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AN ALL OUT WAR AGAINST PRIDE (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “It will be when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you...you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground...and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there. You shall come to the priest who will be in those days...and the priest shall take the basket from your hand” (Devarim 26:1-4).

We know just how powerful the evil inclination is, for it can infuse a person’s heart with pride in order to chase him from this world. As the Sages have said, “Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world” (Pirkei Avoth 4:21). As such, not only will a person lose this world, but the World to Come as well.

In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, detests the proud, as it is written: “Every haughty person is an abomination to Hashem” (Mishlei 16:5).

Although he was a great hero, King David’s heart did not wax proud. Instead he regarded himself as nothing, as he said: “I am a worm and not a man, the scorn of humanity, despised of people” (Tehillim 22:7). He also said, “My heart was not proud, and my eyes were not haughty” (ibid. 131:1). He fully realized that all he possessed originated from Hashem, which is why he fought against the evil inclination as it tried to convince him to take advantage of the honor bestowed upon him by the Holy One, blessed be He. In fact King David chose to devote all his abilities and strength to increasing the glory of Hashem.

When the Children of Israel were about to enter the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey (Shemot 3:8) – “a land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will lack nothing there” (Devarim 8:9) – the Holy One, blessed be He, was concerned that wealth would lead the people to become proud and forget their Creator. As we read, “Yeshurun became fat and kicked – you became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and he deserted G-d his Maker” (ibid. 32:15).

Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, reminded them not to forget that they had been slaves in

Egypt for 400 years. The land of Israel had not been given to them on account of their own merit, but because of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had wholeheartedly served Hashem by completely yielding to Him. Thus they had no reason to grow proud, especially since the gift of the land was based on the condition that Jews study Torah and observe mitzvot. Otherwise the Holy One, blessed be He, would take it from them and send them into exile.

This idea is alluded to in the expression *ki tavo* (“when you enter” [Devarim 26:1]), the word *tavo* having a numerical value of 403. Of this amount, 400 corresponds to the years of oppression they endured, as it is written: “Your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own...and they will oppress them 400 years” (Bereshith 15:13), while 3 corresponds to the three Patriarchs, to whom Hashem promised the land after the exile in Egypt.

This is why Hashem commanded that the first fruits be brought to the Temple and that people declare, “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt... The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and they placed hard work upon us” (Devarim 26:5-6). As such they would never forget their past, when they were slaves in Egypt, nor the fact that they inherited the land due to the merit of the holy Patriarchs, though only on condition that they study Torah and perform mitzvot. Therefore everything the Children of Israel had was given to them entirely as a gift, which would obviously lead them to humility, the opposite of pride, which destroys all that is good within people. This is why they went to the Temple with their baskets in hand and thanked Hashem for having led them to the land of their forefathers, as it is written: “He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the ground that You have given me, Hashem” (vv.9-10). By thanking Hashem for all the good that He did for them, they never entertained forbidden thoughts such as, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.”

This is some of the advice that the Torah gives a person in order to prevent pride from making its way into him and causing him to lose the world. In general, when a person becomes wealthy and his thoughts focus on business, he begins to study less Torah. In fact the wealthier he becomes, the further he strays from the words of Torah. Pride certainly comes to occupy the space created by the diminishment of his study, in which case he is liable to entertain wicked thoughts.

Because of our many sins, today the Temple no longer stands. Therefore the place where a *tzaddik* lives is like the Temple, and the *tzaddik* is like the High Priest who officiates there. When a person learns how to serve Hashem from the *tzaddik*, it is as if he had brought an offering to the Temple.

Furthermore, when we bring a gift to the *tzaddik* and see how he serves Hashem in a completely unselfish way, our hearts will begin to melt. We will then repent and become completely different people. In that case it is like bringing the first fruits to the Temple, as the Sages have said: “One who brings a gift to a scholar, it is as if he had offered first fruits” (Ketubot 105b). This is the meaning of the verse, “When you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you” – remember that it is only your land when you follow the path of the Patriarchs, and remember that you were a stranger for 400 years. The land does not belong to you – for “the land is Mine” (Vayikra 25:23), and I gave it to your fathers “and their descendants after them” (Devarim 1:8) – but only on condition that they do not grow proud on account of their wealth. Let them not think that the power of their own hand has brought them this.

