

PARSHA

BEHA'ALOTECHA

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598



PROLONGING HIS NAZIRITE VOW

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "He shall bring his offering to Hashem: One unblemished sheep in its first year as a burnt-offering, one unblemished ewe in its first year as a sin-offering, and one unblemished ram as a peace-offering" (Bamidbar 6:14).

The Ramban raises an objection here, for a sin-offering is brought for a sin. Yet what sin did the Nazir commit? He explains that until now the Nazir has been, on account of his Nazirite vow, holy and pure, not ceasing to grow in holiness. In fact he has been a crown of sanctity, as the verse states: "For the crown of his G-d is upon his head" (Bamidbar 6:7). Yet now that his Nazirite vow has ended, he descends, so to speak, from the spiritual level that he achieved, which is why he must bring an offering to atone for this spiritual fall. Yet this remains difficult to understand, for he has not committed the slightest sin. That being the case, why must he bring a sin-offering?

To answer this, let us mention what the Sages have said in regards to pride, which is a bitter source of all kinds of sin. The Holy One, blessed be He, says of the proud: "I and he cannot both dwell in the world" (Sotah 5a). The proud repels the Shechinah and is abhorrent to Hashem, as it is written: "Every proud heart is an abomination to Hashem" (Mishlei 16:5).

The Sages also teach, "Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive man out of the world" (Pirkei Avot 4:21). This does not mean that these vile defects drive a man out of the World to Come alone; they also drive him out of this world, for a proud person is never inclined to recognize his error and admit fault. Even when he sees the rope tightening around his neck, he will remain firm in his rebellion and make every effort to cleanse the unclean insect in his hand by saying, "I haven't sinned." It is likely that this character fault is what lies behind the conduct of the sotah (a woman suspected of infidelity). Her pride prevents her from recognizing her wicked deeds, and she is not prepared to admit that she has done any wrong. In fact even when she sees death approaching and realizes that in a few moments she must drink the bitter waters that will cause her death, she continues to proclaim her innocence, brazenly claiming: "I'm pure!" In fact this is how the proud behave: They are ready to give up both this world and the World to Come in order not to admit they are wrong.

Hence this week's parsha is read immediately after the festival of Shavuot, the festival of the giving of the Torah, in order to declare the vileness of pride, a character flaw that drives a person to the depths of the abyss. Even the Torah does not endure

with a person imbued with pride, as the Sages have said: "Why are the words of the Torah compared to water...? To teach you that just as water flows from a higher to a lower level, likewise words of Torah endure only with one who is humble" (Ta'anit 7a). This is why the passage on the sotah is juxtaposed to the giving of the Torah, in order for people to guard against pride, to distance themselves from it as much as possible, and to acquire humility – the source of all virtues and by which we merit the very presence of Torah in perpetuity.

We can now understand why, at the end of his Nazirite vow, a Nazir must bring a sin-offering. It is because his main goal was to abstain from wine in order to improve his conduct. In fact, having seen the sotah in her disgrace proved to the Nazir that he was suffering from a lack of modesty and the fear of G-d, and the Torah commanded him to avoid wine in order to sanctify himself. Now that his Nazirite vow is over, he must again examine his conduct and ensure that he has absolutely rid himself of his past errors, that he has freed himself of the evil that previously cleaved to him.

Who will guarantee that he has managed to eliminate the spiritual plague that dwelled in him, such that he can now free himself of the yoke of his Nazirite vow and start drinking wine again? Hence his conduct includes, in a manner of speaking, a sin, which is why he must bring a sin-offering to atone for it. In fact he should have continued on the path of the Nazirite vow and increased his holiness. After the sanctity from the festival of the giving of the Torah, we must strengthen ourselves in the spiritual realm and constantly progress, not being content with the holiness and purity that we have already obtained.

Hence after the festival of Shavuot, we read Parshiot Nasso and Beha'alotcha, the names of which evoke the concept of constant spiritual growth. There are in fact two growths that we experience here: The preparation for receiving the Torah, and the giving of the Torah. During the counting of the Omer, we prepare ourselves to be a vessel worthy of receiving the Torah, which will reside in us. Then the moment that we have waited for so long – Shavuot – finally arrives. We must preserve this spiritual growth and not stop adding to it.

