

# הַיְהוָה יְהוָה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### HACHEM ALONE LEADS A PERSON WHO ACTS HUMBLY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**I**t is written, "The L-RD alone did lead him [Israel], and there was no foreign god with Him" (Deuteronomy 32:12). The meaning of this verse is not clear, for if Hashem alone directs Israel, it is obvious that there is no foreign god with Him. Why then the need to state this?

The Holy One, blessed be He, directs the Children of Israel and protects them so that they acknowledge Him, but only when they negate themselves before Him and uproot the pride that dwells in their hearts. The more that a person isolates himself to examine his behavior, the more he merits knowing G-d. This is the meaning of "there was no foreign god with Him." The word neichar ("foreign") has the same numerical value as ra ("evil"). In fact there is nothing worse than pride, and if a person in his self-importance dreams of being compared to G-d, then G-d says, "He and I cannot live together in this world" (Erchin 15b), for such a man is called evil. This is what constitutes, "The L-RD alone did lead him": When does He direct and lead a person? When that person has no foreign god with him, meaning that far from being imbued with pride, on the contrary he negates himself before G-d. The word ra ("evil") has the same Gematria ketanah as geieh ("pride"), and in the absence of all traces of arrogance, G-d leads a person.

Who do we have who is greater than Moses, of whom it is said: "Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people" (Deuteronomy 32:44)? How did he manage to speak in private to tens of thousands of men, women, and children? This shows us his greatness, his humility, and his self-effacement before all Israel, to the point that his words were actually heard by them all, words that descended into the heart of each of them individually. The Children of Israel therefore understood what each of them must work on, and how each must serve G-d. Moreover, they had the impression that Moses spoke to all of them personally.

Moses had arrived at this extraordinary level because he knew that pride is fitting only for Hashem. Now Moses was the most humble of all men on the earth (Numbers 12:3), and his modesty had already enabled him to attain the level necessary to graze the flock that was Israel, even while he was shepherding the flock of Jethro his father-in-law in the desert (Exodus 3:1). From that point on, he never

stopped elevating himself, to the extent that he arrived at humbling himself before all men, made in the image of G-d. Thus in him was fulfilled the verse that states, "For the L-RD's portion is His people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:9), for the person who is G-d's portion – who is attached to and abases himself before Him – he alone can be called "the lot of His inheritance." He is drawn by G-d and attaches himself to Him, and G-d is his heritage and his portion. This is our role in the world: To humbly stand as servants before Hashem.

In regards to this, our Sages have said: "Whoever becomes proud, it is as if he committed idolatry" (Pesikta Zutah Beha'alotcha 12:2). A person will do this in order to allow himself to sin, as it is said: "Israel only gives itself over to idolatry in order to allow itself to sin" (Sanhedrin 63b). At the incident of the golden calf it is written, "and they got up to revel" (Exodus 32:6), and Rashi explains in the name of the Sages that this refers to illicit relations (Tanhuma Tisa 20). It follows, therefore, that if a person is flawed in the area of morals, as well as in the areas of idolatry, purity of the eyes, or wicked thoughts (or even acts), all this stems from the pride that is within him. Even

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*The Pinto Associations across the world and their spiritual guide, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, send you their wishes for an excellent Shana Tova 5765. May everyone be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.*

if he studies, all his learning is aimed at feeling superior to others, an attitude that leads to the grave sin of forbidden relations or other serious prohibitions. At that moment, given that pride is a useless thing, he is punished measure for measure by useless spiritual blemishes. Similarly, someone who derives pride by giving a class to students will fall into serious sin. This is because he is only trying to show off at the expense of others, which engenders sin, and he imagines that the Torah belongs to him and that he receives nothing from G-d.

As for Moses, he was self-effacing before everyone and the most humble of men on the earth. This means that he felt himself to be more insignificant than even the earth that is tread on by foot, and this is what earned him everything he merited. Everyone should follow his example, and if a person wants to uproot his sins (which originate from animal matter), he must devote himself to the holy Torah with humility and self-effacement. This leads to an awareness of G-d and to the bowing down before His glory. In this way a person contributes to the perpetuation of Creation, through humility and the love of others, and at that moment Hashem will guide and lead him on the right path.

