



**THE PATH TO FOLLOW**  
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**THE ONLY FREE MAN IS ONE WHO STUDIES TORAH (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)**

**I**t is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings" (*Bereshith* 37:1). Our Sages have said, "When the righteous wish to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: 'They are not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, but they wish to live in peace even in this world!'" (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:3). When Jacob wanted to live in peace in this world, he attracted the accuser on account of Joseph.

I believe that this *parsha* was written for all the generations only so as to teach people the greatness of the words of our Sages, who said: "There is no free man except one who occupies himself with the study of Torah" (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:2). Observe the difference between the early generations and the later generations: The early generations gave their lives for words of Torah and did not turn away from its study for even an instant. As we read concerning King David, the Angel of Death could not take his soul because his lips were moving at all times, and the Angel of Death cannot interrupt a man who studies Torah (*Shabbat* 30b). It is also said (*Midrash Tehillim* 1) that David learned Torah with one group after another so as to fulfill the verse, "From all my teachers I grew wise" (*Tehillim* 119:99).

Along the same lines, we read: "Torah scholars have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World to Come" (*Berachot* 64a). Rashi explains that they go from yeshiva to yeshiva, and from Beit HaMidrash to Beit HaMidrash. Rabbi Yochanan said of himself, "In my case [it is a profanation if] I walk four cubits without Torah or *tefillin*" (*Yoma* 86a). It is also said, "A scholar is forbidden to stand in a place of filth, because he must not stand still without meditating on Torah" (*Berachot* 24b). It is also said, "It was reported about Rabbi Eleazar ben Harsom that his father left him 1,000 cities on the continent, as well as 1,000 boats on the sea. Every day he would take a sack of flour on his shoulder and go

from city to city and from province to province in order to study Torah" (*Yoma* 35b).

In the Midrash our Sages cite Hashem as saying, "Torah scholars who force themselves to go from city to city and from country to country in order to study Torah, I exempt them from the yoke of government" (*Midrash Otiyot*). As a result, the early generations gave themselves no rest from the study of Torah and performance of *mitzvot*. Even the wealthy among them went from place to place in order to study Torah, not diverting their attention from learning for even an instant.

As for recent generations, it is precisely the opposite: In the summer, people put religious matters aside and neglect the study of Torah to go on vacation. Although they leave their homes on vacation, they return and immediately want to rest and relax some more, for they never have enough in life.

Why does this happen? It is because a Jew's soul can never be satisfied by this ephemeral life and its pleasures, but only by eternal life and Torah study. Whoever studies Torah does not need a vacation, for there is no greater freedom than Torah itself. As for those who fail to study it, even if they were to spend their entire lives on vacation, it would still not be enough. Indeed, the Sages say: "Exile yourself to a place of study" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:14), not "Exile yourself on vacation." Earlier generations were relaxed, despite never resting from the study of Torah. How so? They were relaxed because they studied Torah, as it is written: "These are the generations of Noah – Noah" (*Bereshith* 6:9). This teaches us that whenever Noah wanted to rest (*nach*) from the words of Torah, he returned to learning.

**He Completed the Entire Tractate**

It is said that at the end of Yom Kippur, the saintly Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, despite being exhausted after an intense day of pouring out his soul in prayer, told his assistants that he wanted to rest a little. He then proceeded to his room, and they followed behind to see

what he was doing. They saw him take out the Gemara in tractate *Sukkah* and begin to study it from the very first page. He did not move before having completed the entire tractate on that night. His servants even went home to sleep, and when they returned the next morning, they saw him with the book still open, about to complete the entire tractate.

From here we learn that there is no free man except one who studies Torah. Although earlier generations never left their homes to go on vacation, they still managed to rest. How? By studying Torah. They studied only in a yeshiva, and the word *yeshiva* evokes rest, as the Sages have said: "The word *yeshiva* means dwelling" (see *Megillah* 21a). Since they went from one yeshiva to another, they were relaxed. As for recent generations, despite going on one vacation after another, they find no rest. This is normal, for the only free man is one who studies Torah. The soul of man is only satisfied by words of Torah.

Among the early generations, was there the custom of *Bein HaZemanim* that today we see practiced in all *yeshivot*, a time in which students are free between *zemanim* to devote themselves to foolish pursuits? When I myself went on vacation, I would give classes in synagogues and Batei HaMidrash every day, strengthening many broken hearts. Although I enjoyed no physical rest, I experienced a great spiritual rest.

