

# THE POWER OF TORAH BRINGS UNITY AND PERFECTION IN ISRAEL (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

## The Path To Follow

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### Guard Your Tongue!

#### Concealed Lashon Harah

The Jerusalem Talmud recounts that a king wanted to construct a large bridge. He ordered the Jews in the city to begin building it, and to that end he divided them into different groups. Each day one group had to work on the bridge without pay.

One morning Mr. Spinchy decided that he would rather learn Torah than obey the king, and therefore he did not come to work. Some of his fellow laborers were jealous and wanted to harm him. "Hey there, what did you bring for lunch today?" one worker loudly asked another. "Spinach," he said. When the foreman heard the word spinach, it reminded him that Mr. Spinchy had not come to work that day. He immediately dispatched a policeman to bring him to work by force (Yerushalmi Peah 1:1). This is an example of concealed Lashon Harah. Although Mr. Spinchy's name was not explicitly mentioned, and the damaging intent was not overt, Lashon Harah was still spoken of him.

**O**n the verse, "Come to Pharaoh..." (Exodus 10:1), the holy Rebbe of Lizensk, Rabbi Elimelech, wrote in his book Noam Elimelech: "'Come to Pharaoh...so that you may relate.' This leads us to believe that the Creator's main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make this a sign for the Children of Israel, that the letters of the Torah would increase by what was said, and that a single letter would not be lacking in the Sefer Torah."

Now when Moses went to find Pharaoh, he did not go willingly, for he did not want to look at a wicked man. This is why Hashem told Moses to come to Pharaoh, meaning that he should proceed willingly because it was a way of adding more letters to the Torah, resulting in a greater degree of holiness. Hence the word go is not used, for we speak of going even when we do so unwillingly. That is, our legs "go" in any case, whereas to "come" designates voluntary movement that we agree to in our mind, which drives us. It can then be said, "So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai]," a word that evokes otot, the "letters" of the Torah, as we have mentioned. This is what the holy Rebbe was saying.

It seems difficult to understand the meaning of the Rebbe's statement, "To make this a sign for the Children of Israel, that the letters of the Torah would increase by what was being said." Could Moses not have given some speech for the Sefer Torah to be filled with letters? Better that Moses should be the person to do so, for it is best to speak as little as possible with the wicked. Consequently, what is the meaning of, "So that I can put these signs of Mine [ototai]" with regards to the letters of the Torah?

Let us try and explain. Pharaoh was at the head of the forces of impurity, and he clearly knew that in order for the Children of Israel to leave Egypt with a high hand and receive the holy Torah, which has 600,000 letters, they would also have to have 600,000 souls among them. Thus it is said that the word Israel is formed from the initials of the expression: Yesh shishim ribo otot laTorah ("There are six hundred thousand letters in the Torah"). This is why Pharaoh tried to kill as many Jews as possible. It is why he decreed, "Every son that will be born, into the river shall you throw him" (Exodus 1:22). By doing so, there would be fewer people among the Children of Israel, and therefore they would be unable to leave Egypt. Furthermore, by bringing despair upon them, Pharaoh made them lose faith and confidence in the Creator of the world. However the Children of Israel increased their faith in the Creator, doing so by means of none other than the king of Egypt himself! As a result, it was Pharaoh himself who at that point caused so many words in the Torah to be written about him, thus reinforcing the Children of Israel's faith. It was also in this way that the letters of the Torah reached six hundred thousand in number, the same as the Children of Israel.

This is why it is stated, "They could not delay" (Exodus 12:39). Why not? Once the letters in the Torah reached their complete number, and once the Children of Israel had strengthened themselves and emerged from the 49 gates of impurity (Zohar Chadash, Yitro 39a), the Holy One, blessed be He, immediately took them out of Egypt. We find this idea succinctly

stated by the Noam Elimelech: "The Creator's main purpose in striking Pharaoh and his servants was to make it a sign for the Children of Israel, that the letters of the Torah would increase by what was said, and that a single letter would not be lacking in the Sefer Torah." This means that what was said concerning Pharaoh represented a sign for the Children of Israel, thanks to which one Jew after another is spiritually elevated, and thus the Sefer Torah is complete. In examining these verses, we can fully understand why Pharaoh often sent Moses away (e.g. Exodus 10:28). Pharaoh did not want his words to help the people grow, for he realized that the more he said, the more words would fill the Torah, resulting in the souls of the Children of Israel being elevated. Pharaoh knew that many Jews would die in the plague of darkness, and therefore they would need to greatly add to their numbers. It was precisely for this reason that Moses came to meet Pharaoh by the river (ibid. 7:15) – where he could return home whenever he wished – in order to have more conversation. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to go willingly to Pharaoh ("come to Pharaoh"), for if he went under duress, he would not want to speak. The Torah would therefore be missing letters, which would affect the souls of the Children of Israel.

