

The Path To Follow

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Vayikra

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Under the Direction of Rabbi David H. Pinto Shlita

www.hevratpinto.org | hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief: Hanania Soussan

32 rue du Plateau 75019 Paris, France • Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 • Fax: +331 42 06 00 33

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Let Those Who Are Pure Come And Study That Which Is Pure

It is written, "He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, 'When a man offers among you an offering to Hashem, from the cattle or from the flock shall you bring your offering'" (*Vayikra* 1:1-2).

Our Sages say in the Midrash, "Why do young children begin studying with *Sefer Vayikra*? It is because all the offerings appear in it, and because up to that point they are pure and do not know the taste of sin. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said that they begin with the study of the offerings: Let those who are pure come and study the offerings that are pure. I will account it to them as if they had brought offerings before Me" (*Tanchuma, Tzav* 14). Although the Temple was destroyed and offerings are no longer brought today, if young boys do not read about them, the world cannot endure.

From here we learn that laws of capital importance in the Torah depend upon the offerings, and it is through them that Jews have endured in exile. In fact even when there is no Temple and no offerings are brought before G-d, by the fact that Jews study the laws of the offerings, G-d regards it as if they had brought these offerings, and He redeems them.

Thus our Sages have said, "Whoever studies the laws of the sin-offering is as if he were offering a sin-offering, and whoever studies the laws of the guilt-offering is as if he were offering a guilt-offering" (*Menachot* 110a). This is why our forefathers established the rule that young boys should begin their study of Torah by the offerings. This is meant to accustom them to the subject of the offerings from their youth, in order for them to realize that when a person has sinned in our time – when we cannot bring an offering because there is no Temple – Scripture considers him to have brought an offering if he studies Torah.

Hence this week's *parsha* begins with the term *vayikra* ("and He called"). We may break this term into *vai* and *kra*, *vai* having the same numerical value, including the word itself, as *tov* ("good"). Now there is nothing good other than the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: "Taste and see that Hashem is *tov* [good]" (*Tehillim* 34:9), and there is nothing good other than Torah (*Berachot* 5a). The term *kra* has the same numerical value, including the word itself, as *karev* ("to approach"), teaching us that studying Torah enables a person to draw closer to his Creator.

The study of Torah is alluded to in the term *vai*, telling us that even if a person finds studying Torah difficult (*vai*), he must still study it, even in poverty or hardship, and even if he is old or sick. As the Rambam states, "Every Jew has the duty to study Torah, be he rich or poor, in good health or sick, young or so old that he no longer has any strength, and even if he is so poor that he is forced to beg. Even if he has a wife and children, he must set aside time to study Torah day and night, as it is written: 'You shall meditate on it day and night' [Joshua 1:8]" (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8).

His Blood Deserves to be Spilled

Given that the Torah is eternal, we must say that this call by G-d to Moshe in the Sanctuary is repeated every single day to every Jew. This is done in order

to push them to study Torah, even if they find it very difficult. When a person devotes himself to hard-earned study, he is promised that he will draw closer to his Creator.

Furthermore, when a person studies Torah with devotion, Scripture considers him to have brought an offering to Hashem. When a man brought an offering in the Sanctuary, his entire body was sanctified; it was as if he himself were being offered before G-d. As the Ramban writes, when a person brings an offering, he "must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the main limbs of the offering should be in place of the main limbs of his body" (Ramban on *Vayikra* 1:9).

Hence it is written, "When a man offers among you" (*Vayikra* 1:2), for a man must offer himself before Hashem. How does he do this? It is by giving his life for the words of Torah and by studying it even in hardship. Whoever does not completely devote himself to Torah and *mitzvot*, even if he possesses some Torah, it has no real value because he has failed to give his life for it.

