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LA VOIE
A SUIVRE

THE WAY IS BARED TO THE EVIL INCLINATION (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light” (Bamidbar 8:2). Here Rashi explains, “Towards the face of the Menorah. Towards the middle lamp, which is not on the branches, but on the Menorah itself. Shall...cast light. The six on the six branches: The three eastern ones – that is, their wicks – facing towards the center one, and likewise the three western ones, the tops of their wicks facing towards the center one. Why? So that it should not be said that He needs the light.” The commentators (Rabbeinu Bechaye and others) object to this, saying that if the central stem is described as the “Menorah,” it follows that there are only six lamps projecting light towards it, not seven. Therefore why does the verse state, “Towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light”?

To answer this question, let us begin by discussing another issue that will enable us to better understand this passage. We must ask ourselves why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe when he ascended the mountain and stayed there for 40 days and 40 nights, without eating or drinking. Should He not have given it to him when he was on earth, since it is written: “It [the Torah] is not in Heaven” (Devarim 30:12)?

May My Soul be as Dust to All

Let us see what the Sages have said on this subject: “If a man allows himself to be treated as the desert, upon which everybody treads, the Torah will be given to him as a gift. ... [H]is learning will be preserved by him, otherwise it will not” (Eruvin 54a). This means that a person must be humble, for the Torah does not endure with one who is proud. Elsewhere the Torah is compared to water, for just as water that is placed on an uneven surface will flow from high to low, the Torah forsakes those who rise up and grow proud, and it descends to those who act with humility. It is with the humble that the Torah endures.

We need to understand why the Sages compared humility to the desert. Is it because they wanted to say that a person must become like dust that people step upon, as we say in our daily prayers: “May my soul be as dust to all” (Berachot 17a)? In

that case, the Sages could have said that if a person becomes like the dust which everyone steps upon with their feet, their learning will endure. Yet here they wanted to teach us an additional characteristic of Torah study, namely that just as the desert is far from inhabited regions, and just as few people pass through the desert, a person who wants his learning to endure must have, when he studies Torah, views that are far from those in vogue among inhabited places. Furthermore, such a person must not pay attention to the vanities of this world, but should instead depart from them. All his work must already seem finished to him, to the point that he no longer feels the need to work more. When a person distances himself from all the cares of this world, he is promised that his Torah will endure.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe in Heaven, a place far removed from all inhabited regions and this world. In fact there is no eating or drinking in the World to Come, and therefore when Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, the ministering angels asked Hashem: “What business has one born of woman among us?” (Shabbat 88b). In other words: Just who is this son of a woman, such that he wants to resemble us and be like us, among whom there is no eating or drinking? Since he is the son of a woman, a being of flesh and blood, entirely physical, how can he endure in a world which has no such things, which are indispensable for living?

It is a basic principle that a person only savors the Torah when he studies it, when he is fully engaged in it and distances himself from the vanities of this world in order to cleave to its words, like a desert that is far from inhabited places. How can a person achieve this? It is by studying Torah in a Beit HaMidrash or a yeshiva. If he studies it in another place, a place that is relatively close to his everyday life, his mind will not be free to devote itself exclusively to Torah.

Drag it to the Beit HaMidrash

We can now understand the words of the Sages when they said, “Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva” (Yoma 28b).

This seems surprising, for why did they need a yeshiva? Could they not have studied Torah by themselves? The Sages have also said in regards to Jacob: “He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to teach [Bereshith 46:28]. What is implied by ‘to teach’? Rabbi Nehemiah said, ‘To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal ancestors would read Torah’ ” (Bereshith Rabba 95:3). This is also astonishing, for was Jacob unable to study Torah with them at home or in another place, such that he needed a yeshiva?

The answer is that our forefathers did not act in this way. They wanted to teach their children that a person will only retain his learning when he studies in a place that is far removed from the cares of this world, in a Beit HaMidrash or yeshiva. In fact the present world is material, and the Torah is spiritual, so when a person still focuses on the cares of this world, the Torah cannot endure with him, for he negates it.

However if he distances his heart from the cares of this world and enters the Beit HaMidrash or yeshiva to study Torah, it can immediately endure in him. This is why the Sages said, “If this wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit HaMidrash” (Kidushin 30b). Since the Beit HaMidrash is isolated and far from the vanities of this world, the evil inclination no longer has any control over a person who is there.

