

The Path To Follow

Vaeira

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The Greatness Of The Patriarchs

It is written, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as *E-I Sh-ddai*, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them" (*Shemot* 6:3). Here Rashi explains: "*I appeared* – to the Patriarchs."

We know that many of the Torah commentators who pay great attention to the illuminating words of Rashi, the greatest of the commentators, are stunned by this remark. What does he mean by this? After all, the verse itself mentions the names of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – so what is Rashi trying to teach us here?

We must also recall what our Sages have said, namely that the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob constitute the Chariot of the holy *Shechinah* (*Bereshith Rabba* 47:6). Furthermore, the Zohar states that the Holy One, blessed be He, added King David as a fourth wheel to the Chariot, for a chariot consists of no less than four wheels (Zohar I:248b). We need to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, did not add Moshe rather than King David. How was the greatness of the Patriarchs and King David greater than that of Moshe, of whom it is said, "You made him slightly less than Heavenly beings" (*Tehillim* 8:6), as well as: "Never has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face-to-face" (*Devarim* 34:10)?

They Refrained From Asking Questions

Upon examining the subject more closely, we may say that here the Holy One, blessed be He, suggested to Moshe that, although the Patriarchs experienced many hardships – Abraham overcoming 10 trials, Isaac overcoming the trial of Abimelech and his servants, and Jacob overcoming the trials of Shechem and Joseph – they still did not question the Holy One, blessed be He. On the contrary, they accepted everything with love because they did not want to speak unnecessarily, and they personally fulfilled the teaching: "Sanctify yourself in what is permitted to you" (*Yebamot* 20a). They would have been allowed to ask questions, but they refrained from doing so because they sanctified themselves over and above the norm, even in things that were permitted to them.

Since the holy Patriarchs conducted themselves in this way, they merited being the Chariot of the *Shechinah*, something that others did not merit. Perhaps it is for this reason that Rashi referenced the Patriarchs here, in order to suggest that this is what constituted their greatness. In fact the term *haAvoth* ("the Patriarchs") has the same numerical value (414) as *kadosh* ("holy") when the 4 letters of the latter are added

to the sum. This means that the Patriarchs were infinitely sanctified, to the point that they controlled themselves even in permitted things and did not ask questions. Hence they deserved everything they received. We do not find the same thing with Moshe, who when sent to Pharaoh asked Hashem: "Why have You done evil to this people? Why have You sent me?" (*Shemot* 5:22).

Although Moshe was allowed to ask such questions, in this area the Patriarchs were at a greater level.

His Only Joy

The Holy One, blessed be He, added King David as the fourth wheel of the Chariot because when he served as King of Israel, he made himself into a stranger, acting as if the Holy One, blessed be He, owed him nothing. Thus we read, "Hear my prayer, Hashem, and give ear to my cry. Do not be silent at my tears, for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner like all my fathers" (*Tehillim* 39:13). Here the Midrash states, "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David became as if non-existent, as if strangers in this world" (*Aggadat Bereshith*).

We also find David saying, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the House of Hashem'" (*Tehillim* 122:1). King David rejoiced when someone came to him and said, "Your majesty, I want to study Torah!" He would immediately stop everything he was doing and sit down to study. In this regard it is written, "That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life" (*ibid.* 27:4). This was his only joy, in accordance with the verse: "The orders of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart" (*ibid.* 19:9).

He Never Rejected Anyone

In the Gemara we find that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the universe, am I not pious? All the kings of the East and West sit with all their pomp among their hosts, whereas my hands are soiled with blood, with the fetus and the placenta, in order to declare a woman clean for her husband" (*Berachot* 4a). In other words, he never rejected anyone who wanted to study Torah. He had every right to rejoice in his majesty, but he chose not to because he sanctified himself in what was permitted to him. Since King David made himself into a stranger – like someone who felt that everything the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him was a gift – how much more did he not ask questions! This is because whoever depends on others for his sustenance will be happy with what he is given, and he will not dare make demands. To him, whatever he receives is enough.

The Bone Came Loose at the Last Minute

It is written, “You shall not break a bone in it” (*Shemot* 12:46).

A prominent family from the Ramat Elchanan neighborhood of Bnei Brak can attest to the absolute truth of the Sages’ words. Not that they need to be proved, but when a person has the merit of personally seeing the salvation of Hashem through the *segulot* that appear in the Gemara, it is impossible for his faith not to be strengthened.

