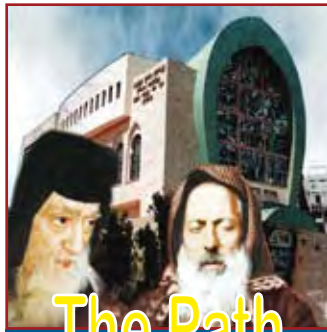


# THE EXISTENCE OF THE TORAH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE DEPENDS ON UNITY (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



## The Path To Follow

VAYECHI

270

Jan. 10<sup>th</sup> 08

14 Tevet 5769

Publication

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

RABBI DAVID HANANIA

PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau

75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)

Responsible of publication

Hanania Soussan

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### Truth and Righteousness

In a letter to his son and family, the Rambam wrote: "Love truth and righteousness; cleave to them, for through them you will succeed. May truth and righteousness always be your delight, even if you believe that they will lead to more losses than falsehood and deception, which you may think can help you. Know that truth and righteousness are the jewels of the soul, and that they bequeath strength, confidence, and eternity to the body. Pay attention to them even in cases where the Torah has not admonished you. Keep your word and do not touch what belongs to others, be it great or small. Do not taste anything that does not clearly belong to you; flee from doubt and assume that it belongs to others. Realize that tasting something that may or may not have been tithed will lead to touching something that has certainly not been tithed, for a little ends up leading to much, and what is hidden leads to what will be revealed on that great day, until one is accused of being a stubborn lout and a cheat."

- From the Writings of the Rambam

It is written, "Jacob called for his sons and said: 'Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father' " (Genesis 49:1-2).

Why did Jacob summon his sons twice by saying "assemble yourselves" and "gather yourselves"? From the fact that they assembled themselves, had they not gathered themselves? Our Sages say that Jacob wanted to reveal the end time to them, but the Shechinah left him (Pesachim 56a). Why did he want to reveal it to them before leaving this world? Furthermore, if he had actually revealed the end time to them, they would have become discouraged on account of the long exile that awaited them, and they would not have been motivated to repent and regret their deeds, since they would have known when the exile ends.

It seems that when the Sages said that Jacob wanted to reveal the end to them, they did not mean that he wanted to tell them when Mashiach would arrive. This is because no man knows the time of the Final Redemption, and he especially cannot reveal it to others, as the Sages have said: "Three come unawares: Mashiach, an object that is found, and a scorpion" (Sanhedrin 97a). What Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons, however, was how to hasten the Final Redemption, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has promised that it would come quickly if Israel is worthy of it, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said concerning the verse, "I the L-RD will hasten it in its time" (Isaiah 60:22): "If they are worthy, 'I will hasten it.' If not, '[Mashiach will come] in its time' " (Sanhedrin 98a). Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons how they could hasten the arrival of the redeemer, and how they could lighten the yoke of slavery.

He began by saying, "Assemble yourselves," a reference to unity, which shows us that they were dispersed and that Jacob assembled them through Ruach HaKodesh. Jacob taught his sons that the existence of the Jewish people in exile among the nations depends on unity, which is why he said "assemble yourselves" and "gather yourselves." It was for this reason that he summoned them, and it was also why he gathered them together by Ruach HaKodesh - in order to show them that unity was the main thing, and that without unity we have nothing. When Jews are united, no nation can harm them, in which case the Final Redemption can take place, as our Sages state in the Midrash (Tanhuma, Nitzavim 1). We also find that the Jewish people will not be delivered before they unite into a single group, as it is written: "In those days and in that time - the word of the L-RD - the Children of Israel will come, they together with the children of Judah" (Jeremiah 50:4). It is when they come together as one that they can welcome the Shechinah.

This is why Jacob gathered his sons before dying. He said to them: "My children, I fear that you will argue with one another after my death and that you will never escape enslavement." He therefore assembled them, taught them the mitzvah of loving one's brother, and gathered them together with the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is the One and only G-d. Together they replied, "Just as there is but One in your heart, there is but One in our heart," as our Sages have said.

The Children of Israel were reduced to slavery in Egypt only after they lost this unity. When Moses saw the Children of Israel fighting among themselves, he said: "Surely the thing is known" (Exodus 2:14). Here the Sages cite Rabbi Alexandri as saying: "Moses was thinking in his heart, 'How has Israel sinned, such that they are more enslaved than all the nations?' When he heard these words, he said: 'Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for salvation?' Hence 'Surely the thing is known' - now I know the cause of their enslavement" (Shemot Rabba 1:30). The Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt only when unity existed among them, as we shall explain.

