

# The Path To Follow

**Shemot**

**425**

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## Extra Caution In The Holy Land

**K**ing David asked the Creator of the world, “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). The *Ba’alei HaMussar* have asked why King David only wanted to “visit” His Sanctuary. Did he not want to “dwell” in it, rather than just visit?

They have explained that a student who visits his teacher is not like one who regularly stays at his teacher’s home. A student who merely visits him – coming only from time to time – stands before his teacher with reverence, whereas one who is a regular in his teacher’s home will take him lightly and no longer sense the gulf between them. This is why King David asked to be like a student who visits his teacher’s home, not like one who is too often there. He wanted to constantly sense the pleasure that one feels upon seeing him for the first time, for by visiting only from time to time, he will not get used to this pleasure.

We can therefore understand what our Sages have said, namely that it is a *mitzvah* for every person, on the night of Passover, to consider himself as having personally left Egypt (*Pesachim* 116b). In fact the Sages were afraid that one who recalls the exodus from Egypt each day, morning and night, will end up growing accustomed to it. Hence the Torah has fixed a special time for revitalization, so that the exodus from Egypt should seem new in a person’s eyes, as if he himself had left Egypt. We find the same idea in regards to the study of Torah, which should seem new in our eyes (*Sifri, Va’etchanan* 6:8), so that we do end up learning Torah and performing *mitzvot* out of habit.

This may possibly be why the Torah commanded every Jew to travel to Jerusalem three times a year. The Sages have termed this *Aliyah laRegel*, an expression that requires an explanation. Were they going to spy (*laregel*)? They only went to Jerusalem and to the Temple! Yet because a person would go to Jerusalem for the holidays, he would succeed in removing the tendency for performing *mitzvot* out of habit (*hergel*), a tendency that made its way into him as he performed *mitzvot* without focusing on what he was doing.

### Routine Mitzvot

In fact we find that when the Children of Israel stopped going to Jerusalem for the holidays, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times” (*Isaiah* 1:14). The Sages say that a non-Jew once asked Rabbi Akiva why Jews celebrate the holidays, since Hashem had expressed Himself in this way. Rabbi Akiva replied, “If He had said, ‘My soul detests My New Moons and My appointed times,’ I would say as you do. However He said, ‘your New Moons and your appointed times’ – the holidays instituted by Jeroboam. As for the real holidays, they will never be abolished” (*Tanchuma, Pinchas* 17).

This teaches us that G-d did not say that He abhors the holidays of the Children of Israel, but only the holidays of Jeroboam, who did not allow the people to reach Jerusalem. When the Children of Israel stopped going to Jerusalem, they grew accustomed to the *mitzvot*, which became routine *mitzvot*, performed without any real concentration. Thus Hashem

said, “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times” – for as long as the holidays were those of G-d, and as long as people were careful not to fall into a rut, they would give G-d satisfaction. Yet when they stopped being those of G-d and became those of Israel, their intention was no longer to carry out Hashem’s commands, but to simply rejoice during the holidays with family and friends. It was in this regard that Hashem said: “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times” – you have grown accustomed to the *mitzvot* and forgotten the One Who gave them. I want nothing to do with them, for they are not Mine.

As long as the Children of Israel came to Jerusalem for the holidays, their deeds were performed for the sake of Heaven, and they did not fall into a rut or trample upon the *mitzvot*. Yet when they stopped going to Jerusalem for the holidays because of Jeroboam, they immediately began to forget their Creator. They ended up performing *mitzvot* out of habit, and celebrating the holidays only for their own pleasure, not for the sake of Heaven. In so doing they irritated G-d, Who said that He had no desire for such holidays.

### Like the First Time

According to what we have said, we can fully understand the command that G-d gave to Moshe: “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). The Sages say in the Midrash, “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). We need to understand why it is forbidden to wear shoes where the *Shechinah* dwells.

