

# The Path To Follow

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## May All Our Deeds Be For The Sake Of Heaven

**I**t is written, "The son of the Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel" (*Vayikra* 24:10). The Midrash states, "From where did he go out? Rabbi Levi replied: He went out of his world, as may be inferred from the text: 'A champion went out' [I Samuel 17:4]. Rabbi Berekiah said: He went out from the preceding section. He argued, 'It is written, "You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves" [*Vayikra* 24:5]. A king usually eats fresh bread. Does he eat stale?' ... Rabbi Chiya taught: He went out as a result of the section regarding ancestry. He came with the intention of pitching his tent among the camp of Dan, but they said to him: 'What right do you have to pitch your tent in the camp of Dan?' He replied, 'I descend from the daughters of Dan.' They told him, 'It is written: "Each man by his standard, with ensigns according to the houses of their fathers" [*Bamidbar* 2:2] – their fathers, not their mothers.' He appealed to Moshe's court and lost his case, and so he rose and cursed G-d" (*Vayikra Rabba* 32:3). It is difficult to understand how he could scorn the showbread by saying that it was eaten cold. All Israel knew that it did not get cold as long as it had not been placed on the *Shulchan*, and that when the *kohanim* came to remove it, they found it as hot as when it had been placed there!

The Sages have said, "All who heard him placed their hands on his head. They placed their hands on his head and said to him, 'Your blood is upon your own head. You brought this upon yourself' " (*Torat Kohanim* 19:2). In his book *Degel HaMussar*, Rabbeinu Gershon Lieberman *Zatzal* asks: "Why did they tell the one who cursed, 'You brought this upon yourself,' since he belonged to the generation of the desert, the generation of knowledge? They had stood upon Mount Sinai at the lofty moment when the Torah was given, and they saw all the miracles that took place during the exodus from Egypt, during the war against Amalek, when the sea split, when Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, and so on. The dispute in which he found himself was somewhat of a dispute for the sake of Heaven, not just a dispute for material gain of some kind. He was not allowed to pitch his tent among his tribe, so what was he to do? In the end, he wanted to live with the Jewish people; he only desired good, so what does it mean that he brought this upon himself?"

### Who Sees Angels?

To explain all this, let us begin by citing a teaching from our Sages in the Gemara: "What is the meaning of the text, 'The lips of the *kohen* should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is an angel of the L-RD of hosts' [Malachi

2:7]? If a Rav is like an angel of the L-RD of hosts, they should seek the law at his mouth. If not, they should not seek the law at his mouth" (*Moed Katan* 17a). This is difficult to understand. Do people see angels, such that they can tell the difference between one Rav and another? Can they say, "This one resembles an angel, but that one does not"? Can they say, "I will accept the Torah from this one, but not from that one"?

We may explain this according to a teaching of our Sages: "Israel is more precious to the Holy One, blessed be He, than the ministering angels, for Israel sing praises to Hashem every hour, whereas the ministering angels sing praises but once a day. Others say once a week, while others say once a month. Others say once a year, while others say once in seven years. Others say once in fifty years, while others say once in eternity" (*Chullin* 91b). It is also taught, "Each day ministering angels are created from the fiery stream, sing praises, and cease to be" (*Chagigah* 14a).

From here we learn that there are some ministering angels who only sing praises before G-d after seven or even after fifty years, at which point they are immediately consumed by a fiery stream. Although they know that they will disappear once they sing praises, they still sing before G-d and give their lives for a single song of praise, regardless of the fact that they will perish immediately afterwards.

This is the meaning of the teaching which states that a Rav must resemble an angel of G-d: Just as an angel has no consideration for its own life when it must bring satisfaction to its Creator, since it knows that it will perish once it sings a song of praise, likewise a Rav must devote himself entirely to words of Torah. And just as ministering angels await no reward for giving up their lives, a Rav must also await no reward, acting solely for the sake of Heaven.

We must not accept words of Torah from the mouth of a Rav who is not like an angel, however, for the Sages have said: "Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an ax with which to cut" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:5). Whoever does not give his life for the Torah, it is a sign that he hopes for a reward; and whoever awaits a reward clearly proves that he is using the Torah as a crown for self-aggrandizement and an ax with which to cut. The Holy One, blessed be He, will remove such a person from the world.

