

# הַיְהוֹדוּת THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### THE NEED FOR EFFORT IN TORAH STUDY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**W**hy does the verse that states, "If you walk in My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (Leviticus 26:3) seem to be redundant? The decrees are themselves commandments that we are held to observe and practice! Consequently, why does the Torah state, "walk in My decrees and observe My commandments," as if they consisted of two different things? To this question Rashi answers as follows: "If you walk in My decrees.' This means, 'If you *put effort* into studying My Torah.'"

What we have here, therefore, is a law. It is a commandment that differs from commandments that involve practice, for to arrive at practicing the mitzvot (that is, to observe them properly), one must first put in the effort to study Torah without cease or limit. We see here, therefore, two important yet distinct principles:

1. The obligation to put great effort into Torah study.
2. The obligation to observe the commandments, which brings a man to perfection.

Of course, the performance of the commandments can only be perfected if a man studies Torah and understands these commandments and their value.

For this reason, the verse begins by commanding a man to put effort into the study of Torah by telling him, "If you walk in My decrees." Only afterwards does the verse state, "observe My commandments," inviting a man to graduate to a second level (that is, the performance of the mitzvot) by saying, "and you will perform My commandments."

In addition, we note that the verse uses the

expression, "If you *walk in* My decrees." The verse does not say, "If you *observe* My decrees," as it says further on: "*observe* My commandments."

Why does the verse use an expression that signifies walking, advancing?

I reflected upon the words of the prophet who states, "Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water" (Isaiah 55:1), and I found myself in somewhat of a bind concerning this verse. In effect, what does the prophet teach us that is new? Is it not obvious that the one who is in dire need of water should go and drink? Will he not *run* to a source of water? Will he put his life in danger by waiting to drink?

It seems to me that the prophet alludes to those people who occupy themselves solely with earning money and amassing wealth. Having enough for today, these people feel that they need twice as much for tomorrow. A man with this mindset will seek to increase his wealth to the point that he abandons family life, and even personal life, solely for material gain. And yet he does this knowing full well that, in the end, he will die and leave all his wealth here in this world.

This man demonstrates a great ability to toil for futility and momentary gain. Water, as we know, alludes to the Torah, and this is the reason why the prophet said, "go to the water". The prophet is saying: "Woe to all those thirsting after money. Stop right now and put your efforts into the study of Torah, which is your life, your true future."

We see here, therefore, something that is extremely important, namely that to study Torah, one must put great effort into doing so because the evil inclination is powerful. Hence when a man

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decides to go and study Torah, the evil inclination is always ready to tell him: "But you already observe the mitzvot! Why do you need to go and study?"

This is why one must answer him that the study of Torah is a *Chuk Veloya'avor* (a decree that one cannot transgress, and for which no reason has been given). One must devote oneself to the study of Torah with all one's strength, for if a man doesn't devote himself to the study of Torah as he devotes himself to work – to a material undertaking for which he will earn much – he will have much to lose by it.

What will he lose if he neglects the study of Torah?

He begins, first of all, by performing the Divine commandments in an erroneous manner, and from one error to the next he will end up succumbing to the evil inclination.

This is why the Torah insists, and tells us, that study alone will not allow a man to escape the evil inclination, but rather that one must constantly improve one's ways by daily progress. Concerning the study of Torah, this must be done with effort, not done simply so as to be clear of one's obligation to study. Imagine that someone were to tell a man that in a few days he would become a millionaire if he worked day and night to perform a certain task. It is obvious that the prospect of earning so much money would give that man the ability to work without cease, removing fatigue and hunger from him both day and night, and thereby allowing him to accomplish an enormous amount of work.

Certainly, this man would find the strength to work beyond his normal abilities. The work that he is not used to doing in a week, he would do in a day, and he would be prepared to work even more for a few days. And all this for money! Yet it is like this that a man should study Torah. He should conduct his life as if it completely depended on the effort that he put into the study of Torah. We must fight against our own nature with all our might and apply ourselves to Torah study.

It is not enough to observe the commandments. One must study Torah with great effort in order to merit understanding the mitzvot; we will thereby perform them with love and without reservation. From all that we have just said, we therefore see that the second level of obedience to G-d,

(the level of mitzvot performance) is not possible except through the knowledge of Torah and the words of our Sages. This is because it is only after having graduated from the first level of obedience (that is, the fervent study of Torah) that one is prepared to accomplish the mitzvot in the proper way.