On a deeper level, what is the meaning of the fact that a single letter, or a single soul among the Children of Israel, is missing? We may explain this by saying that the Holy One, blessed be He, insisted upon the Children of Israel studying the Torah and constantly being engaged in it (Torat Kohanim, Vayikra 26). Why so? It was in order for their souls to be constantly connected to the Torah, for then the Torah, the Children of Israel, and Hashem are one (Zohar III:73b). When the study of Torah is neglected, severe decrees fall upon Israel. Even the Temple was destroyed on account of the insult made to the Torah (Nedarim 81a on Jeremiah 9:11).

In addition to this, Amalek also comes due to a neglect in Torah study, as explained on the verse: "They encamped in Rephidim" (Exodus 17:1). In other words, "They weakened themselves [raphu yedeheem] in Torah" (Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalach). As a result, just as it is forbidden for a Sefer Torah to be missing a single letter (in which case it becomes invalid), so too is it forbidden for a single soul among the Jewish people to be missing. Even if just one of them of missing, the letters will fly away and the entire Jewish people will be in serious danger. However by the study of Torah and the unity of the Jewish people, everything becomes complete, all that is lacking is filled, and the Holy One, blessed be He, avenges Himself against our enemies and His Name becomes sanctified in the world.

From this we must all learn to work hard in order that nothing should be lacking in the Torah, not even a single letter. We do this by putting an effort into our Torah study, in which case not even a single soul will be missing among the Jewish people. All this depends on us, for we are the only ones who can do it. Only by acting in this way can we merit every good thing from Hashem, which will be our reward in this world and the World to Come.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## By Means of Deception

When the Egyptians were struck by the plague of the firstborn, Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and demanded, “Rise up, go out from among my people” (Exodus 12:31). The Egyptians also encouraged them to leave the land as quickly as possible. However before leaving Egypt, the Children of Israel borrowed vessels of silver and gold from them, as well as clothing, Scripture underlining that they did so “according to the word of Moses” (v.35). Yet were they really interested in such things when they left Egypt? Rather, was this not a case of a people who were exploited and made to suffer, who then rioted and avenged themselves on their taskmasters?

After having read the relevant verses, we see that the borrowing of vessels had been planned by Hashem in advance, even before the process of deliverance had begun. This seems to have occurred as early as Parsha Shemot: “It will happen that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. Each woman shall request from her neighbor... vessels of silver and vessels of gold” (Exodus 3:21-22). When the time to leave Egypt drew near, the explicit order came: “Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, vessels of silver and vessels of gold” (ibid. 11:2). The Children of Israel were now doing just that. What is the significance of this order? The Egyptians owed them the wages of their work, as the Talmud tells us: The Egyptians presented themselves in court before Alexander of Macedon concerning the silver and gold that the Children of Israel had borrowed from them, yet had not returned. Gebiha ben Pesisa then replied that the Egyptians had also not paid the Children of Israel for their work during all their years of slavery in Egypt (Sanhedrin 91a).

Consequently, why did Hashem command their repayment to occur in a roundabout, deceptive manner? Here the Vilna Gaon states that the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid Pharaoh measure for measure, for he had reduced Israel to slavery through deception. As the Midrash explains, at first Pharaoh himself began to work, prompting the Children of Israel to say: “If the king is working, how much more should we!” At first he even paid them well and gave them a great deal of money, until they began working beyond their abilities. In the end, however, he forced them to work.

Similarly, the decree to throw their sons into the river was carried out by means of deception, since Pharaoh had asked the midwives to kill the babies before they left the womb. Then when they emerged, the midwives were to tell the mother that her child was stillborn. Hashem therefore acted with him measure for measure, bringing things about by means of deception.

## A Trap

It is written, “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn, so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst” (Exodus 10:1).

Is it feasible to tell someone, “Go and make a deal for me with [so and so]. Don’t worry, I’ve already spoken with him so that he won’t agree?” Given that Hashem had hardened the heart of Pharaoh and his servants, why did Moses have to go and meet him?