We may explain this by saying that the verse is teaching us a lesson in proper conduct. Given that “Hashem spoke to Moshe face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend” (*Shemot* 33:11), we could have thought that Moshe would have grown used to Hashem’s glory and no longer paid attention to it out of force of habit. In fact a student who speaks with his teacher once or twice is not the same as one who speaks with him nine or ten times, the latter’s sensitivity having been dulled by habit.

We find a story related to this in the Gemara: “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, the sensitivity of its residents to the Sages was dulled, for they treated the Sages like one of their own.

Since there was reason to fear that Moshe would grow accustomed to the glory of G-d, 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 teacher. 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,” My holiness being constantly the same.

## Concerning the Parsha

### Each Has His Own Name

The name of the second book in the Chumash, *Sefer Shemot*, raises questions among Torah commentators. Why does it carry this name? It is apparently because it begins with the words, "These are the *shemot* [names] of the Children of Israel." However this requires an explanation, for this expression ("these are the names of the Children of Israel") does not express the nature of the book, which deals with the exodus from Egypt. It should have been given a name that reveals the essence of the book. Why was the name *Shemot* chosen?

The book *Aleinu Leshabeach* explains this according to a remark by Sforno: "Those who are mentioned here were worthy of being known by their names, for each was worthy of carrying a name that revealed his individual personality."

This means that when the tribes were in Egypt, each of them succeeded in manifesting their full potential in a greater way than in Eretz Israel, close to their father Jacob. As a result, each corresponded to their "name," as the Sages have taught us: "These are mentioned here on account of the pending redemption of Israel: Reuven, as it is said, 'I have surely seen [*raoh raiti*] the affliction of my people' [*Shemot* 3:7]. Shimon, as it is said: 'And G-d heard [*vayishma*] their groaning' [*ibid.* 2:24]. Levi, for G-d associated Himself with them in their trouble from the midst of the bush..." (*Shemot Rabba* 1:5).

### Eliyahu's Coat

Among the Jewish people, there are names to which qualifiers have been added, qualifiers that have become an integral part of a name. For example, the qualifiers *ba'al aderet hase'ar* (one who has a coat of hair) was given to Eliyahu HaNavi. The Chatam Sofer asks why this coat is mentioned, and why Eliyahu wore it.

He explains that Eliyahu was afraid of *shatnez*. If he had worn a garment of wool, perhaps some linen would have gotten mixed into it. He therefore decided to wear what today we would call a "fur coat," meaning a garment made from the hide of an animal. He was therefore certain of not transgressing the grave prohibition of *shatnez*.

Since then, Eliyahu has been known as a *ba'al aderet hase'ar*, due to the great precautions that he took in regards to this issue. His students the prophets emulated him, men such as Elisha, who also wore a coat of hair.

From here we learn that some people have been given names, or qualifiers, on account of particular incidents that have occurred.

We find this in several places. For example, the leader of the tribe of Levi was called Achira ben Enan. Now was there ever a father who named his son Achira – *achi ra* ("my brother is evil")?

In his Torah commentary *Tola'at*, Rabbeinu Paltiel explains that since the Clouds of Glory rejected Dan on account of Micah's idolatry, the leader of the tribe of Dan cried out to his brother Naphtali: *Achi ezer ben Amishaddai*. In other words: "Help me my brother [*achi ezer*], so that I too may be part of my people [*ben ami*], the people of G-d [*Sha-dai*]." The leader of the tribe of Naphtali replied: "My brother [*achi*], remove the evil [*ra*] that is within you."

Hence this name was not given to him by his father. Rather, he was given this name due to a particular incident. As we know, every person has three names: The first is the name given to him by his parents, the second is the name given to him by his friends, and the third is the name that he acquires for himself.

This is what happened to the author of *Baruch She'amar*. He was an orphan, and he prayed at great length to his Father in Heaven for help. When he came to the prayer of *Baruch She'amar*, he said it with such devotion that his friends called him *Baruch She'amar*. He later wrote a book and gave it this name.