I had the very great pleasure, on the night of Shavuot, to see the Jewish people in all its beauty and glory. I walked all along the Eleventh district [of Paris] during that entire sacred evening, and I saw how synagogues were packed with the young and not-so-young learning Torah side by side. I saw hundreds of youngsters, a portion of whom seemed completely non-religious, gathering around my sons

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and avidly listening to and drinking in words of Torah. I gave them a course in Mussar and then asked them, “What are you doing here in the middle of the night? Why don’t you go home and sleep?” They responded with warmth and honesty: “We came to receive the Torah.” I was very moved at that point, and I felt great affection for them. It is certain that the Holy One, blessed be He, also rejoices in them and deeply loves them.

The Words of Our Sages

A Place in the Cemetery

It is written, “He named that place Kivrot-HaTa’ava, because there they buried the people who had been craving” (Bamidbar 11:34).

If you are also looking for the “Kivrot-HaTa’ava” cemetery, you probably won’t find it anywhere between Egypt and the Jordan Valley. In fact you will find it in your home, in the middle of your living room. It’s close at hand, close to your heart.

It’s a vast and spacious cemetery, not overcrowded, and its upkeep isn’t particularly expensive. Indeed, this cemetery is called “Mussar,” and we can assume that at least one book of Mussar adorns your bookshelf. By the way, when was the last time you leafed through it?

Only the study of Mussar can save and protect us from evil thoughts and vile character traits. It alone can strengthen us and enable us to overcome our evil desires and bury them in “Kivrot-HaTa’ava.”

In his book Beit Israel, the Chafetz Chaim notes that our Sages have said, “Every man who possesses [Torah] knowledge without the fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys but not with the outer [keys]” (Shabbat 31ab).

The Chafetz Chaim adds, “Thus a person who is knowledgeable in Torah but not filled with a fear of Heaven, his Torah knowledge will not endure. Hence numerous writings that cite the Arizal, as well as the commentary of the Vilna Gaon on Mishlei, discuss the obligation to study Mussar books every day. This is especially true in our time, for because of our numerous sins, renegades and those who spread false ideas have multiplied among the Jewish people. We must therefore absolutely strengthen ourselves in the study of Mussar, for it alone can help us not become discouraged.

“To what can this be compared? It is like someone who is walking along when suddenly a violent wind arises. If he is not properly covered by his clothes, the wind can completely rip them off. The same applies to us, for in our days the winds of heresy are arising in the world. We must therefore firmly engage in the study of Mussar, which is the protective garment of our Torah, so as not to be swept away by the current movement.

“Hence it is fitting,” adds the Chafetz Chaim, “and even necessary for all yeshivot to establish a time each day for the study of Mussar. I have previously spoken with the great men of the generation who were then opposed to this idea. Today they recognize that this kind of study has become indispensable, and that without it we are not assured of having acquired the Torah and the fear of Hashem. Both youngsters in yeshivot and the heads of households must devote a time each day to the study of books that lead to the fear of Heaven, [books] such as Sha’arei Teshuvah....”

During a visit from the gaon Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman to the Radin yeshiva, the Chafetz Chaim inquired into the spiritual conditions at the Baranovitch yeshiva.

He was trying to find out what ethical teachings his disciple Rabbi Elchanan was emphasizing. “A yeshiva in which Mussar is not studied has little value,” the Chafetz Chaim said to him. “It’s like dust that flies

A great spiritual revolution is occurring in the world before the coming of Mashiach, a spirit of purity is manifesting itself and everyone thirsts for the word of G-d. As the Prophet Amos said, “Not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem” (Amos 8:11). Let us all continue with this same motivation and wisely use this spirit of purity that we received on the festival of Shavuot. As we know, “If one comes to purify himself, he is helped” (Shabbat 104a). Amen, Amen.

away.” As the Chafetz Chaim was saying this, he rolled his thumb across his fingers, as if rolling tobacco, in order to demonstrate just how insignificant it was.