Moshe also did not receive the Torah before having been far removed from this world – on a high mountain separated from the earth, in a desert far from inhabited places – in order to teach us that the Torah is only acquired when we isolate and distance ourselves from the vanities of this world. Furthermore, he could not receive the Torah here below, on earth, in a material place. Since the Torah is completely holy and spiritual, it could not be absorbed into the heart of Moshe in a mundane place. Once he received it at the top of the mountain, he could take the Torah with him into a physical place, into this lowly world, for he had obtained it in a holy world, the World to Come.

THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

ENTHUSIASM AND JOY IN THE PERFORMANCE OF MITZVOT

It is written, “And so Aaron did. Towards the face of the Menorah he kindled its lamps” (Bamidbar 8:3).

Rashi explains that this verse “demonstrates Aharon’s virtue – he did not digress.” The commentators are surprised by this statement, since it seems to indicate that the Torah is praising Aaron for what – for not having modified Hashem’s mitzvot? If Hashem had commanded that a Menorah be built in a certain fashion and that its lamps be kindled in a certain way, why would Aaron – Hashem’s holy one – modify anything?

The explanation is the following: Most people usually observe common mitzvot, which occur each day in the same way. However they do so out of rote, without the necessary concentration or preparation for a given mitzvah, like doing something mechanically. Such is the criticism of the prophet Isaiah: “Insofar as this people has drawn close, with its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me – their fear of Me is like rote learning of human commands” (Isaiah 29:13).

Such is not the case for a rare mitzvah, such as one that occurs once every year. These are accompanied with both special joy and sacred enthusiasm for the fulfillment of the mitzvah. In such a case, people carefully perform everything in all its details and as best they can. Included among these is the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot, the matzah on Passover, the sounding of the shofar, the blessing on trees during Nissan, the blessing of the sun, and so on. These mitzvot do not occur often, and people accomplish them in joy and the fear of Heaven.

Now imagine Aaron the kohen, who each day for 40 years personally lit the Menorah, arranged the wicks, and changed the wicks and the oil with the greatest of devotion. He rejoiced in the mitzvah of kindling the lamps in all its details, even after 40 years, exactly as he had done during the Sanctuary’s inauguration, when he went to light the Menorah for the first time.

This is why the verse comes to tell us, to Aaron’s credit, that he changed nothing in the service of Hashem. Each act of kindling the lamps of the Menorah was faithfully accomplished by him with all the necessary intentions and the same enthusiasm for the mitzvah, as well as with the same immense joy that filled him the first time, and which had reached its pinnacle when he recited the blessing with love and fear: “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the lights of the Sanctuary.” His enthusiasm had endured for 40 years, each and every day.

Such was not only the case with the Menorah, but with all the mitzvot that Aaron performed. He paid attention to every detail, every embellishment, and to the concentration required for each mitzvah. Hence he merited to leave this world by a “kiss of death,” without any suffering, while shining next to him was the Menorah that he had kindled in the Sanctuary.

Two Tables for the Passover Seder

With regards to the defender of Israel, the tzaddik Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev Zatzal – whose heart burned with a love for Hashem and whose enthusiasm for everything sacred was without limit – it is said that his family would prepare two tables for the night of the Seder. Each table contained everything necessary for the Seder, meaning the plate with the matzah, the four glasses of wine, the lettuce, etc.

They prepared two tables because when the Rav began to recite the Haggadah, saying: “This matzah, why?” he would take the matzah from the plate and kiss it with great enthusiasm for several minutes, to the point that there was nothing left but crumbs. The table would therefore shake and the glasses of wine would spill all their contents. At that point Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and his family sat down at the second table, destined for this purpose from the very beginning.

Cutting His Hand

It is also said that during the festival of Sukkot, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would get up very early each day, before sunrise, to prepare for the morning prayer. It often happened that in his excessive zeal for the preparation of the four species, he would go to select his etrog, which was kept in a glass-fronted bureau. Upon seeing the most beautiful etrog, he would

reach out to grab it, inadvertently breaking the glass and cutting his hand in the process, so immersed was he in the joy of the mitzvah.

Maggidim (preachers) have said that if Aaron’s duties – filling the bowls of the Menorah with olive oil, preparing the wicks, and everything else that followed – had been given to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, he would not have been able to bear it. The jug of oil would have jumped from his hands, the bowls of the Menorah would have been filled with too much oil, and so on. This was because of his deep emotional sentiment and affection for the Creator, and because of the great joy that he experienced when performing mitzvot.

Therein lies the greatness of Aaron: Although his heart burned with a love for Hashem, he nevertheless changed nothing in serving Him, but did everything calmly and meticulously. Not a single drop of oil was missing, nor was there a single drop more. With reverence and love, he went to light the Menorah exactly as he had been commanded, which is why the Torah praises him by saying, “And so Aaron did.”