### An Example

The principle here is that whoever gives his life for the Torah must not await any reward or make the Torah into a means for personal

gain. Instead, he must study solely for the sake of Heaven and to teach the Jewish people. This is what Rabbi Akiva did, as the Gemara tells us: "The evil [Roman] government once issued a decree forbidding Jews from learning and practicing Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva publicly gathering people together and teaching them Torah. He said to him, 'Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?' He replied, 'I will explain this to you with a parable: A fox was once walking alongside a river when it saw fish swarming from one place to another. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing?" They replied, "From the nets cast for us by men." He said to them, "Would you like to come up on dry land so that you and I can live together, just as my ancestors lived with your ancestors?" They replied, "Are you the one they call the smartest of animals?"

You are not smart, but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!" So it is with us. If such is our state when we sit and study Torah – of which it is written, "For it is your life and the length of your days" – how much worse shall it be for us if we neglect it!" (Berachot 61b).

How did Rabbi Akiva reach such a level that he did not fear for his life and studied Torah without any ulterior motives? It is because during his entire life, he waited for an opportunity to fulfill the words "with all your soul." All that he did was for the sake of Heaven, not for a reward. This is why he did not fear the government or death. He feared only G-d throughout his entire life, not man, and he gave his life in order to sanctify G-d's Name.

## Concerning the Parsha

### The New Crop

It is written, "You shall not eat bread or parched grain or fresh grain until this very day, until you have brought the offering of your G-d. [It is] a perpetual statute for all your generations in all your habitations" (Vayikra 23:14).

The laws concerning the prohibition of eating from the new crop also appear in the *Shulchan Aruch*: "It is forbidden to eat any of the five species of the new crop until the Omer is offered, meaning Nissan 16. As long as the Omer has not been offered, it is forbidden throughout the day of the 16th. Outside of Eretz Israel, where the festival lasts for two days, it is forbidden throughout the 17th, until the night of the 18th" (Yoreh Deah 293:1).

Concerning the prohibition against eating from the new crop before Nissan 17, *Sefer HaChinuch* states: "This is because our food comes mainly from the crop, which is why we must bring an offering from it for Hashem. We must bring it before we partake of it. All this is to make us worthy of partaking of His kindnesses."

All five grains are included in the prohibition against eating from the new crop: Wheat, rye, spelt, oat, and barley. The Rishonim are divided as to the number of prohibitions that are transgressed by a person who eats from the new crop. The Rambam writes that one who eats bread made from roasted grain and groats transgresses three prohibitions, whereas the Ramban states that he transgresses only one.

The book *Turei Zahav* (Yoreh Deah 293:1) deals with a case of dough that has been kneaded with yeast that transgresses the prohibition against eating from the new crop. In the author's opinion, all the dough is completely forbidden and no nullification occurs for two reasons: The first is that the yeast is added in order to enhance the taste, and all prohibitions involving taste are not nullified even among 1,000 times its volume. Furthermore, the prohibition against eating from the new crop is included in the category of "something that some permit," and we know that something that some permit is not nullified even among 1,000 times its volume.

### Permission Based Upon Nothing

In regards to the prohibition against eating from the new crop outside of Eretz Israel (when harvests do not necessarily occur

in the spring, and when they sometimes occur twice in a year, and often before Passover), the *poskim* are divided as to whether these harvests are prohibited by the Torah or not. Let us cite the opinion of the *Kaf HaChaim* (*Orach Chaim* 489). On the question of whether it is permissible to use the new crop to make *matzot* for Passover, he states that it is obvious that if it has not been sowed and planted before the Omer, it is forbidden to use for making *matzot* for Passover. This is because permission for eating the new crop in our time outside of Eretz Israel is not based upon anything, and most of the Rishonim believe that it is forbidden by the Torah even outside of Eretz Israel.