Above all, from here a person must learn that if he was poor and has become rich, he must remember his poverty. He must remember that it was only because of Hashem’s compassion and the merit of the holy Patriarchs that he was given this gift. Hence he has no reason to grow proud, for just as Hashem made him wealthy, He can also reclaim this wealth if he fails to follow the right path.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Having Everything, Yet Having Nothing

It is written, “Hashem will send in your midst curse, confusion...” (Devarim 28:20).

Rashi explains: “Curse – similar to ‘an affliction that causes loss’ [Vayikra 13:51]. Confusion – the sound of panic.”

This is one of the verses of rebuke, dealing with a sense of loss, a sense of confusion and anxiety. A person can experience such feelings despite lacking nothing. To understand how this can happen, let us look at a story drawn from Yalkut Shimoni (Mishlei 950). Rabbi Dostai, a disciple of Rabbi Meir, was once studying the verse: “The tzaddik eats to satisfy his soul, but the stomach of the wicked suffers want” (Mishlei 13:25). Rabbi Dostai thought, “I can understand that a tzaddik eats to satisfy himself, for the tzaddikim are content with little, just like Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. But what does it mean that the stomach of the wicked suffers want? We know of wicked people who enjoy fame and glory, and who eat to satisfaction every day, so what could they be lacking?” Finding no answer to his question, Rabbi Dostai addressed his teacher Rabbi Meir, who recounted the following incident: “In our town there lived a Roman idolater who was as rich as Korach. One day he invited all the residents in town to a great feast, myself included. A long and exquisitely laid-out table was placed before me, and on it were beautiful and precious utensils and the finest glassware. All kinds of food were present, including the most beautiful fruit produced in our land, as well as fruit from distant lands. The guests ate and drank everything, while we Jews were content on eating fruit. The Roman owner of the house stuffed himself with food, but his face looked discontent. His eyes were always looking at his plate, as if he were searching for something. He eventually turned to his servant in anger and said, ‘Where are my tender pecans, the ones that can be broken by hand?’ His servant replied, ‘Please don’t get angry, my lord. We’ve looked for these nuts, but we cannot find them anywhere.’ Upon hearing this, the man became furious, and in his anger he arose and broke the table, which alone cost 300 pieces of silver! This caused all the precious utensils to come crashing to the ground, as well as all the food. We, the guests, were stunned and terrified by this fit of anger. What could have caused it? Was it simply because of a few choice nuts, which weren’t even valuable? Every precious thing in the world was there!”

Rabbi Meir continued his account: “I spoke to this Roman and said to him, ‘Why did you do this?’ He turned to me and shouted, ‘You Jews say that the World to Come belongs to you. But we have only this world. If I don’t take advantage of this world, then when can I take advantage of anything? That’s why I don’t want my table to be lacking even the smallest thing. I want everything! And if I don’t have everything, I have nothing.’”

Thus Rabbi Dostai finally understood what King Solomon meant by the words, “The stomach of the wicked suffers want.” The wicked are never satisfied or happy. They always hunger for more, since there is no end to material desires.

They Made us Wicked

It is written, “The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us” (Devarim 26:6).

The holy Alsheich (Rabbi Moshe ben Haim Alsheich) was surprised by this expression, questioning why it states vayarei’u otanu instead of vayarei’u lanu. He explains that vayarei’u otanu means that the Egyptians made us wicked. The forced labors that the Egyptians placed on us for numerous years changed our character for the worse, and we lost patience with others. We acted wickedly and cruelly towards one another.

The Greatest of All Blessings

It is written, “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you will listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 28:2).

Rabbi Yaakov Loeberbaum of Lisa (the author of Netivot HaMishpat) noted that our Sages have said: “There is no reward for mitzvot in this world” (Kiddushin 39b). It follows that all the good that the Holy One, blessed be He, pours upon those who perform mitzvot is solely meant to allow them to perform other mitzvot. Hence the verse states, “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you” – in order for you to fulfill – “you will listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d.”

Rabbi Israel Meir of Radin (the Chafetz Chaim) would say, “The Holy One, blessed be He, has many blessings at His disposition, but the greatest of all is ‘you will listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d.’ Happy is the man who receives this blessing from Heaven, for the one who benefits from it will automatically merit every other blessing in the world.”

– Parperaot LaTorah

All Jews are Responsible for One Another

It is written, “All these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (Devarim 28:15).