Studying Mussar

To illustrate the importance of studying Mussar, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal said, “I witnessed a terrible incident involving Rabbi Yosef Shemuel, the head of the rabbinical court of Frankfurt and author of HaGaot HaShas. He was one of the most respected Torah scholars of his time, and he taught Torah to numerous students. After his passing, his students decided to continue their learning together in their usual place, and therefore they gathered there each day. As they were studying there one day, they suddenly saw their departed Rav standing near his desk. They were stunned for a moment, until he reassured them: ‘Do not fear. I will explain why I have come.’ What he told them was the following:

“ ‘As soon as I arrived in the upper world, it was decided that I would sit in Gan Eden next to the Shelah HaKadosh. However he said, ‘Rabbi Yosef Shemuel certainly studied the entire Torah and taught it. However I taught Mussar as well, and even wrote a book on the subject, which he did not.’ The Celestial Court then allowed me to return to you, my students, to stress the importance of learning Mussar and the fear of Heaven.’

“He concluded by saying, ‘I am now standing before you and asking that you study books of Mussar.’ Obviously his students gladly agreed, at which point the Rav immediately disappeared.”

This is an amazing story, for it teaches us that a gaon cannot reach the place reserved for him in Gan Eden simply because he did not make his students learn Mussar!

– Yira Vada’at

He Melted Hearts

Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal also recounted the following: “The sound of the gaon Rabbi Naftali Trop learning Mussar with fervor and enthusiasm each night before Ma’ariv would melt people’s hearts. A sacred respect filled everyone, and their minds were purified and elevated.

“As he served G-d, he never ceased yearning for spiritual perfection. He was never complacent, and adorned himself with every good middah.

“He was completely subservient to others and annulled his own self. When he poured out his heart before the Creator, he lost himself in supplications, beseeching G-d like a child asking his father to accept his requests (noten imrei shefer). It is said that anyone who had not seen Rabbi Yechiel Mordechai Gordon, a man who was already quite old, learning Mussar at the “Beit HaMussar” had never seen Mussar learning worthy of the name. With a simple melody and a trembling voice, he studied each paragraph word by word, until his voice arose and split the heavens, all while torrents of tears dripped from his eyes, causing his entire body to shake.”

The Power of Desire

It is written, “Why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem’s offering at its appointed time?” (Bamidbar 9:7).

The Gerer Rebbe, the Chiddushei HaRim, is surprised by this verse, for G-d is not strict in a case of unavoidable circumstances. That being the case, a person who is impure is exempt from this law, so why should he complain? He is not being deprived – he is only being exempted!

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that these men so ardently desired to bring the Pesach offering that the power of this desire ushered in a new mitzvah, Pesach Sheni. Since they cried from the depths of their heart, “Why should we be diminished?” their cries created a new opening, one through which the light of holiness spread until Pesach Sheni.

The Hazards of Travel

It is written, “But a man who is pure and was not on the road...” (Bamidbar 9:13).

The book Meoran Shel Israel cites Rabbi Akiva Eiger in stating that this verse alludes to the spiritual decline caused by the uncertainties of travel. Which man was pure? The one who was not traveling, for traveling pushes a man to sin.

The gaon Rabbi Itzele of Volozhin taught a similar lesson:

“But a man who is pure and was not on the road” – for travel involves a neglect in the study of Torah, difficulties in concentrating during prayer, and numerous other hazards.

The Clouds of Glory

It is written, “We are traveling to the place of which Hashem has said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Go with us and we shall treat you well” (Bamidbar 10:29).

The author of Ma’alot HaTorah notices an important detail in this verse. It begins by travel (“we are traveling”) but ends with going (“go with us”). Now a verse always has a direct and literal meaning: “We are traveling” – thanks to the Clouds of Glory. In fact these clouds supported them throughout their travels in the desert, as it is written: “How I carried you on eagles’ wings” (Shemot 19:4). However Jethro was a convert, and the Clouds of Glory did not surround converts. Hence Moshe said to him, “Go with us,” for unlike them, Jethro could not benefit from the Clouds of Glory.

A Different Point of View

It is written, “Hashem became very angry, and in the eyes of Moshe it was bad” (Bamidbar 11:10).

