

TRUE PEACE IN THE HOME – THE SOURCE OF THE SHECHINAH

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). The Sages have noted that it is not written, “I will dwell in it,” but rather, “I will dwell among them.”

This teaches us that the Shechinah rests upon everyone. This is actually surprising, for if the Shechinah does not rest solely on the Sanctuary, but also on every Jew, why did the Children of Israel need a Sanctuary? We must also explain why the Torah goes into such detail about the Sanctuary and the way it was built. After all, the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that it was going to be destroyed! When we reflect upon the number of important mitzvot that we learn just from the crowns on the Torah’s letters – mitzvot that apply to all the generation – and yet the Sanctuary was eventually destroyed and its laws do not apply to every generation, we must ask why the Torah goes into so much detail concerning the Sanctuary and its vessels.

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said concerning husband and wife: If they are worthy, the Shechinah dwells among them; if not, a fire devours them (Sotah 17a). Even when the Temple no longer stands, if husband and wife are worthy, peace reigns between them, and the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His Shechinah dwell among them. Hence the Torah speaks at great length about every detail of the Sanctuary’s construction in order to teach us that there exists a Sanctuary and a Temple that are not destroyed, which exist forever, namely the home of every Jew. This is where the Shechinah rests when peace reigns between husband and wife, as it is said: “He did not create it for emptiness. He fashioned it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18). The Sages have explained that the world was made only so that created beings would multiply, as it is written: “The world was only made to be populated” (Gittin 41b). Thus when there is peace between husband and wife, the world endures. The fulfillment of the verse “that G-d created to make” also occurs in that case, and the goal of Creation is attained. Yet the world cannot endure when there is no peace between husband and wife, in which case the verse “that G-d created to make” is not fulfilled. Thus Creation immediately returns to its initial state of chaos.

This is why the Sages said, “If a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears” (Gittin 90b). This means that a man’s house should resemble the Sanctuary, for just as the daily offerings, the olah (elevation offering), and the mussaf (additional offering) were brought in the Sanctuary, likewise a man who marries a woman merits to mossif (add) and oleh (elevate) himself in the service of G-d. He cannot do this without his wife, as it is written: “Any man without a wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness. ... [Some say] without Torah and without a [protecting] wall. ... [Others say] without peace” (Yebamot 62b).

The Altar Sheds Tears

When a man divorces his wife, Scripture considers him to have destroyed the Temple. The explanation is that just as the altar without the Temple is nothing – not being worthy of receiving offerings – a man who divorces his wife amid strife has destroyed the Temple. Hence the elevation and additional offerings that are brought in his home will cease. Since the Temple has been destroyed, even the altar sheds tears over it, for the main thing is the Temple. When the Temple stands, there is an altar. Without the Temple, even if there is an altar, it serves no purpose.

We may therefore say that the Shechinah returns and dwells among Jews, within each person’s home, when peace reigns inside. Even in our time, when the Temple no longer stands, the Shechinah still dwells in the Temple, for the home of a Jew is called a Temple. The verse, “How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel” (Numbers 24:5) refers to the peace that reigned between husband and wife and between man and fellowman when the Children of Israel dwelled in the desert, as the Sages have said: “He saw that the doors of their tents did not exactly face one another, whereupon he exclaimed: ‘Worthy are they that the Shechinah should dwell upon them!’” (Bava Batra 60a).

Appropriating the Garments of the King

We may say that as long as the Temple is not built – meaning that as long as there is no peace in the homes of Israel – the work of Creation is not yet complete, and Heaven and earth cannot endure. When the Temple has been built and there is peace between husband and wife, the creation of Heaven and earth is immediately complete and they can endure. The world only endures by the merit of peace between husband and wife.

Hence we read, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8) – upon each of them. This teaches us that the Shechinah will dwell upon people when there is peace in their home. When there is peace between them, the Name Y-H is among them.

