



THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE POWER OF THE TZADDIKIM'S INFLUENCE (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

It is written, "When Pharaoh summons you and says, 'What is your occupation?' then you shall say: 'Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth until now, both we and our forefathers,' so that you may settle in the land of Goshen, for all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" (*Bereshith* 46:33-34).

The Midrash asks why Joseph only took "some of his brothers" (*Bereshith* 47:2) to meet Pharaoh. It was to teach us that they were not very strong. Why did Joseph take five of his brothers? It was because he knew which ones were stronger than the rest, and he chose wisely. He said, "If I present the strongest ones to Pharaoh, he will want to put them into his army."

I find this absolutely amazing! How can we possibly say that Pharaoh did not know that Joseph's brothers were strong and had killed the inhabitants of Shechem? Furthermore, our Sages have said: "Judah then screamed with a powerful voice, and all the walls of Egypt fell, all the animals lost the young they were carrying, Joseph fell from his throne, Pharaoh fell from his throne, both of them fell, and the faces of all the brave warriors standing around Joseph turned back, remaining that way until the day of their death" (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 5).

As a result, how can we say that Pharaoh was not aware of his brothers' strength? How could Joseph have thought of deceiving Pharaoh?

Joseph told his brothers, "If I tell Pharaoh that you are shepherds and that you brought your flocks with you from Canaan, he will not make you officers in the Egyptian army, even if you are very strong. The Egyptians worship rams, and shepherds are an abomination to them. They are made neither into kings nor

leaders, and Pharaoh will distance you from him."

Hashem Made Them Fertile

Why did Joseph not want his brothers in the Egyptian army? It was because he knew that the Children of Israel would remain in Egypt for hundreds of years, and that if they were to live in Egyptian cities, they would learn from their wicked deeds. Hence Joseph advised his brothers to say things that would prompt Pharaoh to distance them from him.

Likewise the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want the Children of Israel to assimilate among the nations and learn from their ways. In fact as long as Jacob and his sons were in Canaan, they numbered but 70 people. Yet when they descended into Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He, made them fertile, with each woman giving birth to six children at a time. Such was not the case beforehand, and if they had given birth in this way while in Canaan, maybe not all the Children of Israel would have descended into Egypt. Some may have remained in Canaan and assimilated among the nations, which is why Hashem limited their fertility until they descended into Egypt with Jacob. At that point, the *tzaddik* being with them, they would not learn from the deeds of the other peoples.

Furthermore, when Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians stopped worshipping rams. In fact we read, "He took some of his brothers, five men, and presented them before Pharaoh" (*Bereshith* 47:2). From what is stated earlier ("for all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians"), it follows that there were no shepherds in Egypt. This is because the Egyptians worshipped rams, meaning that no one had the right to graze and lead their god. Shepherds had therefore dispersed throughout the land. That being the case,

why does Pharaoh go on to say: "Make them officers over my livestock" (v.6)? This is surprising, for if shepherds were abhorrent to the Egyptians, why would Pharaoh have appointed them over his own flocks?

He Had Repented

Our Sages say, "When the *tzaddik* is in the city, he is its brilliance, its majesty, and its glory. When he leaves it, its brilliance, its majesty, and its glory depart" (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:6). This teaches us that when the *tzaddik* is in the city, its residents learn his ways. When he does good deeds and studies Torah, they do the same. The Sages have also said, "What is good for the *tzaddik* is good for his neighbor" (*Sukkah* 56b).

We have learned that when people see a *tzaddik* improving himself, they will also improve themselves. When Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians also learned from their good deeds and stopped worshipping rams. This is why Pharaoh told Joseph, "Make them officers over my livestock," which teaches us that he had repented and no longer worshipped rams.

When did they return to this idolatry? It was when Pharaoh died, as it is written: "A new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Joseph" (*Shemot* 1:8).

How do we know that the Egyptians themselves stopped worshipping rams? It is because it is written, "Joseph said, 'Bring your livestock and I will provide for you in return for your livestock if the money is gone.' So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in return for the horses, for the flocks of sheep, for the herds of cattle, and for the donkeys. Thus he provided them with

bread for all their livestock during that year” (*Bereshith* 47:16-17). How did they have flocks? If they worshipped them as gods, does this mean that they sold their gods? Rather, from here we learn that when Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt, the Egyptians observed their deeds and learned from them.