A TRUE STORY

By the Merit of Hospitality

It is written, “Everyone’s holy things shall belong to him” (Bamidbar 5:10).

Rashi states, “If you withhold the gifts of the kohanim, then – by your life – you will have to come to him” (Rashi on v.12).

Rabbi Chaim of Kosov had the custom of teaching the importance of love for others, the importance of demonstrating hospitality and giving charity with a joyful heart. When his friends would come to see him, he was concerned with their welfare and would ask, “Where did you sleep last night? Where did you eat?” and so on. When he learned that someone in his entourage was being stingy and neglecting hospitality, he would harshly rebuke him.

A certain innkeeper lived quietly and trouble-free in a village. One day a group of people were passing through the village on their way to see the Rabbi of Kosov. It was a rainy winter night, and they went to the innkeeper and knocked on the door. They asked him if they could spend the night there, but he refused to take them in. A constant rain was falling on their heads, and since they didn’t have any choice, they were forced to continue on their journey. In the morning they arrived in Kosov. They entered the Rav’s home, and as usual he took an interest in their journey. When they told him about the innkeeper’s wickedness, the Rabbi promised: “He will end up needing a kohen.” He was alluding to the teaching of Rashi: “If you withhold the gifts of the kohanim, then – by your life – you will have to come to him.” Before long, this innkeeper came to see Rabbi Chaim. Dejected, he told the Rabbi that the nobleman in his village had ordered him to leave within three months, and that all his supplications were of no avail. The Rabbi said to him, “I have always found it hard to understand how an innkeeper could live in a village so far away from any Jewish center, how he could pray alone – being unable to respond “Amen” to Kedusha or Barechu – and not listen to the reading of the Torah. How can he fulfill his duty as a Jew?”

The Rabbi continued: “If this is allowed, it is essentially because ‘it is more important to welcome guests than to receive the Shechinah,’ and because the mitzvah of hospitality is necessary in villages. This is what makes up for everything you lack. Consequently, as long as you properly observed this mitzvah, the merit of hospitality protected you, and no harm could come to you. Yet now that some people came to you during a driving rain, and you were mean enough not to take them in, what remains in this village for you to do? Return to the city with your Jewish brothers, pray at the synagogue day and night, and give your children a Jewish education.” The innkeeper burst into tears and exclaimed, “But how will I live?” Rabbi Chaim responded, “Take it upon yourself that from now on, your house will be open to everyone, and then G-d will give you back your previous position without loss.” The innkeeper made this promise, and G-d moved the heart of the nobleman in his village. The innkeeper was thus able to retain his position.

AT THE SOURCE

Why the Levites

It is written, "I took the Levites in place of every firstborn among the Children of Israel" (Bamidbar 8:18).

In his book Chizkuni, Rabbi Chizkiyah ben Manoach explains why the tribe of Levi was chosen to serve in the Sanctuary.

He writes, "If all the firstborn had served in the Sanctuary, there would have been a plague among them. In fact the father of a firstborn may not have been a firstborn himself. The grandfather of this firstborn may not have even been a firstborn, meaning that they would not have had any experience in the Sanctuary service. In that case, the firstborn would not know what to do, and he could have made a mistake and been punished, just as Nadav and Avihu were.

"However since the Levites were chosen for this purpose, they, their sons, and their descendants for all the generations were accustomed to it and they were careful to perform the service correctly. This is why the verse states, 'The kohanim, the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi shall have no part or inheritance' [Devarim 18:1]. They had to deal with nothing other than the Divine service, lest they learn a mundane profession that would render their hands thick and hard, in which case they would not have been able to play the harp and lyre, and the singing would have been poor."

Without Garlic

It is written, "The cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic" (Bamidbar 11:5).

In his book Tzror HaMor, Rabbi Avraham Saba Zatzal recounts the following story:

"I saw that when Rabbeinu Meshulam Zal served as the royal physician to an Arab king, the king asked him: 'Your ancestors were ungrateful, for since they had manna, abundant bread, the bread of the mighty, how could they have asked for cucumbers and garlic?'

"He said to him, 'I will answer you tomorrow.'

"What did he do? He went to the king's attendant and said, 'I order you not to give the king garlic after his meal, as he usually eats as part of desert, because his health depends on it.' The attendant obeyed him and did not give the king garlic. The king was furious, and asked him why he had done this. He replied that his Jewish doctor had ordered him to. The king then had the physician summoned and asked him, 'Why did you order my servant not to give me any garlic, since you know that I don't feel well when I don't have any?'