We must realize that the sacred Name Y-H has the same numerical value as ga’avah (“pride”), which teaches us that when there is peace between husband and wife, a husband will not feel superior to his wife, nor will his wife feel superior to him. Only the Holy One, blessed be He, possesses glory, as it is written: “The L-RD has reigned; He has donned grandeur. ... The world is also established; it shall not falter” (Psalms 93:1). This teaches us that when there is peace between husband and wife, and only Hashem glorifies Himself, the work of Creation is solid and does not falter. However when there is no peace between husband and wife, and when one prides him or herself over the other and appropriates the garments of the King, the Name Y-H disappears from among them, leaving only aish, fire.



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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Other Prohibitions

There are other things that are forbidden on account of the “dust” of Lashon Harah, such as when we tell someone what so-and-so has said about him, something that is not derogatory per se, but which people do not like when said in their presence.

A person must not reveal what his friend has told him in private, even if revealing it does not constitute actual slander. This is because revealing a private matter can harm the person concerned and lead to family problems. We should also discreetly distance ourselves and not consider the views of someone with a secret.

– Chafetz Chaim

AT THE SOURCE

Like the Ark

It is written, “You shall cover it with pure gold, inside and outside” (Exodus 25:11).

As we know, the middle layer of the Ark consisted of wood, and it was covered inside and out with a layer of pure gold.

In his book *Midrash Talpiot*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen of Izmir Zatzal states that this alludes to the fact that the holy Torah is not a personal inheritance. Whoever draws near to it, even if he is from an undignified family, becomes upright and is protected and guarded by the Torah, just as if he were made of precious gold inside and out. This is even the case if he comes from a lowly place, like wood, which has no great value.

This verse also alludes to the fact that the holy Torah covers a person’s deficiencies. That is, even if he is lame or blind, then people will respect and love him if he is a ben Torah, just as everyone loves and appreciates pure gold.

Good Deeds and Tzedakah

It is written, “You shall make a table of acacia wood” (Exodus 25:23).

In his book *Shulchan Arba*, Rabbeinu Bechaye bar Asher Zatzal describes an ancient and interesting custom that he personally heard of. It pertained to the leaders of the Jewish community in Spain, who were very careful in regards to the mitzvah of hospitality: The table where the town’s poor and guests were given to eat was used, upon the passing of these leaders, as the primary material for their coffins.

Rabbeinu Bechaye was amazed by this beautiful custom, underlining that these Sephardim certainly wanted “to fix in their hearts the idea that even if someone has attained a very high position, having become as wealthy as King Solomon, they still do not keep anything of the work that they did under the sun. The only thing they take with them is their good deeds and tzedakah, which they fulfilled by having mercy on the poor, as it is written: ‘Your righteousness shall go before you’ [Isaiah 58:8].”

On the Inside, on the Outside

It is written, “You shall make curtains of goat’s hair for a tent over the Sanctuary” (Exodus 26:7).

All the great riches found in the Sanctuary – beams overlaid with gold, bars overlaid with gold, gold rings, curtains of blue, purple, and scarlet – were covered by a simple tent made of goat’s hair and held in place by simple copper hooks.

Why?

The book *Keninei Kedem* relates a teaching of our Sages, who derived a lesson from this for the Jewish people on the way in which a person must conduct himself with the riches that Hashem has given him. With regards to the outside, a person must strive to act simply and modestly so as not to arouse the jealousy of his neighbors and acquaintances. He must not display his wealth or draw attention to himself.

One must always remember the Sanctuary of Hashem, which contained an abundance of gold and other precious materials on the inside, and yet on the outside was covered with a tent made from goat’s hair and held in place with simple copper hooks.

By Allusion

Sanctifying His Name

It is written, “They shall make a Sanctuary [mikdash] for Me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

The term mikdash is formed by the initials of Mitzvat Kiddush Shem (the mitzvah of the sanctification of Hashem’s Name). This tells us that by sanctifying His Name, by allowing oneself to be killed rather than commit any of the three cardinal sins – immorality, murder, and idolatry – Jews will merit for Hashem to reside among them.

– Mincha Dan

Song, Praise, Blessing

It is written, “You shall cover it with pure gold [zahav]” (Exodus 25:11).