The concern regarding the prohibition against eating from the new crop in our time pertains to cakes made outside of Eretz Israel, flakes of oat, grains, breakfast cereals, coffee substitutes and other products that contain ingredients that are derived from the five types of grain. Most organizations overseeing *kashrut* are lenient in regards to the prohibition against eating from the new crop by relying on the opinion of the Bach, who believed that there is no prohibition against eating from the new crop of non-Jews. However one who cares for his soul will verify all food products that contain a mixture derived from these grains, in order to ensure that they do not contain anything from the new crop.

### Most Do Not Pay Attention

Beer, the main ingredients of which are water and alcohol (which comes from the fermentation of barley and an extract of hops) is usually made from a crop planted in the spring. The Acharonim open the debate on a drink made from a fermentation of barley, in the context of a discussion on drinks that come from fruit and a discussion on cases where the main consideration is taste. Here we must be careful. The *Mishnah Berurah* states, "Most people do not pay any attention to the prohibition of the new crop, and some find extenuating circumstances in the fact that it is something difficult. Hence in cases of great need we rely on certain Rishonim who believe that the prohibition of the new crop outside of Eretz Israel is only of rabbinic origin. Although we cannot reprimand those who act leniently, whoever cares for his soul will not rely on those opinions. He will be as careful as possible, because for many great figures among the Rishonim, it is a clear-cut Torah prohibition."

### Cruelty

It is written, "An ox or a sheep, you shall not slaughter it and its young in one day" (*Vayikra* 22:28).

The Ramban states in regards to the *mitzvah* of sending a bird away from the nest, "The reason for both [*mitzvoif*] is that we should not have a cruel heart and be uncompassionate, or it may be that Scripture does not allow us to destroy a species altogether, although it permits slaughter within that group. Now he who kills the mother and its young in one day, or takes them when they are free to fly, [it is] as though he cut off that species" (Ramban on *Devarim* 22:6).

In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, the Rambam states that the reason for the *mitzvah* to release the mother bird when taking its young, and the prohibition against killing the mother and its young in one day, is in order to admonish us against killing the young within the mother's sight, for animals feel great distress under such circumstances. There is no difference between the distress of man and the distress of animals for their young. The primary prohibition against killing the dam and its young applies only when killing the young and *then* the dam, not the other way around. The objective of all this is to distance ourselves from all forms of cruelty.

### An Acceptable Fast

It is written, "You shall deny your souls" (*Vayikra* 23:27).

In his book *Kad Hakemach*, Rabbeinu Bechaye states that the term translated as "deny" includes both body and soul: Denying the body through hunger and the soul by depriving it of evil thoughts, which do more harm than sin itself. If a person denies his body through fasting, but does not deprive his soul of evil thoughts, he sins and derives no benefit from such a fast.

This is indeed true, for we are lenient in regards to physical restrictions when a person is sick and his life is in danger, but we are not lenient in regards to denying the soul. If a person's soul cleaves to immorality and puts him in danger, this is no reason to exempt him, even if it were to kill him.

A fast that denies both body and soul is accepted. Such a fast is as important as an offering, and its reward is even greater than that of an offering, for fat and blood are diminished by it.

### Surprising Regret

It is written, "You shall deny your souls" (*Vayikra* 23:27).

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim of Brisk *Zatzal* was very lenient when it came to people who were sick on Yom Kippur, exempting everyone from fasting if their lives were at risk. Hence he would commonly say, "I am certainly not lenient in regards to prohibitions. On the contrary, I am very strict when it comes to all dangers to life."

He would add, "Sometimes the sick are very sad when they have to eat on Yom Kippur. This is very surprising! For a circumcision, the *mohel* and the father of the child must desecrate Shabbat, but have we ever heard of them regretting this 'desecration' of Shabbat?"

### A Lasting Impression

It is written, "An Israelite man" (*Vayikra* 24:10).

Exactly who was this "Israelite man"?

The fact that the name of this man is hidden from us contains a

great principle and ethical teaching, as the saintly Ohr HaChaim tells us.

He says that the reason why his name is not mentioned – why Scripture may not have wanted to mention it – is because it is what caused the son of an Israelite woman to curse Hashem. Now merit is conferred upon people through a righteous individual, and evil comes upon them through a sinful individual. However the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to humiliate anyone, especially since what is written in the Torah leaves a lasting impression.

