

# PERFORMING MITZVOT SOLELY FOR THE SAKE OF HASHEM

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

**A**t the beginning of this week's parsha we read, "When you kindle the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the Menorah. ... This is the work of the Menorah, hammered out gold" (Numbers 8:2,4). Many commentators have asked why Scripture mentions the making of the Menorah here, since the passage speaks of its lighting, not its making. What connection is there between the two?

It seems that we must understand these two verses as allusions. Thus "the lamps" allude to the mitzvot, as it is written: "For a mitzvah is a lamp" (Proverbs 6: 23). What does "When you kindle the lamps" allude to? When a person has the opportunity to spend money for a mitzvah (such as buying an aliyah to the Torah, purchasing an etrog for Sukkot, and so on), he must view its fulfillment as being extremely important. If many people seek to fulfill this mitzvah, he should be willing to spend (according to his means) a great deal of money for it. This is what constitutes, "When you kindle the lamps," meaning that a person must be willing to pay more in order to fulfill a mitzvah. The expression "in front of the Menorah" alludes to the Holy One, blessed be He. This means that when a person fulfills a mitzvah, he must do so with the intention of bringing satisfaction to Hashem. Therefore when we are willing to pay more in order to fulfill a mitzvah, we must be careful that we do not succumb to pride. Otherwise we will lose on one hand what we gained on the other, for Hashem is not pleased when we grow proud over a mitzvah. Paying more to fulfill a mitzvah must only be done for the sake of Hashem. It must be done solely to bestow importance on the mitzvah and to bring satisfaction to the Creator.

The text continues: "This is the work of the Menorah." This means that if a person performs a mitzvah with the intention that it should be "in front of the Me-

norah" so as to please Hashem – and furthermore, "hammered out gold," that he connects the entire Jewish people and makes them into a unified whole so that every Jew participates with him in this mitzvah for Hashem – then "the seven lamps shall give light," he will merit that the mitzvot and lights of the entire Jewish people will be kindled and reflect his merit.

When we reflect on all this, we realize the importance that we must attribute to each mitzvah. The power of a mitzvah is incredible, as are its effects when properly done. Alternatively, we incur a tremendous loss by passing up a mitzvah, or when we fail to perform it as we should. If we are correct in this regard, we will be able to understand an incident that occurred to King David, one that will support our words. The Gemara states that when David entered the bathhouse and saw himself naked, he said: "Woe is me, for I stand naked without any mitzvot about me!" Yet his mind rested easy when he thought about his circumcision, and afterwards he sang a song to Hashem (Menachot 43b).

Let us think about this for a moment. King David's entire life was filled with Torah and mitzvot, and all his deeds were done solely for the sake of Heaven. Therefore why was he anxious during those few moments that he was in the bathhouse? Was he devoid of Torah and good deeds at that point? What was he afraid of during that brief time?

The answer is that King David carefully weighed every action he took in life. Every deed that he performed, even if not a mitzvah, was a preparation for a mitzvah. Thus even when he went to relieve himself, it was for the sake of Heaven, done so as to cleanse his body. It therefore constituted a preparation for prayer and study, a way to devote himself to these activities in complete holiness and purity. King David was afraid, however, that perhaps it was not necessary for him to have entered the bathhouse. Perhaps it was not a mitzvah, or even a preparation for one, but instead a waste of time, time that could have been used to study Torah. However as soon as he thought about the circumcision in his flesh, his mind was put at ease, for it protected him at all times. We know that when a person carefully guards the covenant of circumcision, it constantly protects him, and through it he becomes spiritually elevated.

