



## THE PATH TO FOLLOW Shemot • No 371 A Hevrat Pinto Publication

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### The Power Of Habit (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

**I**t is written, “[G-d] said, ‘Do not come any closer to here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground’” (*Shemot* 3:5). Here the Sages in the Midrash state, “Wherever the *Shechinah* appears, one must not go about with shoes on, and so we find in the case of Joshua: ‘Remove your shoe’ [Joshua 5:15]. Hence the *kohanim* served in the Temple barefoot” (*Shemot Rabba* 2:6). I would like to explain why it is forbidden to wear shoes in a place where the *Shechinah* dwells, rather than removing any other garment with which a person covers himself. The reason is that Scripture is teaching us proper conduct. Concerning Moshe we read, “Hashem spoke to Moshe face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend” (*Shemot* 33:11), and we might suspect that Moshe could have become accustomed to Hashem’s glory, since he constantly spoke with Him. Since Moshe was accustomed to this, perhaps he would no longer pay attention to His glory because of the temptation to grow proud. This is because a student who speaks with his master once or twice is not the same as one who speaks with him nine or ten times, in which case he grows proud. In the Gemara we read, “Ravina was sitting before Rabbi Jeremiah of Difti when a certain man passed by without covering his head. ‘How impudent is that man!’ he exclaimed. He replied, ‘Perhaps he is from Mata Mahasya, where Sages are common’” (*Kiddushin* 33a). Rashi explains that since there were so many Sages in that town, its residents treated them like one of their own.

Since there was good reason to suspect that Moshe would become accustomed to the glory of Hashem, He warned him by saying: “Remove your shoes from your feet.” In other words: Be careful not to act like someone who is used to speaking with his master, and each time that you speak with Me, it should seem like the first time you are speaking with the *Shechinah*. The reason is that the ground

upon which you are standing is holy, for there My holiness dwells at all times.”

#### Your Feet, Your Habits

We must realize that an allusion is contained in the words that the Holy One, blessed be He, used in speaking to Moshe: “Remove your shoes from your feet.” The term *ne’aleicha* (“your shoes”) actually designates closure (*neila*), and *ragleicha* (“your feet”) is actually *hergel* (“habit”). In other words: As a treasure trove is closed before all men, so should My word be to you. Just as no one enters a treasure trove or can see what is inside, likewise is My word to you. You must feel like a man who is looking at a treasure trove, not knowing what is inside. Each time that he looks at it, he wants to open it. My word should seem this way to you, as if it were completely closed from the outside. Each time that I come to speak with you, it should seem as if you have never heard My voice before.

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, warn Moshe, since this was not the case with the other prophets? The answer is that because Moshe saw “through a clear glass” – whereas the other prophets saw “through a dim glass” (*Yebamot* 49b) – it was specifically Moshe who was told by the Holy One, blessed be He, to remove his shoes. In other words, he was not to become accustomed to the *Shechinah*.

In reality, we find that Moshe was careful in this regard and did not gaze upon the holy *Shechinah*, although he could have. Our Sages explain that Hashem waited, as it were, for Moshe to look at Him and to see the revelation of the *Shechinah* (*Berachot* 7a). However he avoided looking, as it is said: “Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to look at G-d” (*Shemot* 3:6). In his eyes, the *Shechinah* was like a closed treasure trove, into which no eye could look.

#### The Kohanim Went Barefoot

The *kohanim*, when they served in the Temple, also had no right to wear shoes, for the

offering of sacrifices and incense atoned for the Children of Israel. The *kohanim* were the representatives of the people, and Hashem wanted to show the Children of Israel that they must not perform *mitzvot* out of habit. Otherwise, *mitzvot* would seem burdensome to them, which is why the *kohanim* went barefoot in the Temple. This served as a constant reminder that we must not act out of habit. All Jews must learn from their example and not perform *mitzvot* out of habit. Hence everywhere we find the *Shechinah*, we also find a prohibition against wearing shoes. This is because, when walking barefoot, a person remembers that he must not act casually with the *Shechinah*.

We are familiar with the explanations of the *Ba’alei HaMussar* on the verse, “One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary” (*Tehillim* 27:4). Here they ask why King David only wanted to “visit” Hashem’s Sanctuary, not to “dwell” in it. They explain that a student who visits his teacher is not like one who lives in his teacher’s home. This is because a student who merely visits him – coming only from time to time – stands before his teacher with reverence, whereas one who constantly finds himself in his teacher’s home and is a regular there will act casually with his teacher and not truly appreciate his presence. Hence King David wanted to be like a student who merely visits his teacher, not like one who is a regular in his home. He wanted to constantly sense the pleasure that one feels upon seeing him the first time, for by visiting only from time to time, one does not grow accustomed to it.