The book Mincha Belula explains why the verse describes the different reactions of Hashem and Moshe, since Hashem became “very angry,” whereas to Moshe it was simply “bad.” The answer is that Moshe judged the people favorably and thought that when they asked, “who will give us meat,” they simply wanted to eat a great amount of meat. He never suspected that they were trying to deny Hashem’s providence, which is why things were not as grave in his eyes. However the Holy One, blessed be He, Who probes hearts and minds, understood their real intentions. It was not meat

they wanted, but rather a way to deny Hashem. When they said, “Who will give us meat,” they meant: “Who has the power to give us meat?” This is why “Hashem became very angry,” while to Moshe it was simply “bad.” In other words, Moshe did not want to judge them unfavorably, for he believed that they simply wanted to eat meat in great amounts. Hence he thought it was bad that they were crying just for food, but he did not become angry with them in the way that Hashem did.

The Honor of the Tzaddikim

It is written, “Moshe cried out the Hashem, saying: ‘Please, Hashem, heal her now’ ” (Bamidbar 12:13).

Rabbi Abba said, “The mystery of the Divine Name formed of 11 letters is found in this prayer. Moshe did not wish to lengthen his prayer further, for since it concerned his own [sister], he was unwilling to trouble the King, as it were, excessively. Therefore G-d was concerned for the honor of Moshe. Indeed, He is always more concerned for the honor of the tzaddikim than for His own honor.”

– Zohar III:156ab

In the Light of the Parsha

Good Deeds Bring the Shechinah Closer

It is written, “Vayehi [And when] the Ark would journey, Moshe said: ‘Arise, Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered; let those who hate You flee from before You’ ” (Bamidbar 10:35).

The Sages have said, “The following remark is a tradition handed down to us from the Men of the Great Assembly: Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates sorrow” (Megillah 10b). We therefore need to understand what sorrow occurred in this passage, when the Ark would set out. The Midrash tells us, “All the miracles performed for the Children of Israel on account of the Ark occurred because the Shechinah rested upon it” (Tanchuma, Vayachel 7). Now it is written, “The Ark of the covenant of Hashem journeyed before them a three-day distance to search out for them a resting place” (Bamidbar 10:33) – and it killed serpents and scorpions, burned thistles, and eliminated all the enemies of Israel. Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra: “Two sparks of fire emerged from between the two cherubim, killing serpents and scorpions, and burning thistles. The scent that emerged from it filled everything.”

What scent was this? We may say that when the Children of Israel encamped, they were surrounded by the Shechinah. Yet when the kohanim moved the Ark and walked with it, they immediately sensed an absence of sanctity, which was a source of sorrow. What would Moshe say? “Arise, Hashem.” They studied Torah and the fear of Heaven until they became worthy of standing before Hashem at all times, as it is written: “Who shall ascend the mountain of Hashem? Who shall stand in His holy place?” (Tehillim 24:3). When you perform good deeds and mitzvot, you become worthy of standing in the place of His sanctity, and you will never again feel sorrow when the Ark moves, for you will be standing before Him at all times.

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Mr. Klabari

Do you know who the holy Zohar describes as shotim (“fools”)? This expression is used in translating the verse that describes the manna: “The people shatu [would stroll] and gather it, and grind it in a mill or pound it in a mortar” (Bamidbar 11:8). The Zohar states, “The word shatu indicates that these people allowed shatuta [foolishness] to enter them” (Zohar II:62b). Hence these people were the ones who bent down to gather the manna. Actually, what is destined for every person will come to him easily, without even the need to bend down to gather it.

For anyone who wants a genuine and concrete example of this principle, the gaon Rabbi Asher Weiss recounts an amazing story:

The head of a family living in Manchester, England would spend his time learning Torah with complete confidence in G-d.

His family grew from year to year, and his virtuous wife took on the responsibility of managing their home, making sure not to disrupt his Torah learning. The man would learn Torah exclusively, and since his wife was busy educating their children, they managed to scrape by in extreme poverty. They received help from their own parents, of course, and they were content with little and happy with their lot. When the man and his wife had their tenth child, the man’s parents demanded that he go out and work to feed his large family. However he was absolutely committed to learning Torah, and nothing else. His parents tried to get him to work part-time, but it was useless. He even refused work in a Torah-related field.