The Maharil Diskin said in the name of his father, Rabbi Binyamin, that to understand this verse we need to add two words to the text: “Come to Pharaoh and say I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn...” That is, tell him in My Name that he will not let the Children of Israel go, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants. What do we get from this? Pharaoh was always claiming that Moses was a sorcerer, not Hashem’s emissary. He tried to prove his claim by noting that Moses seemed to be unaware of future events. “I promise to do something, and I don’t keep my word,” Pharaoh said, “Yet Moses believes me each time!” Hashem said to Moses, “Tell him that I’ve hardened his heart. He will then want to prove that you are a sorcerer, and that you do not know

what he will do next. He will therefore free the people of Israel, for he wants to prove that I have not hardened his heart as you have said. He really does not want to free them, but he will have a problem if he keeps them, for it will prove that you can indeed foretell events.” In other words, Hashem told Moses: “Do this to him, for it is a trap. Lodge a bone in his throat, so that he can neither swallow it nor cough it up.”

## A Personal Example

It is written, “So that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son... that you may know that I am the L-RD” (Exodus 10:2).

The verse seems muddled, for if we are to relate these things “in the ears of your son and your son’s son,” the end of the verse should have stated, “that they may know that I am the L-RD” – not “that you may know.”

The Rebbe of Belz said, “When someone tells his children about Hashem’s miracles during the exodus from Egypt, this knowledge is strengthened in him as well. Thus in recounting these things to your son, both you and your son will know that I am Hashem.” Another reason is hidden here as well. A Jew went to the Rebbe of Kotzk and asked him for a blessing that his son should study. The Rebbe said to him, “If you are asking me for a blessing that your son should study, it is certain that your son will also ask for a blessing that his son should study, for he too will not study. However if you study and your son sees what the home of a Jew is like, he will understand that he should also do the same, and he will begin to study. However if you are coming only to ask for a blessing that your son should study, yet your son sees you coming home from work to relax and read the paper without studying, then he will do the same.” We can understand the verse, “You shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them” (Deuteronomy 6:7) in the same way, since it seems more logical for the verse to have stated, “and they shall speak of them.” In other words, if you want your children to study words of Torah, then “you shall speak of them.” You yourself must study, for otherwise there is a strong likelihood that your son will also come and ask for a blessing that his son should study. This teaches us that a person’s efforts should first focus on himself, and from there he can go on to enlighten others.

On the same subject, one of the great figures of Israel recounted how he had elevated himself in Torah. He had been told that, for generations, his ancestors had all worked without studying Torah. When he asked his grandfather why he did not study, he answered that he had worked in order for his son to study. Then when he asked the latter why he had not studied, he too answered that it was in order for his son to study. This had been going on for at least a dozen generations, with everyone working in order for his son to study Torah. “I wanted to know,” said this great Torah figure, “who would be the one for whom a dozen generations had worked, and I decided that it would be me!”

## Forgoing the Bonus of their Deliverance

It is written, “Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, vessels of silver and vessels of gold. The L-RD granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of the people” (Exodus 11:2-3).

Why did the Children of Israel have to be asked to take money? It would have been sufficient just to tell them! The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to fulfill His promise that the Jewish people would not leave Egypt as disgraced slaves, but rather as equals with their former masters, departing with great possessions. However they were prepared to forgo the bestowal of this great wealth, given that they could leave without delay or complication.

## The Distribution of Tasks

It is written, “I shall go through the land of Egypt on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from man to beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment. I am the L-RD” (Exodus 12:12).



# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## The Mitzvah of Pidyon HaBen

It is written, “I shall go through,” and in the Passover Haggadah we read, “I, and not an angel. I, and not a messenger.” That is, “I Myself will go, and I will kill the firstborn.” Nevertheless, it is stated that Hashem commanded the placing of blood upon the lintel so that “He will not permit the destroyer to enter your homes” (Exodus 12:23). Thus who killed the firstborn, Hashem or the destroying angel?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger also asked, “Why were only the maternal firstborn redeemed, whereas the paternal firstborn were not? Given that the paternal firstborn were also killed in Egypt, they should have also been redeemed!”

He answers by saying that there was a distribution of tasks that occurred in Egypt. Everyone knew who the maternal firstborn among the people were, whereas even an angel did not know the identities of the paternal firstborn. As the Gemara tells us, Hashem said that in Egypt He would distinguish between a drop that would become a firstborn and one that would not. As a result, the destroying angel killed the maternal firstborn only, while Hashem killed the paternal firstborn. When Hashem kills, there is no danger that He will fail to make a distinction. However when the destroying angel kills, everyone is in danger. This is because, as the Gemara says, “Once permission has been granted to the destroyer, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked” (Bava Kama 60a). Therefore the angel assigned with killing the maternal firstborn among the Egyptians was liable to kill the material firstborn among the Jews as well. Thus they received the order to place blood on their doorposts, and because they were saved from death, they had to be redeemed.