There are only 49 curses found in the section on curses in the book of Vayikra, whereas here in the book of Devarim there are 98 curses. The reason is that the curses in Vayikra were written before the Children of Israel took responsibility for their fellow Jews by an oath on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, whereas the curses in Devarim were stated after they took this oath. Hence the number of curses doubled, for they correspond to their own sins plus those of others.

– Kli Yakar

What Does This Add?

It is written, “You will go mad from the sight of your eyes” (Devarim 28:34).

Previous to this curse, the Torah already stated: “Hashem will strike you with madness” (v.28). Therefore what does this verse add? The author of Ketzot HaChoshen states, “It seems that He wanted to add even more to the weight of the curses. Despite all the pain that going mad entails, a person who goes mad does not sense it himself. That is, he is not distressed by his strange actions, for they seem perfectly normal to him. As for someone who is perfectly sane, if he is placed under the charge of a person who has gone mad – one who makes him emulate his actions by acting just as mad – his suffering will be far worse, for he will be constantly aware that he is not acting normally. This is what constitutes the additional curse, ‘You will go mad from the sight of your eyes,’ for his actions will appear to him as mad, since his mind is lucid. Thus with his own eyes he will see the consequences of his wicked deeds.”

– MiShulchan Gavoha

Who Separates Israel from the Nations

It is written, “There you will serve other gods of wood and stone, and you will be a source of astonishment, a parable, and a conversation piece among all the peoples” (Devarim 28:36-37).

A convert to Christianity complained to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin that before his conversion he suffered greatly at the hands of his non-Jewish neighbors, who mocked him for his Judaism. This is why he had begun eating with them. Having noticed that this was useless, the man began to profane Shabbat, but that too was useless. He eventually converted, with the thought that they would finally stop bothering him. Nevertheless, they continued to scorn and despise him. Rabbi Chaim told him that this was alluded to in the Torah: “There you will serve other gods of wood and stone” – and yet – “you will be a source of astonishment, a parable, and a conversation piece” – for they will continue to scorn you.

Overview of the Parsha

At the end of the mitzvot given in the book of Devarim, we find mitzvot that touch upon speech, such as those pertaining to the consecration of various things at the end of the book of Vayikra, as well the vows and oaths at the end of the book of Bamidbar, meaning first fruits and tithes, wherein we say something before Hashem. The parsha also describes the deep bond between Hashem and His people. The people then receive the commandment to engrave the Torah upon rocks that are to be set up for the recitation of the blessings and curses when the people cross the Jordan. The covenant in the plains of Moab stresses the importance of the Torah, upon which this covenant is based.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Blessed is He Who Gives Good Advice

It is written, “Cursed is he who causes the blind to go astray on the road” (Devarim 27:18).

Rashi explains this as referring to giving bad advice to a person who is blind in a certain area. Our Sages have said that all the curses were preceded by blessings (Sotah 37b), meaning that before the Levites recited, “Cursed is he who causes the blind to go astray on the road,” they said: “Blessed is he who gives good advice.” The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 232) states that we must not deceive a Jew by giving him bad advice. When a Jew asks for advice, we must give him what we feel is good and right for him. The reason is that effective leadership consists of guiding people and giving them good advice regarding all their endeavors.

The book Sheal Avicha Veyagedcha (Part I) recounts a story involving Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin Zatzal, known as the Maharil Diskin. Several people in Jerusalem once came to the Rav and told him that the grandson of one of Jerusalem’s shochatim had gone to study in a secular school, and therefore they felt that they should prohibit the shochet from practicing his trade. The Rav listened to them and said, “You are certainly correct, but it is impossible to deprive a shochet of his livelihood. Therefore you must definitely find him another job, and then you will have to convince him to leave his position as a shochet.”

The people listened to the Rav and did as he had advised. They found another job for the man, and then they tried to convince him to willingly give up his job as a shochet. He listened to what they had to say, but did not respond. In fact he went to see the Maharil Diskin in order to ask him for advice. When he asked him what he should do, the Rav said: “It isn’t worth it for you to leave your job as a shochet.” When the man heard this, he decided to remain in his position. The people then came to him and asked why he refused to leave his job, to which he replied: “I went to see Rav Diskin, and he said that it wasn’t worth it for me to give up my job as a shochet.” The people were stunned by this, and so they returned to the Rav and asked him: “Did you not agree that the shochet should leave his profession if we found him another job? We went to great lengths to find him something else, and we tried to convince him to leave. So why did you prevent him from doing so?”