## In the Path of the Fathers

### Infusing Ourselves with Humility

The Sages say, "Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an axe with which to cut" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:5). It is a great principle in learning Torah that when someone studies with pride, his learning will not endure. If one repents before learning Torah, such learning will lead to humility. I have seen among the recommendations of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk *Zatzal* that everyone must completely repent before engaging in Torah study. If a person fails to examine his deeds before learning, his Torah will not endure. Furthermore, it is written: "To the wicked, G-d says: What right have you to speak of My statutes?" (*Tehillim* 50:16). In other words: You detest moral instruction and have no regard for My words. Which evildoer is Hashem unable to tolerate? The proud, for the Sages have said: "Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: I and he cannot both dwell in the world" (*Sotah* 5a). In that case, such a person has no part in the holy Torah. Why does all this happen? It is because he detests being reprimanded.

One day I came to see my teacher the *tzaddik* Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian *Zatzal*, and he told me that he was writing a commentary on the book *Shev Shemateta* by the author of *Ketzot HaChoshen*. He added, "Know that this holy Rav, whenever he sat down to study Torah, before beginning he would open a book and isolate himself with his Creator and start searching his soul. He would recite the verse, 'To the wicked, G-d says: What right have you to speak of My statutes?' He did this because he knew that, in regards to his own level, he was not worthy of studying the holy Torah. Thus each time that he wanted to study, he would search his soul and repent in order to infuse himself with humility. In this way, he merited to write important commentaries such as *Ketzot HaChoshen* and *Shev Shemateta*, for he studied Torah with tremendous humility." [Note: The fear of Heaven from the book *Ketzot HaChoshen* led him to write and introduction to the book *Shev Shemateta*, which consists entirely of the fear of Heaven.]

My teacher *Zatzal* added: Since that is the case for the author of *Ketzot HaChoshen*, how much more should we search our souls before learning Torah, so that it endures with us! Yet because of our many sins, the very opposite is true: With our own eyes we see people who come to study in the Beit HaMidrash, and yet before studying they make a few telephone calls, smoke a cigarette or two, and then enter the Beit HaMidrash and start chatting with their *chavruta* about their workday and what is happening at home. Only then do they open a book to study, at which point they have only half or less of their time left to study! That is how they get ready to study Torah. Instead of preparing themselves in a dignified manner and with the fear of Heaven, they spend their time discussing the vanities of the world, and yet nobody takes this to heart.

## Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

### Rabbi Yechezkel Halevi Landau of Prague – The Noda B'Yehuda

During the time of Rabbi David Oppenheim *Zatzal*, the Rav of Prague, the community was proud of its religious life. Numerous educational institutions were the glory of the city, and the *Beit Din HaGadol* maintained a high level of *kashrut* with faithfulness and firmness. On this court were famous *talmidei chachamim* of great standing, men who gave the city an atmosphere of Torah and sanctity.

Following a plot to accuse the Jewish community of having helped the French in their war against Empress Maria Theresa, life became difficult for the Jews of Prague. In fact they were expelled from the city for four years, and upon their return they felt a pressing need to re-establish the life of the community. They had to restore the ruins and rectify the spiritual desert that had been created by this evil plot.

After the passing of Rabbi Oppenheim, the most pressing need that the leaders of the community felt was in the area of spirituality. They wanted a strong personality who could oversee the situation and govern the community according to the dictates of the Torah and the fear of G-d, a strong spiritual leader who would rule in all matters and whom the people would follow. This need was felt even more because the Jewish community of Prague had an ancient custom in which its Rav, before his death, would appoint a person to succeed him as Rav. Yet when Rabbi Oppenheim had been ill, the leaders of the community assembled around his bed in order to ask him to name his successor, according to their custom. Yet to their great surprise, he answered them with a question from the Talmud: "Perhaps it is according to Rabbi Meir?" He said nothing more.

Numerous attempts to decipher the mystery of this enigmatic statement proved useless. The leaders of the community, who found no peace of mind, eventually approached the leading Torah figures of the generation in order to resolve their dilemma. The person able to solve it would merit the position as the Rav of Prague.

