

תורה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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YOU SHALL MEDITATE ON THE LAW DAY AND NIGHT

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "And her days were full to bear, and behold, there were twins in her womb" (Genesis 25:24). The word תומם (twins) is written without the letter aleph, and Rashi explains in the name of the Sages that "this omission indicates that one of the twins was upright and the other was ungodly" (Bereshith Rabba 25:24). This does not preclude the possibility of humbly adding another interpretation.

Concerning Moses, it is written, "Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights" (Exodus 24:18). Why does the Torah state "forty nights," given that a day includes nighttime, as it is written, "and there was evening, and there was morning, one day" (Genesis 1:5)? This latter passage indicates that daytime is the continuation of nighttime. In that which concerns the Temple, nighttime is the continuation of daytime, together forming one complete day (Chullin 83a). On the mountain, Moses was in the presence of G-d, as during the Divine service. Yet one way or another, if it is already stated "forty days," what is the need to add "forty nights"?

To explain this, it must be noted that it is natural to be tired at the end of the day; it is normal to be exhausted at night because of the activities of the day. It is natural to regain one's strength and to become energized by a refreshing sleep. As the Sages say, "night was created for the sake of sleep" (Eruvin 65a). However this does not apply to Moses our teacher. On the contrary, for him the night was in everything just like the day, in the sense of the passage, "Night shines like the day; darkness and light are the same" (Psalms 139:12). For Moses, this was to the point that he felt no fatigue or nighttime weariness. This was because of his great desire to learn the Law from G-d's very mouth.

The Sages add that when he was on the mountain for forty days, during the daytime he studied Torah in the presence of G-d, and during the nighttime he reviewed what he had learned (Shemot Rabba 47:8). He did this in order to instruct the Children of Israel that they should reserve a time to contemplate Torah as much during the day as at night. If the Torah had not written "forty

nights," we could have thought that Moses, given his greatness and abilities, had in fact studied Torah most of the night, as it is written, "You shall contemplate it day and night" (Joshua 1:8), and that, despite himself, he perhaps rested a little and maybe even slept! This is why the Torah explicitly states, "forty days and forty nights." It is in order to underline the fact that the nights were similar to the days, and that in the same way in which he diligently studied Torah with G-d during the day, he also studied it during the night, without feeling weary or tired.

Let us add to this that the will and desire to study at night, with mind sharp and eyes wide open, ensues from study during the day. The ability to fight against the natural hold of sleep and to study during the night is proportional to one's efforts and steadfastness in Torah study during the day, and it is in this way that man achieves that which the Sages promised him: "The one who studies Torah at night is crowned with a halo of Divine kindness the next day" (Hagigah 12b). Moreover, the one who contemplates Torah at night (which is to say, in this world – which resembles the night) is encircled with a halo of Divine kindness in the world to come, in the world that is perfect and eternal (ibid.).

It seems to me that this can be applied to the verse that states, "Happy are those who dwell in Your House; they will yet praise You forever" (Psalms 84:5). What is the sense of "they will yet praise You forever"? The answer is that one who contemplates Torah with diligence during the day has an enhanced desire to pursue his study at night, and this allows him to overcome his natural fatigue. In such a case, G-d gives him the strength to continue doing so. Studying Torah regularly every day, at fixed times, allows a person to overcome fatigue and to continue with renewed strength, as did Moses who studied Torah during forty days and forty nights in the presence of G-d.

To say that "Torah weakens a man's strength" (Sanhedrin 26a) is to say that study weakens the tendencies of his evil inclination and diminishes his natural desires. Yet Torah strengthens a man's spiritual

impulses, which allows him to once again tap the energy of his youth and to devote himself to study with renewed strength.

We know that such diligence, over and above that which stems from natural strength, is possible in the study of Torah, and we encounter it not far from us, with the Sages of our time. The Gaon Rabbi Haim of Brisk was visited one morning by a woman who wanted his advice. Having found him deep in his studies, she sat down and waited ... until the next morning – one entire day! She waited until the Gaon freed himself from his study to listen to her request. We have also heard stories of the extraordinary devotion of the Vilna Gaon, who slept but two hours a night! Only two hours!

This clearly demonstrates that diligence in Torah study on the one hand, and the individual help that G-d provides for those who make the effort to do so, on the other hand, engender one another. G-d's help multiplies man's strength, allowing him to continue to the next day, day after day.