Here too we see the extreme importance of each mitzvah, for its power is so great that it brings tremendous abundance to all who fulfill it. When done properly, a mitzvah protects a person's body and constantly saves him from the evil inclination. Yet nothing protects a person when he neglects a mitzvah, and the evil inclination is free to trouble him and separate him from the Creator. This is what King David was afraid of when he stood in the bathhouse. Yet when he recalled the sign of the covenant that he carried in his flesh, he was calmed. We must learn a lesson for life from this incident, using it to understand what we see in our own generation. Because of our numerous sins, many consider themselves to be great rabbis, and by their pride they attribute great importance to their name and position. Such an attitude damages the sign of the covenant, for by seeking honor a person succumbs to pride, and pride damages the covenant of circumcision. Such people have nothing that will protect them in the bathhouse, and even outside of it their Torah is flawed. They think that they are elevating themselves before the Menorah, and that they are illuminating the entire Jewish people and making it into a unified whole. Yet in fact the opposite is true. They prevent Jews from becoming a unified whole by demonstrating pride and infusing them with it. Because they render Jews impure by their actions, by damaging the covenant of circumcision, their punishment will be severe.

This is why a Jew whose heart is filled with the fear of Heaven will place no faith whatsoever in such people. Instead he will put an effort into wholeheartedly performing each mitzvah with the perfection it demands. Mitzvot will then protect him everywhere he goes, and he will "give light in front of the Menorah." Thus his reward will be absolutely enormous, both in this world and in the next. Amen, may it be so.

## The Path To Follow

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## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### Invalid Excuses

It is written, "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses" (Numbers 12:1).

We learn several things from this verse, namely that the prohibition against speaking Lashon Hara applies even:

1. When the person being disparaged is humble and is not upset by it. This is why the above verse is juxtaposed to the statement, "The man Moses was exceedingly humble" (v.3).
2. When the speaker has done several favors for the one he is disparaging, such as having gone to great lengths in order to save him from harm. Such was the case with Miriam, who saved Moses from the river as an infant.
3. When the speaker is talking in the presence of a single person, not many. This is true even if the solitary listener is close to the speaker, meaning that he will not repeat what he hears.
4. When the speaker is disparaging the leading figure of the generation, saying that he is acting above his true spiritual level. For example, were the speaker to say: "If he was truly unique in his generation, his deeds would correspond to his spiritual level. Since he is not unique in his generation, but rather equal to other great men, his conduct is too lofty for his true importance," this would constitute complete Lashon Hara. Miriam and Aaron's error lay in the fact that they compared Moses to other prophets.

– Shmirat Halashon Part 2, Chapter 18

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## Taking Out the Ark

It is written, “When the Ark would journey, Moses said: ‘Arise O L-RD, and let Your foes be scattered; let those who hate You flee from before You’ ” (Numbers 10:35).

When the Second World War broke out, yeshivot in Poland were forced to seek refuge in Vilna. At that time a group of American rabbis sent a special envoy to Lithuania in order to assess the needs of the displaced yeshivot. At the end of this visit, the yeshivot organized a farewell dinner in Vilna for their distinguished guest. The first speaker was the gaon Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes, the Av Beit Din of Lomza. He took the opportunity to express his categorical views on the critical situation facing them at that time, when the sounds of war could be heard across the globe. Among other things, Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes expanded upon the following idea: The Mishnah speaks of how people must be governed in critical times. It states, “What is the order [of service] for fast days? The ark is taken out to the open space of the city” (Taanith 15a). There is a principle by which the Jewish people are supported and assured of sustenance by the ark, which represents the Ark of the Covenant. If this principle is correct, then during normal times the essential thing – the service of Hashem – occurs around the ark. In fact in normal times the ark is surrounded by those who serve G-d. As for ordinary individuals, they may hold mistaken beliefs and harbor strange ideas. During times of crisis, in urgent and dangerous situations, “The ark is taken out to the open space of the city,” for during such times even the masses in the street sense that their only hope is Hashem’s ark. When all absurdities have failed, when all the various ideologies of the masses have been broken by the harshness of reality, it becomes obvious that the only thing which remains is the Torah and the ark of Hashem, which goes before the people.