The Rav replied, “What do you mean – why did I prevent him from leaving? He came to me for advice, and the best advice for him was not to quit his job as a shochet. That’s what’s best for him. For reasons of religious fervor, however, you want him to quit. However to make him quit against his will is impossible. When he comes to me for advice, I have to give him the best advice possible, for how can I lead him astray? Is it not written: ‘Cursed is he who causes the blind to go astray on the road’? If he tells me that this is what’s good for him, I will not mislead him, for how can I bring such a curse upon myself?”

EISHET CHAYIL

The Creation of the Woman

It is written, “Hashem G-d built the side...into a woman” (Bereshith 2:22). The Holy One, blessed be He, caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and from one of his ribs He decided to create the woman.

The term vayiven (“and He built”) can also be understood in the sense of hitbonenut (“contemplation”), meaning that the Creator of the universe contemplated, as it were, from which of man’s limbs to create the woman, given that everything in creation should resemble its source and share the same essence.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I will not create her from the head, lest she be light-headed; nor from the eye, lest she be a flirt; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip – and it is not fitting for a daughter of Israel to speak excessively or derisively – nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy – meaning that she will never be content with what she has, and she will always want more, thereby making her husband’s life bitter – nor from the hand, lest she be prone to touching everything; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout – loving to go out and never wanting to stay home, for her feet will always be wandering outside. If the goal of the woman is to watch over the conduct of her household, how will she be able to do this if she is always outside? None of these limbs are fitting for the making of the woman, lest her nature emulates one of them. Instead I will create her from the modest part of man, for even when he stands naked, that part is covered.”

The Sages have also said that as Hashem created each of her limbs, He said: “Be a modest woman.” This teaches us that a woman’s basic nature is exemplified by modesty. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, created a woman in modesty, this trait is the key to true happiness. That is, a woman who fails to be modest can never be happy.

– Adapted from Bereshith Rabba 18:2

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Don’t Ruin the Tools of Your Trade

It is known that every artist or craftsman, regardless of how skilled, will be unable to make something without the tools of his trade. The carpenter needs a hammer, nails, various saws, and a host of other things. The painter needs a canvas, brushes, and of course paint. The instrument of a Jew is his ability to speak. By the power of his words, words of holiness, a Jew is capable of creating supernal worlds and holy angels. That is how powerful speech is! True, no artist or craftsman would dare ruin the tools of his trade with his own hands. Yet it often happens that a Jew will ruin the primary tool of his trade, the ability to speak, on his own. How? By speaking forbidden words. By speaking Lashon Harah and uttering slander, which damage the power that Hashem placed in man. Yes, a craftsman can indeed destroy the tools of his own trade! – Chafetz Chaim

Everyone Has a Portion

It is written, “Your people will all be righteous. They will inherit the land forever; a shoot of My planting, My handiwork in which to glory” (Isaiah 60:21).

Based on this verse, the Mishnah states that all the Children of Israel have a portion in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a).

The Chafetz Chaim asks, “Why will the wicked merit a portion in the World to Come? If he is certain of having a portion, he will never repent!” The Chafetz Chaim replies that the text does not say that the wicked will have a portion in the World to Come – which would mean that their portion is guaranteed – but that they have a portion in the World to Come. This means that when each person is born, his portion in Gan Eden is created at the same time, and he must develop this portion in a way that is fitting for his soul. He must work in order to actually obtain this portion, and even if he does obtain it, it is very possible that it will remain barren or grow thistles if he fails to put an effort into working and keeping it. To what can this be compared? It is like rain that falls upon the earth, and which waters planted fields as well as places that have not been planted. Places that have been planted will produce a harvest, whereas nothing will grow in places that have not been planted. Thus each person has a portion in the World to Come, and one who develops his portion by means of Torah and mitzvot throughout his life will merit to see his portion flourishing and perfected. He will then experience infinite joy, joy that is impossible to describe in the language of this world, as the Mishnah states: “One hour of bliss in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world” (Pirkei Avot 4:17). In other words, all the pleasures of every man for all times – all of them put together – cannot compare to the pleasure of a single person in the World to Come.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Rabbi Meir and the Innkeeper

Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Yossi were on a journey together. Rabbi Meir always paid close attention to people’s names, whereas Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi paid no such attention to them. Once as they came to a certain place, they looked for lodging. As they were given it, they said to [the innkeeper]: “What is your name?” He replied, “Kidor.” Then [Rabbi Meir] said, “It is thus obvious that he is a wicked man, since it is said: ‘For they are a generation [ki-dor] of reversals’ [Devarim 32:20].” Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi entrusted their money-bags to him. Rabbi Meir did not entrust his money-bag to him. Instead he went and placed it on the grave of that man’s father. Thereupon the man had a vision in his dream [saying]: “Go, take the money-bag lying at the head of this man!” In the morning [the innkeeper] told [the Rabbis] about it, saying: “This is what appeared to me in my dream.” They answered him, “There is no substance in the dream of the Sabbath night.” Rabbi Meir went, waited there all day, and then took the money-bag with him. In the morning [the Rabbis] said to him: “Give us our money-bags.” He said: “You never left them with me!” Rabbi Meir then said to them: “Why don’t you pay attention to people’s names?” They said: “Why did you not tell us this?” He answered: “Consider it as simply being a suspicion. I would not consider it a definite presumption!” Thereupon they took [the host] into a store [and gave him wine to drink]. When they saw lentils on his moustache, they went to his wife and gave her that as a sign [i.e., they said that her husband had sent them for their money-bags, and as proof they told her that lentils had been the last meal eaten in her home], and thus obtained their money-bags and took them back. [The innkeeper] then went and killed his wife. It is with regards to this incident that it was taught: ... “[Failure to observe the custom of] mayim acharonim slew a person.” In the end, they also paid close attention to people’s names.

– Yoma 83b

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz The Author of Yaarot Devash

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz Zatzal was a gaon in the entire Torah, as well as a gaon in the wisdom of Kabbalah. He was born in Krakow (some say Pinshov) to Rabbi Nathan Neta, the Av Beit Din of Eibeshutz and a descendant of the kabbalist Rabbi Nathan Shapira of Krakow (the author of Megaleh Amukot).

Rabbi Yehonatan lost his father in his youth, and the Eibeshutz community took responsibility for his studies at the yeshiva of the gaon Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt in Prosnitz. There he elevated himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven to such an extent that all who saw him were amazed by his intelligence and incredible diligence in Torah study. As soon as he turned 18, he was named as a Dayan in Bomsala, the town where his father-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchak Shapira, lived. In 5470 Rabbi Yehonatan moved to Prague, where he taught Torah for several years, and whose name is forever connected to his own. It was in Prague that he organized numerous discussions with Christian priests over questions of religion and Torah, discussions from which he always emerged victorious. In 5500, as Prague was under siege, he was chosen as the Rav of Metz, and in 5509 he was appointed as the Rav and Av Beit Din of Altona, Hamburg, and Vedsbeck. He put even greater effort into Torah study, and people realized that he also could perform miracles. He used segulot and amulets to a great extent, and thus he would heal the sick and bring deliverance to those in need. Everywhere he served as a Rav or Dayan, he taught Torah to students who avidly drank in his words. At the same time, because of his segulot, he was struck by the fire of controversy, though he stood firm during this entire time.

Rabbi Yehonatan remained in Altona for 14 years, until on Elul 21, 5524, at the age of 74, his soul departed for Heaven. He left numerous works behind, including Kereiti Ufleiti, Yaarot Devash, Sar HaElef, Bina LaIttim, and Tiferet Yehonatan. He also wrote many books on Kabbalah, including Otzar HaChochma and Pinat HaDat. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

A TRUE STORY

The Lengthy Eulogy

It is written, “Also every sickness, and every plague that is not written in the book of this Torah...” (Devarim 28:61).

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson was among the great Torah figures of Galicia. Since he was known throughout the country, numerous communities wanted to appoint him as their Rav. Although he rejected all who addressed him for this purpose, he eventually yielded to the persistent requests of the Lvov community. He agreed to become their Rav and Rosh Yeshiva, but only on one condition, namely that he would receive no salary from community funds. One day a prominent figure in Lvov passed away, a man who had given sizeable donations to community institutions. Therefore a large crowd from town gathered to accompany his body to its final resting place. Several rabbis delivered moving eulogies, and Rabbi Yosef Shaul also took part, though he delivered a short eulogy. Before the man was finally laid to rest, one rabbi from Lvov began delivering a very lengthy eulogy. He read it from a prepared text, and it lasted much too long. Rabbi Yosef was upset by the length of the eulogy, and he said to those close to him: “The Sages have said that ‘every plague that is not written’ [Devarim 28:61] refers to the death of the tzaddikim. Yet here I see the opposite: The death of the tzaddikim is a plague that is written!”