The Zohar speaks of amazing things concerning those who push themselves to study Torah at night, describing how G-d connects Himself to them. We shall cite some of these statements: "The one who puts the effort into understanding Torah attaches himself to the Tree of Life" (Zohar Korach 176a); "Know the Name of G-d and free yourself from the prison" (ibid. III:176a); "The one who occupies himself with Torah in this world will find many gates open for him in the world to come" (ibid. III:213a); "The one who studies Torah during the day and night acquires two worlds: The higher world and the lower world" (ibid. I:189b); "He perceives the unity of G-d" (ibid. III:9b); "It is as if he is on Mount Sinai and receives the Torah himself" (ibid. III:179b); "He will die from G-d's kiss" (ibid. I:168a). All this is to say that the one who overcomes his fatigue in order to study Torah brings joy to G-d, to the point that it is stated that G-d kisses him and says, "See what a being I have made in My world!" For such a man, "commensurate with the effort is the reward" (Perkei Avoth 5:21).

In opposition to Moses, who studied Torah forty days and forty nights on the mountain, we find in the Torah a character that is completely different. Even though it is not the subject here, the comparison between the two will allow us to explain and understand the subject that we have been dealing with up to now. The person we are referring to is Ephron the Hittite, the man who sold the cave of Machpelah to Abraham.

At first Ephron told Abraham, "You are a prince of G-d in our midst" (Genesis 23:6) and furthermore, "Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham ... before all entering the gate of his city, saying, 'No my lord, hear me. I give the field to you, and the cave which is in it I give to you'" (vv.10-11). Apparently he acted with the formal respect due a representative of G-d, to whom he gave everything as a gift, free of charge. Yet when

the time came to fulfill his promise, he revealed what his true intentions were: "A land worth 400 shekels of silver, what is it between you and me?" (v.15).

This shows us that Ephron, a cheat of Esau's caliber, was lying openly. Just as Esau deceived people, Ephron passed himself off in public as upright and generous, yet this was in appearance only, as the end of the story proves. Ephron was one of those hypocrites "who speak much but do nothing of what they say" (Bava Metzia 87a), for their words are nothing but lies.

The world was destroyed by the flood as punishment for the crimes committed by men against one another. After the flood, G-d entered into a covenant with Noah, promising all the creatures on earth that there would never again be another flood. He designated the rainbow as a sign of that promise, as it is written, "I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13). If in the future G-d wanted to destroy the world again, "the bow will be seen in the cloud, I will remember My covenant between Me and you ... and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" (vv.14-15). There will never be another flood.

Ephron, through his deception and baseness, could have provoked another flood if it had not been for the sign of the covenant – the rainbow in the cloud – preventing it. This is indicated in his name, עפרון, which (without the ו) would have a numerical value of 400. This number, added to the 400 shekels of silver that he extorted from Abraham, comes to 800, the numerical value of the word קשת, the rainbow. The rainbow must have appeared in the sky when Ephron deceived Abraham in the eyes of all the people of the city.

What is the meaning of the word תומם (twins), written without the א? Rebecca went to the Academy of Shem and Eber (Bereshith Rabba 63:6) in order to ask them about her future and the meaning of the jostling in her womb. They told her that even though she was carrying twins – which usually means that the children will resemble one another – her children were completely different than each other: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be separated from your insides" (Genesis 25:23). This one will journey on his path in the steps of Moses, who studies Torah day and night, and that one will follow the path of Ephron the Hittite, who deceives and pulls the wool over people's eyes.

In decomposing the word תומם (twins), we get תו and מם. תו has the same numerical value as the name Ephron, which recalls Esau the liar. מם doubled has the same numerical value as the name Jacob, a man similar to Moses, who studied Torah for forty days and forty nights without stop.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine” (Genesis 27:28). Our Sages say, “‘And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens’ – He will give you blessings and also the ability to acquire them. Rabbi Acha says: He will give you the blessings and also the godliness that accompany them. ‘Of the dew of the heavens’ – this is Zion. ‘Of the fatness of the earth’ – these are the sacrifices. ‘And abundant grain’ – these are the first fruits. ‘And wine’ – these are the drink offerings.”

The Maggid of Dubno explains this Midrash with a parable.

There was once a wealthy man who ran several businesses, owned fields, possessed vineyards, and was involved in numerous enterprises. As he grew older, he realized that the best thing for him to do would be to choose one of his sons and give all the secrets of his assets over to him, and that it be him who takes care of everything. He therefore called his sons and told them, “I will give everything that I own in this world to the one among you who wants it. The others will receive their living from him.” Each refused, scared by the magnitude of the task and preferring to receive their sustenance without laboring for it, rather than to kill themselves at work in order to earn a living for everyone else.

Yet one among them, who was remarkably intelligent, answered his father as follows: “I accept to provide for the needs of my brothers and for the entire household, given that you keep your word to put me in charge of everything you possess.”

As he was leaving, one of his relatives asked him why he had accepted such a heavy responsibility.

“Don’t you see that I have a great deal to gain from this?” he replied. “First of all, my father will give all his enterprises over to me, along with everything required to make them function, whether it be gold or silver, copper, tin or lead. Secondly, he’ll teach me everything there is to know about commerce and trade, including the work of vineyards and fields, as well as what needs to be known regarding internal business affairs. Besides wealth, I’ll gain an enormous amount of knowledge and wisdom in this way.”