Since Pharaoh had appointed them over his own flocks, Jacob’s sons began to fear that they would assimilate among the Egyptians. Hence they decided to limit themselves in certain areas so as to avoid that possibility. They took it upon themselves to be very careful in regards to their customs and not to change their names, their language, and their way of dress (*Lekach Tov, Shemot* 6:6). By the merit of these things, they were saved.

We may logically infer that since the wicked in Egypt learned from the good deeds of Jacob and his sons, stopping their practice of idolatry as a result, how much more should we learn from the deeds of the *tzaddikim*! Furthermore, when they reprimand us, how much more should we listen to them! I often see people falling asleep as a Rav is giving a lecture, none of which they end up hearing. Of such people we read, “He turns away his ear from hearing the Torah” (*Mishlei* 28:9). There is no greater opportunity to repent than when a Rav delivers a lecture and makes his reprimands heard, as the Sages have said: “When the Sage is teaching, I forgive and atone for the sins of the Children of Israel” (*Midrash Mishlei* 10).

CURRENT ISSUES

UNDER THE SIGN OF CAPRICORN

The month of Tevet has witnessed three disasters that took place one after the other, from the eighth to the tenth of the month. Hence the Sages have instituted fasts on these days for all the generations. The fasts of the eighth and ninth of Tevet are called *Ta’aniot Tzaddikim*, fasts which only exceptional people observe. However a public fast takes place on the tenth, which everyone observes.

Transformed into a Joyous Occasion

The fast of the tenth of Tevet is one of the four fasts that Sephardim announce in synagogue on the preceding Shabbat, after the *Haftarah*: “Our brothers, House of Israel, hear: The fast of the tenth shall be the [day of week]. May the Holy One, blessed be He, transform it into joy and happiness, as it is written: ‘So says Hashem, Master of hosts: The fast of the fourth [month] and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be for the House of Judah for joy and happiness and for festive holidays. Love truth and peace.’”

The fast of the *tzaddikim* on the eighth of Tevet recalls the actions of King Ptolemy and the early Sages. The custom among Ashkenazim is not to announce any of the fasts.

On the ninth of Tevet, the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, overran Jerusalem. Thus Israel was devastated, as it is written: “It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, he and all his entire army, came against Jerusalem and encamped near it, and built a siege tower around it. The city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth of the month, famine prevailed in the city and there was no bread for the people of the land. The city was breached” (II Kings 25:1-4).

The Midrash describes the famine that raged in Jerusalem in the following terms:

“Hunger became unbearable in the city. The daughters of Zion gathered and met outside, one saying to the other: ‘Why did you go out, since you have never gone out in your life?’ She replied, ‘Shall I hide it from you? The famine is terrible, and I can no longer bear it.’ They held one another and again tried to find something in the city, but could not. The women leaned against the columns and died in every corner of the city. Their babies walked upon hands and feet, each recognizing its mother. They climbed upon them, looked for their bosoms in search of milk, but there was none. Thus they died upon their mothers’ bosoms” (*Pesikta Rabbati* 26).

For three years, the Holy One, blessed be He, awaited their repentance. As the Sages explain in the Midrash, “When that

wicked one [Nebuchadnezzar] with the confederate kings came to Jerusalem, they thought they were going to conquer her in short time. However the Holy One, blessed be He, strengthened the people of Jerusalem until the third year, in the hopes that they would repent. In Jerusalem, there were giants of great strength who slew many of the Chaldeans. When the enemy propelled large stones to break down the walls of Jerusalem, one of these giants – Avika ben Gabtari by name – would catch them in his hands and fling them back upon the besiegers, and thus he slew many of them. Sin, however, brought a wind that blew him from the wall, and he fell to his death. At that point Jerusalem was breached, and the Chaldeans entered it” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Eicha* 1).

The Meaning of a Fast

In his book *Yesod VeShores HaAvodah*, Rabbi Alexander Ziskind *Zatzal* indicates that on each fast day, we must stir our hearts to tears by reciting *selichot*. It is the responsibility of every person to lament and bitterly regret all the things that have brought so much pain, as it were, to the Creator and such misery to His children, as we well know. This is the essence and basis of fasting. In fact all it takes is one tragedy, but as the Rambam states, the essential aspect and goal of fasting is to “awaken hearts and open the ways to repentance. These observances are a reminder that our evil deeds and the deed of our fathers, which were like our current deeds, brought these tragedies upon them and us. It is through recalling these things that we repent.”

