person will receive even more than what he needs to perform mitzvot.

However a person who does not devote himself to Torah study is not given the possessions of this world, for he does not study and therefore cannot fulfill mitzvot. In fact only one who studies Torah has the ability to fulfill all the mitzvot. If a person says before the Celestial Court when he is being judged, “I was poor and did not have the ability to fulfill mitzvot because of my poverty,” the Court will tell him: “You did not have enough sustenance because you did not put enough effort into learning Torah. If you had studied, the Holy One, blessed be He, would have given you enough to perform the mitzvot, for He only gives material goods in order to perform them, and the Sages have said: ‘I have acted wickedly and destroyed my livelihood’ [Kiddushin 82a].”

Some may object by saying that there are many wealthy people who do not study Torah. We reply that the Ba’alei HaTosafot have already answered this by saying, “The Holy One, blessed be He, created three gifts in the world: Wisdom, strength, and riches. Whoever merits one merits them all. When does this occur? When they come through the power of the Torah’s wisdom and the fear of Heaven. Otherwise there is no strength or wealth that can help man in any way” (Da’at Zekenim 32:1). Jeremiah said, “Let the wise man not glorify himself with his wisdom, and let the strong man not glorify himself with his strength, and let the rich man not glorify himself with his wealth. For only in this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me” (Jeremiah 9:22).

These three abilities, when they do not come from the Holy One, blessed be He, will be to the detriment of the one who possesses them. Our Sages have taught that the verse, “Riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune” (Kohelet 5:12) applies to Korach (Sanhedrin 110a). The Sages also say, “Two rich men arose in the world, one in Israel and one among the nations of the world – Korach in Israel and Haman among the nations of the world – and both of them were destroyed from the world. Why? Because their gifts were not from the Holy One, blessed be He, but they snatched it for themselves” (Bereshith Rabba 22:7).

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

Robbing and Deceiving a Non-Jew

It is written, "You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your G-d, for I am Hashem your G-d" (Vayikra 25:17).

The Gemara states, "Shemuel once bought a golden bowl from a non-Jew, who thought that it was made of copper, for four zuzim, and also left him minus one zuz" (Bava Kama 113b). We normally explain this to mean that Samuel paid him one zuz less (see Rashi and others on this passage).

This is surprising! First of all, how is it possible for Shemuel to have deceived him by using a ruse to purchase a bowl of gold as if it were made of copper? Not only that, but he paid less and kept the zuz for himself! How could this be?

There is also something else to be astonished at. For what purpose did the Sages tell us this? Are they by chance teaching us how to steal? What does all this mean?

The gaon Rabbi Nathan Adler Zatzal said this is not the sense of the Aramaic expression that we have translated as "and also left him minus one zuz," behavior which the Sages did not want to teach us.

What the passage really means is this: Shemuel realized that this non-Jew was trying to sell an obviously expensive golden bowl for only four zuz. This aroused his suspicion, and he concluded that this non-Jew did not know that the bowl was made of gold, but thought that it was made of copper instead, which was why he was asking for so little. In that case, he would have to point out his error to him. Alternatively, Shemuel thought that this non-Jew knew that the bowl was made of gold, but was it really stolen property, which was why he was trying to sell it so cheaply. In that case Shemuel had to retrieve the bowl, pay the non-Jew his asking price, and return it to its rightful owner.

Shemuel wondered how he could determine what the truth really was.

He had an idea: "I will delay in paying him a zuz." In the Talmud, the Aramaic word used really means "pay a little more."

As a result, Shemuel paid an extra zuz, and instead of the four zuzim that the seller was asking for, he paid him five zuzim in order to verify his honesty. If he would return the extra zuz, it would mean that this non-Jew was an honest man, in which case Shemuel would point out his mistake to him, namely that the bowl was made of gold, not copper, and he would pay him the difference. However if the non-Jew did not return the zuz to him, it would mean that he was trying to sell the bowl at a cheap price because it had been stolen. In that case, it would have been a mitzvah to take it from him at any price and return it to its rightful owners.

In fact our Sages have left us this story as an example of just how far we must go in order to avoid theft, even from a non-Jew.