What did Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, do to the Children of Israel? He appointed taskmasters to oppress them, as it is written: "The foremen of the Children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had appointed over them, were beaten" (Exodus 5:14). I say that something is concealed in these words, for instead of placing Egyptian foremen over the Children of Israel, Pharaoh placed Jewish foremen over them. This requires an explanation.

Pharaoh was the great enemy of the Jewish people, for he was the one who made them breach the 49 gates of impurity. He knew that as long as the Children of Israel were united, they could not be reduced to slavery, in which case it would not be long before they left Egypt. Hence Pharaoh resorted to trickery by appointing Jewish foremen to supervise the work, which would result in disputes and fighting among them, leading to a lack of unity. These Jewish foremen realized what Pharaoh wanted to do, and therefore they did not disrupt the unity that existed among them. As Scripture tells us, "The foremen of the Children of Israel...were beaten." Although the Egyptian taskmasters struck the Jewish foremen because the Children of Israel had not completed their work, the Jewish foremen did not strike their own brothers in return. Hence by the merit of having protected their unity, the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt. Further on we read that Hashem told Moses, "Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and with a strong hand will he drive them from his land" (Exodus 6:1).

Although they did not have the Torah and mitzvot, the Children of Israel were able to leave Egypt on account of the unity that reigned among them. The Sages say, "The generation of Ahab all worshipped idols. Yet owing to the fact that there were no informers among them, they would go out to war and emerge victorious" (Vayikra Rabba 26:2). Concerning the generation that left Egypt, the Sages say that they were delivered because there were no informers among them. Jethro as well, when he wanted to leave Midian in order to venture into the desert to receive the Torah of Moses, heard that the Children of Israel were united. The verse states, "Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that G-d did to Moses and to Israel His people" (Exodus 18:1). Here our Sages say: "What news did he hear that he came and became a convert? Rabbi Yehoshua said, 'He heard of the battle with the Amalekites' " (Zevachim 116a). According to our Sages, when the Children of Israel were standing by the sea, it immediately split when Nachshon the son of Amminadav jumped into it (Sotah 37a). In other words, Nachshon sacrificed himself for the community, and by the merit of his love for Israel, the sea split. Hence it only split for the Children of Israel when they were united. This is precisely the news that Jethro heard - that Nachshon had been ready to give his life for the Jewish people. Now when Jews demonstrate love for one another, the Holy One, blessed be He, performs miracles for them, which is why the sea split. On the other hand, Jethro also heard something negative on their account. He heard about the war with Amalek, who came and attacked the Children of Israel because there was no unity among them. The Midrash (Tanhuma, Yitro 5) states that Amalek heard their quarreling and attacked them. Jethro realized that when the Children of Israel are united, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His Shechinah dwell among them and performs miracles for them. Therefore perhaps when they are not united, and when they quarrel with one another, He brings them Amalek and causes destruction. Hence Jethro left Midian in order to join them, in order for their unity to be complete. The same evil inclination that existed at the time of the Temple, the inclination geared at created division among people, is still with us, and it constantly tries to sow discord in our hearts and baseless hatred among Jews. Now when the evil inclination wants to sow discord among the Jewish people, it begins by introducing pride in people's hearts. It stresses the importance of a person in his own eyes, while at the same time lowering his opinion of others, until finally a dispute arises between people and their unity is shattered.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## He Elevates Himself and the World With Him

*It is written, "They came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is across the Jordon, and there they held a very great and imposing eulogy" (Genesis 50:10).*

The Sages say, "Even the horses and donkeys [joined in the lamentation]" (Sotah 13a).