When Hashem was preparing to give the Torah to the Children of Israel, He gave them three extra days in order to prepare themselves to receive it. One must understand what this means. Here the Children of Israel found themselves ready to receive the Torah in front of Mount Sinai. This was an event for which they had come from Egypt, and for which they had prepared themselves, day by day, for the last 50 days, until finally they were ready to receive it. Did they therefore need to prepare themselves for three more days before the Torah could be given to them? Were all the preparations that they underwent not sufficient for them to receive the Torah? Did they need still further preparations?

Obviously, however, when it comes to Torah study, the evil inclination is so powerful that all the preparations that a man does in lieu of this study can always be defeated. These extra three days that G-d ordered at the foot of Mount Sinai allude to the fact that everything that one can add as preparation for the moment of Torah study and mitzvot performance is always counted as gain. Also, the blessing (the gain) is greater for the man who foresees all the ways necessary to resist the evil inclination.

Between the moment that a man decides to accomplish a mitzvah, or to study Torah, and the moment when he puts this decision into practice, the evil inclination is particularly strong, as it does everything it can to make a man go back on his decision. This is why the Torah alludes to the fact that when one undertakes to study Torah, or to perform a mitzvah, one should not hesitate to perform all the necessary preparations. For example, one should reduce the amount of pleasures that one partakes of in this world and in its vanities, for otherwise it is certain that the study of Torah will be difficult – perhaps even painful – because it will bring a person to tear himself away from the material world in order to bring him closer to the spiritual one.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

### RABBI MEIR BAAL HANESS

**R**abbi Meir Baal Hanes, of the fourth generation of Tannaim, belonged to that group of men who developed Torah instruction after Bar Kochva's revolt.

His teachers were Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Ishmael, and Elisha ben Abuya, and his manner of instruction consisted of one-third Halachah, one-third Aggadah, and one-third Proverbs. All classes of people appreciated his lessons.

His lineage was not well known. According to the Aggadah, Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes stemmed from a family of converts to Judaism, descendants even of Emperor Nero himself.

They say that when Emperor Nero came to conquer Jerusalem, he shot divining arrows into the air and they all landed pointing in the direction of Jerusalem. Sensing that the event had been sealed and that he would only be an instrument of grief, he repented. From his descendants was born Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes.

Rabbi Meir would say, "One should always teach his son a simple trade and pray to Hashem, Who is the source of all wealth. For wealth does not come by one's trade, since each trade has its rich and its poor."

He would also say, "There exist two types of friends: Those who rebuke you and those who do not. Love the first type above all."

And again, he would say, "Where do we learn that the resurrection of the dead is explicitly mentioned in the Torah? It is written, 'And Moses will sing'. The verb is in the future."

We say that his father-in-law, Rabbi Hanania ben Teradion, was busy spreading Torah during that difficult time. The Romans ordered that he and his wife be burned. His daughter, the sister-in-law of Rabbi Meir, was sent to a brothel. Rabbi Meir's wife, Bruria, told him, "It is an insult that my sister is in such a state." Rabbi Meir took a sum of money with him and said, "If she has not sinned, may a *ness* [miracle] be done for her." He disguised himself as a Roman and asked to meet her.

"Get away from me," she told him, "I don't feel well." With this, Rabbi Meir understood that she was innocent. He presented himself to the guardian of the brothel and said, "Give me this one." He then gave him the money and said, "Half of it is for you. The rest is to help her leave." The guardian asked him, "And when the money is

spent, what will I do?" Rabbi Meir told him that when this happens, he should say, "May the G-d of Rabbi Meir save me," and assured him that in so doing he would be saved.

"Let us test what you say," the guardian replied.

"Here are some vicious dogs," Rabbi Meir said. He then threw a stone at them and the dogs ran to attack him. He immediately said, "G-d of Rabbi Meir, help me," and the dogs calmed down.

The guardian then agreed.

Nevertheless, what the guardian did eventually became known, and he was ordered into prison. However, he uttered what Rabbi Meir had told him and was saved.

Amazed at what happened to him, the guardian told people of his encounter with Rabbi Meir. Drawings of Rabbi Meir's likeness were affixed everywhere in the market, and one day someone eventually recognized him. When he saw him, he ran towards him. Rabbi Meir then spotted some non-kosher food and dipped one finger in it and put another finger in his mouth. The man who had recognized Rabbi Meir then thought that this could not be him.