Upon the birth of their eleventh, followed by their twelfth child, the man’s parents again tried to convince him to find a job, but he wouldn’t budge. He firmly declared that he would continue to study, convinced that G-d would support him and that he would lack nothing. His mind didn’t change when his thirteenth child came into the world, for he didn’t alter course. However his parents were extremely upset and almost became angry with him. That’s when something incredible happened.

A few days after the circumcision of their most recent child, the man received a letter from the “district court.” Upon opening it, he discovered to his great surprise that he had been summoned to court on a given date for a case involving a certain Mr. John P. Klabari. Not understanding what it had to do with him – a court and a man whose name he had never heard of before – he immediately returned the letter to indicate that it had been sent to him by mistake.

However he received another letter ordering him to appear in court on a certain day and time, in order to carry out the will of Mr. John P. Klabari, who had died on such and such a day. Our friend therefore made his way to the court, where he was informed that Mr. Klabari had passed away without leaving behind any children. In his will, Mr. Klabari bequeathed all his wealth (comprised of two businesses and numerous other possessions) to the largest family in the city.

The judge then addressed the man: “We verified with the civil authorities, and it appears that you have the largest family. Two weeks ago, there was another family with twelve children, yet because you recently had a baby boy, you’ve become the largest family in town, and therefore the inheritance goes to you.”

Making an effort to earn a living is nothing other than a “punishment” and a “curse,” as it is written: “By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread” (Bereshith 3:19). The episode of the manna in the desert publicly demonstrated that some people exhausted themselves to gather the manna, whereas others exerted much less effort. The result was that, in the end,

“whoever took more had nothing extra, and whoever took less was not lacking” (Shemot 16:18). Be that as it may, the Sages have taught: “The entire sustenance of man is fixed for him from Rosh Hashanah” (Beitzah 16a). That being the case, better to extricate ourselves from the curse as much as possible.

In the book *Messilat Yescharim*, we find the following teaching: “Let us rely entirely on G-d, knowing that what is destined for us will never be lacking. Moreover, our Sages have said: ‘The entire sustenance of man is fixed for him from Rosh Hashanah’ [Beitzah 16a]. They have also said, ‘No man can touch what is prepared for his fellow’ [Yoma 38b]. We could remain idle and witness the decree [of a fixed income from the start of the year] fulfilled, if not for our punishment: ‘By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread’ [Bereshith 3:19]. Hence we must make an effort to earn a living. Such is the decree of the supreme King. It is like a tax that is levied on all mankind, one that we cannot escape.” We cannot escape a tax; we can only try to lessen its impact as much as possible.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

The Power of the Tzaddik’s Holiness

The brother of Mrs. Levy of Lyon had lost his wallet, which contained all his important papers as well as a large amount of money, 5,000 francs. In his distress, he went to see Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan and tearfully recounted how he had lost all his money. The Rav replied, “Return tomorrow. Tonight I will ask my grandfather in a dream where your wallet is.”

On the following morning, it was the Rav himself (not his assistant) who personally went to the home of the man, summoned him, and said: “You have nothing to fear. The police have your wallet. Go and see.” In fact, that is precisely what happened.

This incident demonstrates the humility of the tzaddik, who chose to personally go and see the man, rather than waiting for the man to come and see him. It is equally astonishing that this man was able to recover his wallet, and that the police did not touch any of the money it contained. From here we see the great power of the tzaddik’s holiness.

The Finger that Was Saved

A resident of Mogador once cut his finger in an accident. The cut was very deep, and his finger was liable to tear off at any moment.

The doctors he saw thought it would be impossible to fully return it to normal, advising him instead to have it completely removed.

Being a good faithful Jew, however, he went to see Rabbi Haim Pinto, which is when a miracle occurred. The Rav touched the spot of the cut, and the man’s finger returned to its original state, as if it had never been injured!

Guard Your Tongue

The Principle that Enables You to Protect Yourself

The decision to protect yourself from slander does not just consist of a sincere resolution. It must be accompanied by the daily study of laws and Mussar regarding speech. The cure for slander consists of meticulously learning the laws that prohibit it according to the Talmud and midrashim of our Sages. It is solely in regards to such learning that they also declared, “What enables us not to utter slanderous words? The study of Torah.” On the other hand, this study will only be useful if we truly make an effort to not transgress these prohibitions.