### Name or Number?

The holy *Shelah* wrote that after *Shemoneh Esrei*, a person should recite a verse whose first and last letters are those of his own name. This is a *segula* that will help a person not forget his name when he is judged before the Celestial Court after 120 years on earth.

In his commentary on *Parsha Vayishlach*, the Ridbaz states: "For example, if someone has murdered, he is condemned for his sin by being sent into exile, and his civil rights are removed. There are countries where serious criminals have their names taken away, and they are called by a number (one, two, etc.) to indicate that they are no longer considered human, who possess names. When these criminals write an appeal for clemency, they are forbidden to sign their names to it because they are not allowed to use human names. They sign as a murderer or thief, using a number."

The Ridbaz adds that this idea appears in the Torah: "Lest there be among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. [That man] will bless himself in his heart.... For then Hashem's anger and jealousy will smoke up against that man...and Hashem will erase his name from under Heaven" (*Devarim* 29:17-19). This means that Hashem erases a person's name and calls him by his sin and rebellion, as it is explicitly stated: "May his posterity be cut off; in a later generation let their name be erased. May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before Hashem, and the sin of his mother not be erased" (*Tehillim* 109:13-14). In other words, the name of his fathers is smeared with the name of his sin, and that of his mother with the name of his sin.

Thus by reminding ourselves of our name on the day of judgment, we prove that we have a real name, not just a "number."

## Guard Your Tongue!

### Not a Good Enough Reason

It is forbidden to believe *Lashon Harah*, even if the speaker is saying it in the presence of several people. Despite this, one must not decide that what the speaker says is true. The listeners should simply be cautious and verify to see if it is true. If so, one must reprimand the party in question.

– Chafetz Chaim

### Talmudic Interpretation

It is written, “The Egyptians made the Children of Israel work with harsh labor” (*Shemot* 1:13).

There is a Midrash which connects the verses describing the work of the Children of Israel to the “*middot*” of Talmudic interpretation.

Among the numerous and various explanations that have been given for this Midrash, the book *Minchat Ani* brings this simple commentary:

One says: “By the method of *kal vachomer* [extrapolating from a minor premise to a major one], meaning that at first the Egyptians imposed easy (*kal*) work upon the Children of Israel, and only afterwards did they add more difficult (*chamur*) work, which is the *middah* of *kal vachomer*.”

Another says: “By the method of *gezerah shavah* [verbal analogy], meaning that the decree (*gezerah*) of the Egyptians from the very outset was equal (*shavah*); the work was difficult from the start.”

### 210 Years

It is written, “A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (*Shemot* 1:8).

In his book *Vayomer Moshe*, the *gaon* Chacham Moshe Sasson *Zatzal* explains this verse according to our Sages’ teaching that Pharaoh arose with Hashem’s decree in his hand: “Your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs; and they will enslave them and they will oppress them, 400 years” (*Bereshith* 15:13).

Pharaoh arose to demand these 400 years from Hashem. However he “did not know Joseph,” who by *Ruach HaKodesh* had seen that they would be enslaved for only 210 years. As Joseph told his brothers, “G-d *pakod yifkod* [will surely visit] you” (*ibid.* 50:25). Now the term *pakod* has a numerical value of 190, which corresponds to the number of years missing from the count of 400. In other words, the decree of enslavement would last only 210 years.

### With a Gentle Mouth

It is written, “The Egyptians made the Children of Israel work with harsh labor” (*Shemot* 1:13).

The Midrash cites Rabbi Eliezer in explaining that the term *bepharech* (“with harsh labor”) can be read as *be peh rach* (“with a gentle mouth”). How so?

When Pharaoh said, “Let us deal shrewdly with them” (*Shemot* 1:10), he gathered all the Children of Israel and said to them: “Please do me a favor today.” Thus it is written, “The Egyptians made the Children of Israel work *bepharech* [*be peh rach*].” Pharaoh took a bucket and a shovel, and he began making bricks with them. Whoever saw him working did the same.