This is a long-observed phenomenon, as it is written: "Man is born for toil" (*Job* 5:7). When he seeks rest, misfortunes come and attack him, depriving him of rest. If he is worthy, his Torah study will not cease; and if he is not worthy, it will be his misfortunes that will not cease. When a man studies Torah, he becomes free.

This is why Jacob was punished when he wanted to settle down in peace. Hashem said to him, "You think that you can settle down in peace and study Torah in peace? By your life, I am sending you misfortunes that rob man of all his peace and make him suffer, for I will not allow you to rest in this world!"

## A TRUE STORY LIKE PARSHA VAYEISHEV

During a certain era, the Volozhin yeshiva was led by two men at the same time: The *gaon* Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (the Netziv), and the *gaon* Rabbi Yosef Ber of Brisk. As we know, there were often disagreements between these two Torah giants, usually pertaining to their individual responsibilities in leading the yeshiva. Furthermore, these two men had different methods of learning Torah. In his learning, the Netziv followed the *pshat*, preferring to study according to the plain meaning of the text. As for Rabbi Yosef Ber of Brisk, who was extremely intelligent and bright, the essential thing was sharp debate. In general, the young men attending the Volozhin yeshiva were also divided into two groups: Some gathered around Rabbi Yosef Ber, while others gathered around Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda. Over time, the tension between them increased, as usually happens with disagreements.

Some of the greatest rabbis of the generation were therefore invited to Volozhin in order to make peace between these two leaders. Their task was to clearly define the roles of these men in regards to leading the yeshiva, as well as to restore order. These mediators were Rabbi Yosef of Slutsk, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan of Kubna, Rabbi Velvel the Maggid Mesharim of Vilna, and Rabbi Tebele of Minsk (may the memory of the righteous be blessed).

The rabbis sat down to consider how to reach a compromise between these two great men. Rabbi Velvel began by saying, "You know, my friends, I am now studying *Parsha Vayeishev*."

Everyone looked at him, for this meeting was taking place just after Sukkot, during the month of Cheshvan. In other words, there were still many days and weeks from then until *Parsha Vayeishev*.

Rabbi Velvel added, "I'll explain what I mean. I am a *maggid* [preacher] in Vilna, and every Shabbat I must speak about the *parsha* of the week. In my talks, I usually recount situations in which a *tzaddik* is confronted by a *rasha* – cases of good verses evil – describing the great virtues of one and the horrendous flaws of the other.

"I can easily find these two opposites in any given *parsha*: In *Parsha Bereshith*, there is man and the serpent, Cain and Abel. In *Parsha Noah*, there is Noah and the generation of the flood, Shem and Ham. In *Parsha Lech Lecha*, there is Abraham and Pharaoh. In *Parsha Va'eira*, there is Abraham and Sodom.

"In short, I can find a *tzaddik* and a *rasha* in all these *parshiot*. I therefore put myself on the side of the *tzaddik* and praise him, while pouring fire and sulfur upon the *rasha*. Yet when I come to *Parsha Vayeishev*, with Joseph and his brothers, I am perplexed: There are *tzaddikim* on both sides, and both are pure and holy."

Rabbi Velvel finished by saying, "I now find myself in the same perplexing situation. If I were trying to reach a compromise between Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah and a regular Jew, it would be clear to me who the *tzaddik* is. Yet to reach a compromise between Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah and Rabbi Yosef Ber – both of whom are Torah giants, both of whom are great *tzaddikim* – this seems, as I said, like *Parsha Vayeishev*."

## THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

### The Chanukah Blessing

As the saintly Bluzover Rebbe, Rabbi Israel Shapira *Zatzal*, was lighting Chanukah candles in the Bergen Belson concentration camp, he was asked a question by a Jew who had completely abandoned Torah and *mitzvot*.

"Rabbi, you are known as someone who is wise and intelligent. I understand that you want to light the candles for Chanukah, and I know that you have an obligation to recite the first two blessings: *Lehadlik ner Chanukah* and *She'asa Nissim*. What I don't understand is how, at a time like this, you can recite *Shecheyanu*. Thousands of Jews are inundated with terrible suffering, and others are being put to death in horrific ways! How can you say, 'Who has granted us life and enabled us to reach this occasion'?"

"You are right, my dear Jew" replied the Bluzover Rebbe. "That question also came to mind when I recited *Shecheyanu*, for I wondered what place this blessing could have at such a terrible time. I tried to find an explanation to justify the formulation of the blessing.

"In fact," continued the Rebbe, "as I was reciting the blessing, I saw a large number of Jewish prisoners behind me, and on their faces I could see that they were ready to fight for their Judaism. I recited *Shecheyanu* with that in mind, for even under such horrific conditions, Jews were ready to give their lives for their Judaism!"