He thereafter went into exile and died outside of the land of Israel. His bones were buried in Tiberius, the place where people still go to make a pilgrimage to his grave

## EISHET CHAYIL

### THE OMER AND SHAVUOT

1. Women are not under the obligation to calculate the Omer. If they so desire, they may do so, but without reciting the blessing (they do not have the right to recite it because G-d's Name will thereby be used in vain). According to Kabbalah, women should abstain from calculating the Omer, even without reciting the blessing.

2. The custom of staying up during the entire night of Shavuot regards only men, not women.

# PERKEI AVOTH

## THE GOAL OF OUR EXISTENCE

by Rav M. Lehmann ז"ל

**T**he Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah: Blessed is He Who chose them and their teaching. Rabbi Meir said: Whoever occupies himself with [the study of] Torah for its own sake merits many things. Furthermore, he is worthy that the whole world should have been created because of him" (Perkei Avoth 6:1).

To reach this goal, man should spare no effort in the study of Torah as well as in the conscientious performance of the duties that it imposes on him. In this ceaseless effort, he should fight against outside influences and the evil inclination. Whatever his material situation is like (be he living in abundance or scarcity), trials will occur, as King Solomon himself underscores in his proverbs: "Keep vanity and falseness far from me; give me neither poverty nor wealth, but allot me my daily bread, lest I be satisfied and deny [You] ... and lest I become impoverished and steal, and take the Name of my G-d [in vain]" (Proverbs 30:8-9). The one who remains victorious – regardless of the tests that life sends him – is the one who is spiritually complete. He has completed his task on this earth, and furthermore, the future world is his.

Yet in reality, the material world is also his. G-d created the world to serve man. Of course, if man lets himself get carried away in taking pleasure only in the material things that G-d bestows on him, and if he does not put a halt to his desires, he will end up by losing himself and carrying the world with him. However, if he knows how to control his desires, if he rejoices in the good things of this world in order to better serve his Creator, he will in this way elevate both himself and the world with him.

Everything that G-d created to serve man finds itself sanctified when man uses it to serve and honor G-d. Actually, the world was created for the one who studies Torah for its own sake, with the only goal of observing its commandments. For the observation of the commandments requires a material world. A man requires a garment for the mitzvah of tzitzit and a home for the mitzvah of mezuzah. Fields producing harvests are required to perform the mitzvah of *peah* (the corner of the field whose produce is left for the poor). The Torah teaches us, "If you walk in My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land" (Leviticus 26:3-5). The sun and benevolent rain are at the service of those who put their entire existence at the disposal of G-d and His law. In the blessings pronounced in chapter

28 of Deuteronomy, the statement "blessed shall you be in the city" comes before "blessed shall you be in the field." The blessing of the city (which is to say, organized collective life according to the requirements of the Torah) should precede those of the field (i.e., harvests).

It is in this way that the Mishnah which states, "he is worthy that the whole world should have been created because of him" should be interpreted, meaning that only the one who sees the goal of his existence in the study and observance of Torah will merit the good of this world.

### AN APPEAL BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

Beginning from Lag BaOmer, Bar Mitzvah and wedding ceremonies resume to the great joy of the entire community. Also with summer coming, everyone begins to think about their vacation.

It seems to me that the moment is right to recall the necessity of *Kedusha* and *Tzniut* (holiness and modesty) that is characteristic of a Jew.

Concerning ceremonies and various festivities that are planned, I would like to make a point of saying just how saddened I am to know that many of our brothers ruin the Kedusha of their celebration by mixed dancing and all sorts of practices that are contrary to our customs and sacred duties.

It is obvious that I will not support, by my presence, such ceremonies. Moreover, these same requirements of Kedusha and Tzniut also apply to us when we are on vacation.

It is written, "If you *walk* in My ways," and our Sages have explained this as follows: Why does the Torah employ the verb "walk"? It is to signify that the Holy One, blessed be He, demands that we also remain true to ourselves when we leave our homes.

The weariness of travel and being distant from our homes can never justify a violation of the laws of Kashrut or the requirements of Kedusha and Tzniut, which are the pride and privilege of the Jewish people.

I hope that everyone will have it at heart to attach themselves to these mitzvot.

By the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto z"l, I direct all my blessings to you. May we soon celebrate the arrival of Mashiach our Righteous One. Amen.