Numerous candidates tried, but without success.

The precise solution to the mystery that enveloped the leaders of the community was given by Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, who at the time served as the Rav of Yampol. He immediately answered their question in the following way: "In the Talmud, we find the *din* that 'most people in a dying condition die' [*Gittin* 28a]. Yet Rabbi Meir believed that we must take into account a very small minority who make a complete recovery. Your Rav meant to say, in response to your question about his successor, that 'perhaps it is according to Rabbi Meir,' for Rabbi Meir thought of a very small minority among those in a dying condition who make a full recovery. In other words, perhaps your Rav would continue living and you would therefore not need a successor." This short and brilliant response by Rabbi Yechezkel left the leaders of the community speechless. They did not expect such an answer, and they immediately appointed him as their venerated Rav.

### The Honor of the Torah

The appointment of the "Noda B'Yehuda" did not please some members of the community, who were against it. They began to tarnish the name of the Rav and damaged the honor of the Torah and those who studied it.

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz later recounted that the attribute of justice descended harshly upon the opponents of the Rav. Each of them was punished when the time came. One of them had a son who studied in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yechezkel, and he was known as one of the most diligent students in the yeshiva. However he suddenly fell ill and his state worsened from day to day, until finally the doctors lost all hope. Those close to the young man felt that it was certainly

the attribute of justice that was responsible, since his father had damaged the honor of the Torah. They immediately went to see Rabbi Yechezkel to ask him to intercede for the young man through prayer.

When they could not find the Rav at home, they went to the *mikveh*, where they found him preparing for *Shacharit*. He told them that in this case, he could do nothing. However he advised them to take a copy of *Tzelach* and to place it under the head of the young man until he would come to visit him. In the end, he did not need to visit him, for as soon as they placed the book under his head, he began to recover. He later got out of bed like someone in good health.

How great is the honor of the Torah, and how terrible is the punishment of those who attack its sages!

### Let the Driver Enter

The greatest Torah scholars of the city were among Rabbi Yechezkel's rabbinic court in Prague. It was a court that everyone revered. Located near the Rav's home, it harbored righteousness and justice. The wisdom and intelligence of the Rav were also evident there.

There once was a conflict between two litigants, one being a businessman and the other his driver. The case involved their true identities, for one morning the driver got up, dressed himself with his master's clothes, and left his own clothes by the bed of the businessman. When he woke up, the businessman began looking for his clothes, and was stunned to see his driver wearing them! He was even more stunned when his driver showed him his own clothes and told him to put them on. For a moment, the businessman thought that the driver's audacity may have been justified, for he was speaking with a great deal of confidence.

This strange incident immediately made its way into court. Rabbi Yechezkel, who understood what was going on, let the litigants wait outside for many hours, until they had almost forgotten what they were there for! He then went outside his chambers and called out with an authoritarian voice, "Let the driver enter." The one wearing the nice garments instantly got up and took a few steps, until he realized what he was doing and sat back down. His actions constituted the best witness to his identity.

### In the Heavens

Rabbi Yechezkel Halevi Landau *Zatzal* was born in 5474 to Rabbi Yehudah Segal, a descendant of the Maharal and, going further back, to Rashi. At the age of 18, he married the daughter of Rabbi Yaakov of Dubno. Her sole desire was to enable her husband to study Torah in peace. On Iyar 17, 5553, the soul of Rabbi Yechezkel ascended to Heaven in holiness and purity. An expression of respect for his memory can be found among Belzer chassidim, who do not say *leshem yichud* on the night of Lag BaOmer before counting the Omer, out of respect for the Noda B'Yehuda, who did not agree with the saying of *leshem yichud*.

## Guard Your Tongue!

### We Must Praise Him

If we assume that our listeners do not seek to disparage an individual, for example because they do not know him, it is permitted to praise that individual, even in public, as long as we do not exaggerate.

If we want to praise a person who is widely known to be a righteous and upright individual, concerning whom nothing bad is ever said, we must praise him even before his enemies or those who are jealous of him. This is because they cannot disparage him; if they were to try, everyone would realize that they are just making up stories.