

The Path To Follow

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He Who Seeks Rest, Let Him Study Torah!

It is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings" (*Bereshith* 37:1). The Sages have said, "When the *tzaddikim* wish to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: 'Are they not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, that they wish to live in peace even in this world!' The proof lies in the fact that the Patriarch Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph's Satan" (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:3).

I believe that this *parsha* was written for all the generations in order to teach people just how great are 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). Look at the difference between the early generations and the later generations: The early generations devoted themselves entirely to learning Torah without stopping to rest for even a moment, as the Sages said in regards to 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).

Everything Has Been Reversed

The Sages also say, "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). The Sages also say in the Midrash, "Torah scholars who go from town to town and from country to country in order to study Torah, I remove the yoke of government from them" (Midrash 400). This is why 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 later generations, everything has been reversed: In the summertime, people put spiritual matters aside and neglect the study of Torah so they can go on vacation. Although they leave their homes for a vacation destination, 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 the soul of a Jew 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 or free time. The Torah itself constitutes freedom, the greatest kind of freedom. 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. As the Sages have said, "Exile yourself to a place of study" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:14), not "exile yourself on vacation."

The early generations enjoyed rest, despite never taking time

off from the words of Torah. How? By learning Torah! It is also written, "These are the generations of Noah – Noah" (*Bereshith* 6:9). Now the name Noah is formed from a root that means "rest," teaching us that whenever Noah wanted to rest from words of Torah, he returned to learning. I have heard that at the end of Yom Kippur, the saintly Rabbi Chaim of Sanz *Zatzal*, after an exhausting day of prayer and pouring out his soul before Hashem, told his *Shamash* that he wanted to rest a little from his service of G-d on that day. He then went to his room, with his *Shamash* following behind to see what he would do. He saw Rabbi Chaim take tractate *Sukkah* and begin studying 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 finish the entire tractate. This is how the *tzaddikim* rested from the exhaustion of Yom Kippur, by a different service of G-d, the study of Torah. Why? Because they only found rest through words of Torah, meaning that they did not need a physical rest, but a spiritual one.

Regarding our forefathers, our Sages have also said: "Our fathers were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva" (*Yoma* 28b). This is curious: Why a yeshiva? Could they not have studied Torah at home? Concerning our father Jacob, we read: "He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to teach" (*Bereshith* 46:28). What is implied by "to teach"? The Sages say, "To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal fathers would study Torah" (*Bereshith Rabba* 95:3). Could they not have studied at home? Why did they need a yeshiva?

They Studied Only in a Yeshiva

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, a term that comes from the root *yashav* (to sit), which indicates rest. As the Sages have said, the term *yeshiva* denotes lingering (*Megillah* 21a). By going from one yeshiva to another, they found rest. As for later generations, despite going on vacation after vacation, they still find no rest. This is understandable, since the only free man is one who studies Torah, and man's soul is only satisfied by words of Torah.

This is why our father Jacob was punished when he wanted to settle down in peace. G-d 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 take away a person's peace and do not allow him to rest in this world."



Concerning the Parsha

Even as Adults

It is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings" (*Bereshith* 37:1).

The Midrash states, "When the *tzaddikim* want to live in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: 'Are they not content with what is in store for them in the hereafter, that they wish to live in peace even in this world!'" (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:3).

In reality, why would the *tzaddikim* not wish to live in peace? Does the Holy One, blessed be He, not want the *tzaddikim* to live in peace, which is pleasant for them and pleasant for the world?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *Zatzal* explained it as follows: Jacob wanted to live in peace with regards to the education of his children. He thought that he no longer had to worry about the education of his children, who were all *tzaddikim* and G-d fearing men, and that the Holy One, blessed be He, would glory Himself in them. At that point, Jacob was attacked by Joseph's Satan.

This teaches us that a father must never turn his attention away from his children, even when they are mature, righteous, and G-d fearing individuals. He must constantly admonish them when necessary, and show them how to act.

Why Imprisonment?

It is written, "Joseph's master took him and put him in prison" (*Bereshith* 39:20).

Is this the Torah, and is this its reward? After the great trial that Joseph overcame, was this his reward – to be imprisoned for 12 years?!

The Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka *Zatzal* explains that since the time had not yet come for Joseph to reign, there was the risk that if he remained in Potiphar's house, Potiphar's wife (or others) would return, in which case Joseph would constantly have to battle his instincts and always be faced with a trial. Hence for Joseph's spiritual protection, Divine wisdom decreed that only prison was good for him. Yet in order for him not to lose hope, "Hashem was with Joseph and extended kindness to him" (*Bereshith* 39:21). Joseph felt that Hashem was with him, and he did not despair in prison.

A Shaliach Mitzvah

It is written, "Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word" (*Bereshith* 37:14).