It all began during an enjoyable Shabbat meal at the home of one of the neighborhood’s *talmidei chachamim*. The family was seated at the table, and the sons (known as outstanding *talmidei chachamim* in their own right) were discussing Torah.

At the end of the meal, one of the sons started to gasp, and they soon realized that a turkey bone was stuck in his throat. It was a particularly hard bone, and it seemed to have lodged itself horizontally in his throat.

The members of the family remembered a *segula* mentioned in the Gemara: “If one has a bone in his throat, he is to bring [another] of that kind, place it on his head, and say [the formulation]. ... For a fish bone he should say [another formulation]” (*Shabbat* 67a).

Because of the panic that reigned in the home at that point, however, they forgot the Gemara’s stipulation (“he is to bring [another] of that kind”), meaning the same kind of bone that is lodged in the throat. Thus they brought another bone, not a turkey bone, and placed it on the head of the son who was choking.

Not Exactly

After a few moments, the situation was not getting any better, and the son was brought to the nearby Ezer MiTzion clinic. The doctor on duty examined his throat but could not see the bone, for it was lodged deep inside. He therefore told the family to bring him to the hospital. Before desecrating Shabbat, however, the family went to see the local Rav, the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein *Shlita*, and asked him for the Torah view of the situation.

Rav Zilberstein told them to immediately go to the hospital and to do everything necessary to treat the son. As the Rav was telling them this, he asked: “Did you employ the *segula* mentioned in the Gemara?”

When they said yes, the Rav then asked: “Did you do *exactly* as the Gemara says?”

At that point they remembered that the bone they had placed on his head was not, in fact, a turkey bone, but a regular chicken bone. The Rav then said that before going to the hospital, they should try the *segula* a second time, this time in compliance with all its details. Only then were they to proceed to the hospital, and with a non-Jewish driver.

In fact by the goodness of Hashem, the bone that had been lodged in his throat suddenly came loose when they placed a turkey bone on his head, though it made no logical sense. The son thus avoided a complicated operation.

Praise Hashem, for He is good!

How Could Pharaoh Have Not Repented?

From what transpired between Moshe and Pharaoh when Moshe was sent to him, we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not prevent Pharaoh from repenting. He simply strengthened his heart in order for him not to repent due to the suffering brought about by the plagues.

In reality, it is amazing that Pharaoh did not repent, for the Egyptians had already acknowledged the reality of Hashem, as well as the fact that He is the Almighty. As the magicians of Egypt said, “This is the finger of G-d” (*Shemot* 8:15). Concerning the plague of hail, it is written: “Those who feared the word of Hashem among Pharaoh’s servants...” (ibid. 9:20), and afterwards we read that Pharaoh told Moshe and Aaron: “I have sinned this time. Hashem is righteous, and I and my people are wicked” (v.27).

As the Midrash tells us (*Shemot Rabba* 9:12), Hashem warned Pharaoh 24 days before the plague, giving him enough time to truly reflect and repent. As a result, it is amazing that he did not repent.

It would seem that this happened because Pharaoh had made himself into a god. Thus on the verse, “Go to Pharaoh in the morning. Behold, he goes out to the water” (*Shemot* 7:15), the Sages have said: “Only in the morning did he go out to the water, because this evildoer would boast that he was a god and did not need to relieve himself” (*Shemot Rabba* 9:8). We also read, “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great crocodile that lies within its rivers, who has said: ‘Mine is the river and I have made myself!’ ” (Ezekiel 29:3). Hence because of Pharaoh’s pride, because he did not want to yield before Hashem, he did not repent.

Guarde Your Tongue

Innocent Before Hashem

An individual who desires to be innocent before Hashem in regards to *Lashon Harah* should take the following steps: If someone wants to speak to him about another person, and he realizes that the speaker intends on disparaging him, he must first ask the speaker if what he is about to say has future relevance to him, or if he will be able to rectify a situation by rebuking that person or achieve some other positive outcome. If the speaker says that it does have future relevance, or that it can achieve a positive outcome, then the individual is allowed to listen, but not to believe him until the issue is clarified. However if the individual realizes, based upon the speaker’s reply, that listening to him will serve no purpose, or that the speaker wants to disparage someone out of spite, then even listening to him is prohibited.

The Palace of the King

It is written, "To give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned" (*Shemot* 6:4).

In his book *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* asks why the Torah uses the apparently redundant expression, "the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned." It could have simply said, "To give them the land of Canaan, in which they sojourned."