Our Sages left us with definite signs for the time called *ikveta d’Meshicha*, the period preceding the arrival of *Mashiach*. This time will be so horrific that some of our Sages wished not to live through it themselves. Why not? It is because at this time insolence will prevail, life will become extremely expensive, and rulers will be completely godless. Furthermore the wisdom of scholars will be scorned, those who fear sin will be disparaged, the young will shame the old, the old will stand before the young (i.e., the world will be ruled by the young), and the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog. Rabbi Yerucham Halevi of Mir asked, “Will all these economic, spiritual, and social signs occur in a single generation, and will they occur in the generation before the Final Redemption?” He replies: “Concerning this generation it is written that they shall ‘seek the L-RD their G-d and David their king’ [Hosea 3:5]. Redemption will not come until everyone realizes that there is no way out, that all other promises have failed, and that every other path has been tried and found to be an illusion. People will then search their souls and realize that they can rely on none other than their Father in Heaven, at which point they will seek Hashem and King David, no one else.”

## A Pearl From the Rav

Hashem gave instructions for Aaron to “kindle the lamps” (Numbers 8:2) because he was saddened that he did not bring offerings along with the tribal leaders. He therefore consoled Aaron by giving him the task of kindling the lamps. In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why Hashem did not console him by means of the incense or by some other offering, or by the fact that he entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

According to the Arizal, it would seem that we are forbidden to change the language of prayer, for there are 12 gates that correspond to the 12 tribes, and therefore a person’s prayer should ascend by the very gate

corresponding to his tribe. Now with the absence of the Temple, prayer replaces offerings. However in Temple times the tribal leaders brought actual offerings, which is what unlocked the gate of a particular tribe. Thus Aaron wanted to bring an offering in order for the gate of his tribe to also be unlocked, and for abundance to flow through it. Hashem therefore consoled Aaron by instructing him to kindle the lamps. This meant that the abundance flowing into the world through all the gates of prayer comes by the merit of kindling the lamps. Furthermore, these lamps must shine light toward the central stem of the Menorah, for together they will radiate in the light of the King’s countenance.

## Aaron’s Greatness

It is written, “Aaron did so. Toward the face of the Menorah he kindled its lamps, as the L-RD had commanded Moses” (Numbers 8:3).

Rashi states: “Aaron did so. This demonstrates Aaron’s virtue, in that he did not deviate [Sifri].” Does this mean that Aaron could have deviated from Hashem’s orders, but chose not to? The Maharil Diskin states that there were three steps in front of the Menorah, and a priest would climb them in order to kindle the lamps. Now the steps were meant for a regular priest. However Aaron was a prophet, and Hashem rests His Shechinah only on one who is wealthy, strong, intelligent, and tall. Thus because he was tall, it was difficult for him to use these steps. Nevertheless Aaron did not deviate from Hashem’s orders in any way.

## The Same Enthusiasm

The expression “Aaron did so” may be explained in another way. Who doesn’t remember the first day that he put on tefillin? On the night before, his excitement was already preventing him from sleeping! Yet what happened six months later? Where did all his enthusiasm go? Normally, says the Sefat Emet, we begin performing mitzvot with tremendous enthusiasm and sanctity, but after a while we begin to relax. Aaron’s greatness in not deviating means that the enthusiasm and sanctity he displayed when he first kindled the lamps remained unchanged over the years.

### Why Should We Be Prevented?

It is written, “There were men who had been contaminated by a human corpse and could not make the Passover offering on that day, and they approached Moses and Aaron on that day. These men said to him, ‘We are contaminated through a human corpse. Why should we be prevented from offering the L-RD’s offering at its appointed time among the Children of Israel?’ ” (Numbers 9:6-7).

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin Zatzal said: How many mitzvot did these people have? One mitzvah to remove and burn chametz. Another mitzvah to bring the Passover offering. A third mitzvah to be joyful. A fourth mitzvah to eat maror. A fifth mitzvah to dispose of chametz. Although they could perform all these mitzvot, there was one mitzvah they could not perform. Therefore why did they make such a fuss?