### Why Such Joy?

One time, as the saintly Rabbi Shlomo Karelitz *Zatzal* was lighting his *chanukah* with oil, the wall facing him caught on fire and became completely black. When Rabbi Shlomo saw this, he was overjoyed. "Why such joy?" his students asked.

Rabbi Shlomo replied, "Although the wall is ruined, now at least there is a lasting imprint of the *mitzvah* in the home, the *mitzvah* of Chanukah. This impression will remain, leaving its mark on all days of the year."

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### Jealousy

"Know that just as it is forbidden to disparage others, it is also forbidden to praise them" (Rabbeinu Eliezer of Metz in *Sefer Yereim*).

It often happens, because of our numerous sins, that a merchant will disparage the products of another merchant, or say things of a similar nature, because of jealousy. This constitutes *Lashon Harah* prohibited by the Torah.

– Chafetz Chaim

# AT THE SOURCE

## Little by Little

It is written, "Reuven said to them, 'Shed no blood!' " (*Bereshith* 37:22).

The holy Shelah cites Rabbeinu Levi Gershom in saying, "It is preferable for a person, when he sees that someone has a desire to do evil, to distance him from this desire little by little. If he tries to accomplish this all at once, it will provide him with a reason not to listen, and to carry out his evil intentions."

Thus when Reuven saw that his brothers wanted to kill Joseph, he realized that if he were to tell them to leave Joseph alone, they would not have listened to him, so great was their hatred for Joseph. He therefore tried to steer them away from this desire little by little, telling them not to spill blood, but rather to throw Joseph into a pit and to let him die on his own.

Reuven believed that he could change their minds in this way. He made sure that nothing bad happened to Joseph, and he planned on returning him to their father without the brothers knowing about it. Hence the brothers agreed with Reuven and abandoned their initial plan, and in the end they listened to Judah, who said: "Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites" (*Bereshith* 37:27).

## Allusions

It is written, "Midianite men, traders, passed by. They drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit" (*Bereshith* 37:28).

This verse is nicely interpreted by the *gaon* Rabbi Eliezer Papo in his book *Dan Yadin Ve-Alef HaMagen*.

He states that the term *vaya'avru* ("[and] passed by") may be read as *vai avru* ("woe, they have sinned"), meaning woe to those who commit *averot* (sins), for evil will come upon them. Hence we must try to be *anashim* ("men") – *tzaddikim*, as Rashi states on the expression: "All of them *anashim*" (*Bamidbar* 13:3); *i.e.*, *tzaddikim*.

If we see that the evil inclination is preventing us, we must be "Midianites" (*Midianim* – those who judge) and fight the evil inclination.

Although it is difficult, we learn from "traders" – those who put a great deal of effort into earning money – that we must also live through adversity, for "commensurate with the effort is the reward" (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:21). Of those who act in this way, it is said: "They drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit" – they lift the Jewish people out of the pit of exile.

## Removing His Protection

It is written, "They stripped Joseph of his tunic" (*Bereshith* 37:23).

In his book *Bechor Yaakov*, Rabbi Yaakov HaCohen *Zatzal* explains why the verse mentions Joseph's tunic:

Since the Sages have said that his tunic was covered with all kinds of animal designs, and that it had the ability to protect whoever wore it, Jacob placed his trust in this ability by sending Joseph to a place where savage animals roamed. His brothers wanted to take away his tunic in order to put him at the mercy of serpents in the pit into which they threw him.

## The Heart Forgets

It is written, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" (*Bereshith* 37:26).

It has been decreed by Heaven that death is forgotten by the heart after eleven months. Hence in his book *Ma'assei Choshev*, Rabbi Shimon HaCohen *Zatzal* of Tunis explains that Judah told his brothers: "If we kill Joseph, then after twelve months he will already be forgotten in the heart of our father Jacob. The *Shechinah* will then rest upon him, and it will reveal that we killed Joseph with our own hands. He will become angry, bear a grudge against us, and want to punish us.

"However if don't kill him, our father will be distressed and inconsolable as long as he lives. The *Shechinah* will therefore not rest upon him, and he will never know that we were responsible for Joseph's disappearance."

This is why Judah said, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and cover up

his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let our hand not be upon him."

## Irrefutable Proof

It is written, "All his sons and all his daughters arose to console him" (*Bereshith* 37:35).

The double expression "All...and all" – all his sons and all his daughters – needs to be explained, for it would have been enough to say: "All his sons and daughters arose to console him."