The Children of Israel immediately began to work enthusiastically with him, with all their heart, for they had great strength. When night fell, Pharaoh set foremen over them and said: “Count the number of bricks.” When they counted them, he said: “This is the number that you must make each day.”

### To a People of Heavy Tongue

It is written, “I am not a man of words, neither from yesterday, nor from the third day, nor since You have spoken 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 literal sense of the verse, which is that Moshe had difficulty speaking and would stutter, as some of the Rishonim say.

“Is it possible,” he objects, “that the prophet whom Hashem knew face-to-face, and who received the Torah directly from Him, would stutter?”

For the Rashbam, the meaning of “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” is the following: “I’m not very familiar with the Egyptian accent, for I fled from Egypt in my youth, and I am now 80 years old.”

The Rashbam brings a proof from 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).

Naturally, one who is not very familiar with the language of the court is called “heavy of tongue.”

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Bitya the Daughter of Pharaoh

It is written, “Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe by the river, and her maidens walked by the riverside. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant, and she took it” (*Shemot* 2:5).

The Gemara states that Pharaoh’s daughter was named Bitya (*Megillah* 13a), which she takes from the verse: “His Jewish wife bore Jered the father of Gedor, and Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. These are the sons of Bitya, the daughter of Pharaoh” (I Chronicles 4:18). We may say that all these names (Jered, Gedor, etc.) refer to Moshe, who was born to Yocheved, described by the verse as a Jewish wife, and that he was raised by Bitya, as the Gemara discusses at length. The Midrash states, “Rabbi Yehoshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh, ‘Moshe was not your son, yet you called him your son. You as well, though you are not My daughter, I will call you My daughter,’ even as it is said: ‘These are the sons of Bitya – the daughter of Y-A’” (*Vayikra Rabba* 1:3).

We may also explain that Pharaoh’s daughter was called Bitya because the letters of her name are the same as those of *teva*, since Moshe was found in a *teva* (basket) when Bitya rescued him. It is also because she was willing to sacrifice her own life in doing so, since Pharaoh had decreed that all the male children should be killed, and he would have killed her if he knew what she had done. A miracle also occurred at that time, for her arm grew much longer so she could take him from the basket, as Rashi explains. She therefore carries this name in recollection of this deed.

We must also underline just how miraculous it was that Pharaoh did not learn that this child was among those he had condemned to be thrown into the river. Indeed, he grew up in Pharaoh’s home, and he carried the name Moshe because Pharaoh’s daughter drew him from the water (*meshitihu*). His name therefore testified to his origins, and yet Pharaoh never realized who he was.

### **Talmidei Chachamim are the Only “Prisoners”**

Regarding the lofty level of the *talmidei chachamim* who study Torah in the Beit HaMidrash, the book *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba* (ch. 27) cites the following Midrash:

“Just as they [the *talmidei chachamim*] live solitary lives in this world, without any strangers with them, so too are they in the World to Come. They sit alone next to the Holy One, blessed be He, without any strangers with them. Of them the verse says: ‘G-d settles the solitary in a house; He releases prisoners to prosperity. Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land’ [*Tehillim* 68:7]. These ‘prisoners’ are none other than the *talmidei chachamim* who make themselves prisoners of the Beit HaMidrash, of Scripture, the Mishnah, the Gemara, the Midrash, the Halachot, and the Aggadot.”

### **You Could Have Earned \$15,000**

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hermann *Zatzal*, famous as the “Chafetz Chaim of America,” was a Jew who earned a living from his work. He owned a store that sold fur, and yet he managed to set times for learning Torah. In fact he was able to complete the entire Talmud.

Other than his fixed hours for learning, every day he had a special learning session at home between 9 am and 10 am. Only afterwards would he open his store. During that hour of study, he would not be interrupted for anything in the world, regardless of the consequences.

One morning, a few minutes after 9 am, a well-known fur merchant wanted to sell him some fur at an extremely good price. Wanting to see Rav Hermann, he happily announced to the Rav's wife: “I have a nice offer for your husband, one that will make him a \$15,000 profit! The only condition is that we agree to the details of this offer right away.”