"He replied, 'Sire, may your ears hear what your mouth has said. You became upset with me because you were not given garlic just one time. Yet our ancestors ate delicious-tasting manna without garlic or anything else for 40 years, so what could they do?'

"The king said to him, 'You are right, and your Torah is truth.'"

Different Perspectives

It is written, "The wrath of Hashem flared greatly, and in the eyes of Moshe it was bad" (Bamidbar 11:10).

The book Mincha Belula explains why the verse describes the different reactions of Hashem and Moshe, since Hashem's anger "flared greatly," while it was simply "bad" in the eyes of Moshe.

The answer is that Moshe judged the people favorably. He thought that when they asked "who will give us meat," they simply wanted to eat a great quantity of meat. He did not suspect them of trying to find a way to deny Hashem's providence, which is why things were not so serious in his eyes. However the Holy One, blessed be He, Who probes hearts and minds, knew what their real intentions were. It was not meat that they wanted, but instead they were seeking a way to deny Hashem. When they said, "Who

will give us meat," they meant: "Who has the power to give us meat?" This is why "the wrath of Hashem flared greatly," while in Moshe's eyes it was simply "bad." In other words, Moshe did not want to judge them unfavorably, for he believed that they simply wanted to eat a great quantity of meat. It was bad in his eyes that they were crying for food like babies, but he did not become angry with them in the way that Hashem did.

By Allusion

Eighteen Tefachim

It is written, "Vezev [And this] was the work of the Menorah" (Bamidbar 8:4).

The term vezev has a numerical value of 18, which corresponds to the height, in tefachim, of the Menorah.

– Rabbeinu Bechaye

Studying Torah at Night

It is written "Vaya'as Aharon [And so Aaron did]" (Bamidbar 8:3).

The last letters of the expression Vaya'as Aharon form the term shanan, which alludes to the fact that a man leshanen (must study) Torah at night, for the last letters of the expression el mul pnei hamenorah ("towards the face of the Menorah") form the term laila (night).

– Maskil el Dal

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE TSADDIK RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

Good Deeds Draw a Person Closer to the Shechinah

It is written, "Vayehi binsoa ha'aron [And it came to pass, when the Ark set forth], Moshe said: 'Arise, Hashem, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You'" (Bamidbar 10:35). The Sages have said, "The following remark is a tradition handed down to us from the Men of the Great Assembly: Wherever we find the term vayehi in Scripture, it indicates sorrow" (Megillah 10b). We need to understand what sorrow existed here, when the Ark set forth. The Sages have said (Tanchuma, Vayakhel 7) that all the miracles performed for the Children of Israel by means of the Ark stemmed from the fact that the Shechinah was within it. In this regard it is written, "The Ark of the covenant of Hashem journeyed before them a three-day distance, to search out a resting place for them" (Bamidbar 10:33) – it killed serpents and scorpions, burned thistles, and killed the enemies of Israel. Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra, "Two sparks emerged from between the two cherubim and killed serpents and scorpions, burned thistles, smoke billowed up, and the entire world endured on account of the odor that emanated from it."

We may say that when the Children of Israel were encamped, they were in the domain of the Holy Ark. Yet when the kohanim carried the Ark and walked with it, they immediately sensed the absence of the sanctity and splendor of the Shechinah, which is why an element of sorrow was present. What would Moshe say? "Arise, Hashem" – they study Torah in the fear of Heaven until they merit to stand before Hashem at all times, as it is written: "Who shall ascend the mountain of Hashem? Who shall stand in His holy place?" (Tehillim 24:3). When you perform good needs and fulfill mitzvot, you will merit to arise in the place of His sanctity, and you will never again mourn when the Ark moves from its place, for you will be standing before Him at all times.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI NISSIM YAGEN

The light of the tzaddik Rabbi Nissim Yagen Zatzal began to spread in America, where he arrived by boat with great devotion from Eretz Israel. He went to the Lakewood yeshiva, which was then under the direction of Rabbi Shneur Kotler Zatzal. He arrived with the encouragement of his teachers, who recognized the makings of greatness in him. The Lakewood yeshiva was the most fitting place for the one who would advance the world of teshuvah.

Rabbi Nissim Yagen's profound Mussar classes became famous in Jerusalem after his wedding, when he established special va'adim that attracted youngsters from the Beit HaTalmud yeshiva, from the Hebron yeshiva, and from others that followed his classes with devotion.