A Grave Sin

In his commentary on the Mishnayot, the Rambam gives us the following warning:

"Likewise lies, tricks, subterfuge, cheating and circumventions of non-Jews are forbidden. They said, 'It is forbidden to deceive anyone, even an idolatrous non-Jew,' especially when it can lead to the desecration of G-d's Name, for this is a grave sin and imbues bad traits in a person. G-d explained that He will be disgusted with all these wicked actions and with those who perform them, as it says: 'For anyone who does these is an abomination to Hashem' [Devarim 18:12]" (Rambam on Kelim 12:7).

In his Sefer Chassidim, Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid writes: "We must not commit an injustice even to a non-Jew. Such deeds lower a man, his wealth decreases, and if he is not affected directly, his descendents will have to pay."

Rabbi is also cited as saying, "I once sold four korin of dates to a non-Jew, and I measured it out evenly for him in a dark room. He said to me, 'G-d rules over the heavens, and you know how much you measured out for me.' Since I measured in a dark room, however, I gave him three seahs too little. After he paid me, I purchased a jar of oil and placed it in the same place where I had sold the dates to the non-Jew, but the jar burst and the oil spilled out. I said to him: My son, it says: 'You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not steal' [Vayikra 19:13]. ... You learn from here that it is forbidden to steal from a non-Jew because it is theft" (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 16).

They Became Wealthy and Left a Heritage

Along the same lines, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Ravkash Zatzal writes: "I am writing this for all the generations. I have seen many people who have become wealthy by swindling non-Jews. Yet later they became unsuccessful, for they lost all their possessions and left nothing behind. Many have become wealthy because they sanctified Hashem's Name by returning something important to a non-Jew, who had given it to them by mistake. They became successful and left a heritage for their children" (Be'er HaGolah, Choshen Mishpat 248:4).

In passing, we must underline that the gaon Rabbi Moshe Ravkash Zatzal greatly suffered during Tach v'Tat (the pogroms of 1648-1649). He managed to escape with nothing but his own life, and he arrived in Amsterdam after wandering from place to place with great difficulty. As he states in the introduction to his book, he only managed to save a small timetable that provided him with the dates and times for religious obligations during his wanderings. Nevertheless, despite all the trials he endured, he believed that it was his duty to warn us against deceiving a non-Jew.

AT THE SOURCE

Liberating Slaves and Masters

It is written, “Proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (Vayikra 25:10).

The Pnei Yehoshua Zatzal asks why the verse states, “for all its inhabitants,” since only slaves were freed on the Jubilee, not “all the inhabitants.”

He answers by citing a statement of the Sages: “Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is like buying a master for himself” (Kiddushin 20a). That being the case, not only were slaves freed on the Jubilee, but also their masters, who in reality were the slaves of their own “masters” – the slaves.

Honesty at Work

It is written, “You shall not wrong one another” (Vayikra 25:14).

In his book *Moreh B’Etzba*, the Chida states that when someone attends to his business affairs, he must pay close attention to several prohibitions that may be transgressed. Included among these is theft, wronging others, lying, deceiving, dishonesty in weights and measures, making others believe something that is not true, the “dust” of lending on interest, keeping the wages of a hired worker, false oaths and declarations. Happy is he who guards himself from everything that resembles this or leads to it.

Our intention should be to engage in business so we can honorably support our families, without stumbling, and to being vigilant in regards to everything that the Torah and the Sages have forbidden, in which case all our deeds will be for the sake of Heaven.

Equal Lives

It is written, “You shall not take interest or increase from him, and you shall fear your G-d and let your brother live with you” (Vayikra 25:36).

The juxtaposition of “and let your brother live with you” with this subject of interest is explained by the Alsheich HaKodesh:

When a person lends with interest, the lender will want the time to pass quickly, for interest accumulates with each passing day and the borrower’s debt will increase. As for the borrower, he wants the time to pass slowly, so that his debt does not increase and he will not have to pay more.

It is here that the Torah warns us: “You shall not take interest or increase from him,” for then “your brother [will] live with you” – your lives will be equal, for one will not have long days and the other short days.

A Bad Strategy

It is written, “If you despise My statutes” (Vayikra 26:15).

There are some people, writes the Chafetz Chaim Zatzal, who dread being admonished, and during the reading of the Torah they will leave synagogue when passages containing admonishments are being read. In other communities, the person reading such passages will swallow his words and read quietly, so that most of the congregants will not hear him.