Along the same lines we read, “The wise man says: ‘If you want your friend to hate you, visit him constantly. If you want him to love you, visit him infrequently.’ In this regard it is said, ‘Let your feet be scarce in your fellow’s house, lest he grow weary of you and hate you’ [*Mishlei* 25:17]” (*Orchot Tzaddikim, Sha’ar HaSina*).

## CONCERNING THE PARSHA

It is written, "Hashem said to him, 'Who makes a mouth for man, or who makes one dumb or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, Hashem?'" (*Shemot* 4:11).

This painful cry was uttered by none other than the Rebbe of Klausenbourg-Sanz, Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam *Zatzal*, during a talk that he gave on *Parsha* Toldot. He spoke before the public and his students, trying to awaken them to the great care that must have with our words. He also wanted to make them realize the tremendous power of speech, which was given to man by G-d so he can fulfill the *mitzvah*: "You shall speak of them – of them, not of vanities." Let us cite his words during a talk that he gave on the proper use of speech, in order to understand the lesson it conceals:

"Something else pains me – that I was not born a mute. If I had come into the world without being able to speak, my life would have been free of obstacles. I would have been protected from *Lashon Harah* and slander, and I could have returned to my Father in Heaven with my integrity intact. In fact speaking *Lashon Harah* is as grave as the three cardinal sins, and even worse, which is why the forces of impurity concentrate on it. They neglect all the other sins of the Torah in order to focus precisely on baseless hatred, *Lashon Harah*, slander and similar things.

"I wonder why we often study *Chafetz Chaim*, and yet we still forget that we may lose both worlds in an instant, not dealing with it as we should. In fact if we were to see someone eating pork, we would all scream: 'Evildoer!' We would strike and humiliate him so that he leaves the Beit HaMidrash, despite this being but a single prohibition. On the other hand, if someone arrives in yeshiva and speaks *Lashon Harah*, not only will we *not* scream: 'Evildoer! You are destroying the entire world with your words! You are committing idolatry, immorality, and murder,' we will even laugh and enjoy it, regrettably."

Indeed, the forces of impurity increase in this very area because with each word of *Lashon Harah*, we become their partners in testifying against the Jewish people, as the holy Arizal taught. This is why the forces of impurity accept that a person wears a *shtrimmel*, a large *gartel*, and sways in prayer. Just as long as he speaks *Lashon Harah*, everything else means nothing! A person can be a great *talmid chacham*, and yet his Torah may be worthless, for one needs a sanctified mouth to truly merit the holy Torah. If a person speaks *Lashon Harah*, he becomes a partner of the forces of evil. Hence we can easily understand how such a person cannot merit the Torah of truth.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### *Verifying the Truth*

The same thing applies here: If a person will not derive any personal benefit by listening, but can help someone else by doing so, then he is allowed to listen.

For example, if he wants to listen in order to later verify the information so he can rebuke the individual in question, perhaps even prompting the sinner to repent, or return what he may have stolen to its rightful owner, then he is allowed to listen.

## THE PARABLE AND ITS MEANING

### *THE FAITHFUL SERVANT*

It is written, "The people believed, and they heard that Hashem had visited the Children of Israel" (*Shemot* 4:31).

Our Sages have said that the Children of Israel had no *mitzvot* to save them except one: Having faith in Hashem. Thus the verse states, "The people believed, and they heard that Hashem had visited the Children of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves." Due to their faith, they were delivered from Egypt and the house of bondage.

### **To what can this be compared?**

It is like a poor man from a good family. The king wants to demonstrate kindness to him because he was pleased with his fathers, although the poor man himself is simple-minded and in frail health.

The king thought, "How can I help him? What task shall I assign him? I cannot put him in charge of the kingdom's defense, for he is too naïve. To wage war, we need someone who is crafty and can devise war strategies, as it is written: 'Through strategies you can wage war' [*Mishlei* 24:6]."

The king continued to reflect upon the matter: "Can I put him in charge of the royal treasury? He doesn't even know the meaning of money! Can I make him my personal secretary? He can't read or write! Can I put him in charge of the palace guards? He is tiny and frail! What about putting him in charge of justice? He understands absolutely nothing! Can I put him in charge of royal commerce and duties? He can't tell the difference between silk and linen, or between silver and gold!"

### **And so went the king's thoughts.**

Suddenly, the king had an idea that would enable him to carry out his wish.

"I will put him in charge of the royal seal, which will be his to guard. Every decree I make will go before him so my seal can be placed upon it. This is a very honorable position, and it comes with a large salary. It does not require any knowledge or intelligence, but only fidelity and devotion. He must not place my seal on decrees that are not mine, and he must follow only my instructions."