The term zahav is formed by the initials of Zimra Hallel Baruch (“song, praise, blessing”). This tells us that while eating at the table, we must speak words of Torah, sing songs and praise, and recite the proper blessing for everything we eat. – Siftei Cohen

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA A TEACHING OF THE GAON AND TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

Happy is He Who Supports the 36 Hidden Tzaddikim

In the Gemara our Sages note that, with regards to the staves that carried the Ark, it is written: “The ends of the staves were seen” (I Kings 8:8). However the very same verse goes on to state, “but they could not be seen outside.” What was it then: Were they seen or not? The Sages state that the staves of the Ark protruded from behind the partition within the Sanctuary like the breasts of a woman (Yoma 54a). This is something that needs to be explained, for if Hashem wanted the staves to be seen, why were they placed behind the partition, where they could not be seen? However if the staves were not to be seen, why did they project from behind the partition?

We may explain this by saying that Hashem wanted to teach the Children of Israel that we sometimes see something and think that we understand it. As the Sages say in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 97b), in every generation there are 36 tzaddikim who welcome the Shechinah every day, as it is written: “Happy are all those who wait lo [for Him]” (Isaiah 30:18). Now the numerical value of lo is 36, which refers to the 36 hidden tzaddikim in every generation. People do not know that they are tzaddikim, for they look like very ordinary individuals. The great Torah figures of the generation do recognize them, however, and they have the mitzvah to support them. Whoever supports them enables the world to endure, for the world cannot endure without them.

This is why the staves of the Ark were perceived without being seen. The staves were the means by which the holy Ark was supported when being carried, telling us that these tzaddikim – who seem like ordinary individuals and whose greatness we cannot see – are the ones through whom the world endures; they are the ones who support the holy Torah. Now just as they support the holy Torah, we must support them. Whoever gives his money to them, Scripture regards him as having supported the Torah.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA RECEIVING TZEDDAKAH FROM A WOMAN

The verse states, “Speak to the Children of Israel and let take for Me an offering, from every man whose heart motivates him” (Exodus 25:2). Several commentators have noted that it is written “from every man,” not “from every woman.” In fact we know that we do not accept a large donation for tzeddakah from a married woman, for everything that she acquires belongs to her husband. Hence there is reason to worry that she is giving without her husband’s consent, meaning that her donation is a form of theft.

In Parsha Vayakhel we read, “Every wise-hearted woman spun with her hands and brought the yarn” (Exodus 35:25). The commentators have described the wisdom that the Torah underlines here. They have also explained the meaning of the expression “spun with her hands,” for what difference does it make if the women themselves spun or not?

The book Pardes Yosef deals with this issue by citing a Gemara which explains that everything a woman acquires belongs to her husband (Nazir 24b). If a woman saves money on household items, or if somebody gives her money on condition that her husband is not to have any control over it, the law is that it belongs to her. It is not said in this regard, “What a woman acquires belongs to her husband.” According to the law, a woman may also tell her husband: “I receive nothing from you and I do nothing for you.” In fact the Sages have decreed that what a woman does for her husband is compensation for the fact that he takes care of her material needs. If a woman wants to benefit from the work of her hands and forgo her rights of sustenance that are owed to her by her husband, she may do so. She may tell her husband, “I receive nothing from you and I do nothing for you.”

Thus for the generation of the desert, which was nourished by bread from heaven – the manna that descended to the very doors of the Children of Israel – the women did not need the sustenance of their husbands. They could therefore do whatever they wanted with the work of their hands.

This is the explanation of the verse, “Every wise-hearted woman.” The wisdom of these women expressed itself by the fact that they understood the law that everything which a woman acquires belongs to her husband. Since they wanted to have the merit of participating in the construction of the Sanctuary, they “spun with [their] hands.” They brought an offering from the work of their hands, which belonged exclusively to them according to the law, for a woman can tell her husband: “I receive nothing from you and I do nothing for you.” Since they did not need their husbands for sustenance, the work of their hands belonged to them alone, and they had the right to offer it to Hashem’s Sanctuary, just as their hearts desired.

In the Domain of Her Husband

The Noda B’Yehuda (on Yoreh Deah 72) deals with a common issue: Since the Halachah states that we can only accept small sums for tzeddakah from women, servants, and children – since a large sum has a much greater chance of having been stolen (Shulchan Aruch 248:4) – can we trust a woman who says that she has her husband’s permission to give a large sum for tzeddakah?