This can be compared to a person who has been warned not to journey along a road because it is filled with brambles and thistles, with wild beasts roaming along it. The person does not listen to this warning, but decides to take the exact same road

and to cover his face with a mask so as not to see the obstacles or wild animals. He does not realize, of course, that this will only increase his risk.

The same applies here. King Solomon advises us not to scorn the rebuke of Hashem, nor to despise admonishments. Those who are wise in their own eyes believe that if they do not listen to the voice of admonishment, nothing bad will happen to them. If they were to think about this, they would realize that closing their eyes to obstacles does much more harm to their soul!

No Doubts

It is written, “You shall eat the flesh of your sons” (Vayikra 26:29).

Rabbi Yehuda Tzvi of Stretin Zatzal would usually explain the curses found in the passage of the admonishments by transforming them into blessings. Such was his custom.

His students once asked him, “Rabbi, how are the words of the verse, ‘You shall eat the flesh of your sons’ to be understood as a blessing?”

The Rabbi answered them, “The verse is telling us that we will merit for all our children to follow in our path, the path of Torah and mitzvot. As such, parents will be able to eat meat in the home of their children – ‘you shall eat the flesh of your sons’ – without any doubts as to its kashrut.”

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS INSIGHTS ON PIRKEI AVOTH BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

Ten Utterances

It is written, “The world was created with ten utterances” (Pirkei Avoth 5:1).

Although the world could have been created with but a single utterance, we need to realize that it was created with ten utterances in order to tell its inhabitants that the Holy One, blessed be He, will give a great reward to the tzaddikim who enable the world to endure. In fact this reward is so great that people cannot even imagine it, as the prophet states: “No eye has seen, G-d, but You” (Isaiah 64:3).

Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world with ten utterances (although He could have included everything in one), so too is the reward of the tzaddikim. Sometimes there is a mitzvah for which we receive a great reward, since it encompasses many things that are known only by the Holy One, blessed be He. Everything pertains to the difficulty of the mitzvah and the devotion of the person who accomplishes it, especially in regards to the result.

What can this be compared to? It is like a wealthy man who gives a poor person a small amount of money. The poor person will quickly buy some bread, go home and wash his hands to eat, as will the members of his family. They will say the blessing for the washing of hands and for the bread, and then they will eat and recite Birkat Hamazon. All these mitzvot were only made possible by the small amount of money that the wealthy man gave to the poor person.

The inverse is also true. If a wealthy man gives a thousand gold coins to tzedakah, and a poor person gives but a single small coin, the gift of the poor is more important to the Holy One, blessed be He, because he gave it with devotion. Thus the Sages have said, “Commensurate with the effort is the reward” (Pirkei Avoth 5:21).

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI MOSHE CHAIM LUZZATTO – THE RAMCHAL

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, known by his acronym as the Ramchal, was born around the year 5467 in Padua, Italy. His father, Rabbi Yaakov, was a great talmid chacham from a well-known family who did much good.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim's love and thirst for Torah knew no bounds. Thus, for example, it is said that as a youngster he already began studying Kabbalah and the writings of the Arizal, for which he demonstrated extraordinary abilities.

He learned most of his Torah from his teacher the gaon Rabbi Yeshaya Bassan Zatzal, who was the Rav of Padua. Rabbi Yeshaya understood the immense capabilities that his student possessed, and in his wisdom he guided him in the revealed Torah and in Kabbalah.

Despite his young age, the Ramchal was skilled in Kabbalah and knew how to create yichudim for Hashem. Thus on Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5687, we find him in an isolated room trying to elevate and sanctify himself, creating yichudim for the Creator, as was his custom.

Suddenly, without noticing, his eyes closed and sleep took hold of him, but not for long. When he awoke, chills went through his body, and he heard a voice saying to him: "I have come to reveal the hidden secrets of the holy King!"

As trembling seized him, the Ramchal sat there immobile. After a few seconds, he regained his strength and prepared for what was to come. The voice continued and revealed the secrets of the Torah to him.

With his hands trembling, the Ramchal immediately wrote down what his ears heard as he continued to study with great emotion.

On the following day, as the hour when he had heard the voice on the previous day approached, he sanctified himself in preparation for it. In fact he merited to hear the voice once again, and it revealed more novel things to him.

