

The Path To Follow

Tetsaveh

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The Power Of Beginnings

It is written, "They shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to light the lamp continually" (*Shemot* 27:20). The Sages teach, "There are three [crops of] olives, and each crop gives three kinds of oil. The first crop of olives is when the olives are picked from the top of the tree. They are pounded and put into the basket, yielding the first oil. They are then pressed with the beam, yielding the second oil. They are then ground and pressed again, yielding the third oil. The first [oil] is fit for the Menorah, and the others for the meal-offerings" (Mishnah in *Menachot* 86:1).

We may ask why the first oil is so special, such that it alone may be used for the Menorah.

We can explain this according a statement in the Midrash: "[G-d says,] 'Present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass.' Rabbi Tanchuma, Rabbi Hunia, and Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Resh Lakish: It is written, 'Desist and know that I am G-d' [*Tehillim* 46:11]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'Desist from your evil deeds and know that I am G-d.' Rabbi Levi said, 'Were Israel to practice repentance even for one day, they would be immediately redeemed, and the scion of David would immediately come.' How do we know this? Because it says, 'For He is our G-d, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would but hearken to His voice' [ibid 95:7]" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 5:3).

The Holy One, blessed be He, asks for only one thing, namely that a person starts with repentance and good deeds. As soon as he begins to repent, the Holy One, blessed be He, will immediately help him to resist the evil inclination. The Sages teach, "One is allowed to follow the path he wishes to pursue" (*Makkot* 10b), something that depends solely on the beginning, as it is written: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem" (*Tehillim* 111:10). Also, "Now, O Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear" (*Devarim* 10:12). When we have fear, we have everything; and when we lack fear, we have nothing. Without fear, even repentance is far from perfect.

From here we learn just how important beginnings are. The early Sages said, "Fervor is never greater than at the beginning." When we start getting used to something, we lose our focus and pay less attention to it. In this regard our Sages have taught: Let it not seem in your eyes like the same old story that nobody can tolerate any longer, but like something new that everyone seeks (*Sifrei, Va'etchanan* 6:8). When words of Torah become old to someone, they lose their enthusiasm and people observe them out of habit. In that case, they are called "commandments of men learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13), which people do not observe with full concentration.

However when they seem new to someone, enthusiasm returns each day.

The essence of a *mitzvah*, and indeed the essence of everything, depends on its beginning. Hence the first kind of oil was suitable for the Menorah, thereby hinting to the Children of Israel that if they created an opening as large as the eye of a needle, G-d would widen it into a large opening and enable them to defeat the evil inclination. There is no reason to fear the outcome, for the Sages in the Mishnah have said: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but you are not free to desist from it" (*Pirkei Avoth* 2:16). This means that when you start something, G-d will immediately come and help you. A person should not think, "How can I start learning Torah and fulfilling *mitzvot*? The Torah is so vast, it contains hundreds of extremely important *mitzvot*, and hundreds of serious sins depend on it! How can I pay attention to it all?" To answer these questions, the Torah says that the first kind of oil was required for the Menorah, meaning that we only need to start, and G-d will help us finish.

This is why the Menorah was lit by the *kohen*, who remained there until the flame ascended on its own (*Shabbat* 21a). In fact the Menorah alludes to the Torah, as it is written: "For a *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23). When a person begins observing a *mitzvah* and lights it in his heart, the Holy One, blessed be He, helps him and the flame ascends on its own. As the Sages have said, "If one comes to purify himself, he is helped" (*Yoma* 38b).

They Can Maintain Peace

The power of beginnings is great in every area. Just as a good beginning is of capital importance when it consists of *mitzvot*, it is also important for everything else. Oftentimes, disputes arise between people or between a man and his wife. Yet because people fail to control themselves at the beginning, when they see faults in others, they instantly get angry and everything degenerates from there. If they were to control themselves at the very beginning – thinking before getting angry, or before saying something that will lead to strife and hatred – they could maintain peace between them.