The book *Tevuat Yonatan* cites the words of the Gemara here: "Those sent for a *mitzvah* do not suffer harm" (*Pesachim* 8a). The book *Chukei Chaim* states in this regard, "One who wants to travel far, let his friend give him some money and say, 'Be my emissary, and when you arrive at your destination, give this money as *tzeddakah* for me.' He is then called a *shaliach mitzvah* [emissary sent for a *mitzvah*], and no harm will come to him on the road."

Our father Jacob personally understood the struggle that exists between brothers, and he feared for Joseph. That is why he made him into a *shaliach mitzvah*, telling him to "look into the welfare of your brothers." He also wanted Joseph to have the status of a *shaliach mitzvah* upon his return, which is why he said: "bring me back word." He wanted for Joseph's return to also be considered a *mitzvah*, in order for nothing bad to happen to him.

Kinah

It is written, "His brothers were jealous of him" (*Bereshith* 37:11).

It would seem that jealous is alluded to in the name Joseph, for it has the same numerical value as *kinah* ("jealousy").

Ein Bo

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

Why did the Sages explain that the well was not empty, but contained serpents and scorpions?

The *Sefer Chassidim* notes that letters of the expression *ein bo*

("nothing in it") form the initials of *aval nechashim ve'akravim yesh bo* ("but there were serpents and scorpions in it").

– *Torat Bnei Issachar*

Ya'akov Yosef

It is written, "These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph..." (*Bereshith* 37:2).

This contains an amazing allusion, for the letters forming the name Jacob (*Ya'akov*: *yud-ayin-kuph-beit*) emerge from the name Joseph (*Yosef*: *yud-vav-samech-peh*).

In fact if you remove the *yud* from the letter *yud* (*yud-vav-dalet*) in Jacob's name, there remains *vav-delet*, which combined have a numerical value of ten (*yud*). This is the *yud* in Joseph's name.

If you remove the *ayin* from the letter *ayin* (*ayin-yud-nun*) in Jacob's name, there remains *yud-nun*, which combined have a numerical value of 60 (*samech*). This is the *samech* of Joseph's name.

If you remove the *kuph* from the letter *kuph* (*kuph-vav-peh*) in Jacob's name, there remains *vav-peh*, which are the remaining letters in the name Joseph.

– *Peninei Daniel*, citing the Gaon Rabbi Yehudah Moyal Shlita

In the Light of the Parsha

Negligence in Torah Study is the Worst of All

It is written, "Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. Now it came to pass, after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph" (*Bereshith* 39:6-7). From the fact that the passage states that Potiphar's wife "cast her eyes upon Joseph," right after telling us that he was handsome, this indicates a cause and effect relationship. This is surprising, for could we possibly think that the righteous Joseph adorned himself before the wife of Potiphar? Even before he went down to Egypt, Joseph studied Torah and reviewed with Jacob all the laws that Shem and Eber had transmitted to him (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:8). This means that Joseph had no time to devote to frivolous matters, nor to see whether he was handsome or not! When he arrived in Egypt, Potiphar's wife saw him and tried to entice him, as our Sages have said: "The wife of Potiphar tried to entice him with words every day. The garments she put on for him in the morning, she did not wear in the evening; those she had put on in the evening, she did not wear in the morning" (*Yoma* 35b). Joseph immediately began to forget his father's house, as the Sages have said: "When I was at home, my father would place before me every good thing that he saw, which made my brothers envious. Now I give thanks to You that I am at ease" (*Bereshith Rabba* 87:4). Since he stopped studying Torah in poverty and wanted to continue living at ease, he began to look after himself and focus on his appearance. Had it not been for his father, whose image appeared before him, Joseph would have succumbed to sin (*Sotah* 36b). The Sages have said, "This is like a man who sat in the street, penciling his eyes, curling his hair, and lifting his heel while shouting: 'I am indeed a man.' Bystanders replied, 'If you are a man, here is a bear. Get up and attack it!'" (*Bereshith Rabba* 87:3).

If such was the case with the righteous Joseph, how much more does it apply to us! How much more should we pay attention to a single instance of neglecting the study of Torah so as not to succumb to sin! Indeed, just as the Sages have said that the study of Torah is equal to all other *mitzvot* (*Peah* 1:1), likewise its negligence is equal to all other sins. All sins present themselves to one who neglects the study of Torah.

Napoleon and the Chief Cupbearer

It is written, “If only you would think of me when things go well with you, and please do me a favor and mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place” (*Bereshith* 40:14).

In the book *Oznaim LaTorah*, we find an account given by the Rav of Brisk in the name of his father, Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik:

During the time of the Napoleonic wars in eastern Europe, a formal dinner was organized in honor of the Emperor at the home of a nobleman in Kovno province. Invited to this dinner were the representatives of various religions, but not a Jewish rabbi. During the speeches given in honor of the “glorious victor,” Napoleon asked why no representative of the Jewish religion was present. Immediately, someone was sent to look for the old Rav in a nearby town.