The Entire World for Him

Thus we read in the Gemara, "Rabbi Papa said to Abaye: 'How is it that miracles were performed for former generations, yet miracles are not performed for us? It cannot be because of their [superiority in] study, for in the days of Rav Yehudah all of their studies was confined to Order *Nezikin*, and we study all six orders, and when Rav Yehudah came [to the law] in *Uktzin*: 'If a woman presses vegetables in a pot' (or, according to others, "olives pressed with their leaves are clean"), he used to say: "I see all the difficulties of Rav and Shemuel here." Yet we have 13 versions of *Uktzin*. However when Rav Yehudah drew off one shoe, rain used to come, whereas we torment ourselves and cry loudly, and no notice is taken of us!' He replied: 'The former generations were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of the Name; we do not sacrifice our lives for the sanctity of the Name.' There was the case of Rav Adda bar Ahava, who saw a heathen woman wearing an [immodest] red head-dress in the street. Thinking that she was a Jewish woman, he arose and tore it from her. It turned out that she was a heathen woman, and they fined him 400 *zuz*" (*Berachot* 20a).

The world endures because Jews study Torah with devotion in times of tremendous difficulty. This is why Scripture begins *Sefer Vayikra*, which deals entirely with the offerings – which are pure and through which the world endures – by the term *vayikra* ("and He called"). This is to tell us that when a man puts an effort into studying Torah, he becomes worthy that the entire world should have been created for him, and his Torah will endure. Thus it is taught, "Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it" (*Berachot* 63b), as they were for Hillel the Elder and Rav Adda bar Ahava. However if we fail to study Torah, it would be better if we had not been born.

Concerning the Parsha

Some Customs of the Great Men of Israel

It is written, “When a ruler sins and commits one for the prohibitions of Hashem his G-d which should not be done, through error, and he is guilty...” (*Vayikra* 4:22).

The Gemara states, “Happy is the generation whose ruler brings an offering for a sin that he committed unwillingly” (*Horayot* 10b). On the verse, “His surroundings are very *nisarah* [turbulent]” (*Tehillim* 50:3), the Sages (*Yebamot* 121b) explain that the Holy One, blessed be He, deals strictly with those who are close to Him, even to the breadth of a hair (*se’arah*).

It is said that the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, the *gaon* Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka, would consider even the smallest of his actions. He would be extremely careful in evaluating everything he did, in order to determine whether or not it could be detrimental to the honor of Heaven.

Every afternoon, he would rest for a few minutes in order to regain his strength and recuperate from the trouble that he went through without respite from the early morning. Yet when a worker once came to his home, a simple man who had come to repair various things, Rabbi Yehudah did not rest on that day. In fact he told himself, “I’m afraid of desecrating G-d’s Name! This worker should not think, ‘The *talmid chacham* Yehudah has time to sleep in the middle of the day when he wants, but I have to work without stop!’ ”

The Gemara states, “Rabbi Yanai possessed an orchard that had become ripe for picking during *Chol HaMoed*, [and] he picked it. The next year, all the people waited until *Chol HaMoed* in order to pick their orchards. Rabbi Yanai then renounced his [proprietary rights in the] orchard that year” (*Moed Katan* 12b). He did this because he had led others into doing wrong. In the commentary of Rabbeinu Chananel, the *Yerushalmi* states: “We learn from that which can lead to an error, but we do not learn from that which is correct.”

Thus Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka paid tremendous attention to not creating even the smallest misconception. Once on a Thursday night, as he was traveling in a distant place, he only had a few minutes before the prayer of *Vatikin* in order to study as he usually did. As soon as he entered the synagogue, he said to the student who accompanied him: “Let us study for at least a few moments.”

Yet after having read a line or two, he closed the book he was studying and said, “The congregation will soon arrive to pray. If they see me, they will think that I have been studying here for three hours, and I will have therefore deceived them.”

He cherished the concerns of the saintly Chafetz Chaim *Zatzal* regarding such situations. It is said that the Chafetz Chaim’s mouth never stopped studying unless he was ill, in which case his doctor would forbid him from studying for health purposes.

In such situations, the Chafetz Chaim reflected on what he should do. If people saw him doing nothing, without at least having an open book before him, there could be no greater *chillul Hashem!* On the other hand, if he had an open book before him just for the sake of appearances, without reading from it, he was transgressing the prohibition against deliberate deception. In that case, what should he do?