This means that all of Creation, even the material part of it, was concerned by the absence created by the passing of Jacob. Even coarse animals such as horses and donkeys felt the darkness that descended upon the world. Blessing had departed and spiritual nourishment was gone. Even the crudest aspects of the material realm were damaged. In fact the existence of a tzaddik in this world nourishes all aspects of Creation and gives them enjoyment. Even plants and flowers, animals, the earth and everything it contains are nourished from the influence that a tzaddik brings down for them through his pure thoughts. This influence is embodied and reveals itself in several ways and in different forms. The thoughts of a tzaddik also sharpen and purify the outside atmosphere, increasing blessings in the world as a result. Likewise his absence diminishes them, and the entire universe, along with all its creatures, sense this lack. Hence they all participate, as it were, in mourning the passing of a tzaddik. As the Sages have said, from each word that emerged from the mouth of Hashem at the giving of the Torah, the entire universe was filled. Likewise a tzaddik extends the bounty of the Holy One, blessed be He, to all of nature, which is blessed through his existence as he elevates himself and the world along with him. Therefore when he passes away, the entire world joins in mourning his passing. Thus as the Sages said, even horses and donkeys mourned Jacob's passing.

– Ohr Chadash

## All Revelation Ceased

*It is written, "Jacob called for his sons and said: 'Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days'" (Genesis 49:1).*

Assemble yourselves and I will tell you, solely by the power of gathering together, for it is unity that makes the moment favorable, allowing for prophesy to be attained and the end time to be revealed.

– Imrei Shefer

In the prayer that we recite after the reading of the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays, each verse begins with: "May it be the will of our Father in Heaven." However the last begins with, "Our brothers, the house of Israel," omitting the introduction "May it be the will..." The Rebbe of Belz, Rabbi Sar Shalom Zatzal, said that when our brothers the Children of Israel are united, we no longer need to ask for a favorable time, for through unity the time will inevitably become favorable.

– Likutei Batar Likutei

The Sages have said that Jacob wanted to reveal the end time to his sons, but the Shechinah left him. Surprised by this, he said: "The letters chet and tet do not appear in their names." G-d's spirit replied that the letters of the word ketz ("end") also do not appear in their names.

– Da'at Zekenim

The reason why the Shechinah left Jacob is because something that emerges from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, must be fulfilled. Therefore people would have been obligated to repent in order to hasten the end time. However since the end time was not revealed by G-d, our freewill remains intact, and we can hasten the end time by choosing to repent.

– Machazeh Avraham

Jacob spoke about other things once the Shechinah left him, starting by admonishing his sons. The reason he did this was because, as the Sages say: "The former ones, whose iniquity was revealed, had their end revealed" (Yoma 9b). In other words, since they realized that they had sinned, they repented and were saved. As for the later generations, they do not even know that they have sinned, nor do they repent as they should, which is why they are not delivered. Therefore when Jacob saw that the Shechinah had left him to prevent their end from being revealed, he realized that they did not clearly perceive their sins, which is why he began to reprimand them. He wanted to open their eyes, hoping that in this way he would also succeed in revealing their end.

– Yalkut HaOrim

## A Pearl From the Rav:

### When a Tzaddik Leaves this World

It is written, "May the angel who redeemed me from all evil bless the lads, and let my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac" (Genesis 48:16). We read that when Jacob was ill and about to die, he told Joseph to swear an oath. When Joseph complied, "Israel prostrated himself towards the head of the bed" (ibid. 47:31). Here Rashi states, "He turned around to the side of the Shechinah. From here [the Sages] deduced that the Shechinah is at the head of a sick person (Shabbat 12b). Another explanation: It was because his offspring were perfect, insofar as not one of them was wicked, as evidenced by the fact that Joseph was a king, and also that [although] he was captured by heathens, he remained steadfast in his righteousness." Why does Rashi provide us with these two explanations?

Jacob said to Joseph: All my life, I distanced myself from sin. My son Reuven is the beginning of my strength (Genesis 49:3), and now I will soon die. I see that my bed is perfect, and I never succumbed to sin, for an angel protected me from all harm during my entire life. The Shechinah is above my head, and all the blessings that I give to you will certainly come true. Even if it is impossible for a person to trust in himself up to his dying day, since he must always fear sin (Pirkei Avoth 2:4), nevertheless on the very day of his death, if he sees that he has not committed any sin, he may trust in himself and bless his children.