Thus the voice came to him every day. After a few days, the voice added that it was a maggid, an angel sent by Heaven. It then revealed that it would tell the Ramchal certain yichudim that he had to make each time he wanted the angel to appear and help him understand difficult Torah passages.

For three months, the angel revealed itself to him every day, and from these revelations the Ramchal wrote three books. At the end of this time, the angel gave the Ramchal a certain number of extra tikkunim in order to merit the revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi as well. During that week, he in fact merited the revelation of Eliyahu. In addition to the maggid, Eliyahu appeared to him regularly, studied with him, and also revealed secrets to him.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's tremendous abilities in Kabbalah attracted talmidei chachamim to him. Yet it was these very same revelations that awakened the wrath of the rabbis of Venice, who accused him of being a false messiah. They even wanted to excommunicate him and destroy his books. Yet through the intermediary of his teacher, Rabbi Bassan, a compromise was reached in which his books would be collected and placed in a chest that would remain with Rabbi Bassan.

Hiding His Works

A great uproar occurred when one of his main disciples sent out letters in which he spoke of the Ramchal's greatness and his deeds. Many Torah scholars of the generation, who remembered the Shabtai Tzvi movement, feared that the Ramchal would arouse another messianic movement. Leading his opponents was the gaon Rabbi Moshe Hagiz Zatzal. The Ramchal, who was certain that his path was true, sent him numerous letters in order to prove it. These letters were preserved and printed in the book Iggerot HaRamchal. However when the Ramchal

realized that he could not convince his opponents, he agreed to hide his writings in order to return to studying Torah and write in peace.

The great pressure that was exerted against him by his opponents led to the Ramchal's decision to move to Amsterdam in Holland. It was there that he directed a large yeshiva and made numerous students, all while continuing to correspond with his disciples in Padua and his teacher Rabbi Yeshaya Bassan.

He Would Have Gone by Foot

In Amsterdam, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote his famous Messilat Yesharim, which deals with the service of Hashem and the perfection of middot according to the order established in the teaching of the Tanna Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. This book later became a cornerstone for the Mussar movement, and many great Lithuanian and Chassidic Torah figures held it in great esteem. In fact the Vilna Gaon said that if the Ramchal had lived in his time, he would have gone by foot to receive a lesson in Mussar from him.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto also wrote Shivim Tikkunim, which consists of 70 tikkunim for the last verse of the Torah, "in the eyes of all Israel" (a book that parallels Tikkunei HaZohar, written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, which consists of 70 tikkunim for the term bereshith, which begins the Torah).

The Ramchal's other books deal with Kabbalah, Mussar, poetry, and other subjects. They include Adir BaMarom, Ohr HaGanuz, Da' at Tevunah, Choker U'Mekubbal, LaYesharim Tehillah, HaMa'amarim, Migdal Oz, and Sefer Yesharim. All his works were characterized by language that was both clear and beautiful.

The Sun Set

After living for eight years in Amsterdam, the Ramchal fulfilled his yearning to settle in the Holy Land. Thus the Ramchal, his wife and only son, and a few students (including Rabbi Yekutiel Gordon) left for the Holy Land and settled in Akko. While living there, the Ramchal would sometimes travel to Jerusalem.

At one point, about four years after his arrival, an epidemic broke out in Jerusalem while he was there. He quickly returned to Akko, but the decree was sealed and the epidemic pursued him. The Ramchal, his wife, and their only son were taken.

The Ramchal was 40 years old when he passed away on Iyar 26, 5506. He is buried close to the grave of the Tanna Rabbi Akiva in the holy city of Tiberius.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

According to the Listener

In general, we find scoffers among those who do not possess a fear of Heaven. Thus when they hear words of Mussar or criticism regarding a negligence in Torah study – something that annoys them, as it is written: "A scoffer does not like being reproved" (Mishlei 15:12) – they seek faults in the speaker. In reality, as the Sages have said: "With his own blemish he stigmatizes [others] as unfit" (Kidushin 70a).

In particular, it often happens that there is nothing to ridicule in a lecture, which is usually judged according to what the listener wants to hear. Some people go to a lecture wanting to learn completely new Torah concepts, others seek clarifications on existing topics, while still others are interested by light parables.