This is the parable. The meaning is that the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that the Children of Israel were devoid of all *mitzvot* and every merit. The Torah had not yet been given to them, and they could not demonstrate generosity because they were poor and enslaved. However there was one *mitzvah* that they could fulfill, the *mitzvah* of having faith in Hashem. Thus their hearts were pure and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His prophet. For such a *mitzvah*, they did not require wisdom, intelligence, strength, or money.

By the merit of this precious and important *mitzvah*, the Holy One, blessed be He, came and delivered the Children of Israel. He also gave them two additional *mitzvot*. The blood of circumcision and the blood of the Passover offering, and He brought them out of Egypt.

– From *Ben Ish Hai*, by *Rabbeinu Yosef Haim of Baghdad*

# AT THE SOURCE

## Different Intentions

It is written, "So they appointed taskmasters over them in order to afflict them with their burdens" (*Shemot* 1:11).

Although all governments impose taxes on their citizens, there are different intentions behind such taxation. One government collects taxes for the benefit of its citizens, for their personal and financial well-being. Another government imposes taxes in order to harm its citizens and burden them.

Such was the case with Pharaoh's kingdom, whose goal was "to afflict them with their burdens."

## The First Three Months

It is written, "Shall I go and summon for you a wet-nurse from the Hebrew women?" (*Shemot* 2:7).

Rashi states, "This teaches that she had taken him around to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he did not nurse because he was destined to speak with the *Shechinah*."

This is surprising, for the Gemara explains that a three-month-old baby can already distinguish between people and not nurse from a woman other than its own mother (*Ketubot* 60a). At the time, Moshe had already nursed from his mother for three months, as it is written: "she hid him three months" (*Shemot* 2:2). Therefore how can Rashi say that Moshe did not nurse from another woman because he was destined to speak with the *Shechinah*?

The book *Edut BeYosef* cites the author's father, the *gaon* Rabbi Eliezer Halevi Ettinger *Zatzal*, in saying that it is clear that as soon as Yocheved brought Moshe into the world, she knew that he was going to leave her. Thus in order to ensure that Moshe would nurse from another woman, Yocheved did not nurse him during those three months. The only reason Moshe did not nurse from another woman was because he was destined to speak with the *Shechinah*.

## Immediately

It is written, "Pharaoh's daughter said to her [Yocheved]: 'Take this child'" (*Shemot* 2:9).

In his book *Chomat Anach*, the Chida cites the great Rav Moshe Berdugo *Zatzal* in his book *Rosh Mashbir* as stating that Pharaoh's daughter had Egyptian women attempt to nurse Moshe, but he refused. She thought that his lips were pursed because the river was cold, or because of some illness in his mouth.

This is why she said, "Take this child." In other words: Now that he doesn't want to nurse, take him to your home and try to heal him so he can nurse.

However Yocheved did not do so, for we read: "The woman took the child and she nursed him" – right there and then, to prove that he refused to nurse because he had been presented with Egyptian woman. Hence the verse does not say, "The woman went," as Pharaoh's daughter had instructed her. She instead took the child and nursed him immediately.

## Don't Stand Aside

It is written, "He said to the wicked one, 'Why would you strike your fellow?'" (*Shemot* 2:13).

The book *Marbitzei Torah MeOlam HaChassidut* recounts the following incident:

The Maharsham of Brezhan *Zatzal* never hesitated to fulfill the duty of reprimanding people who deserved it. One day, during a conversation that he had with a Rav who had been invited from Poland, the Polish Rav began to tell him about a dispute that broke out in a community near his home. The Maharsham asked him, "What did you do about it?" He replied, "What could I do? I distance myself from conflicts, because it's better not to get involved in them."

The Maharsham replied with a smile, "That is not what Moshe Rabbeinu did. He said to the wicked one, 'Why would you strike your fellow?' He said this because it is forbidden to stand aside. We must tell people what the Torah perspective is."

## Three Tasks

It is written, "Who made you a man, a leader, and a judge over us?" (*Shemot* 2:14).

In his book *Givat Shaul*, the *gaon* Rabbi Shaul Halevi *Zatzal* nicely interprets the abundance of terms – man, leader, and judge – found in this verse.

He states that three people are required for justice:

1. A king who decrees and enacts laws.
2. A judge to decide if the king's laws have been transgressed.
3. An officer to carry out the judge's decisions.

When Moshe killed the Egyptian, he performed all three tasks himself. He decreed that striking a Hebrew was punishable by death, he judged the Egypt to be guilty of having done so, and he carried out the sentence.