In reflecting upon this, we note just to what point we are insignificant, for if the holy Patriarchs deserved that which we have not deserved, it is because their entire yearning was to arrive at an understanding of the Creator. Through self-effacement and personal effort, they arrived at a point whereby their kidneys became like two vessels overflowing with Torah (Bereshith Rabba 61), for they were entirely directed towards the search for truth. Consequently, only the holy Torah remains for us, accompanied by true introspection, and it is only with these that we will arrive at ever-higher levels of understanding. This is because the Torah is not enough; one must also fight against the evil inclination. This is the meaning of heshbon nefesh (introspection), whose initials make up the Hebrew word nah (the root of which means "rest", "serenity"). In fact a person can only undertake a proper introspection when he is calm and tranquil. This is the sense of King David's exclamation, "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers" (Psalms 8:4): It is only when a person is calm and pensive that he comes to an awareness of G-d and can say, "How abundant are Your works, O L-RD!" (Psalms 104:24).

With regards to this, how many times does a person witness the marvels of nature, yet through habit doesn't think to praise and exalt G-d? The remedy for this is to go to the mountains and to contemplate nature, focusing all one's attention on admiring the marvels of Creation. This is what constitutes, "When I behold," meaning that it is to constantly observe nature and thus to understand Who created it all, as did Abraham, who at first did not discern the Holy One, blessed be He, but finally became aware of Him.

The prophet Jeremiah said, "Let us search and examine our ways and return to the L-RD" (Lamentations 3:40). This alludes to the fact that it's only when a person rests from all his endeavors of the past year that he has the time to examine himself and see if he is walking in the right path. The meaning of "examine our ways" is that in moments of tranquility, a person must undertake a deep examination

of all that he has done and repair what needs repairing. In this way a person returns to Hashem with all his heart and soul, which allows him to begin the month of Elul aright.

One must also understand that Shabbat, when it is properly appreciated, is a day when a person should reflect upon his actions during the previous week and to try to find a way to correct his faults. The word Shabbat has the same root as the word Teshuvah, and its letters form the initials of the expression Shabbat Bo Tashuv ("Repent on Shabbat"). This recalls the verse that states, "You reduce [tasheiv, which has the same letters as Shabbat] man to pulp" (Psalms 90:3), for on Shabbat it is easy to return to G-d. He then guides us, particularly on Shabbat, a day that is a foretaste of the World to Come. Moreover, concerning Torah study the book Ben Ish Hai states that even a person who does not have the opportunity to study during the week should at least do so on Shabbat, as the Sages have said: "That he makes his Shabbat into a entire day of Torah" (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 1). In fact the holiness of Shabbat can have a positive influence on all the days of the week, for a person who absorbs its atmosphere of purity can greatly elevate himself.

Above all, a person must understand that the more the moment is appropriate, the more the evil inclination seeks to disrupt him and make him transgress. One example of this principle is the Mincha prayer, of which it is stated: "And it was [vayehi] at the time of the afternoon-offering [mincha]" (I Kings 18:36). Now we know that the expression vayehi is always used when speaking of a tragedy (Megillah 10b). For example, when we are in the middle of doing something that is potentially very profitable and the time for Mincha arrives, it requires great courage to close one's business. Moreover, it requires strength to push oneself to attend Mincha services if one is tired and would rather rest. The word mincha means a gift, a present that one offers to the Holy One, blessed be He. A person merits a great spiritual elevation when he takes it upon himself to perform Mincha at a difficult time. This is why the Sages have said, "Eliyahu was only answered during Mincha" (Berachot 6b).

In addition, during the Mincha prayer of Yom Kippur, a person is hungry and tired, and it is difficult to concentrate on prayer. Yet if despite this a person conquers his fatigue and offers his mincha, his gift, to Hashem, it is as if he offered his life to G-d. This is similar to Abraham, who went to sacrifice his son Isaac, and who said with every gesture that he made on the ram: "May all this be considered as if I did it to my son Isaac" (Tanhuma Shelach 14). In offering one's soul to G-d, one merits a great spiritual elevation, and so "the L-RD alone leads him." He guides him in the path of a good life, all this occurring when one is self-effacing before Him and studies the holy Torah with humility, a sense of lowliness, and self-effacement.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## RABBI DAVID OPPENHEIM ZATSAL

**R**abbi David Oppenheim was born in 1664 (5424) in Worms. He learned Torah from Rabbi Guershon Ashkenazi of Metz, Rabbi Yaakov Ashkenazi (the father of Chacham Tzvi), Rav Binyamin Wolf Epstein of Fridberg, and Reb Yitzchak Binyamin Wolf of Lensberg (author of Nahalat Binyamin).