He raised the question with his friend the *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski *Zatzal* of Vilna (the author of *Achiezer*), who was among the greatest *poskim* of his generation. He told the Chafetz Chaim that it was better for him to have an open book before him, because “there is no reason to worry about deception.” That is, nobody would be deceived if he thought that the Chafetz Chaim was really studying at that time!

The Words of the Sages

You Shall Return What You Have Stolen

One of the questions often asked of the great *poskim* is how a person can atone for the sin of theft if he cannot remember the people from whom he has stolen!

In the book *Tuvcha Yabiu*, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein *Shlita* advises one who wants to repent and atone for the sin of theft to donate some money for the needs of the community.

The Rav *Shlita* cites an amazing incident that occurred in Israel, an incident that he himself witnessed:

“Someone had placed some comfortable benches next to the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron. A few years ago, when I went to Meron, I saw a Jew who was lying down on one of these benches, and when he got up he said something like, ‘Oh, how it’s good to relax on these benches!’

“As it turned out, the man who was responsible for placing the benches there had sinned against the very same Jew relaxing on them. Since this Jew had benefited from these benches, it was considered as if the transgressor had atoned for his sin, thereby erasing it. The same applies to returning a stolen object: If we do something for the community by donating things that the public needs, and if we also pray to Hashem so that those against whom we have sinned will forgive us, we will attain atonement and forgiveness for our sin.”

Guarde Your Tongue

Forbidden to Obey Them

In regards to the prohibition against tale-bearing, it makes no difference whether we speak spontaneously or feel pressured into recounting things, since tale-bearing is forbidden in any case. Even if a person’s own father or rav (who must be respected and feared, not contradicted) ask him to recount things about so-and-so, and he knows that *Lashon Harah* will result from what he says – even if it is just the “dust” of *Lashon Harah* – it is still forbidden to obey them.

Rabbi Aryeh Levine

During the British Mandate, Rabbi Aryeh Levine became known as “the father of prisoners.” Every Shabbat, regardless of the weather – despite the *sharav* (sand storm) or winter storms – the Rav would visit prisons and meet with prisoners of the underground movement and those condemned to death, encouraging them and later writing to them. He did this for nearly a quarter century. We are especially familiar with his frequent visits to the “Russian Compound,” the central prison in Jerusalem, where he organized communal prayers for Shabbat. Rav Aryeh’s personality fascinated everyone. Prisoners of the underground movement, both religious and non-religious, gathered around him. Even common criminals gathered around him, some to pray and some to hear his uplifting words.

Rabbi Aryeh Levine also regularly visited hospitals for lepers in order to encourage the sick, and he was particularly sensitive to the needs of the poor. Besides his great concern for their sustenance and needs, he paid great attention to their honor and complained that people were being disrespectful to them.

Special Sensitivity

His grandson, Rabbi David Levine, recounts the following story: “When I was a small boy, I was always playing pranks, as children often do. One day my friend and I saw a flag hanging from the wall of a house, and we bet each other who could climb up and get it. I climbed up and reached the flag, and then took it and came down. The lady of the house saw what was happening, and she called to me from her window: ‘Little boy, I know who you are.’ I then fled and hid the flag. The next day I arrived at *cheder*, and my grandfather called me into his office, which was a small room located beneath the stairs. Here, in the building of the Etz Chaim Talmud Torah, I could not imagine what he wanted from me. Rabbi Aryeh took a *Tanach*, leafed through it, and arrived at *Sefer Shemot*. He then said to me, ‘Read it!’ I read: ‘You shall not afflict the widow or the orphan’ [*Shemot* 22:21].