Hence on the following day, when Moshe asked the evildoer, "Why would you strike your fellow," he replied: "Who made you a man, a leader, and a judge over us?"

Here the "man" is the officer with the power to carry out the judge's decisions, the "leader" is the king who enacts laws, and the "judge" is the one who decides if the king's laws have been transgressed.

## A Failure to Acknowledge

It is written, "They said, 'An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds'" (*Shemot* 2:19).

The Midrash cites Rabbi Levi as stating that Moshe said, "Sovereign of the universe, the bones of Joseph are entering the land, and am I not to enter the land?" Hashem replied, "He who acknowledged his native land is to be buried in that land, but you – who did not acknowledge your native land – will not be buried in that land."

The Midrash explains: "How do we know that Joseph acknowledged his native land? His master's wife said of him, 'Look, he brought us a Hebrew...' [*Bereshith* 39:14]. He did not deny it, and in addition he said: 'For indeed I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews' [ibid 40:15]. He is to be buried in his native land. How do we know this? It is said, 'The bones of Joseph, which the Children of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem' [Joshua 24:32]. 'But you – who did not acknowledge your native land – will not be buried in that land.' When was this? When Jethro's daughters said, 'An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds,' and Moshe heard and kept silent. He is therefore not to be buried in his land" (*Devarim Rabba* 2:8).

## From Neighbor or Friend?

It is written, "A woman shall request from her neighbor" (*Shemot* 3:22).

In his book *Darchei David*, Rabbi David of Lidola *Zatzal* (an Av Beit Din in Italy), states that this order pertains to the time when the Children of Israel were about to leave Egypt. It therefore says, "A woman shall request from her neighbor" – the neighbor who lives in her house, since the Children of Israel were ordered not to leave their houses until morning.

Later on, in *Parsha Bo*, we read: "Please speak in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow from his friend, and every woman from her friend" (*Shemot* 11:2). It does not say "her neighbor," for this took place before the plague of the firstborn, at a time when the people could leave their homes and borrow from whomever they wanted.

## A People of Heavy Tongue

It is written, "I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue" (*Shemot* 4:10).

In his commentary on the Torah, the Rashbam does not accept the usual interpretation of this verse, namely that Moshe stuttered, as some of the *Rishonim* explain. How could it be possible, objects the Rashbam, for a prophet to whom Hashem spoke face-to-face, and who received the Torah, to have stuttered?

To the Rashbam, the expression "heavy of mouth and heavy of speech" means: "I cannot speak Egyptian properly, for I fled from there in my youth, and now I am 80 years old."

To prove his interpretation, the Rashbam cites what Hashem told the prophet Ezekiel: "For not to a people of difficult speech and heavy tongue are you being sent, but to the House of Israel" (Ezekiel 3:5).

# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI – AUTHOR OF THE TANYA

The *gaon* Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi *Zatzal*, also known as the “Alter Rebbe” or “Baal HaTanya,” was born on Elul 18, 5505 (1745) in Liozna, a town in the White Russian province of Mohilev. His father, Rabbi Baruch, was among the hidden *tzaddikim*, one of the faithful disciples of the holy Baal Shem Tov.

It is said that even before his birth, the Baal Shem Tov sent his parents precise instructions on how to raise their future child, as well as on his education. Upon his birth, the Baal Shem Tov warned his parents to hide him from people’s eyes and not to mention anything about his intelligence, as parents tend to do.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman came to the world of Chassidut at the age of 18, when he traveled to Mezritch. It was there that the great disciple and successor of the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Dov Ber Zatzal (known as the Maggid of Mezritch), led the Chassidic Movement. Rabbi Shneur Zalman quickly became one of his disciples, and the greatest among them. Although he was the youngest among the group, he was worthy of a close relationship with his teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch.

In the letters of the Maggid of Mezritch (those discovered in the famous Kherson *geniza*), he writes absolutely amazing things about Rabbi Shneur Zalman. For example he states, “The initial deliberation of my faithful disciple Rabbi Zalman, the author of *Shulchan Aruch*, is a minor form of prophecy. Do whatever he says, for he would have excelled even in the generation of the Baal Shem Tov.”

### Yud-Tes Kislev

After the death of the Maggid of Mezritch in 1772, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was put in charge of the activities of the chassidim. Three years later, during a general assembly of the disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, it was decided to appoint Rabbi Shneur Zalman as the leader of the chassidim in Lithuania.