At the age of 25, he was named rabbi of the community of the large city of Nickelsburg, as well as rabbi of the province of Moravia. He founded a yeshiva that he supported with his own money and in which he gave courses to numerous students.

Besides writing many introductions and approbations for different books, and besides the many manuscripts that he refused to have published during his lifetime, Rabbi David Oppenheim published more than 30 books. He later became the rabbi of Prague, dying in the year 1737 (5497).

From across a span of 300 years, it is difficult, if not to say impossible, to trace in detail all the incidents, stories, and decisions that the Gaon Rabbi David Oppenheim lived through and participated in. Who today can explain to us the exact nature of that which troubled the Jews of Nickelsburg, of Prague or in the province of Moravia and its regions between 1689 and 1737 (5449 and 5497)? We are, however, cognizant of this man who possessed astounding virtues and an exceptional character, a man who saw unfurled and heaped onto his plate all that happened in the Jewish world during these several dozen years.

Rabbi David Oppenheim was among the greatest decision makers of his generation. In almost every domain, he left an incalculable number of responsum in which the truth shines forth. He speaks of his teachers – the great of the previous generation – with great respect and reverence, and he cites their views with trembling and love. However it still remains that when, having worked for a long time on a question asked of him, he arrived at a conclusion that was different than that of his predecessors, he did not hesitate to express his opinion. And just as with every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, he began by saying just how insignificant he felt in comparison to those whose decisions he disagreed with.

He maintained a particularly loving relationship with his students. His commentaries were often written as if he was speaking directly to them, and they knew it. This is why today we are in possession of numerous letters that they addressed to their great Rav long after they had grown up and gone out into the world. These letters not only contain questions pertaining to Halachah, but also requests for help in gaining a livelihood or questions concerning their rabbinic roles in different communities. Rabbi David was for them not only a Rav, but also a father. In a letter that one student, Rabbi Meir Segal Horowitz, sent him from the Hanover Beth Midrash, the expression Adoni hamelech (“My lord the king”) is unceasingly used to designate Rabbi David. This attests to the veneration that the letter’s author had for his great teacher. When we look at the original letter, we see that Rabbi David, who apparently could not stand the honors that the letter bestowed upon him, crossed out in ink every place where the term “the king” was used to describe him.

His first years as Rabbi of Nickelsburg were a difficult period for the Jews. Four years earlier, in 1686 (5446), Austria had conquered Oben Castle, and in the course of that war the Jews of the region suffered greatly. Numerous communities had been entirely destroyed and others decimated. An echo of those painful days reverberated in the responsum of Rabbi David, and he took upon himself the difficult task – both physically and emotionally – of taking care of the numerous agunot whose husbands had disappeared during those horrific times. He gave himself no respite and worked relentlessly to provide them with help in accordance with Halachah.

His community work did not diminish in the years that followed, when he was designated as Rav and Av Beit Din of Prague. Much to the contrary, he was recognized as state Rabbi and the supreme authority in everything that concerned the community. He enacted decrees and oversaw all that occurred

in the community, be it important or not. In one of his responsum, he described his crushing work schedule as follows: “You are very familiar with the weight of the tasks that burden me, beginning with the worries of our yeshiva, where we study from the middle of the night until the middle of the day, and proceeding to the affairs of the community and the state. I don’t even have time to swallow my spittle.”

If we had asked a contemporary of Rabbi David Oppenheim to give a title to the following story, it is probable that he would have chosen one that expresses the misfortune of a series of events. Today, more than 250 years after the passing of Rabbi David, it turns out that the events of this story seem far from misfortunate, and that the story should in fact be entitled The Extent of Divine Providence.

Rabbi David’s library had 7000 works in its collection, which even for us is a large number (and how much more so for that era, when books were rare and precious). Yet that is not all. The library shelves were also filled with more than 1000 manuscripts that had not been published. Of all the books published at that time dealing with Torah, there was not a single one that he did not have a copy of. If he heard people speaking of a manuscript that he did not have, he tried to obtain it, and if that was impossible, then at least to have it copied. When the Amsterdam Talmud was published in 1714 (5475), he prepared a parchment made from deerskin and asked that a copy of that Talmud (which was the most beautiful of the era) be printed on it, an undertaking that he paid 1000 gold coins for.