– Aish Dat

## Overview of the Parsha

The last plagues are described in Parsha Bo, as well as the exodus from Egypt and the mitzvot that came as a result. It is said that the plagues of locusts and darkness were the last to come through an intermediary. It was Hashem Who brought the last plague upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Hashem commanded the entire Jewish people to offer the Passover sacrifice, whose blood would be a protective sign for them during the last plague. Hashem also told them to make their bread unleavened, instituting the Passover sacrifice and unleavened bread for all the generations to come. The plague of the firstborn (which resulted in their death) took place at midnight, and the Children of Israel left Egypt the following morning. That day marked 430 years from the time that Abraham, the father of the nation, had left Ur of the Chaldees. Finally, the Children of Israel were commanded to constantly remember the exodus from Egypt.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### The Mother of Yehoshua ben Chanania

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai said of his disciple Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania: “Happy is she who bore him” (Perkei Avot 2:9). What did his mother do to merit such praise? It is said that as soon as Rabbi Yehoshua was born, she saw to it that he received a pure education. She said, “From infancy I want his ears to hear the sounds of Torah.” What did she do? She brought his crib to the Beit Midrash and left it there to hear words of Torah being uttered. Indeed, the prayers and hard work of this righteous woman bore fruit, for she merited that her son would become great in Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua’s wisdom was also exceedingly profound in the affairs of this world, and even the Roman Emperor respected him so much that he sought his advice on matters relating to the empire.

It is written, “Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among the Children of Israel, of man and beast; it is Mine” (Exodus 13:2).

It is a positive Torah mitzvah for every Jew to redeem his firstborn son from the Kohen for five selaim. The firstborn is redeemed on the thirty-first day after his birth, and the redemption money is given to the Kohen. This represents one of the 24 gifts that the Kohanim were entitled to. At the Pidyon HaBen ceremony, a festive meal is normally held.

The Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 18) states: “This mitzvah teaches man to dedicate his very first achievements to G-d. Although firstborn children, like firstfruits, are the culmination of much yearning, labor, and sacrifice (and it is human nature to want to keep them for oneself), the Torah wants us to recognize that they are a gift from G-d and should be dedicated to His service. Thus man redeems his firstborn.” The Sefer HaChinuch adds that he does this despite the fact that, to him, they are as important as the apple of his eye. There is another reason behind this mitzvah, namely that when Hashem killed the firstborn of Egypt, He allowed the firstborn of Israel to live. Thus everyone saw His power, and in this way His Name was sanctified in the world. Since the firstborn were the means by which this sanctification of G-d’s Name took place, Hashem commanded us to devote our firstborn to Him.

We may ask why the Torah commanded the redemption of the firstborn of man, for would it not have been better for him to conserve his sanctity for all time? The answer is that the Torah does not want man to be content with the fact that the Torah sanctifies him. Instead, a person should redeem the holiness that was given to him as a gift and try to attain it through his own efforts. This is because what a person acquires through his own efforts remains permanently his, whereas he quickly loses what he easily attains. We see that although the Children of Israel arrived at the level of prophesy during the exodus from Egypt, they complained shortly thereafter for trivial reasons. As for the prophets themselves, such a thing did not occur with them because they reached their level of prophesy through their own hard work. Hence they retained it. The generation of the desert, however, did not achieve their level of prophesy by means of effort. Rather, Hashem gave it to them as a gift in preparation for receiving the Torah. The result was that, on the inside, the generation of the desert did not change.

The commentators have mentioned this with regards to an embryo in its mother’s womb. They say that a light shines upon an unborn child’s head as it studies Torah. However when the child emerges from the womb, an angel strikes it and makes it forget all it learned (Niddah 30b).

Why teach the Torah to a child in the womb, given that it will forget everything upon being born? The answer is that a person must make an effort to acquire the Torah, and in doing so what he learned in his mother’s womb will then help him to remember things little by little. As science teaches us, boiling water that has been chilled is easier to boil than cold water that has never been boiled.

# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## Rabbi Nathan David Rabinowitz – The Rebbe of Pertzova

The Rebbe Rabbi Nathan David Rabinowitz, from the Polish city of Pertzova, was a gaon in Torah and famous in his time. He was the son of the tzaddik Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov of Biala (from whom emerged the famous Biala dynasty, which exists to the present day), as well as the grandson of Rabbi Nathan David of Shidlovtza and the great-grandson of Rabbi Yerachmiel. He in turn was the firstborn son of the saintly Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak, the Yid HaKodesh (Holy Jew) of Pshischa, may his merit protect us all.

People could see that Rabbi Nathan David was from a noble line. From very early on in life, he spent many hours each day diligently studying Torah and Chassidut, completely separated from the vanities of this world. In fact it was said that he didn't even know what a coin looked like.