His diligence in Torah study was famous. With Rabbi Yitzchak Abadi, he covered the sea of the Torah in meticulous detail and with an exceedingly sharp mind, raising himself to lofty spiritual levels. His opinions were weighed and upright, and he never agreed to hear or accept the views of others in regards to learning if they did not conform to the truth of the Torah.

During the afternoon break, when everyone was resting in order to renew their energy for the afternoon and evening, Rabbi Nissim retired to a corner and studied the Maharal in depth. He would later recount that during that hour-long break, he had merited to complete all the books of the Maharal, works that had enlightened him on the meaning of life, as well as on the contents and special meaning of the Aggadot of the Sages in the Talmud, as reflected by the Maharal.

After his wedding, he studied in Rav Unterman's kollel, where he devoted himself to the study of teaching, to the rabbanut and dayanut. He would later exert a tremendous influence on young men as the Mashgiach of the Ohel Moed yeshiva, and then as the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Somayach in Givat Ada and Zichron Yaakov, which naturally led to the world of teshuvah. He was among the founders of the Arachim teshuvah movement, which at the time was almost alone in this area.

For the Community

Without a doubt, his main concern was to be of service to the community. He would go to great lengths in order to give a Jew the opportunity to perform a single mitzvah. He once heard that a woman from Beit Shean had proclaimed that if Rav Yagen brought her something with which to cover her head, she would do so. Without hesitating, he traveled from Jerusalem to Beit Shean in order for this woman to cover her head in accordance with Jewish law.

Wherever Rav Yagen went, both in Israel and around the world, he was always accompanied by something that he called his "first-aid kit." It did not contain tourniquets or bandages, things that could be obtained almost anywhere. No, it was a first-aid for an entirely different area, since it contained tefillin, mezuzot and material to verify them, tallitot, kippot, electric razors, cassettes with religious material, articles that had appeared in newspapers on the failure of secular education, and other things.

He was once asked about the constant need for such a kit, given the availability of rapid delivery throughout Israel and around the world. He responded by saying whenever a Jewish spark would ignite, speed was of the essence in order to benefit from this opportunity, which might never return.

Wisdom in Chesed

His numerous deeds did not prevent him from immersing himself in Torah study. Late nights of learning would revitalize him as he floated

upon the sea of the Torah. During his last years, he took it upon himself to complete the entire Talmud in an in-depth fashion. He devoted a certain time every day for this purpose, and once every few months he would gather his sons and sons-in-law to celebrate the siyum for a tractate.

One day he went to verify some information about a certain young man in one of the large yeshivot. There he saw an avrech studying Torah with many serious scholars. As soon as he saw him, he perceived that the avrech's clothes did not befit his standing. His jacket was used, his shoes torn, and everything about him loudly proclaimed his poverty. Rav Yagen's astonishment only increased when he learned of his greatness as an outstanding talmid chacham in Torah and the fear of Heaven. He went to find out more from the Rosh Yeshiva, who told him that he was aware of the avrech's terrible material situation.

Rav Yagen did not let this pass. "Tomorrow I want to meet you in Geula at such-and-such a place and time," he told the avrech. On the following day, they met in Geula, and at the end of their meeting the avrech went away with numerous things: Two suits, a new hat, clothes, shoes, and all the rest. Everything came from Rav Yagen's own pockets, a man whom the avrech didn't even know!

Rav Nissim Yagen learned chesed from his father, Rav Yaakov Yagen Shlita, and from his mother, Rebbetzin Rachel Zal. One day he asked for a prayer book from the kollel. Two people heard what he was asking for, and they wanted to partake in the mitzvah of bestowing chesed. One of them was faster, and he brought the prayer book first. The Rav took it and hid in his coat, waiting to receive the other prayer book from the second person. He paid equal importance to them both.

When You Kindle the Lamps

Rav Yagen fell ill and was confined to bed in the prime of his life, and he suffered greatly because he was unable to continue his sacred work. He often expressed himself by saying that he was "a worker who had to stop in the middle of the day, before having completed his work." Despite his tremendous suffering, he continued working and diligently studied Torah at the Kol Yaakov yeshiva, which today is under the direction of his sons and those who have continued to extend his path.

At the conclusion of Shabbat Beha'alotcha, the sad news of Rav Nissim Yagen's passing spread. May his merit protect us all.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Even if True

It is forbidden to speak Lashon Harah about others, even if what is said is true, and even if it is said to only one person, and especially to several people. The more people who hear it, the graver the sin of the person who says it, for the fact that several people are aware of it increases the damage caused to the person being spoken of. Furthermore, we thereby cause many people to fall into the transgression of listening to Lashon Harah.

– Chafetz Chaim