All the blessings and benefits of this world are acquired only through the intermediary of our holy Torah, for it is from it that life and goodness

ensues, as Scripture time and time again affirms: “I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah” (Proverbs 4:2). The Midrash goes even further: “Some seize spoils of gold but not silver, or of silver but not gold. As for the holy Torah, it consists of silver and gold, fields and vineyards.” This means that the Torah is at the origin of all blessings, and it is the source from which all good emanates. To give the Torah the best possible conditions for fulfillment, G-d led us to a pleasant and beneficial place for the performance of mitzvot: Zion and Jerusalem. For our benefit, there He built a dwelling place in which He could reside. The Sages have taught that the Temple below corresponds to the Temple above, and that the Table, Menorah, Showbread, sacrifices, and incense are the likely means by which an abundance of blessings descend from on high. It is with this entire assortment of favorable items that we will be able to properly worship G-d and obtain the best of His blessings. It will then be possible for us to spread this throughout the world.

This is one of the reasons for which G-d caused Jacob to receive the blessings of the dew of the heavens and the fatness of the earth. It was not for his personal pleasure, but rather that these blessings be found in the hand of His faithful servant, one who will be able to manage such a treasure. It required extraordinary wisdom, great knowledge of Torah, and a very clear understanding of Hashem’s divinity and the Temple service. Our Sages derived all this from the addition of the letter vav (“and”) in the phrase, “And may G-d give you,” which alludes to an addition. This is the idea that the Midrash develops: “He will give you blessings and also the ability to acquire them.” Blessing is conceived of here as a fruit whose root is hidden in G-d’s treasure. The ability to acquire is therefore the path to this root. The statement, “He will give you the blessings and also the godliness that accompany them” alludes to the knowledge of G-d needed to properly serve Him. The purpose and essential aspect of this blessing is therefore the way to holiness. It is this that provides the key. This is why the Midrash continues and states, “‘Of the dew of the heavens’ – this is Zion. ‘Of the fatness of the earth’ – these are the sacrifices. ‘And abundant grain’ – these are the first fruits. ‘And wine’ – these are the drink offerings.”

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra

The following story is one that pertains not only to Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, but also to Shabbat.

In 1159 (4919), more than 840 years ago, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra had a dream. It took place on a Friday night, and after Shabbat ended, he wrote down what he had dreamt.

“I was pleasantly sleeping, and in my dream I saw an angel standing in front of me that resembled a man. He was holding a sealed letter, and he said to me, ‘Take this letter. It is on Shabbat that I send it to you.’ I bowed before G-d and I blessed Him for having granted me such a great honor. I took hold of the letter with both hands and read it. It was like honey in my mouth.

“This is how the letter began: ‘I, Shabbat, crowned by those who are valued, the fourth of the Ten Commandments, an eternal covenant for all the generations. ... Every day one may find the doors of understanding open, but on Shabbat a hundred doors are opened. My honor desires that one not behave on Shabbat as during the week, neither in moving about, nor in business, nor in speech. And I kept watch over you everyday because you carefully guarded me since the days of your youth.’ ”

However when Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra arrived at the end of the letter, he saw that it contained an open rebuke. Stunned, he began to tremble.

“My heart is hot within me, and my soul almost escapes me, and I ask the one who is standing in front of me, ‘What is my error, and what is my sin? For since the day that I knew awesome G-d – Who

created me and from Whom I learned His mitzvot – I have always loved Shabbat, for whose arrival I would go out to greet it with all my heart, and for whose departure I would accompany it with songs of joy. Who was more faithful among its followers than I, and why am I being sent this letter?’ ”

The angel let him know that one of his disciples had let himself become seduced by false ideologies that had “decided” that Shabbat began on Saturday morning and continued until Sunday morning. It was as simple as that, a “discovery” without any foundation, contrary to all tradition that we hold since Moses, and contrary to what is written in the Torah: “And there was evening” followed next by “and there was morning.” Thus in all eras there arise “Sages” that propose all sorts of things. This one believes that such and such is not considered forbidden work on Shabbat, another gives “proof” for neglecting something else on Shabbat, and so on and so forth. However the Torah is eternal, and Shabbat complains about the insults that it receives.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra ends by writing, “Whoever adopts such an explanation, G-d will take vengeance on him in honor of Shabbat. Whoever reads this explanation, may his tongue stick to his palate. And whoever writes this explanation, may his arm be torn off and his eye grow dim. Thus there will be light for all the house of Israel!”

This letter was published for the first time at the end of the Arizal’s Shulchan Aruch, and it teaches us just how much one should watch over the honor of Shabbat.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra’s Hilloula is on Adar 1.