Still young, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi accompanied Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk for a decisive visit to Vilna in order to convince the Vilna Gaon of the righteousness of the Chassidic Movement. In their storm of violence against the chassidim of Lithuania, the *mitnagdim* denounced Rabbi Shneur Zalman to the authorities, which led to his interrogation and imprisonment on Tishri 24, 5559 (1798). Thanks to the effort of the chassidim, however, he was released on Kislev 19, 5559. For the chassidim of Chabad (a movement founded by the Alter Rebbe), this date is known as the “Rosh Hashanah” of Chassidut.

### The Quill of the Soul

His most important work was *Sefer HaTanya* (also known as *Likutei Amarim*), which may be the most thoroughly conceived and systematic Chassidic work ever written. The main part of the book is devoted to a deep examination of the inner workings of the soul, with a decided tendency towards kabbalistic terminology. Because of this work, Rabbi Shneur Zalman is also called the “Baal HaTanya.” He is also known by the name of another of his works, *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, which he wrote upon the orders of his teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch. This book is also rare among early Chassidic works, insofar as being a book on Halachah written by a Chassidic rabbi.

Besides these works, the Alter Rebbe wrote several books dealing with the Torah. He was also known for having been a musician. According to Chabad tradition, he composed ten *niggunim*, the most sacred of which is *Arba Bavos* (“Four Sections”), a *niggun* whose four sections correspond to the four supernal words: *Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*.

Among Chabad chassidim, it is said that these ten *niggunim* have a special power to awaken repentance. In the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, singing is an indispensable part of serving Hashem, for it helps the heart to open during prayer and the performance of *mitzvot*. As we know, one of the sayings of the Alter Rebbe was: “The tongue is the quill of the heart, but melody is the quill of the soul.”

### Give it to Your Wife

One day, the chassidim asked Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s brother, Rabbi Yehudah Leib of Nowitz (the Maharil), how their parents merited to have children such as themselves (all their sons being Torah giants and *tzaddikim*).

He replied, “It was by the merit of our mother, an exceptional woman because of her devotion to Torah and the fear of Heaven.”

He added, “One time, when our father returned from a business trip abroad, he brought our mother a beautiful and expensive garment. After a certain time, she realized that our tutor seemed preoccupied, which diminished the enthusiasm with which he taught us. When she asked him why, he told her that his wife was jealous of her beautiful garment, for he didn’t bring her similar gifts.

“Our mother immediately went to the closet, took out her expensive garment, and gave it to him. ‘Give it to your wife, just as long as you stop thinking about it and you teach our sons with energy and joy.’”

### The Forces of Impurity

During the Napoleonic wars, when Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, the Alter Rebbe led a spiritual battle against the French emperor. Due to the spirit of decadence and free-thinking that Napoleon brought to the people, the Alter Rebbe considered him to represent the forces of impurity. In fact the Alter Rebbe said that he did not even want to read the letters of the Frenchman.

He also considered Napoleon to be a sorcerer. When Napoleon wanted to revive a “Sanhedrin,” the Alter Rebbe stated that Napoleon even wanted to use the forces of impurity with the forces of holiness.

In 1812, when a bloody war broke out between Russia and France, a stormy debate arose among the disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch on whether it was better to pray for peace and a Russian victory, or to pray for Napoleon and France.

The Alter Rebbe was in favor of a Russian victory, saying: “If Bonaparte wins, Jewish wealth will increase and the prestige of the Jewish people will be raised, but their hearts will disintegrate and be distanced from their Father in Heaven. Yet if Alexander wins, although Israel’s poverty will increase and their prestige will be lowered, their hearts will be joined, bound, and unified with their Father in Heaven.”

At the conclusion of Shabbat, on Tevet 24, 5573 (1812), Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi died and was buried in the town of Haditz, near Poltava.

## THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

### Chasing Darkness Away

Rabbi Asher *Zatzal*, the great Torah figure of Stoln, would usually have a meal for Chanukah after lighting the eighth candle. He would then sing *Hadran alach ner chanukah ve’hadrach alan*, as we say when celebrating the end of a tractate, out of love for the *mitzvah*. When Rabbi Asher was asked about this, he explained: “Chanukah possesses something found in no other *mitzvah*.”

On day, the chassidim asked his son, the Rebbe of Karlin and author of *Beit Aharon*: “Why does your father extol the *mitzvah* of Chanukah so greatly, saying that it possesses something found in no other *mitzvah*? We know that ‘Chanukah lights must be lower than ten *tefachim*.’”

The Beit Aharon explained, “When the Sages said ‘Chanukah lights must be lower than ten *tefachim*,’ they did not mean that the light and the lighting of the candles are inferior to other *mitzvot*. On the contrary, its light is strong and shines so brightly that it chases darkness away from even the lowest and darkest of places.”