When the Rav heard that he was being summoned, he was terrified, for he did not know how to act before an emperor. When he arrived at the dinner and it was his turn to speak, he began with an apology, saying that he was an old Rav from a small village who was used to speaking words of Torah only, not delivering speeches in honor of an emperor.

Napoleon told him that he had already heard enough praise and flattery from people at the dinner, and that he had invited the Rav to hear the “Torah perspective” on his brave deeds and the wars that he had fought.

Feeling encouraged, the Rav said the following:

“You, Sire, and the nobles who are here, you have read the story of Joseph and the dreams that he interpreted for the chief cupbearer and chief baker. As you know, after having promised the chief cupbearer that Pharaoh would give him back his position in the royal court after three days, Joseph asked that he mention him to Pharaoh and take him out of prison: ‘If only you would think of me.’ However requests do not usually start with ‘if only’ – other things begin with such an expression – so why did Joseph use it?”

“The answer is that in reality, Joseph used this expression to explain the strange and unusual interpretation that he had given to the chief cupbearer’s dream. As we know, there are two types of servants employed in a royal court: The first type consists of secondary servants, those who are thrown into prison and questioned like anyone else if anyone hears that they have transgressed any law. If the judges find them guilty, they are punished according to their transgression, and if they are found innocent, they are returned to their position. The second type consists of prominent ministers and officers of high standing. If rumors are heard that they had committed a transgression, they are not so quickly imprisoned on the basis of a simple suspicion. A thorough investigation is first conducted, and if it proves that rumors are true, they are removed from their position with dignity, meaning that they are given a ‘leave of absence.’ If their crime is too great, however, they are held in prison and judged for their transgression.

“According to this explanation, a secondary servant who finds himself in prison can not only hope of regaining his freedom, but also his position. In fact if he is in prison, it does not mean that

he is guilty, since he is imprisoned first and questioned only later. However if a minister finds himself in prison – since he is only imprisoned once his guilt is certain, not upon a mere suspicion, so as not to damage the honor of royal ministers – his only hope is that his punishment will be diminished when he is judged because he has good attorneys. He has no hope of being completely acquitted, and even less hope of returning to his position.

“When Joseph interpreted the dream of the chief cupbearer, who had already been in prison for an entire year, telling him that he would be returned to his position and serve Pharaoh as before – Joseph saw a look of astonishment on his face. As we have said, it is unusual for a minister to be released from prison and returned to the royal court.

“This is why Joseph took the initiative by telling him, ‘Since no investigation was done before you were imprisoned, you shall be returned to your position. And if you say, ‘How is it possible for a minister such as myself to be placed in prison without a prior investigation,’ know that this is indeed contrary to how things happen, for Heaven decreed your imprisonment so you could see an innocent man in prison and free him. The real reason for your imprisonment is “if only you would think of me.” Therefore don’t be surprised at what has happened to you.’ ”

Heaven Sent You Here

After giving this explanation, the Rav turned to Napoleon and said to him: “It is truly difficult to understand what you are doing in eastern Europe, which is like a prison compared to the wealth of western Europe. It is also difficult to understand all your victories over the nations, which have allowed you to reach this far east. However the true reason is that Heaven has sent you here so you could see with your own eyes just how the Jewish people, the descendants of the righteous Joseph, are imprisoned here. You have been sent here to see how they suffer as a result of unjust laws, how food has been taken from their mouths, and how they have been overwhelmed by harsh decrees.

“Sire!” exclaimed the Rav. “Heaven has given you power and strength to conquer all the nations of western Europe, and you have been sent here to see the persecuted innocents. ‘If only you would think of me when things go well with you,’ when you conquer eastern Europe as well, and take us out of this prison and give us fair laws in order that we may no longer live in misery and hardship.”

The Emperor held the old Rav’s hand firmly and thanked him for his words, which had greatly impressed him.

Guard Your Tongue!

He Did Nothing Wrong

Although it is forbidden by the Torah to believe *Lashon Harah*, meaning to decide in your mind that what you have heard is true, the Sages have said that you must still be cautious. This means that you must regard what you have heard as a simple suspicion, so as to protect yourself from harm. You must not even consider it as a doubt, for you must continue to believe that the person in question has done nothing wrong.

– Chafetz Chaim

The verse, "Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi" (*Bereshith* 24:62), was explained by Rabbeinu Avraham, the son of the Rambam, in the following way: "This means that Isaac would usually leave the place where he lived and go into the desert towards the well in question, in his fervor to serve G-d and his desire to seek solitude. He would linger there for a time, and then return to his home. The verse is telling us that the encounter in question occurred as Isaac was returning from this well, not when he left for it.