The book *Peninei Kedem* cites the *gaon* Rabbi Shalom Yitzchak Levitan *Zatzal* (an Av Beit Din in Lithuania), who refers to a teaching in the Gemara: "Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav, 'Whoever indulges in grief to excess over his dead will weep for another' " (*Moed Katan* 27b).

Hence the tribal fathers, when they saw Jacob weeping excessively for Joseph and not willing to be consoled, all gathered together – sons, daughters, and grandchildren, including infants, everyone without exception – and said to him: "Our father, since whoever indulges in grief to excess over his dead will weep for another, it seems that another family member should have died. You therefore have irrefutable proof that Joseph is still alive, for otherwise – since you wept excessively for Joseph [as it is written, "He mourned for his son many days"] – someone else should have died. Since you can see that no one among us is missing, this must console you because it means that Joseph is still alive."

This is why the verse says, "All...and all," teaching us that all his sons and all his daughters came before him, not one person missing, in order to console Jacob by the fact that they were all present, irrefutable proof that Joseph was still alive.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

### *The Pit and Water: Allusions to the Heart and the Holy Torah*

It is written, "The pit was empty. There was no water in it" (*Bereshith* 37:24).

Rashi explains: "Since it says, 'The pit was empty,' do I not know that there was no water in it? For what purpose did the Torah write, 'There was no water in it'? There was no water in it, but there were serpents and scorpions in it."

I would like to explain this subject by suggesting that the "pit" alludes to the heart of man. Rashi states that the pit was empty, there was no water in it, and we know that water represents the Torah, as the Sages have taught: "Water signifies the Torah, as it states: 'Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water' [Isaiah 55:1]" (*Bava Kama* 17a). However serpents and scorpions were in the pit, a reference to the serpent, the Satan and the evil inclination, which is found in the heart of man, as it is written: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (*Bereshith* 8:21). As the Sages say in the name of Rav, "The evil inclination resembles a fly, dwelling between the two entrances of the heart" (*Berachot* 61a).

A man must bring the Torah into his heart, as it is written: "Your Torah is in my innards" (*Tehillim* 40:9). Here Radak explains, "Within my heart, which is part of my innards," meaning that it should never leave his thoughts. If a person brings the Torah into his heart, he will chase away the evil inclination, as the Gemara states: "Rabbi Yochanan said on behalf of Rabbi Bana'ah: What is the meaning of the verse, 'Happy are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the donkey roam freely' [Isaiah 32:20]? [It means] Happy is Israel: When they occupy themselves with Torah and acts of kindness, their inclination is mastered by them; not them by their inclination, as it is said: 'Happy are you who sow besides all waters' " (*Avodah Zarah* 5b). Rashi explains, "They themselves constantly drive away the evil inclination, which comes to attack man."



# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## RABBI AVRAHAM HARARI RAFUL

The *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Avraham Harari Raful *Zatzal*, better known as “the elder among the rabbanim of Baghdad in Eretz Israel,” would begin his full day at midnight. At that point he would prepare himself to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* with tears and supplications for the Final Redemption. During the *Bein HaMetzarim* (Three Weeks of Mourning) he would also recite *Tikkun Chatzot* at noon. By way of allusion, he would say: “Noah was a righteous man” – the name Noah is formed by the initials of *nekudat chatzot* (the point of midnight) as well as *netz chama* (sunrise). He also encouraged others to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* and to pray *Shacharit* at sunrise, as he himself would do.

His prayers were famous. He would weep and pour out tears from the depths of his heart, and with an insistent voice he would make his prayers heard like a *kohen* serving in the Temple, like someone who was counting pearls and precious stones. This was particularly apparent during the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe), when he served as the *Shaliach Tzibur* and led a great community that merited to pray by his side.

Rabbi Avraham would often cite the words of the Mishnah: “One may also take up the *meduma* when there is one among a hundred” (*Shabbat* 141b), explaining by allusion that the words of one who sheds tears in prayer will ascend and be received by the angel Michael, whose name has a numerical value of one hundred and one. The word *dema* (“tear”) evokes *meduma*, the angel Michael being the one who takes up prayers that are seasoned with tears. Regarding this issue, the Sages have said: “The gates of tears are never closed.”

### That They May Remember

With his extraordinary talents, Rabbi Avraham would devise mnemonics (memory aids) for himself in order to remember specific subjects, mnemonics that also helped others remember and revise their studies. Regarding the passage, “You shall not go astray...in order that you may remember” (*Bamidbar* 15:39-40), he would often say that it is the memory that helps a man study Torah.