A wise man possesses the great characteristic of "not rushing to answer" (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:7), for he gives himself time to think before speaking. As our Sages have said, "The commoner always jumps to the front" (*Megillah* 12b). We know what Rabbi Israel Salanter said, namely that before a person says anything, he is the master of his words and can choose to speak or not to speak. However once he says something, he can no longer take it back. Even if he regrets it, he has already spoken and can no longer do anything about it.

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This is why the Sages have said, "Heaven and earth were created only for the sake of Israel, for it is written: 'Because of *reshith*, G-d created Heaven and earth' [*Bereshith* 1:1], and *reshith* cannot mean anything but Israel" (*Vayikra Rabba* 36:4). The Sages have also said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world only for three things that are called *reshith*, and these are: Torah, Israel, and the fear of Heaven" (*Seder Rabba d'Bereshith* 5). When a person starts with Torah and the fear of Heaven, which are a beginning, he

becomes worthy for the world to have been created for his sake, and Hashem helps him.

The Gemara gives us a wonderful example of this: " 'The fear of Hashem is his treasure' [*Isaiah* 33:6]. ... This may be compared to a man who instructed his emissary, 'Bring up a *kor* of wheat to the loft,' and he went and did so. 'Did you mix in a *kab* of *humton* [a preservative]?' he asked him. 'No,' he replied. 'Then it would have been better had you not carried it up,' he retorted" (*Shabbat* 31a).

Real Life Stories

During the time of Rabbi Yehudah Assad *Zatzal*, one of the greatest rabbis of Hungary, there lived a simple Jew in the small town of Serdihal who worked as a *shamash* in the local synagogue. He was so simple-minded and innocent that every day, as he lit the lamps in the synagogue, he would put on his *gartel* and say: "*Leshem yichud*... to fulfill the *mitzvah* of 'glorifying Hashem with the lights.' My intention is that the lighting of these lamps in the synagogue will fulfill all the *yichudim* of lighting the lamps in the Temple."

These words emerged from his mouth with great concentration, with true innocence and purity. They came from a Jew who faithfully served his Creator.

The *shamash* did this every day. He would light the lamps in synagogue, his mouth murmuring the words *leshem yichud*, and his heart overflowing with pure and innocent intentions, hoping that it would be accepted as during the time of the Temple, when the *Kohen Gadol* ascended to prepare the lamps in front of the Holy of Holies.

The congregants, who heard him, were astounded by the magnitude of his innocence and the purity of his heart.

One day, the town butcher was in synagogue as the *shamash* was lighting the lamps. When he saw this incredible sight, he was moved to the point of becoming jealous of the *shamash's* actions and his great merit. He quickly approached the *shamash* and asked, "Would you be willing to sell me the merit of this great *mitzvah* of lighting the lamps?" However the butcher was not content on just making this offer, so he included a large sum of money, which he would give to the *shamash* if he agreed.

The *shamash*, who understood the value of this special *mitzvah*, absolutely refused to sell it to the butcher. However the butcher did not give up, and every day he arrived in synagogue and followed the *shamash*, begging him for the *mitzvah*.

The butcher managed to become so troublesome that the *shamash* decided to speak to Rabbi Yehudah Assad. When he heard this story, he advised the *shamash* to give the *mitzvah* to the butcher in exchange for a gold coin every day. Although this was a large sum of money, Rabbi Yehuda told the *shamash* not to spend it, but to put it aside.

Time to Use the Money

Although this order was very difficult for the *shamash* to follow, since he cherished the *mitzvah* of lighting the lamps, he obeyed the Rav of the town by following his orders. Thus every day, the butcher gave the *shamash* a gold coin and lit the lamps of the synagogue with reverence and love.

For his part, the *shamash* also observed the second part of Rabbi Yehudah's orders, namely to put aside the money that he received from the butcher, without spending it. As the years went on, he amassed an enormous amount of money.

It is amazing to consider the level of these Jews! What moving innocence they had! What love for *mitzvot* they possessed! Happy are you, O Israel!

One day a certain congregant met the butcher in synagogue, who was weeping bitterly. When the butcher was asked what had happened, he explained that his daughter had become engaged that week, but he did not have money for her dowry!