Fasting for the Sake of Heaven

In his commentary on tractate *Taanith*, the holy Shelah cites the Sages in stating: “The term *taanith* [fast] is formed by the letters of *tat ani* [giving to the poor]. *Taanith* has the same numerical value as *kematnat yado* [give as he is able], teaching us that we must give *tzeddakah* during fasts.”

The Sages say in the name of Mar Zutra, “The merit of a fast day lies in the *tzeddakah* given” (*Berachot* 6b). The Bach explains why this is the case, citing the Sages in saying that some people love their money more than their bodies, which is why fasting is not difficult for them. Hence by fasting and giving *tzeddakah* at the same time, their atonement becomes complete. The Gilionei HaShas gives another reason: In order for a fast to be completely for the sake of Heaven, and in order for no money to be saved because food was not purchased on that day, we give money to the poor after the fast, money that would otherwise have been spent on food. In such a way, a fast becomes entirely for the sake of Heaven.

AT THE SOURCE

Like Old Wine

It is written, "To his father he sent the following: Ten donkeys laden with the best of Egypt" (*Bereshith* 45:23).

Here the Midrash states that Joseph sent his father "old wine that the elderly appreciate." In his book *Kol Yehudah*, the *gaon* Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka explains this by citing the *gaon* Rabbi Ben Zion Atton *Zatzal*:

The young always boast by saying that the elderly have aged and are no longer correct. They claim that they themselves have greatly progressed and that the new generation is more advanced, which is not the case for the elderly.

This is why old wine is appreciated by the elderly, for they believe the opposite of the young: It is precisely the minds of the elderly which are broader and more composed. They have greater discernment than the young, whose intelligence fizzles. The proof can be found in wine: The older it is, the better it becomes, which is why the elderly appreciate it.

Joseph was afraid that his father thought that he himself had adopted the view of the young and would not obey him. In that case, what good would it do to see him? Hence Joseph took the initiative and sent his father old wine, thereby hinting that he appreciated old age. The example of the old wine proved this, for wine becomes better with age. In fact the Children of Israel are compared to the vine, for the older they are, the wiser they become, as in the saying: "The older the Torah elders become, the more trustworthy their opinions."

Why So Much?

It is written, "To his father he sent the following: Ten donkeys laden with the best of Egypt" (*Bereshith* 45:23).

The average load that a donkey can carry, the Sages tell us, is 90 *kabin* (equivalent to about 1,300 liters). The load carried by ten donkeys would therefore be 900 *kabin*. That said, was Jacob a drunk? Did he need so much wine – 13,000 liters of it – to tide him over until they would soon depart for Egypt?

The book *Seder HaDorot* by Rabbi Yechiel Halperin *Zatzal* cites the Midrash in giving a description of Jacob's final days in the land of Canaan: "Each person was given what Joseph had sent, and everyone dressed in accordance with what he had sent. Upon his head, Jacob placed the turban that Joseph had sent him. All the inhabitants of Canaan heard and came to rejoice with Jacob, and he made a banquet for them that lasted three days. All the kings of Canaan and the nobles of the land rejoiced."

Hence it follows that Jacob needed this wine to prepare his farewell banquet for the inhabitants of Canaan. To that end, Jacob needed ten donkey-loads worth of the best of Egypt, old wine that the elderly appreciate.

If They Only Knew

It is written, "I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up" (*Bereshith* 46:4).

The Zohar cites Rabbi Chiya as stating, "If men only knew what great honor was shown to Jacob when the Holy One said to him, 'I shall descend with you to Egypt,' they would lick the dust for three *parasangs* distance from his grave" (Zohar II:5a).

Restraint

It is written, "Dan's sons: Hushim" (*Bereshith* 46:23).

The author of *Yalkut HaMussar* explains this verse allegorically according to a statement found in the Gemara: "The world exists only on account of one who restrains himself in strife, for it is written: 'He suspends the earth upon *belimah* [restraint]' " (*Chullin* 89a). Thus the verse states: "Dan's sons" – he finds himself among those who judge (*dan*), who scorn and humiliate him, and yet in his soul he fulfills "Hushim" (literally, "they are silent"). He keeps quite, remains calm, and does not answer the fool in accordance with his foolishness. The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore says of him: "He suspends the earth upon restraint."