Today, too, there are many book collectors. However Rabbi David Oppenheim was certainly not a collector. His great passion did not come from shelves loaded with beautiful volumes of works; it came from Torah, which he loved with every fiber of his being, which he studied with all his strength, and which he always had on his lips. He possessed a complete understanding of the Gemara, and in his numerous responsum he cited different versions thereof, as well as the remarks of commentators taken from the books in his library. It is therefore astonishing to realize that during his entire life, he almost never had access to his library and hardly managed to profit from it.

At the beginning, the library was located in Nickelsburg. However when he left for Prague, he made it follow by way of Worms. He waited in vain in Prague for the arrival of his books that were so precious to his heart. Yet it was not to be, as a fire ignited and burned everything in the library, down to the last book. In a letter dated to that year, he wrote, “I am like a craftsman that no longer has the tools of his trade.” Would he accept this? Would he become discouraged? Not him! He began again from scratch, one book after another, one manuscript after another. Yet again, he could not have them by his side. For one reason or another, he had to spend some years in Vienna while his books stayed in Nickelsburg. He wrote, “I possess only that which I know by heart. I ascend and descend the Talmud only by what I have on my tongue.”

Next he returned to Prague, but at the time there was an official censorship policy in place that prevented his books from entering the country. This was due to a fear that some books could contain material offensive to Christianity. Thus each time he needed to consult one of his books, the Rav of Prague was forced with great regret to go to his father-in-law in Walfendithal, near Hanover. He thus left this world far from his books, which were sold by his son after his death and purchased by Oxford University’s Bodleian Library in England. Divine Providence in this story can be fully seen today in all its strength. Many works and manuscripts would have certainly been burned over the course of the years and during times of persecution. Only the refusal of librarians to permit these books to be taken out allowed a great number of them to remain intact until our day. These books have subsequently been copied and scholars have made great use of them. The Rav Itzchak Dov Feld of London, a Holocaust survivor, worked tremendously hard to publish the works that Rabbi David Oppenheim had written. The Nazis had left him but one finger intact, and he used it to type the works of Rabbi David Oppenheim, which in this way were saved.

# THE MORAL OF THE STORY

## “FROM THE DEPTHS” (A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno)

**From** the depths I called you, O L-RD. L-rd, hear my voice; may Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas” (Psalms 130:1-2).

During the ten days that separate Rosh Hashanah from Yom Kippur, some add Psalm 130 to their morning prayer. This particular chapter, which begins with the words, “From the depths” is perfectly suited for these days of Teshuvah.

The Maggid of Dubno uses a parable to explain this to us.

Baron Levinski was known for his natural likeability. All those who worked for him had good reason to be thankful. Contrary to the other members of the aristocracy at the time, the baron personally knew each of his household servants and carefully saw to it that they be treated as best as possible, even if they were not well or too old to work in their field. Moreover, everyone knew that the baron made it a special point to be close to all his personnel. The warm relations that he maintained with his men had made him famous.

In light of the special atmosphere that prevailed in the chateau, everyone was stunned to learn that one day the master’s precious scarf had disappeared. It had been a gift that he had personally received from the baron’s wife, and he cherished it as if it had been woven of gold and studded with diamonds. Yet now it could not be found.

At the beginning, only those close to the baron knew that the scarf had vanished. Yet the days passed, and there was still no sign of the scarf. After a week, people began to suspect that the scarf had been stolen, not lost. Yet who could have stolen such an insignificant object? Among all the riches amassed in the chateau’s 89 halls, rooms, chambers, towers, and lounges, nothing else was missing. Who, therefore, would want to get his hands on a scarf and neglect the innumerable treasures in the chateau? At the end of two weeks, the baron found a solution: He announced to all his employees that he would search all their cottages, room by room, one after the other, until the missing scarf was found, so precious was the scarf in his eyes.

Now it turned out he did not need to start looking. The next morning, when the sun began to shine above the thatched roofs of the cottages, the mystery was solved. Seeing some signs in front of the home of one of his servants, one could immediately solve the riddle of the scarf. The shutters were wide open, yet there were no curtains on the windows. On the pathway leading up to the front door, marks on the ground indicated that heavy loads had been dragged toward the gate. The door itself had been left half-open, as if the entire cottage had been left with its mouth wide open in view of its empty interior.