When news reached the ears of Rabbi Yehuda Assad, he approached the *shamash* and said to him: "The time has come to use the money to perform a great *mitzvah*. Take all the money that the butcher has been giving you for all these years, the money that you put aside, and give it back to him so he can honorably marry off his daughter."

What did the *shamash* do?

In the purity of his heart, the *shamash* did not say a word, but did what he was told. The most surprising thing is that when he counted the money he had put aside, Rabbi Yehudah Assad took heaven and earth as witnesses "that it was the exact amount which the butcher had committed himself to giving for his daughter's dowry, to the very last coin! Not a single more or less!"

The Wheel of Mitzvot

In the final analysis, what had the *shamash* done? He lit the lamps of the synagogue with great concentration and pure innocence. This deed led to a great series of *mitzvot* in which everyone came out a winner. Besides the fear of Heaven that we can learn from such an amazing story, there are several other lessons it contains:

1. The butcher believed that he was giving the money to the *shamash*, but it turned out that it was really for himself, allowing him to marry off his daughter with honor.
2. By the great *mitzvah* which the *shamash* performed by lighting the lamps in such a special way, the merit of providing a woman with a dowry was transferred to him.
3. This lighting of the synagogue lamps caused a "lighting of the holy lights" in the soul of the butcher, a simple man, arousing an enthusiasm for the *mitzvah* within him.

Guarde Your Tongue

Lashon Harah About a Child

The prohibition against *Lashon Harah* applies even in regards to a child. For example, *Lashon Harah* about a young orphan being raised in the home of others is forbidden, for it may cause him to be chased out of the home. If our intention is to avoid some damage that may be caused by a child, and to guide him on the right path, then it is permitted. However we must know with complete certainty that the account we plan on giving is accurate, and we must not hastily depend on what we have heard from others. We must also foresee the consequences of what we plan on saying, for oftentimes injustices result from such situations.

Moshe's Name

It is written, "And you, command the Children of Israel" (*Shemot* 27:20).

We know the famous question raised by the commentators, who noted that Moshe's name does not appear anywhere in *Parsha Tetzaveh*.

Why?

Many reasons have been given.

The Baal HaTurim explains that throughout the Chumash, starting from Moshe's birth, there is no other *parsha* in which Moshe's name is not mentioned, other than in *Sefer Devarim*. The reason is because Moshe said, "Erase me, please, from Your book that You have written" (*Shemot* 32:32), and the curse of a Torah scholar is carried out even when it is conditional. Hence Moshe's name does not appear in *Parsha Tetzaveh*.

The Vilna Gaon *Zatzal* writes that according to Kabbalah, it is because almost every year Adar 7 falls on the week in which we read *Parsha Tetzaveh*. The One Who saw to the end of the generations knew in advance that Moshe would die on Adar 7, which is why his name is not mentioned in that *parsha*, an allusion to his passing.

Giving for a Mitzvah

It is written, "To light the lamp continually" (*Shemot* 27:20).

Thus it is written, "For a *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23).

Oftentimes a person will have a heartfelt desire to perform a *mitzvah*, but the evil inclination that dwells in him will protest: "Why do this *mitzvah*? You'll lose money on it. Before giving to others, think of your own children!"

The good inclination will say, "Give for the *mitzvah*. See what is written: 'For a *mitzvah* is a lamp' – for just as we can light even thousands of candles from a lamp that is burning, likewise everything we give for the sake of a *mitzvah* will not take away from any of our possessions." Hence it is written, "For a *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Midrash Rabba*).

To Engrave or Not?

It is written, "Engrave upon them the names of the sons of Israel" (*Shemot* 28:9).

Here the Torah commands the stones of the *Ephod* to be engraved with a stylus. Where we find the expression *bemilu'otam* ("in their perfect state" [*Shemot* 28:20]), ink was used only for tracing, and the *shamir* was placed on it and cut into the stone. Therefore the "engraving" was not really an action, but rather led to an action. As the Gemara states, the stones "split on their own" (*Sotah* 48b). Hence it is difficult to understand how both of these verses could be fulfilled at the same time: "Engrave upon them" (*Shemot* 28:9) and "Like the engravings of a signet shall you engrave" (v.11). The first verse refers to the actions of the hands, not to engraving that occurs on its own.

Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank explained this according to the words of the Ramban, meaning that the expression *bemilu'otam* ("in their perfect state") refers only to the stones of the *Choshen*, which means that the command that they be "perfect" (*i.e.*, whole)

applied only to them. They were therefore engraved by the *shamir*. However the stones of the *Ephod* were engraved by a craftsman. We therefore understand that these orders – "Engrave upon them" (v.9) and "shall you engrave" (v.11) – were given for the *Ephod*, which could be engraved by hand and not by the *shamir*. Such was not the case for the stones of the *Choshen*, which were to be engraved by the *shamir*, not by hand.

According to this explanation, we can also understand why for the *Choshen* it is written: "The stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel" (*Shemot* 28:21), which seems to mean in any case, without the need to engrave them by hand.

Refusing to Teach

It is written, "You shall engrave upon it, like the engravings of a signet: Holiness to Hashem" (*Shemot* 28:36).

In his book *Minchat Chinuch*, Rabbi Yosef Bavad *Zatzal* notes that when a scribe wrote the letters *yud* and *hei*, he apparently already had Hashem's Name before him. Hence by continuing, it seems that he was erasing this Name.

This is why our Sages reprimanded Ben Kamtzar for failing to teach others his skills in writing. He knew how to write Hashem's Name by writing its four letters all at once, meaning that no erasing of the Name occurred.

The fact that he did not want to teach this skill to others was criticized by the Sages.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Holy Menorah Alludes to Shabbat

It is written, "And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to light the lamp continually" (*Shemot* 27:20).

I would like to explain this verse by way of allusion. In fact the holy Menorah alludes to Shabbat: Its six branches allude to the six days of the week, with three branches on one side alluding to the three days of the week following Shabbat – days that are nourished from the holiness of that Shabbat – and the three branches on the other side alluding to the three days of the week prior to Shabbat – days that are also nourished from the holiness of that Shabbat. The seven lamps that burn before the face of the Menorah allude to the fact that the six days of the week are blessed by Shabbat.

The verse is saying, "And you, command the Children of Israel" – you, Moshe, who ascended to Heaven and remained there for 40 days and 40 nights – you who contemplated the immense happiness of rejoicing in the splendor of the *Shechinah* – you can teach the Children of Israel about the infinite pleasure of Shabbat, which is truly a "foretaste of the World to Come."

The verse then says, "that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil" – an allusion to the additional soul that a person receives on the holy Shabbat. In fact the term *hashemen* ("the oil") is formed by the same letters as *neschama* ("soul"), telling us that this additional soul will shine in them forever, every Shabbat, illuminating the six days of the week.

The fire of the Torah burned in the *chacham* Salman Moutsaphi *Zatzal*. From his youth, he was an example of diligence among the students of the yeshiva.

Rabbi Yechezkel Dorai described him as follows: “I taught a group of youngsters from the yeshiva, and I supervised them in the evenings. At midnight, I would go through the hallways and see Rabbi Salmon Moutsaphi seated in the Beit HaMidrash. All his friends were tired after having studied for the entire day, and they were asleep in their beds or on benches, while he alone was seated at a table learning. When he got tired, he would sleep with his head on the table. He did this every night, and I never saw him sleeping on a bench.”

Near the end of Rabbi Salman’s life, while beset by various ills that prevented him from learning for hour after hour without stop, as in his youth, he let out a sigh and said: “In times past I was so diligent, two hours of sleep a night was enough for me. With my friend Rabbi Yaakov Moutsaphi [his close relative], we would study for 18 straight hours without eating or resting. We hid ourselves in a corner of the Beit HaMidrash, without anyone sensing our presence. Sometimes our parents would send someone to call us to eat or rest a little, but they could not find us.”