The Noda B’Yehuda concludes that the decision of the Shulchan Aruch, according to which a large sum has a much greater chance of having been stolen, does not imply that a woman who took money from her husband without his permission has the intention of committing an infraction. She believed in her heart that she was performing a mitzvah, even if in reality it was as if she had stolen. Yet as she is giving, if she testifies before us that she is doing so on the orders or with the permission of her husband, we are to believe her.

Some wish to say that since the Ketubah states “they will manage their possessions fairly,” this clause permits us to accept tzeddakah from a woman without obtaining the permission of her husband.

Such a view, however, is forcefully rejected by Responsa Tov Ta’am VaDa’at, for the statement “they will manage their possessions fairly” is not an explicit condition that cannot be contravened. It is only a blessing on the part of the one writing the Ketubah and the witnesses who sign it, those who give the newlyweds the blessing of peace and unity. Their intention is that the newlyweds should agree on how to manage their possessions fairly. However it is obvious that this does not give us permission to accept large sums for tzeddakah from women, unless they have the permission of their husbands.

THE WORDS OF THE SAGES OPENING THE GATES OF GAN EDEN

The tzaddik Rabbi Meir of Premishlan Zatzal once told his disciples the following story:

One day I ascended to Heaven and arrived at the gates of Gan Eden to see what was happening. All of a sudden I saw a Rav who wanted to enter, but the guardian angel was barring the way. “Why so quickly?” asked the Rav. The angel replied, “What great merit do you possess?”

The Rav replied, “What does that mean? I’ve studied Torah my entire life! Day and night I remained studying, and if Gan Eden is not for me and those like me, then for who was it created?”

However the angel was not moved by these words. “First of all, we have to verify that you really studied Torah without ulterior motives. We have to check that you were not seeking honor, wealth, or the like. You will therefore have to wait a little.”

He was still speaking when another Rav approached. A tzaddik and a chassid from an excellent family, he was heading directly towards Gan Eden. “Stop!” the angel said. “By the merit of which good deeds are you entering?”

The tzaddik began to enumerate a long list of good deeds that he had performed during his lifetime: When he was young, he adopted austere measures for himself, immersing himself in a mikveh, praying for days on end, reciting Psalms and the Zohar, and studying Kabbalah and the like. “Isn’t that enough?” he asked. “That is enough,” replied the angel, “but first we have to check that you did all this for the sake of Heaven, not for the sake of honor, money, or the like. Wait a little.”

In the meantime an ordinary Jew, an uneducated farmer who worked on a leased plot of land, arrived at the gates of Gan Eden. The angel said to him, “Well then, what good deeds do you possess?”

“I have nothing,” the Jew sighed. I’m a simple man, and I spent my entire life in a village. The door to my home was open to all who passed by. I warmly welcomed everyone, both strangers and people I knew, Jews and non-Jews. I would first give them something to drink in order to warm their hearts, and then I would invite them to sit down and eat something that I had in my home. Both summer and winter, guests came to my home from all around, and I never refused anything that I had to anyone.”

The farmer concluded by telling the angel, “That’s it. That’s all I know. If you let me enter Gan Eden, good. If not, it’s not so bad.”

When the angel heard this, he immediately opened the gates and said to him, “We don’t need to verify anything. Someone who fulfilled the mitzvah of tzeddakah and hospitality – someone who gave the thirsty to drink and the hungry to eat – his motives do not need to be checked, nor do we need to verify whether they were done for the sake of Heaven.”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI YITZCHAK BENOULID

Known as “the western light,” the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Benoualid Zatzal was born in 5538 to Rabbi Shem Tov Benoualid Zatzal, a great talmid chacham and one of the leading Torah figures in the city of Tetouan, which was rich with talmidei chachamim. Rabbi Yitzchak Benoualid was from a noble family, from a line of rabbis and great Torah figures who had been expelled from Spain.

Rabbi Yitzchak did not have the opportunity to study with his father or learn Torah from him for long. He was still young when his father died suddenly, with responsibility for the household falling on his mother the tzaddeket. She was known for her piety and good deeds, and she provided for her family through the work of her hands.