How often do we ask someone to make a sacrifice for his Judaism, only to discover that he is all too happy to find pretexts to exempt himself?

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin said that this allows us to see the difference between our forefathers and ourselves. Despite it all, those men asked, “Why nigarah [should we be prevented]?” The word *nigarah* is formed by the initials of *Nihieh Goyim Reshaim v’Alerim* (“[Why] should we be considered as non-Jews, wicked, and uncircumcised?”), for such people are exempt from bringing the Passover offering.

## Eyes For Us

It is written, “He said, ‘Please do not forsake us, since you know our encampments in the wilderness, and you shall be as eyes for us’ ” (Numbers 10:31).

What is the meaning of, “You shall be as eyes for us”?

The Mahari Assad (a Hungarian Torah scholar who lived about 150 years ago) said that a person who experiences miracles all day long will eventually fail to recognize them. The Gemara states, “Two men...set

# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

out on a trading expedition when a thorn got into one of them, who began to blaspheme and curse. After a time, however, when he heard that his friend's ship had sunk in the sea, he began to laud and praise. ... Even a person for whom a miracle is performed is unaware of the miracle" (Niddah 31a). When someone fails to recognize a miracle, he will not be grateful either. As for one who recognizes a miracle and understands that everything comes to him from Hashem, he knows that nothing he owns is really his. He therefore has no difficulty in giving to others. Moses said to Jethro: Because we lived through the miracles of the Exodus and the passage through the sea, the manna that we received in the desert and the absence of snakes seem "insignificant" to us. We fail to recognize these miracles, for we are constantly experiencing them. You, however, know the places where we encamped in the desert. You have not seen the miracles of the Exodus, since you arrived only after we journeyed into the desert. You can still appreciate the miracles that are done for us, so please stay and point these miracles out to us. We will then know that everything comes from Hashem, and we will treat you well. Otherwise, we will be arrogant and think that we deserve everything we have, and in that case why would we give you anything? However when you shall be our eyes, we will realize that everything comes from Hashem through miracles, and we will have no difficulty in giving to you.

## Fish and Vegetables in the Field

It is written, "The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more, and they said: 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.'" (Numbers 11:4-5).

The book Zichron Israel states: How were the fields irrigated in Egypt? Jacob had given Pharaoh the blessing that the Nile should rise to meet him. Therefore Pharaoh would go out to the Nile every morning so it could rise to meet him and thus irrigate all of Egypt. When the fields were inundated with water, the Egyptians would catch fish by spreading their nets upon the rivers that had formed in their fields. This is why the Children of Israel said, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic," meaning that they could all be found in any field and garden. This explains why they mentioned fish and vegetables together.

– Aish Dat

## Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Beha'alotcha begins with the preparations for the service of the Sanctuary and the first journeys of the people with its camps and banners around the Sanctuary. Just as the order is given for oil to be collected for the lamps in Parsha Tetzaveh (which follows the instructions for building the Sanctuary in Parsha Terumah), so too is the order given for Aaron to kindle the lamps in Parsha Beha'alotcha (which follows the anointing of the Sanctuary in Parsha Nasso). Similarly in Parsha Emor, after the offerings of the festivals are described, we find the passage concerning the perpetual lighting of the lamps. Parsha Beha'alotcha continues with the purification of the Levites in preparing Aaron's assistants for the service of the Sanctuary. Before describing the journeys of the people in the second year from the Exodus, the parsha recalls Hashem's commandment for the Passover offering to be brought at the appointed time, namely the first month (or the second month if one could not bring it then). For their journeys, the Children of Israel were commanded to follow the signs of Hashem's cloud and to assemble for departure at the sound of two trumpets. The people began to complain during one of their first journeys, however, and Moses realized that this was very bad. Hashem then sent a spirit of prophesy upon the elders in the camp and provided the people with quail, after which Miriam was struck with leprosy.