“Rabbi Aryeh again said to me, ‘Read it, only louder!’ I repeated the verse. ‘Read it a third time!’ my grandfather said. During all that time, I didn’t know where my grandfather was going with this, or what he wanted from me. He then began to moan, ‘The Torah explicitly commands us not to cause pain to a widow! It’s a prohibition like not eating pork! That woman, whose flag you stole, was a widow! How could you dare cause her pain?’ I sat there, all sheepish, thinking: He didn’t criticize me for having transgressed, ‘You shall not steal.’ Instead he was concentrating on a single issue – the pain that I had caused to this widow and the gravity of the evil I had done. ‘What can I do?’ I asked my grandfather. ‘This is bad. I’ll go and return the flag,’ I added. ‘No, no...that’s not enough,’ he replied. ‘You have to go to her home and ask her for forgiveness, otherwise things will be bad for both of us.’ I said, ‘Good, tonight after school, I’ll go see her and ask for her forgiveness.’ ‘At night?’

my grandfather retorted. ‘No! Go there right away!’ Naturally, I didn’t have any choice, and so I went straight to the home of the widow and asked her for forgiveness. Ever since that day, my grandfather’s call still resonates in my ears: ‘How dare you cause a widow pain?’ The sensitivity that he had for isolated cases – which he inculcated in us – is still in my blood.”

The “Goral HaGra”

The name of Rabbi Aryeh Levine became engraved in the collective consciousness of the Jewish people on account of the following incident: In January of 1948, a group of 38 soldiers was sent to defend the besieged settlements at Gush Etzion. While on their way, one of the soldiers tore his ankle and had to return to base in Har Tov, accompanied by two soldiers. The 35 others continued on their way to a desperate battle taking place in the Judean hillside, a battle from which none of them would return. Following a cease-fire, their remains were returned a year and a half later, but some were unrecognizable. The military could only positively identify 23 of the bodies, meaning that the remaining 12 could not be identified. Some of the soldiers’ parents addressed the *gaon* Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank *Zatzal*, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem at the time, for his help. After carefully considering the matter, Rav Frank decided that in order to identify the remains of the other soldiers and provide them with a proper burial, he would begin a process known as the “Goral HaGra.” Attributed to the Vilna Gaon, it involves the selection of pages, columns, and then verses from the *Tanach*. Rav Frank believed that only a single *tzaddik*, the G-d fearing Rabbi Aryeh Levine, could carry out this difficult and important task. To begin the process, Rabbi Aryeh took an old *Tanach* of his and randomly opened it. Each time he opened it, he would leaf through seven pages. Then, based on an allusion in the text before him, he determined the identity of the remains in question. He opened his *Tanach* with great emotion and trembling eleven times, and each time the first verse that appeared contained an allusion to the name of one of the soldiers. After having identified the eleventh soldier, the twelfth was automatically identified.

Background

Rabbi Aryeh Levine was born on Nissan 6, 5645 in Orla, Russia (near Bialystok) to Rabbi Binyamin Beinush and his wife Ethel. He studied in the *yeshivot* of Sutzk and Slonim, where he was considered an extremely gifted and diligent student. Despite his young age, he was accepted into the Volozhin yeshiva, where he continued his brilliant studies.

In Adar 5665 Rabbi Aryeh Levine settled in the Holy Land, where he studied in the Torat Chaim yeshiva. He later became the *Mashgiach* of the Etz Chaim yeshiva in Jerusalem. He passed away on Nissan 9. May his memory be a blessing.

For His Acceptance

It is written, “A male without blemish he shall offer; to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting he shall offer it for his acceptance” (*Vayikra* 1:3).

Why is the expression “he shall offer” repeated here?

In his book *Oznaim LaTorah*, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin *Zatzal* explains that in the laws of the offerings, there are three conditions made in this verse: The offering must be a “male,” it must be “without blemish,” and it must also be “for his acceptance.”

When a burnt-offering was brought to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, the *kohanim* could verify that it was a male without blemish. However in order to know whether the person really brought it “for his acceptance,” it first had to be offered before Hashem – “he shall offer it for his acceptance” – for only Hashem knows the secret thoughts of the heart.

Going Willingly

It is written, “A male without blemish he shall offer; to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting he shall offer it for his acceptance” (*Vayikra* 1:3).