He answers by citing a teaching of the Sages, namely that one who lives in Eretz Israel must pay greater attention to his deeds and everything that concerns him. He must also conduct himself with greater humility and piety than a person living elsewhere. The situation is comparable to a man who lives in the king's palace, for one who irritates the king in his palace is unlike one who irritates the king outside of it. Furthermore, serving the king while living in the palace is unlike serving the king while living outside of it, for serving him is clearly more incumbent upon the person who lives in the palace.

This analogy enables us to understand why there are several *mitzvot* that are only practiced in Eretz Israel. For example, there are the *mitzvot* of *shikcha*, *terumah*, *ma'aser*, *shmita*, *yovel*, and so forth.

This is why the verse uses the redundant expression, "the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned." In other words: Eretz Israel, the land of their *megureihem* ("sojourning"), represents a *magur* ("fear"), for a person must live in Hashem's abode with holiness and piety, in constant fear before Him. Thus we read, "Happy is the man who constantly fears" (*Mishlei* 28:14), for as such he will merit to constantly live in Eretz Israel.

Intrinsic Importance

It is written, "I have also heard the groan of the Children of Israel" (*Shemot* 6:5).

Why the term "also"?

In *Me'am Loez*, Rabbi Yaakov Kuli replies as follows:

Concerning Shemuel *HaKatan*, the Gemara tells us that during a drought he "ordered a fast and rain fell before sunrise. The people thought that it was due to the merit of the community, whereupon he said to them: 'I will give you a parable. This can be compared to a servant who asked his master for a favor, and the master exclaimed: Give it to him, but let me not hear his voice' " (*Taanith* 25b).

It is precisely the same in regards to the community. When they merit it, Hashem listens to their prayers and then answers them, an indication that they are important to Him.

This is the meaning of the verse, "I have also heard the groan of the Children of Israel." In other words: Besides saving people per se, the very fact that Hashem listens to their prayers is significant in and of itself, for it proves that they are important to Him.

If the Holy One, blessed be He, were to help them before they prayed, it would mean that He does not desire, as it were, their prayers.

Expect It

It is written, "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron, and He commanded them regarding the Children of Israel" (*Shemot* 6:13).

What did Hashem command Moshe and Aaron?

The Midrash answers: "G-d said to them, 'My children are stubborn, bad-tempered, and troublesome. In assuming leadership over them, you must expect that they will curse you and even stone you' " (*Shemot Rabba* 7:3).

Kinim and Kinam

It is written, "The lice was on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became lice throughout the land of Egypt" (*Shemot* 8:13).

Concerning the dust of the earth, the verse uses the term *kinim* ("lice"), written with the letter *yud*. However when it comes to describing the lice that affected man, the term *kinam* is used, without the *yud*.

To explain this, the *gaon* Rabbi Leib Dayan *Zatzal* said that an apparent discrepancy among the verses must be resolved.

In one place, it is said that the lice were "smaller than a lentil," which is why the magicians could not reproduce them. In another place, however, it is said that they were the size of a chicken egg.

The answer is that regarding the dust of the earth, where lice do not reproduce, there was a miracle and the lice were smaller than a lentil. There were a great number of them, which is why the term *kinim* is written with a *yud*, in the plural.

As for the lice that attacked people, where lice normally breed, a miracle occurred and each louse was as large as an egg. There was a single large louse, which is why the verse uses the singular form, *kinam*.

Upon closer examination, we see that the term *kinim* is used everywhere the dust of the earth is mentioned, whereas *kinam* is used in regards to lice on man.

Rabbi Yehudah Ben Moyal

The *gaon* Rabbi Yehudah ben Moyal *Zatzal*, among the great Torah scholars of Mogador on the Moroccan coast, was born around the year 5598 in Tarodna, Morocco to the *tzaddik* and pious Rabbi Makhlof ben Moyal *Zatzal*. We find his name mentioned in the history books: "Rav Makhlof Moyal *Zatzal*, one of the Torah scholars of Morocco, is the father of our teacher Rabbi Yehudah Moyal *Zatzal*." He was a man of great piety who performed numerous good deeds. From his youth, Rabbi Yehudah took upon himself the yoke of Torah and the fear of Heaven with great diligence. He studied in the yeshiva of his uncle, the *gaon* Rabbi Yaakov ben Sabbat *Zatzal*, who was a student of the *gaon* Rabbi Haim Pinto *Hakatan Zatzal*, the Av Beit Din of Mogador. While devoting his body and soul to learning Torah, Rabbi Yehudah distanced himself from the vanities of this world. Historical accounts testify, "While still a young man, he completed the Talmud and was examined by all the great Torah figures of the city, who found him infused with Torah despite his age."