I Will Yet Sleep a Long Time

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian *Zatzal* recounted that in his youth, he would usually stand while learning for six hours straight during the third *sefer* [study session]. He studied without respite starting from Thursday morning, continuing on the entire night that followed, and extending to Friday until Shabbat began. He also recounted that after his wedding, he studied alone at Kelm, not returning home except for the holidays. During that time, he studied with the great men of the generation and was able to go through the entire *Shulchan Aruch* with the commentary of the Vilna Gaon.

One night, Rabbi Eliyahu’s family saw that the light in his room was still on very late at night, much later than normal, and we know that he used to wake up very early each morning. A family member entered his room to tell him that it was already very late, and that even the yeshiva students were already long asleep.

Rabbi Eliyahu gently replied, “Of course they can sleep, since they still have a long time left here. However I’m old, and I already have one foot in the grave. I therefore have to make use of everything I can.” He then promised, “I will yet sleep a long time. I will yet sleep a long time!”

On another occasion, when someone suggested that Rabbi Eliyahu go to bed early, he replied: “You know, there is someone else who encourages me to sleep – the evil inclination!”

One of his students said, “I once went to see Rabbi Eliyahu in order to bring him breakfast, and I realized that he was very tired. I asked him why, and he replied: ‘I will tell you: I get up before dawn.’ I asked him why he got up so early, since prayers at the yeshiva only started at 7 am. He replied, ‘It is written in the *seforim* that when a man arrives in the world above, he will be asked if he fulfilled Torah and *mitzvot*, to which he will probably

say yes. The four parts of the *Shulchan Aruch* will then be brought, and he will be questioned on one section after another. They will certainly begin with the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*. In the first section, Rabbi Yosef Karo writes: “A man must strengthen himself like a lion to arise in the morning and serve his Creator, that he be awake with the dawn.” Naturally, it won’t be good to be at fault from the very outset, which is why I arise early in the morning, so I can say that I fulfilled this section.’”

Something to Think About

Every year on Rosh Chodesh Elul, the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak David Rotman *Zatzal* (the father-in-law of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian) would leave his home and shut himself inside the Beit HaMidrash until Rosh Hashanah, where his wife would send his meals. His son, Rabbi Israel, recounted that he saw his father taking these meals and giving them to a poor boy who was learning at the Beit HaMidrash, while he himself was content with a small piece of bread.

For a certain time, Rabbi Yitzchak David isolated himself in a forest cabin outside of town. On Sunday mornings, he would take two loaves of black bread and a pitcher of water, which would last him until Friday. During the week, he spent the night plumbing the depths of Halachah, happy to have the merit of learning the holy Torah. He recorded his thoughts during that time:

“To merit seeing the light of G-d in truth, even eating dry bread is enough for man, for what are all the vanities of this world and its pleasures compared to a single word of Torah? As the verse says, ‘All your desires cannot be compared to it’ [*Mishlei* 3:15]. That is why anyone who devotes himself to the study of Torah and the service of G-d, even if he lives in poverty, must not get discouraged. In truth, he is richer than the wealthy when he perceives the light of the holy Torah, which is more valuable than pure gold and sweeter than honey.”

When Rabbi Yitzchak David was questioned as to the meaning of his custom, and on whether it was better to act otherwise, he replied with a parable drawn from everyday life:

“When a great and wealthy merchant, a man who lives in a house that lacks absolutely nothing, leaves his beloved family and town for a journey that takes him on dangerous roads for many months in the hope of earning a large profit at various fairs, everyone understands this, and they all congratulate him on his courage and devotion. Nobody objects by saying, ‘Why are you doing this? What good will this exhausting trip accomplish?’ When it comes to earning money, everyone understands such behavior, for money justifies all kinds of devotion. Yet when it comes to strengthening oneself in Torah and acquiring greater character traits and refining the soul – something that does not require traveling along various roads, does not put a person in danger, and does not mean that he must leave his home for half a year, only to enclose himself in the Beit HaMidrash for a few months – immediately everyone is surprised by this behavior and tells him to do something else. Isn’t *that* astonishing?”