When this widow had nothing left and her situation was desperate, she was forced to sell the volumes of her husband’s Talmud in order to feed her fatherless and hungry children. When Rabbi Yitzchak saw his mother’s distress, he saved cent after cent until he was able to repurchase the entire collection of his father’s Talmud, which for him was the most important part of his spiritual heritage.

With the passing of Rabbi Moshe Halevi Zatzal, who served as the Av Beit Din of Tetouan, the Torah scholars of the generation wished to appoint Rabbi Yitzchak Benoualid as his successor. He was the obvious choice, for he possessed all the necessary traits for the position: He plumbed the depths of the law, he was wise and well-versed in all fields of Torah, and he was imbued with a pure fear of Heaven that could always be seen on his face.

The leaders of the community presented their request to him, asking that he accept upon himself the leadership of the Jewish community and teach them the ways of Torah and the fear of Heaven. They asked that he guide them in how they should act and what they should do. The nomination that Rabbi Yitzchak received contained some 60 signatures from the great Torah figures of the generation and leaders of the Tetouan community.

Upon becoming the Av Beit Din, Rabbi Yitzchak’s Beit Midrash was transformed into a beacon of light. Halachic questions were addressed to him from all corners of the land, questions both great and small regarding matters between G-d and man, and between man and fellowman. His influence extended throughout the Maghreb and the Middle East. To all who inquired of him, he replied in a friendly way, clearly and in a pleasant tone.

For Those Who Hungered

His character traits and devotion to the community and individuals attracted, almost in a magical way, the love of all those who lived in the Maghreb. They found his home open to all who were in need. With kindness and generosity, Rabbi Yitzchak nourished everyone who came to him. In his wisdom and intelligence, he knew how to take care of the poor in town, giving them enough to eat for Shabbat and the holidays.

It is said that during a time of economic hardship for the residents in the city, he called an emergency meeting for the leading

figures in the community. Once they had gathered, he protested about his paltry salary, which was not even enough to provide a meager living. He therefore proposed that a tax be placed on meat so as to allow him to see to the needs of his family.

The leading figures in the community accepted his proposal, and the Rav immediately announced in their presence that this tax, which they believed was for his own personal use, was going to be entirely devoted to the poor, those who suffered from hunger.

In 5622, Rabbi Yitzchak left the community for the Holy Land, settling in Haifa. He often traveled to the graves of the tzaddikim in order to multiply his prayers and supplications. However he did not remain there for long, and after a certain time he returned to Tetouan for reasons that remained unknown. The elders of his generation had a tradition that from Heaven, he had been summoned back in order to lead and defend his flock.

Near the end of his life, Rabbi Yitzchak suffered from painful ills that confined him to bed. However he did not stop studying despite his tremendous suffering, for his lips whispered words of Torah as he sanctified and purified his soul in order to welcome the face of the Shechinah.

Towards evening on Friday, 8 Adar Sheni 5630, Rabbi Yitzchak Benoualid’s soul departed in holiness and purity. He was 93 years old. News of the tzaddik’s death took everyone by surprise, and the residents of town were inconsolable over the passing of their Rav and revered leader.

Giving Birth with Ease

The grave of Rabbi Yitzchak Benoualid, like the narrow room in the attic of his home that served as a place for prayer and study, was surrounded by an aura of holiness for the inhabitants of the Maghreb and the Middle East. Even non-Jews would recount its greatness and the power of its holiness. A reliable account is given in the book Noheg BeChochma by the gaon Rabbi Yosef Benaim Zatzal, who traveled to Tetouan in order to visit its judges. This is what he writes:

“The synagogue where the Rav prayed is downstairs, and from there we climb some stairs up to the house where the tzaddik lived. The yard belongs to his descendants to this very day, although nobody lives in this house. The house is filled with benches, and on one side there is a corner space, higher than the floor, that the Rav reserved for study. We can still see a small table where he placed his books when studying. His cane is also there, as well as his prayer books and his belt. It is said that when a woman experiences difficulty in childbirth, his cane and belt are placed on her stomach so she can give birth easily.”

He finishes his description by stating, “While I was standing before the grave of the tzaddik, trembling seized me and all my limbs quaked, as reverence for his Torah and righteousness hovers over his grave.”