In fact Jacob was so certain of himself that he said, "Let my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac," meaning that he fled from sin during his entire life, and he thereby merited for his progeny to be perfect. He put his own name before those of his fathers, which is the meaning of the verse: "Therefore thus says the L-RD to the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham: Jacob will not be ashamed now, and his face will not pale now" (Isaiah 29:22). Here the Sages comment, "Where do we find that Jacob redeemed Abraham? Rav Yehudah answered: It means that he redeemed him from the pains of rearing children" (Sanhedrin 19b). Rashi explains that Jacob took this hardship upon himself, for it should normally have gone to Abraham, as it is written: "I will increase your

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### Fighting with Sword and Bow

*It is written, “Which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow” (Genesis 48:22).*

We need to understand why Targum Onkelos translates this passage as: “By my wisdom and my prayer.” Why is wisdom compared to a sword and prayer to a bow? The essential difference between a sword and a bow is that a sword is used at short range, when the enemy is close, whereas a bow is a long-range weapon, used when the enemy is still at a distance. We need to be aware of an important difference between wisdom and prayer, namely that wisdom helps to resolve problems occurring in the present or near future, but cannot solve problems in the distant future. The more a person tries to imagine future consequences, the less he can foresee everything that is liable to happen and upset his plans, which are based on wisdom. This is what wisdom and the sword have in common: Each is effective only against a danger that is close by. On the other hand, the power of prayer extends a great distance into the future. Take for example the verse, “Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem” (Genesis 12:6). Here Rashi states that he went to Shechem in order to pray for Jacob’s children when they would fight against Shechem. Thus a few generations prior to this fight, the power of prayer was already working to save Jacob’s children. Since prayer is beneficial at such a great distance, it is compared to a bow.

– Be’erot Yitzchak

The Sages also say that the expression, “With my sword and with my bow” means: “With mitzvot and good deeds.” What seemed to puzzle the Sages is that normally, when an enemy is far away, a bow is used against him. Then when the enemy is nearby, a sword is used against him. That being said, why does the passage mention a sword before a bow? In light of this difficulty, the Sages concluded that the passage is dealing with the war against the evil inclination. We must first fight in close quarters so as to chase it away, for the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Then, upon successfully chasing it away, a person must fight it from a distance in order to prevent its return. It is therefore normal that a sword is mentioned first, followed by a bow.

– Kehilat Yitzchak

## ESHET HAYIL

### Not Even the Slightest Word is Overlooked

A person must not allow himself to think, “I only committed a small sin, so it’s not worth worrying about or repenting. I’ll forget the sins that aren’t so bad and concentrate on fixing what’s really serious.” A person must realize that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not let anything pass, not even the slightest word. The author of Rechev Eliyahu describes an incident that occurred in his time to a group of women who were sitting together. They were discussing teshuvah and the accounting that everyone would have to give for their actions. One woman began to joke by saying, “When I arrive before the Heavenly court to be judged, and they ask me why I acted in the way that I did, I’ll pretend to be mute and unable to answer!” Not long after, this very same woman became mute and remained that way until she died! Our words ascend and take effect.

– Kav HaYashar 1

offspring” (Genesis 26:4), thereby saving him from it. By the fact that his descendants were perfect, he fulfilled this promise. Jacob trusted in himself even on the day of his death, confident of being worthy of blessing his sons, and the Holy One, blessed be He, agreed with him. All this happened to Jacob on account of the Torah for which he had completely devoted himself for 14 years in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber, as well as for 20 years with Laban (Bereshith Rabba 68:11). It is also written, “Grant truth to Jacob” (Micah 7:20). Why was he protected from all evil? It was because he conducted himself with holiness. Now it is written, “You shall guard against anything evil” (Deuteronomy 23:10), which is to say that when you guard yourself from all evil, your camp will be clean. Therefore Jacob’s entire camp, meaning his children, were holy, for they had maintained their righteousness. Why? Because Jacob had conducted himself with holiness and was protected from all evil.

### Not Through an Angel

*It is written, “The G-d Who sustained me from my inception until this day” (Genesis 48:15).*

The Sages have said, “Man’s sustenance is more difficult [to obtain] than redemption, for of redemption it is written, ‘The angel who redeemed me from all evil’ [Genesis 48:16]... whereas of sustenance it is written, ‘The G-d Who sustained me’” (Pesachim 118a). The reason is that redemption is something spiritual, which angels can understand. However they do not understand material sustenance, which is why it comes from the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself.

– Torah Temimah

### Fathers and Sons

*It is written, “Let my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers” (Genesis 48:16).*

The fathers of wicked children are ashamed of them. Hence Jacob gave his sons the blessing that they would be at such a great spiritual level that they could be called by the name of their fathers, who would not be ashamed of their grandchildren.