Rabbi Nathan David devoted himself not only to the revealed Torah. He also possessed an extensive and clear understanding of the hidden Torah, and many Kabbalists of his time came to study with him late at night. He wrote many books on Kabbalah, but unfortunately the world did not merit to see them. These books were lost forever, a fact that he bitterly regretted for his entire life. Rabbi Nathan David often described himself as being the root of the soul of the saintly Rabbi David of Lelov. As it turned out, Rabbi Nathan David passed away on Rabbi David's yahrtzeit, Shevat 7, dying in the prime of his life. May his merit protect us all.

## A TRUE STORY

### The Erev Rav

It is written, "An erev rav [mixed multitude] went up with them" (Exodus 12:38).

The gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger (who lived some 200 years ago) was among the greatest rabbis of his generation, a man who unstintingly fought against the Reform movement.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger once traveled to Warsaw, the capital of Poland, where the leaders of the community invited him to visit the "Beit HaMidrash LaRabbanim." The goal of this institution was to produce "progressive" rabbis who were educated in the spirit of the times. The gaon walked the hallways of the institution and questioned some of its students. He then realized that they were far from being competent in the Talmud, as is fitting for one who wants to be a Rav in Israel.

The gaon asked the director of the institution, "Where is the Torah of your students?" Bothered by his distinguished guest's question, the director replied that the school was but an introductory phase for young students who were just starting out. It was established in the hopes that they would later focus their energies on delving into profound and complex Talmudic studies, necessary for them to exercise their role as a rav. Rabbi Akiva answered, "From what you are telling me, it would seem that a student who graduates from this institution receives the diploma of an erev rav ["mixed multitude," but also "before a rav"], and strictly speaking he cannot be considered a rav!"

## A MATTER OF EDUCATION

### Progressive Education Determines Success

It is written, "I will bring one more plague" (Exodus 11:1).

The plague of the firstborn was the deathblow whose arrival Hashem had already announced in Parsha Shemot: "I shall kill your firstborn son" (ibid. 4:23). With regards to the first nine plagues (which were not intended to bring about the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt), it is explicatively stated that their goal was the sanctification of Hashem's Name in the eyes of Egypt and among the Jewish people for all time. We may, however, derive another reason from it, namely that education should be progressive in nature. A single rebuke, issued just once, does not have the ability to encourage thoughtful reflection on the issue at hand. In order for understanding to take root in a student, what is needed is a progressive, step-by-step method of teaching, until little by little the message we wish to convey sinks in. A single criticism or physical punishment serves no useful purpose, and it is liable to do more harm than good. In fact such an approach will do nothing but ruin a student's education.

The Sages have said, "I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who accepts reproof" (Arachin 16b). There are even some great Torah scholars who attempt to educate their children in such a way that they can immediately reach the same level that they themselves are at. It is certainly true that since they have already experienced many things in life, they can transmit lessons to their children and students that are free of all kinds of error. Hence the student, as he progresses in life, is spared the pitfalls involved in eliminating mistakes. We must realize, however, that there are some things that cannot be understood at a deeper level unless they are experienced. The book Messilat Yesharim compares education in life to navigating a maze. According to this analogy, a wise man (who already has life experience) who is about to exit the maze cannot tell someone who has just entered it to learn from him by the way he moves near its exit.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### Wounded and Dying

It is written, "Though I shall make an end of all the nations where I have dispersed you, yet I shall not make an end of you" (Jeremiah 46:28).

The prophet Jeremiah is telling the Children of Israel that in the future Hashem will set the 70 nations against one another. Mashiach will then arrive as the nations lie wounded, dazed, and dying. A non-Jewish king once asked a talmid chacham how the Jewish people would manage to survive the destruction that will occur among the nations. The chacham replied, "Gather 70 large and powerful roosters, as well as a small and sickly one, and put them in a closed room without food or water." The king did so, and the next day the chacham accompanied the king into the room holding the roosters. Carrying some food for the birds, they opened a window into the room and threw some grain inside. Dozens of famished roosters immediately pounced on the food, resulting in a struggle among them. The birds gauged each other's eyes out and tore at their feathers, with the result being that blood spewed from their bodies. The sickly little rooster, however, stood to the side and tried to hide. However once the others were wounded and dying, it ventured to the center of the room where the grain was. There it ate its fill, and none of the other birds bothered it. The chacham said to the king, "So too will Hashem set the nations of the world against one another, though tiny Israel will not get involved in their conflicts. Then as the nations lie wounded and dying, the Messiah will arrive and save us."