The employee had disappeared, or rather had fled, in the middle of the night. Now the other employees were left shaking their heads in sobriety and saying, “Obviously, we should have been suspicious right away. He always seemed a little strange.”

Of course, the baron learned of the news, but as opposed to his household workers and servants, he remained silent. He only let out a sigh of pain in saying, “The fool. Why didn’t he ask me what he wanted? And now here he flees like a thief. May he never return. I never want to see him again!”

No one heard anyone speaking of the scarf ever again, nor of the former employee, now escaped. Finally, around the beginning of winter, rumors began circulating to the effect that the former employee had built a modest cabin for himself on the edge of the forest. He could be seen in town from time to time, trying to collect charity for himself or collecting scraps of food that kitchen helpers put out for him. And since he never satisfied his hunger when eating, he had to face facts: His only hope was to go back to the baron.

What would the baron – who was so generous, who for so many years had glossed over the man’s faults, who worried over his petty daily troubles, and who was almost a second father to the man – what would he say when he saw him rendered to a state of abject poverty through no one’s fault but his own?

The former employee had overheard the city-dwellers mention that fateful morning when the cottage had been discovered, emptied of all its contents. He especially remembered people recounting the baron’s reaction, and how he said, “May he never return. I never want to see him again!”

Despite everything, the former employee had to find a way to awaken the baron’s pity. It would be his greatest joy if he could only beg the baron’s pardon and get restored to the ranks of those who served him.

“I have an idea,” he thought. “The baron takes a walk on the grounds of the estate every Sunday. I’ll hide myself nearby and attempt to beg his pardon and his help.”

He spent his days collecting dead branches in order to build a hiding place behind which he could watch the baron and his entourage.

Sunday arrived and everything was finally prepared. He wrapped himself up in his threadbare coat, adjusted his scarf (or rather, the baron’s scarf) and repeated for the umpteenth time what he was about to say.

The sound of voices coming closer pulled him away from his thoughts. The voices were getting ever closer, and he could now clearly recognize that of the baron’s. His cheeks turned red with shame with the idea of finding himself before the kind-hearted baron whose trust he had so violated. Suddenly, he had the desire to be somewhere else, anywhere, given that he wouldn’t have to publicly admit that he had behaved like a stubborn fool.

“Help! Help! Save me!” he began to groan.

He was really suffering, tormented by remorse and afflicted with hunger. His voice expressed all the misery in the world.

The baron and his men, alerted by these sounds, quickened their pace. They went in the direction of the hiding place, yet found nothing. They searched all around, turning in circles near the former employee’s hiding place. The sounds of groaning continued, and their distress intensified.

“Where are you? We can’t help you if we can’t find you.”

“Here, in the bush,” replied the former employee, his voice choking with shame. “I beg you, help me! I have no food to put in my mouth and I am homeless. Help me!”

“We will help you,” the baron reassured him in a parental tone. “But first you have to show yourself. Stop eluding us. Step out from your hiding place and we will see what can be done for you.”

“I can’t leave,” his voice lamented, “I can’t...”

“But why? What will happen?”

“You said that you never want to see me ... when I took your scarf ... so ... I’ve hidden myself here. I can’t show myself. I’m too ashamed to look into your face ... I’m still wearing your scarf, so I still have to hide.”

Chazal tell us that Hashem is very close to us between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This is the time to do Teshuvah, when Hashem is found practically nearby, just as Baron Levinski was found next to his former employee. If the latter had not called him aside as he did, the baron and his friends would have passed by and he would have lost the chance to be forgiven.

We also have the opportunity to call to Hashem and ask Him for His help in doing Teshuvah and making everything right. This opportunity is offered to us every year during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah (Ten day of Repentance).

The problem is that we are too ashamed to act. In fact, there are people that are so ashamed of their sins that they don’t even dare and pray to ask Hashem for His forgiveness.

However that is a big mistake, for everyone can find a way to ask for Hashem’s forgiveness. King David taught us to call to Him: “From the depths I called you, O L-RD. L-rd, hear my voice. ... If you preserve iniquities [instead of forgiving them] O G-d, O L-rd, who could survive?” (Psalms 130:1-3).