Rabbi Avraham once told one of his grandchildren, “I don’t have a good memory, but I pay close attention to things and take note of all that I see and study, which page it is found on, and which Sage issued a given Halachah. By doing so, I retain what I have learned.” In this regard, he would cite the well-known saying: “One does not forget something that he loves.”

He used numerical calculations with great ease in order to provide himself with interesting mnemonics. Some examples include the following:

The Mishnah in *Chullin* 22a begins with the words *kasher batorim* (“[the age that] qualifies turtledoves”), and Rabbi Avraham said that this is alluded to in the number of the folio (22), *kaf beit*, the initials of *kasher batorim*.

In *Bava Metzia* 24a, we find the story of the pious Mar Zutra, whose silver cup was stolen. The initials of *kasa d’chaspa* (“silver cup”) are *kaf dalet*, meaning 24, the folio of the tractate where this story appears.

There is a page in the Gemara that consists entirely of statements by our Sages the *Ba’alei HaTosaphot*, not being an actual page of Gemara at all. It is found in *Nazir* 33a, the mnemonic being that *lamed gimel* (33) constitute the initials of *lo Gemara* (“not Gemara”).

Another allusion is found in *Menachot* 42b, where the Rambam’s name is mentioned by *Tosaphot*. The name “Rambam” is formed by the initials of *Re’eh Menachot Mem Beit* (“see *Menachot* 42”).

Likewise, in Rabbi Avraham’s conversations with people, he peppered his remarks with initials, numerical values, and other memory aids. On every subject that people discussed with him, he would amazingly find initials or numerical values that alluded to that subject. When he asked someone for their name, he immediately found a corresponding verse or proverb. He would discover all these allusions on the spot, without having to make an effort. He would sometimes answer with a *gematria*, as a prophesy that emerged from his mouth, and everyone was amazed by this great ability. In him people saw the fulfillment of the verse, “You will decide what to say, and it shall come to pass.”

### We Are Not Perplexed

One of his granddaughters asked him a question that she heard from her teacher. It concerned the words of the Rambam in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, which she was studying in seminary. His granddaughter asked him to help her answer this question. His surprising and instructive response revealed the Torah’s perspective on this issue, such as he envisioned it.

“Tell your teacher that we do not study the *Guide for the Perplexed*, for we are not perplexed. We believe in Hashem according to the tradition of our fathers. My father believed in Hashem without question, as did my grandfather and his father, going back to Moshe Rabbeinu at Sinai, and we do not need philosophical inquiries.”

This is a good place to cite a statement often made by the *gaon* Rabbi Israel Mei HaCohen *Zatzal* of Radin (the Chafetz Chaim). He said that a person who feels that his faith is diminishing should read the Torah accounts found in *Sefer Bereshith*. In fact the Chafetz Chaim himself, in his advanced years, would study *Bereshith* after praying *Shacharit*.

The Chafetz Chaim would say, “The Sages tell us that Abraham pondered things intellectually and discovered that the world has a Ruler. This was only because he was the first to reach this conclusion, for he did not inherit the principle of Judaism from his fathers. Yet why do we, the sons of men who received the Torah on Mount Sinai, have to spend time intellectualizing from scratch?” (These remarks are found in the book *Ma’asei LaMelech*, pp. 24-25.)

### Like the Pain of the Shechinah

The Rav’s grandson, Rabbi Shlomo Raful *Shlita*, recounts that his grandfather once asked him to bring him to the zoo. When they arrived, his grandfather wanted to see the elephants and monkeys in order to recite the blessing *Baruch...meshaneh haberiot*. Next, he wanted to see the king of the animals, the lion. He stood in front of the lion and looked at him for a long time. He then told his grandson, “Look at the lion – the king of the animals – imprisoned in a cage!”

Having said these words, his grandfather suddenly burst into tears for reasons that Rabbi Shlomo did not understand. It was only a few years ago that he found, written in the holy Zohar, that the *Shechinah* in exile is like a lion in a cage! Rabbi Avraham’s genuine and sincere participation in the pain of the *Shechinah* extended to such a point!

We read, “Abraham was old, advanced in days.” Rabbeinu Avraham Harari Raful passed away at an advanced age, being 97 years old. During that time, the residents of Jerusalem benefited from his light, which went out on the first night of Chanukah. He left behind a son, Rabbi Yosef Harari Raful *Shlita*, a man of Torah and *chesed*, as well as grandchildren who are great in Torah and the fear of Heaven.