## The Greatest of All the Prophets

It is written, "Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Here Hashem testified that Moses was very humble, and the greatest individual is the one who possesses the most humility. It is truly amazing to realize that the man who brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, split the sea for them, and received the Torah from Heaven was precisely the humblest of all men. In his book Meor Enayim, Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl wrote: "The Sages have said that one who has 100 desires 200, and one who has 200 desires 400. Therefore the latter (who wants 200) desires more than the former (who wants only 100). The same applies to the realm of spirituality: What Moses felt he was lacking in terms of spirituality was something that no other person felt, for Moses had reached the 49th gate of wisdom. Therefore he still felt that he needed to reach 49 more, which means that no other Jew has ever had such an intense feeling of lack.

Rabbi Naphtali of Ropshitz said that Moses, who was the greatest of the great, was well aware of the Creator's greatness, better in fact than any other man. Moses saw that he was but a single drop in a vast ocean, which was precisely the cause of his tremendous humility. As for a person who does not realize Hashem's greatness, he regards himself as important, intelligent, gifted, diligent, and the like.

Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin said: How do we know that "the man Moses was exceedingly humble"? It is because "more than any person on the face of the earth," he would look for and find splendid character traits in everyone, for no two people are completely alike. What we all have in common is that everyone possesses a special virtue. Above all, Moses perceived the pure simplicity of those who worked the land, those "on the face of the earth."

Rabbi Israel Meir Hacohen of Radin explained that the duty to serve Hashem, which is incumbent on every person, depends on the understanding of the individual. Moses, who ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah and learned it from the mouth of Hashem, knew that he had not fulfilled his duties toward G-d, as had every other Jew. This is because he ascended to Heaven and should have resembled the angels. Thus the demands made of Moses were considerably greater than those made of others.

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian said that humility does not mean that a person fails to recognize his actual importance. On the contrary, we all need to understand our spiritual abilities, and in function to that we will never succumb to pride. The proof is that one of the thirteen principles of faith is to believe with a complete and sincere faith that Moses our teacher is the greatest of all the prophets. Since Moses, just as every other Jew, must believe this, we must say that it is possible for both to be true. That is, Moses was the humblest of all men and the greatest of all the prophets at the same time.

# EISHET CHAYIL

## A Vine and an Olive

It is written, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home. Your children will be like olive shoots surrounding your table" (Psalms 128:3).

We need to understand why Scripture compares a woman to a vine and her children to olive shoots. We note that the older food gets, the more it decays and the less edible it becomes. A vine (i.e., wine) is an exception to the rule, for the older wine gets, the better it tastes. By comparing a woman to a vine, the above verse alludes to the fact that a woman who walks in ancient paths, observing Torah mitzvot as our holy Matriarchs did, will have children "like olive shoots." Her offspring are compared to olive plants because a great deal of effort is required to extract oil from an olive (Menachot 53b). Therefore a great deal of effort is required in order to merit sons who will succeed in Torah and be filled with the fear of Heaven.

## A TRUE STORY

### The Peasant's Meals

It is written, "They said, 'Who will feed us meat?'" (Numbers 11:4).

Chassidim recount the story of a chassid whose Rebbe sent him to small village, for there a Jewish peasant would teach him how to eat for the sake of Heaven. When the chassid arrived in the village and met this Jew, he was astonished to see that he was an extremely simple man, one who ate a full pot of food at every meal – morning, noon, and night. The chassid asked the peasant, "Please forgive my question, but perhaps you could tell me why you eat so much food?" The peasant replied, "All my life I've lived in this village, where my father and grandfather lived before me. My father worked at an inn where he sold alcohol to non-Jews, and one day they got so drunk that they threatened to kill him if he didn't kiss their cross. Naturally my father refused, and so they began to put their plan into action. My father, however, was so frail that he died before they could actually hang him. This meant that he didn't have the chance to sanctify the Name of Heaven by being hanged. That's why I eat so much, because if something like that should ever happen to me, I'll be healthy and strong enough to live until I'm hanged!" At that point the chassid understood why his Rebbe had sent him there. He wanted him to realize how a simple Jew eats for the sake of Heaven.