– The Commentators

### Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Vayechi ends the book of Genesis, which describes the world as it serves as the backdrop for the formation of the Jewish people. The book begins with an account of Creation as a whole, including the creation of man, and it continues until the end of the lifetime of our Patriarchs. Joseph is part of the story of the Patriarchs as well, for his personality and the events surrounding his life had a profound impact on the development of the Jewish people. Joseph is also considered a father of tribes, since his two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) took their place among the tribes of Israel “like Reuven and Shimon.” When Jacob senses his death approaching, he calls for Joseph, who promises Jacob that he will take him out of Egypt and bury him with his fathers. Jacob then blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, placing them in the same category as his own sons. Jacob summons his sons in order to reveal to them what will occur at the end time. As he is about to die, he orders them to bury him with his fathers. After embalming him and observing a period of mourning, Jacob’s sons go and bury him in the land of Canaan, accompanied by Pharaoh’s servants and the wise men of Egypt. Since Joseph’s brothers are worried that he hates them, they try to appease him. Joseph then reassures them, and at the end of his life he sees the great grandchildren of Ephraim. In fact the children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, are born on Joseph’s knees.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### From Moses to Moses, None Arose Like Moses

The twentieth day of Tevet is the anniversary of the passing of our teacher the Rambam, may his merit protect us all. Rabbi Yedaya Ha-Bardashi writes in his letter to the Rashba, "G-d wanted to give something to Israel, and He made the sun of the great Rav shine upon us, the crown of the Geonim, our teacher Moses. A spirit of truth burned within him, and Hashem placed His words in his mouth: This is how you shall speak to the house of Jacob; this is how you shall show them the way. Do not fear, for it is I Who has sent you. The Rambam ascended the rungs of truth, peace, and righteousness more than anyone else from the closing of the Talmud until now." In the book Omer HaShikchah, the Chida writes that as the Ri Migash Zatzal lay on his deathbed, the Rambam (who was five years old at the time) went to his home and kissed his hand. He later said that he only merited what he did because of this kiss and the blessing that he received, for the Ri Migash had passed his wisdom on to him. The Rambam and his father were certain that the blessing of the Ri Migash had borne fruit, which is why he referred to him as his Rav. In a letter written by the Rambam, we come across something amazing: "I am here to testify before gentlemen [in] Heaven and earth, for I have heard truthful information regarding all the lands of the kingdom of Yemen, [namely] that most communities occupy themselves with Torah and mitzvot, and there are memories of the Rav in all the multitude that are holy, saying: 'In our lives and days and life of our teacher Moshe ben Maimon,' for the Rambam had taught them Torah and distanced evil decrees and heavy burdens from them."

The Rambam left this world on Tevet 20, 4965. At his passing, Jews wept and mourned him greatly, fasting and gathering together. The Chazan read reprimands from Parsha Bechukotai, and from a section in the prophets that begins with the verse, "The word of Samuel came to all Israel" (I Samuel 4:1) and ends with, "The Ark of G-d has been captured." A few days later, his body was being transported for burial. Armed robbers attacked the procession, and those carrying the casket fled and left it there. The robbers, seeing that everyone had fled, wanted to throw the casket into the sea. Yet with all their strength, they were unable to lift it, even though there were 30 of them. When they saw this, they told themselves that the deceased was probably a man of G-d. Therefore they went to implore the Jews to bring him to his final resting place, and they also accompanied the procession. – Ohr HaChaim

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### Self-Control

*It is written, "King David's days drew near to die, and he instructed his son Solomon, saying: '... Behold, with you is Shimei son of Gera.... He cursed me with a powerful curse on the day I went to Mahanaim. However he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the L-RD, saying: I will not put you to death by the sword' " (I Kings 2:1-8).*

People usually try to avenge an offence through the shedding of blood. A tremendous desire for vengeance is enflamed and burns, and people lose their composure and become unstable, not reflecting any longer or thinking about the catastrophic results that may stem from their impulsive actions. Exacting vengeance is as sweet as honey, and in that fleeting instant all future consequences, as bitter as they may be, are hidden.