A Lesson for Us

It is written, "Joseph brought all the money into Pharaoh's palace" (*Bereshith* 47:14).

This apparently insignificant detail – the fact that Joseph brought the money he collected from the wheat that the Egyptians had purchased from him – actually

serves as a lesson for us. As Rabbeinu Avraham, the son of the Rambam states: "The verse testifies that he performed his duties with complete trustworthiness, a lesson for those who possess the Torah."

How Much More Should We!

It is written, "Only the lands of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's" (*Bereshith* 47:26).

What does it matter to us if the lands of the priests remained theirs or belonged to Pharaoh?

According to Abrabanel, this is an important teaching that pertains to the gifts given to the *kohanim* and the obligation to provide offerings and tithes to the *kohanim* and Levites who performed the Temple service.

Since the Egyptians did not complain when their idolatrous priests received their sustenance from royal coffers during shortages and famines, how much more should Jews, Hashem's chosen people, not complain when their priests, the *kohanim*, receive their sustenance as the Torah commands. We must not grow wealthier by failing to provide them with offerings and tithes.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

Weeping with an Objective in Mind

It is written, "He fell upon the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept" (*Bereshith* 45:14).

Rashi explains that Joseph wept over the two Temples that would be built upon the territory of Benjamin and destroyed. Benjamin wept over the Sanctuary at Shiloh, which would be built upon the territory of Joseph and destroyed.

We need to ask whether this was a fitting time to weep over the destruction of both Temples and the Sanctuary at Shiloh.

Later in the *parsha* we read, "Joseph harnessed his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck excessively" (*Bereshith* 46:29). Rashi explains: "Jacob, however, neither fell on Joseph's neck nor kissed him. Our Sages say that he was reciting *Shema*." Here too, we need to understand why Jacob recited *Shema* precisely when meeting Joseph.

We also need to understand why both Joseph and Benjamin wept over the destruction to take place on each other's territory, rather than the destruction to take place on their *own* territory.

To explain this, we may say that they should have normally wept on account of meeting each other after so many years apart. However they knew that this was G-d's decree, and that everything is for the good. Hence they did not want to weep upon reuniting, nor to weep at all. Yet they could not help themselves, which is why they wept with the objective that these tears should be over the destruction of the Temple and the Sanctuary.

The reason they chose to weep at that precise moment over a future destruction, as opposed to other things, is because they were separated due to baseless hatred, a sin that would later destroy the Second Temple, as the Sages tell us (*Yoma* 9b). Hence at that point, upon reuniting, they wept over the destruction that would be brought about by baseless hatred, a sin that they wanted to completely rectify. Thus they wept over the destruction to occur in each other's territory.

Jacob, however, was at such a level that he did not need to weep upon meeting Joseph after a separation of 22 years, for he knew that everything comes from Hashem. He therefore recited *Shema* to demonstrate that Hashem is One and that everything comes from Him.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

SEVENTY (LESS ONE) OR SIXTY-NINE?

It is written, “All the people of Jacob’s household who came to Egypt, seventy” (*Bereshith* 46:27).

When we count the actual number the people who descended into Egypt, we find a total of only sixty-nine, not seventy, as the verse states. This discrepancy is discussed in the Gemara, where we read: “Abba Halifa of Keruya asked Rabbi Chiya bar Abba, ‘Why do you find seventy in their total, and seventy less one in their detailed enumeration?’ He said to him, ‘A twin was born with Dinah, for it is written: “*Ve’et his daughter Dinah*” [*Bereshith* 46:15].’ Yet if so, was there a twin with Benjamin, for it is written: ‘*And saw et Benjamin, his brother, his mother’s son*’ [ibid. 43:29]? He said, ‘I possessed a precious pearl [*i.e.*, I had a precious teaching that I wished to keep secret], and you seek to deprive me of it?’ Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, ‘It was Yocheved who was conceived on the way and born between the walls [of Egypt], for it is said: “*Who was born to Levi in Egypt*” [*Bamidbar* 26:59] – her birth was in Egypt, but her conception was not in Egypt” (*Bava Batra* 123ab).