It is therefore not surprising that from his youth, he was named as a *dayan* and *posek* on the rabbinical court in the Jewish community of Safi. From there he was named to succeed Rabbi Avraham ben Attar *Zatzal*, the Rosh Av Beit Din of Mogador, who died in 5639.

In fact Rabbi Yehudah extended his family's dynasty in becoming a *dayan*, following a tradition of more than 20 *dayanim* in the ben Moyal family.

Turn it Over and Over Again

The story is told of an incident that took place at the British consulate in Mogador. A Jew by the name of Lumbroso had sent his sons to study mathematics at the University of London. A few years passed, during which time they excelled in their studies. The two eventually returned to their father, who wanted to evaluate them in order to get an idea of what they had learned.

He therefore sat them before Rabbi Yehudah. The man asked the Rav to evaluate the mathematical skills of his sons, at which point they began to laugh inside. "What could this old Rav, dressed in a robe and never having left his four cubits of *halachah*, possibly know about mathematics?" they thought.

Rabbi Yehudah asked for a pen and paper, and he began to devise a complex mathematical problem before their eyes, which neither of them could solve. Rabbi Yehudah then devised a second problem, somewhat less complex than the first. Here they showed some competence, but were still unable to come up with a solution. He then devised a third problem, which they were able to solve. At that point, much to their amazement, Rabbi Yehudah sat down and wrote out both solutions in a few minutes, thereby fulfilling the adage: "Turn it over and over again, for everything is in it" (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:21).

Not Benefiting From Public Funds

Rabbi Yehudah conducted himself as a merciful father towards his family and his community. He saw to all their needs, both material and spiritual, with his characteristic humility, as the following incident illustrates:

When Rabbi Yehudah wanted to leave for the Holy Land, his family began to prepare for the journey. They hired someone to help them pack their bags and the sacred items in the Rav's home. This employee, who was not completely honest, wanted certain things

in the Rav's home, books and silver objects, and therefore he slid them into the folds of his robe.

Unfortunately for him, during a public book sale in which he tried to sell the stolen items, people noticed several books containing the signature of Rabbi Yehudah ben Moyal. Those who purchased them realized where they came from, and thought that perhaps Rabbi Yehudah was in need of money and had been forced to sell his books. Hence they hurried to collect donations for their Rav, and these donations were presented to him on the same day.

To the Rav's great astonishment, those who brought the money started talking about what they assumed was his dire financial state. They said that they had organized a collection, which explained the money that now lay before him. Rabbi Yehudah, however, wanted nothing from them, publicly announcing that it was out of the question for him to accept public funds. He added that he harbored no resentment towards the dishonest employee, and that he forgave him with all his heart. He did not calm down before making them explicitly promise that no harm would come to the man or to his livelihood because of the incident.

You Shall Go No Further

More than once, the members of his community begged him to pray and beseech the Creator of the world to quickly save them, and his prayers were never fruitless. In fact by the power of his prayers, which were pleasing to Hashem, many were saved in a miraculous way, for "the *tzaddik* decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes."

It is said that the inhabitants of the Jewish quarters of Mogador once came to him and said that every year, during high tide, the water rose to such a point that it flooded several homes in the area. The result was that certain poor families were left without a roof over their heads. Rabbi Yehudah immediately got up, took his cane, and went to the edge of the water. There, he traced a line in the sand and declared with his gentle voice: "You shall go no further." This is precisely what happened, and the residents of the Jewish quarters were able to breathe easier.

The Time Has Come

Rabbi Yehudah wrote down his *halachic* decisions with clear explanations, all while displaying the full measure of his wisdom and cleverness. We have only been able to benefit from a few of his works, namely a collection of his writings that were recently discovered and made into the book *Shevet Yehudah*. In it we find his *halachic* decisions and Torah commentaries, as well as sermons and articles on the *parshiot* of the Torah. Rabbi Yehudah ben Moyal's descendants were responsible for helping create this book.

During Elul of the year 5670, Rabbi Yehudah was able to reach Jerusalem. On Shabbat, Tevet 29, he was invited for *Seudah Shelishith* along with members of the Maghreb community, when suddenly he said to those present: "Read the *Shema*, for the time has come." As they were reading, Rabbi Yehudah ben Moyal's soul departed for the celestial yeshiva with extraordinary serenity, a typical attribute of the Rav, leaving his face radiant and peaceful looking. He was buried on the Mount of Olives, in the section of the Maghreb, near the Temple Mount.