Yet what of King David? Shimei had scorned him and trampled his honor into the dust, calling him the most vile names imaginable. At that critical instant, David demonstrated his fortitude and strength of will by rhetorically asking, "Shall a man of Israel be put to death today?" (II Samuel 19:23). The Sages say that Hashem hastened to tell David, "You were able to see far into the future, perceiving that from Shimei a man will be born who will protect and save his generation, namely Mordechai. Because of you – because of your humility and self-control – all the people of Israel will merit the presence of Mordechai and Esther at the right time!" Since this was attributed to David, Mordechai carried the name of David's tribe, Judah, for he was called "a Jewish man" (Esther 2:5).

How much blessing and success is brought into the world on account of people who control their instincts, overcome their anger, and refrain from exacting their share of retribution from those who insult them! Such people hear themselves being humiliated but do not respond. Who knows how many tzaddikim will be born and bring salvation into the world when we learn to control our instincts and not seek revenge for hurtful words!

## A TRUE STORY

### Jacob Wanted to Reveal the End Time

It is written, "I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days" (Genesis 49:1).

The Maggid of Radin once paid a visit to the Chafetz Chaim, and the Chafetz Chaim asked him: "Rabbi Binyamin, what will happen to us? We have been in exile for so very long!"

Rabbi Binyamin replied, "I will give you a parable. One day, in the middle of a harsh winter, a few ba'alei batim undertook a long journey from Pressburg to Odessa. Since it was a journey that would take many days, and since it would take place in the middle of winter, they left in a special carriage that was outfitted for the cold, a carriage that was harnessed to two powerful horses. The passengers also prepared themselves for the cold by wearing thick coats. The journey began in the middle of the night, and the passengers spent their time speaking, with an occasional drink of alcohol to warm themselves up. Thus they would drink, warm themselves up, and then fall asleep. In the meantime the sun arose, although winter days in Russia are quite short. Since our passengers slept for more than 12 hours, when they awoke and saw that it was dark out, they thought that morning had not yet arrived. Hence they chatted with one another, drank some more alcohol, and slept once again. When they awoke a second time, the day had already passed, since they had slept through it. The passengers spoke to the driver and said, 'How can it be that the night is so long here?' The driver replied, 'Two days have already passed, days that you slept through, and now you're asking me about the length of the night?'

"What is happening," the Maggid said to the Chafetz Chaim, "was foretold by the prophet Isaiah: 'Guardian, what of the night?' The guardian said, "The morning comes, but also the night" [Isaiah 21:11-12]. We, the Jewish people, ask Hashem – the Guardian of Israel – 'What of the night? Why has the night, which symbolizes our exile, gone on for so long? The Holy One, blessed be He, says to us: 'The night ended and morning has already arrived, but you missed the morning and the night has come again.'

### They Have a Mouth, But Cannot Speak

A certain teacher who was a talmid chacham had young students with whom he studied Gemara every day. On the seventeenth of Tammuz, which is a fast day, his students reluctantly came to class to study Gemara as usual. However he could see on their faces that they really did not want to be there, and he felt that they had come out of fear. They wanted to study without tiring themselves, in sadness and weariness, for they claimed that they had no energy because of the fast. What did the teacher do? Once they were seated before him and had started studying, he said: "Today I don't have any energy and I can't study. I want to play a certain card game. Does anyone know how to play it?" Everyone joyfully replied that they did, adding that they were all experts in that particular game. He therefore took out some cards and they began playing with excitement, energy, concentration, and loud voices, as they normally would. After 15 minutes of playing, the teacher said to them: "My children, I thought that since today was a fast day, you didn't have the strength to study and discuss Torah. Yet now I see that you have a great deal of energy. Therefore open the Gemara and let's start studying." They had been caught in his trap, being obligated to study with energy and enthusiasm. They could no longer use the excuse that they had no energy on account of the fast, for they already demonstrated their enthusiasm elsewhere.

The Holy One, blessed be He, placed the soul's sustenance and holiness in the mouth, the place where a person also derives his physical sustenance and strength. Hashem did this so as to motivate a person in performing his sanctified task (which also takes place in this area) at least as well as his mundane tasks. Since it is with the mouth that a person performs his physical tasks with great excitement and haste – indeed, with his entire body – he should perform his holy task, the study of Torah, in the same way. As our Sages have said, "She is life to one who brings her forth from his mouth." If both tasks are not executed in the same way, a person will be unable to justify himself during the judgment. He must therefore sanctify himself by the joyous and enthusiastic study of Torah, by the power of materiality that is found in the same place – in his mouth – so that his spiritual endeavors are at least on par with his physical endeavors.

– Ben Ish Hai