– Sheal Avicha Veyagidcha, Part II

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### Wagon Wheels

It is written, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the L-RD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

It is said that the gaon Rabbi Dov Berish Wiedenfeld of Tchebin Zatzal put a great deal of effort into trying to exempt yeshiva students from serving in the army. One day an army official came to see Rabbi Dov Berish, telling him that the yeshiva students were going to be drafted into the army because of the dangers facing the country. The gaon of Tchebin replied with a parable: A wagon driver was traveling over a steep hill with a full load of cargo. When he saw that the terrain was difficult and that the horses were too exhausted to continue, he unloaded part of his cargo. However the wagon still weighed too much and the horses refused to move. Upon seeing this, he unloaded still more of his cargo...a package here, a box there...until finally the wagon was completely empty! Nevertheless, the horses still refused to move. Refusing to give up hope, the driver then began to remove the wagon's heavy wheels, naively thinking that their weight was bogging the wagon down. "The lesson here," said the gaon to his listener, "is that you are like this naive wagon driver. By the merit of the Torah being studied by these yeshiva students, the world continues to exist, and you can continue to fight your wars. However if the army drafts those who study the Torah into its ranks, it will be like removing the wheels that enable the wagon to move." The gaon ended by saying, "You should realize that without its wheels, a wagon won't be able to advance at all."

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin

#### The Main Disciple of the Vilna Gaon

The gaon Rabbi Chaim was born on Sivan 8, 5509 in the small town of Volozhin. The son of Rabbi Yitzchak, a well-respected and wealthy man, Rabbi Chaim became the main disciple of Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (the Vilna Gaon Zatzal), from whom he learned the essentials of Torah and sanctity. Rabbi Chaim also learned with the gaon Rabbi Raphael Hamburg Zatzal, the author of Torat Yekutiel. Rabbi Chaim first served as the Rav of Vilkomir, where he refused to accept a salary. However the Jews of the city made his life difficult and caused him many problems. Once on Shabbat Mevarchim, a congregant asked him when the molad would occur. In his innocence, Rabbi Chaim said that he would have to check a calendar because he didn't know. At that point people began to disparage him to such an extent that he was forced to leave Vilkomir and return to Volozhin, his birthplace. There he informed the leaders of the community that he would only serve as their Rav if he wasn't paid. He also warned his students that whoever served as a Rav must know when the molad would occur. Rabbi Chaim garnered the attention of the Vilna Gaon, who selected him to establish a yeshiva. Thus Rabbi Chaim opened the famous Volozhin yeshiva, which from its very outset became famous throughout the land, a place where thousands of men flocked to study Torah. The yeshiva illuminated the Torah world, and from it emerged tremendously gifted students, Torah giants who brought light to the world through their Torah and sanctity.

Rabbi Chaim's life came to an end on Sivan 14, 5581, and his soul ascended to the celestial academy. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

### Eight Instead of Seven

In order to intercalate the year, Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages: "Send me up seven [scholars] early in the morning to the upper chamber." The law is that only judges appointed specially for the purpose of intercalating the year may do so. When Rabban Gamliel arrived the next day, he found not seven, but eight scholars. He asked, "Who is the one who came without permission? Let him leave." At that point Shemuel Hakatan got up and said, "I was the one who came without permission. My objective was not to join in the intercalation of the year. Instead, I felt the need to learn the practical application of the law." Rabban Gamliel then said, "Sit down, my son, sit down. You are worthy of intercalating all years [in need of such], but it is a decision of the rabbis that it should be done only by those who have been specially appointed for the task." In reality Shemuel Hakatan had been summoned to that meeting. However in order to prevent the uninvited scholar from being humiliated, Shemuel Hakatan said that he was the one who arrived without permission. Now because an uninvited individual was present on that day, no decision was taken with regards to intercalating the year. However Torah insights abounded during the entire day, and the year was intercalated on the following day.

– From Sanhedrin 11a