Rav Hermann's wife quickly made her way to the room where her husband was studying, and with excitement she briefly told him about the offer. Yet even then, he did not depart from his custom of not interrupting his learning. Thus despite the magnitude of the offer, he signaled to his wife that he would remain learning until 10 am, as was his custom.

The fur merchant was disappointed by his reaction, for he could not understand this “odd” behavior, and so he immediately left. When his fixed hour of learning was over, the Rav's wife said to him: “Yaakov Yosef! You would have earned \$15,000, and then you could have closed your store for several months and studied without interruption and with peace of mind!”

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef was not bothered by having missed this opportunely to become rich, and he simply told his wife: “You believe that I didn't take advantage of a favorable opportunity to earn this money, but that's not true. In reality, it was the Satan who came to put me to the test, to see if I was going to cancel my regular time for learning!”

### **Neither Torah Nor Wisdom**

It is said that from the time of his youth, the Ketav Sofer would normally complete tractates every year on his birthday. When he reached the age of 54 (at which time he was living in the city of

Pest), he told his assistant to not let anybody into his home for the entire day.

Arriving at his home on that day was a Rav who was among his greatest disciples, as well as a relative. When he made his way inside, he found the Ketav Sofer sobbing. Stunned by this sight, he asked: “My teacher, why are you crying?”

The Ketav Sofer replied, “Know, my dear student, that today is my birthday. I'm 54 years old, and I've done some soul-searching: What have I done during all these years, and how have I spent my precious time without a clear goal? I possess neither Torah, wisdom, nor righteousness, so how can I not cry over the days that have passed, days that will never return? I should cry without end!”

When the Rav's disciple heard these words, he began to cry as well. If a flame fell upon cedars such as the Ketav Sofer, who was occupied throughout his life with Torah, serving Hashem, and doing good deeds – and yet he was crying and worrying over the years that have passed – what can be said by those unfortunate individuals who have spent their time in vain?

### **Jerusalem's First Buses**

One day the *gaon* Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah, recounted to one of his children an instructive story that contains a great lesson:

“In my youth, when the first buses arrived in Jerusalem and passed through Jaffa Road next to the Etz Chaim yeshiva, all the yeshiva students went into the street to see this stunning sight. As for me, since I was a curious boy who wanted to see and understand everything, I also felt the urge to be among the first to witness this wonder. However I controlled this personal desire, and I forced myself to remain seated and learning, not leaving the house of Hashem.

“It was only because of many similar cases that I arrived at where I am today,” Rabbi Shlomo Zalman concluded.

### **Her Devotion for Torah**

When the Sha'agat Aryeh lived in Volozhin, he experienced tremendous poverty. Every aspect of his life was affected by it, forcing him to wear the same clothes on Shabbat as during the week.

He was unable to purchase books that he needed for learning. Yet to his great joy, among the *ba'alei batim* of Volozhin he found a prominent individual by the name of Rabbi Yitzchak (the father of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin). Rabbi Yitzchak owned many books, and from time to time the Sha'agat Aryeh would go to his home to consult them.

One day, as he was at Rabbi Yitzchak's home immersed in Torah study, Rabbi Yitzchak's wife began having contractions. Knowing that the Sha'agat Aryeh was learning at the time, she took it upon herself not to cry out during the contractions so as not to disturb his learning. She therefore suffered in silence.

When the Sha'agat Aryeh later learned what had happened, he was very moved by her devotion to Torah. He immediately raised his hands to Heaven and whispered a silent prayer: “Sovereign of the universe, since this woman controlled herself so as not to cry out for the sake of Torah, reward her with the blessing of a son who will be known for his Torah throughout the world!”

The blessing of the *tzaddik* was fulfilled, and the son she gave birth to was named Zalman. His fame in Torah spread around the world, being known as Rabbi Zalman of Volozhin *Zatzal*.