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra is surprised by this opinion, saying that “if so, why did Scripture not mention the wonder that befell her, for she gave birth to Moshe when she was 130 years old? Why did it mention the case of Sarah, who gave birth when she was 90 years old? This distress was not enough for us, such that the poets came and composed *piyutim* for Simchat Torah in which they state, ‘Yocheved my mother will be comforted after me’ [implying that she outlived Moshe], and thus she was 250 years old at the death of Moshe! Is the poets’ proof for Yocheved’s longevity the fact that Achiya the Shilonite lived a very long life?”

The Ramban, on the other hand, rejects all astonishment at the fact that Yocheved’s age at Moshe’s birth is not mentioned, answering Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra as follows: “Lest he be wise in his own eyes by contradicting the words of our Rabbis, I must answer him and say that in any case, in the case of Yocheved there is a great wonder of the hidden miracles that constitute the foundation of the Torah. ... But I will tell you a true principle, clearly indicated in the Torah: Scripture mentions miracles performed through a prophet and which he previously prophesied, or performed by an angel who is revealed in the course of a Divine mission. Yet those effected naturally, in order to help the righteous or destroy the wicked, are not mentioned in the Torah or in the books of the prophets” (Ramban on *Bereshith* 46:15).

The Ramban continues, giving an additional reason for why Scripture mentions the miracle that occurred to Sarah, but not the one that occurred to Yocheved: “There was an additional miracle in the case of Sarah, namely that the manner of women had ceased with her. Once this happens, women no longer give birth. Now if Yocheved lived as many years as her father Levi had, and if her vitality remained with her until her old age, as is the way of women, it would be no wonder that she gave birth at the age set forth by our Rabbis. It is because G-d wanted to redeem Israel through the brothers [Moshe and Aaron], and since the time of the deliverance had not yet come, He delayed their birth for many years until their mother was old. Nothing is too difficult for Hashem” (Ramban, *ibid.*).

Completing the Total

The Midrash mentions another opinion, according to which Jacob himself completed the total number of seventy. This is an opinion shared by Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra and the Rashbam. The book *Da’at Zekenim* states that Jacob is counted with the sons of Leah because we begin enumerating the tribes with Leah’s sons. The Tur notes that at first we read, “These are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming into Egypt, Jacob and his sons” (*Bereshith* 46:8), meaning that Jacob is included in the total number. When the individuals are counted, Scripture states “all the souls, sixty-six” (v.26), Jacob not being included because it is written “his sons.” Yet afterwards, when the total is given, it states “seventy” (v.27) – Jacob included.

The Midrash cites still other opinions concerning the total number of seventy. Some say that the Holy One, blessed be He, completed the total. Others say that it was Hushim the son of Dan, while others say that it was Serah the daughter of Asher (*Bereshith Rabba* 94:9).

Another explanation is brought by our teacher Rabbi Yaakov Ba’al HaTurim, namely that Dinah the daughter of Leah gave birth to Shechem’s son, and that it was this son who completed the total number of seventy.

Ignoring the Missing One

At the end of *perek Arvei Pesachim*, the Rosh states a principle that easily enables him to answer this question. He affirms that there were really only sixty-nine people who went down to Egypt. However “when Scripture mentions a round number less one, it mentions the round number and ignores the missing one.”

In other words, the number of people was seventy less one, but Scripture commonly rounds numbers, in this case to seventy. Thus the verse states, “All the people of Jacob’s household who came to Egypt, seventy” which everyone can agree with.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

He Deserves to be Thrown to the Dogs

It is forbidden by the Torah to believe *Lashon Harah*, be it in regards to matters between man and G-d, or between man and his fellowman. In other words, we must not sincerely believe that the disparaging remarks we hear about a person are true, for this will lower our opinion of him.

One who believes such remarks transgresses a prohibition, as it is written: “You shall not accept a false report” (*Shemot* 23:1). In the *Mechilta*, the Sages say that this constitutes a warning against believing *Lashon Harah*. They state that whoever believes *Lashon Harah* deserves to be thrown to the dogs. Thus the Torah states, “You shall not accept a false report,” which immediately follows the words: “Throw it to the dogs” (*Shemot* 22:30). The Sages also say that the sin of one who believes *Lashon Harah* is greater than the sin of one who speaks it.

– Chafetz Chaim