This expression is explained in the book *Midrash Shemuel* according to a story brought by the Sages: “An ox was once being led away as an offering, but would not budge. A poor man came along with a bundle of endive in his hand. He held it out towards the ox, which ate it, sneezed, and expelled a needle. It then allowed itself to be led away as an offering” (*Vayikra Rabba* 3:5). It seems that the ox did not want to be led away as an offering because of the needle that was in its throat. If it had not sneezed, it would have been *treif* and the offering would have been invalid.

Hence this is what Scripture alludes to by saying, “A male without blemish he shall offer.” If we say that there may be a blemish within the animal, we are advised: “He shall offer it for his acceptance.” In other words, if we see an animal going towards the altar willingly, it is certainly “without blemish.” If *treif*, it would not go towards the altar willingly.

Why Everything?

It is written, “The *kohen* shall cause it all to go up in smoke” (*Vayikra* 1:9).

Concerning the statement of the Midrash (that “it all” includes the bones, tendons, horns, and hooves), the saintly Rabbi Haim ben Attar, the Ohr HaHaim, expresses his surprise: “Why, if that is the case, did Abraham not offer his ram as a burnt-offering along with its horns? Instead, he kept the horns as *shofarot*: The right horn for the *shofar* of *Mashiach*, and the left horn for the giving of the Torah.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss *Zatzal*, the Rosh Av Beit Din of Jerusalem, answered this question in his book *Minchat Yitzchak*. He cites the words of the Kli Yakar, who explained why the law of the offerings requires that all parts of an animal

be offered on the altar. He states that we must offer the horns because every sinner seems to possess horns with which to attack. Hence the horns of an animal must also be offered on the altar.

Since Abraham’s ram was not offered for atonement, providence arranged things such that, as the Ohr HaHaim explains, Abraham did indeed offer the horns on the altar as well. However they fell from the altar and were not burnt up.

How Can He Stand Before His Master?

It is written, “When a soul sins in that he hears the voice of adjuration, and he is a witness – either he has seen or known – if he does not say, then he shall bear his iniquity” (*Vayikra* 5:1).

The Zohar explains that when the day comes for the soul to depart from this world, Hashem looks sadly at it and says: “‘When a soul sins in that he hears the voice of adjuration’ – for did I not adjure her by My Name not to be false to Me, and testify against her when she went down to earth? ‘And he is a witness’ – truly so, for I testified against him many times to keep my commandments. Therefore since man is a witness, when he returns to the King and has either ‘seen’ or ‘known’ – *i.e.*, ‘seen’ his sins and ponders them, or ‘known’ for certain that he has committed some transgression – and ‘if he does not say’ – *i.e.*, if he does not confess his sins before his Master – then when he leaves this world ‘he shall bear his iniquity.’ If so, how can the gates be opened to him and how can he stand before his Master?” (Zohar III:13b).

In the Light of the Parsha

Expressing Oneself Gently or Firmly?

It is written, “He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: ‘*Daber* [Speak] to the Children of Israel’” (*Vayikra* 1:1).

Rashi explains that before any words or orders were spoken, there was first a “call,” indicating affection. This is an expression used by the ministering angels, as it is written: “They called one to another” (Isaiah 6:3). However if G-d called to Moshe with affection, we need to understand why He commanded him to speak to the Children of Israel firmly – *daber* (“speak”), a term denoting firmness. The Ketav Sofer explains, with regards to the sin at the waters of Merivah, when Moshe said: “Listen *na* [now] you rebels” (*Bamidbar* 20:10), that the Sages have taught, “The word *na* means ‘I pray’” (*Berachot* 9a), meaning that Moshe should not have spoken to Israel in a beseeching way when the honor of Heaven was at stake. Since he had spoken to them gently, he was punished for it (*Drashot Chadashot* for Tevet 8).

Along the same lines, we find that at the giving of the Torah it is stated: “*Vetageid* [‘And say’ – denoting firmness] to the Children of Israel” (*Shemot* 19:3). Here the Sages have taught: “Words as hard [unpleasant] to man as worm-wood [*giddin*]” (*Shabbat* 87a).