"The practicality of this, it seems to me, consists of telling those who study Torah that Isaac did not abandon his service of G-d and return because Rebecca was arriving with Eliezer. Instead, his encounter with them occurred after he had finished praying and was returning from it. This is why he returned with them, as emerges from the account."

From these marvelous words of Rabbeinu Avraham, we understand the tremendous importance of Isaac's service of Hashem, to the point that even to welcome his fiancée, who was coming to his home for the first time, it was not fitting to cancel a permanent aspect of Torah and the service of Hashem. The verse is teaching us that Isaac only went to welcome Rebecca after his service was completed and he had returned from it.

He Did Not Attend Weddings

The book *Zahav Sheva* recounts an interesting story that touches upon this subject: "How these things are awe-inspiring in regards to our generation! For with each celebration at the yeshiva, each *Sheva Berachot*, each Bar Mitzvah and the like, we easily cancel our usual study habits at the yeshiva, even to travel to another city, and in recent times to another country! I remember that at the Mir yeshiva in Poland, the students grew up together for decades, and yet they did not attend each other's wedding even when the wedding was short and not far away. Only the five closest friends of the groom attended. The *gaon* Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky *Zatzal* once asked a student why he was not present at a study session. When he replied that he had attended a wedding, Rabbi Yechezkel was stunned: 'You cancelled three hours of learning for a wedding? When I was young, I attended only two weddings: My sister's and my own!'"

Knocking at the Doors of Jews

Among Syrian Jews, old and young alike, a tradition has been carefully preserved for hundreds of years, even to the present day. This is the tradition of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of learning Torah regularly each day, whatever may happen. Setting aside a time for learning Torah is considered by the Jews of Aleppo as something that cannot be changed, a *mitzvah* whose fruits we eat in this world, while its principal reward is reserved for the World to Come. As our Sages cite Rav Hamnuna in the Gemara, "The beginning of man's judgment is in respect to study alone, for it is said: 'The rejection of water is the beginning of judgment' [*Mishlei* 17:14]. Just as the judgment thereof takes precedence over that of practice, so does the reward thereof, for it is said: 'He gave them the lands of nations, and they inherited the toil of kingdoms, so that

they may keep His statutes and observe His laws' [*Tehillim* 105:44]" (*Kiddushin* 40b).

In his book *Korban Ishei*, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Avraham Antebi *Zatzal*, the Av Beit Din of Syria, gives a clear account of this, describing an extraordinary phenomenon that occurred in his community:

"I will describe what I saw in my old age. Hashem aroused the spirit of a descendant from the house of David, the *Chacham* Yedidia ben Dayan. He would courageously arise before midnight, take synagogue employees with him, and go knocking at the doors of Jews, telling them to get up and come to synagogue after midnight.

"Hashem was with him, and they quickly arose and went to synagogue, without anybody refusing. In fact the large majority of the community would arise after midnight and head towards the synagogue.

"They gathered in small groups. One group was comprised of dedicated *talmidei chachamim* who studied Gemara and Tosaphot, a group that I was part of. Another group studied the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* with a *talmid chacham* who studied along with them to explain. Another group studied the Zohar, while another group studied books of Mussar such as *Reshith Chochma*, *Kad HaKemach*, and others. Now the *Shechinah* is found whenever ten Jews study together.

"Every Thursday night, several people would go to synagogue at the start of the night and stay there learning *Tikkun Tzemach* until morning. On Friday night they would arrive at synagogue before it was dark, fill the lamps with oil, and light numerous candles throughout the building, which was filled with light. Most of the community came to study the entire book of *Tehillim* aloud, word by word, followed by the complete reading of *Shir HaShirim*. They did the same on the eve of every Rosh Chodesh. The entire community would spontaneously gather there because they desired to come to a synagogue that was so bright, glorifying the King through their numbers. This man repeated the verse, 'The yoke will be broken due to the oil' [*Isaiah* 10:27] – the yoke of Sennacherib will be destroyed due to the oil of Hezekiah [*Sanhedrin* 94b] (which provided light in order to study Torah)."

No Troubles

Rabbi Avraham Antebi concluded his account as follows:

"I swear by myself that as long as they practiced this good custom, there was light for Jews wherever they were. During all those years, they experienced neither misfortune nor trouble, for no Jew suffered any harm whatsoever. Of that generation it is said, 'Nothing harmful will happen to one who observes the *mitzvah*.' During the entire time that they practiced this custom, there was abundance in the world, and everything was priced at a bargain. Things could be obtained for free, money had no importance, the hearts of people were trouble-free, and no one died before his time. Of that generation I say, 'Your people are completely righteous.'"