

The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Eretz Israel was Given to us Conditionally

It is written, "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there" (*Devarim* 26:2).

In our time, when the Temple no longer stands and we no longer bring *bikkurim* (firstfruit), we need to understand these verses in order to observe and fulfill them, for the entire Torah was given to every generation. As the Zohar states, the entire Torah is filled with good counsel for man (Zohar III:202a).

Our Sages have taught, "Against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give an accounting before the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:22). This teaches us that when Hashem brings a soul down into this world, it says: "Sovereign of the universe, it is impossible to emerge from beneath the Throne of Glory, in a world that is entirely good, and descend into a world that is entirely bad. Who knows if I will be able to resist the evil inclination? Better that You should leave me here."

At that point He responds, "You are descending into a material world against your will, since it is for this reason that I created you – so you may resist the evil inclination. As long as you remain hidden beneath the Throne of Glory, you will nourish yourself from the radiance of the *Shechinah*. You have not yet descended into the world of action, nor have you studied Torah or fulfilled *mitzvot*. You do not possess the merit to obtain a reward, for you have not yet done anything. As long as I continue to nourish you, I am only providing you with 'bread of shame' through My generosity."

This is why Hashem says to the soul, "I order you to descend into the world of action, to study Torah and fulfill *mitzvot*. If you do well, you will receive a reward. You will not descend alone, however, for I Myself will descend into the world with you, and I will help you overcome the evil inclination." Thus the Gemara states, "The evil inclination of man grows in strength from day to day and seeks to kill him.... Were it not for the Holy One, blessed be He, to help him, he would not be able to withstand it" (*Sukkah* 52b).

Entrusted to Man

The soul is a deposit entrusted to man. In general, when someone goes overseas and entrusts his plants to his friend, if his friend is honest, he will protect them from the sun, from the cold, and from mice. Thus when the owner returns and asks for his plants back, he will be able to return them as they were entrusted to him. However if he is not honest, he will not protect them. Instead he will think, "The owner is not going to return soon, for he's gone for a while!" Now if the owner encounters a favorable wind and returns earlier than expected, he will return to find that mice have eaten his plants, or that they have been damaged by the sun and cold, and he will immediately become angry.

The same applies to the soul: A person must protect it from the evil inclination so it does not get soiled by sin, as the Sages have said: "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out" [*Devarim* 28:6]. Your departure from the world should be as your entry into it: Just as you

entered it without sin, so may you leave it without sin" (*Bava Metzia* 107a). We will eventually be asked to return the soul, but nobody knows when the owner will return for it. We must therefore always be careful to ensure that it can be returned at any time, in order not to upset the owner if he finds it tarnished when he comes to retrieve it.

Hence the verse states, "When you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance" (*Devarim* 26:1), meaning that just as Eretz Israel is an inheritance that has been entrusted to Israel conditionally – as our Sages have said, "If you perform G-d's will, the land of Canaan is yours; otherwise you will be exiled from it" (*Sifri, Devarim* 38), and "Let the land not vomit you out for having defiled it" (*Vayikra* 18:28) – likewise the soul has been entrusted to man, and he must watch over it so it does not get damaged.

How can we safeguard this deposit to prevent the evil inclination from damaging it? It is by committing ourselves to intensive study, for we can only learn Torah by devoting ourselves to it. As the Sages have said, "Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was an elder and a member of the yeshiva.... Our father Isaac was an elder and a member of the yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was an elder and a member of the yeshiva" (*Yoma* 28b). Commenting on the verse, "He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen" (*Bereshith* 46:28), the Sages explain: "To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal fathers would study Torah" (*Bereshith Rabba* 95:3).

Devotion to Torah

The Torah states, "You shall take of the first [*reshith*] of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you" (*Devarim* 26:2). Now the word *reshith* always designates Torah (*Bereshith Rabba* 1:1), teaching us that a person must study Torah and fulfill *mitzvot* in order for Hashem to give him a reward in the World to Come. The fruits represent this reward, as it follows from the Mishnah: "These are the things for which a man enjoys the fruits in this world" (*Pe'ah* 1:1). From the fact that a person fulfills the Torah, he merits a reward.

Since the soul cannot study Torah and fulfill *mitzvot* without a material and earthly body – something that cannot occur in the World to Come, but only in this world – and since most of the *mitzvot* pertain to material and earthly matters (such as the *Shmita* year, the Jubilee, conception, circumcision), and since only a few pertain to spiritual matters such as prayer, and man is exempt from *mitzvot* once he dies (*Shabbat* 151b), the Holy One, blessed be He, grants a reward to the soul that has fulfilled *mitzvot* in this world. Hence the Torah states, "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land," for Torah and fruit come only from the earth, from this earthly world. When a person leaves this world, he takes nothing with him, neither silver nor gold, but only the Torah that he studied and the *mitzvot* that he fulfilled in life.

Preparing for the Days of Awe with Joy!

It is written, "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant" (*Devarim* 28:47).

"Joyful days are approaching," wrote the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Yechezkel Lewinstein *Zatzal* to one of his students. He was referring to the Days of Awe in the month of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance.

Joyful, because we have been given the possibility to cleanse ourselves of the impurity of the sins that surround us on all sides. We have merited to draw closer to the Creator of the universe, something that we cannot do during the rest of the year. To be more precise, we have the ability to do so throughout the year, but at this time we can come closer to the King of kings much more easily, for He is found among us.

"Seek Hashem when He may be found; call upon Him when He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). The King has gone to the trouble of coming closer to us, and we must therefore always rejoice and dance with joy, with supreme delight. We must have this marvelous sensation that the great King – the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who possesses the keys to all our requests and desires, and Who is also our Father – is much closer to us now, and we have the ability to ask Him for all that we want. Thanks to this great closeness during these days, He will more readily fulfill what we ask of Him.

Do we possess days that are more joyful and happy than the ones we are presently in? We now have the possibility of asking our Father for forgiveness. He is now in our presence.

Too Serious

The book *HaMeorot HaGedolim* speaks of Rabbi Nathan Tzvi Finkel, who sought the advice of Rabbi Israel Salanter on one of the rare occasions in which they met. He asked Rabbi Israel how one should act in our time with regards to teaching students. Rabbi Israel replied, "Revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the spirit of the oppressed!"

Rabbi Nathan Tzvi worked to make an atmosphere of joy and goodwill reign among his students. It was especially during the period of the holidays that joy reached its height. Joyful melodies and energetic dancing did not stop within the yeshiva during the time of the holidays, and many people came to see this joy of the yeshiva and participate in it. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi encouraged this atmosphere, with songs escaping the rooms of the students and Rabbi Nathan Tzvi's home on Shabbat.

During the week as well, there was a spirit of joy in the yeshiva that was prevalent throughout the year. This was a natural phenomenon, one caused by a love for Torah and the wisdom of Torah that revives the soul and rejoices the heart, and which constantly filled the yeshiva. When Rabbi Nathan Tzvi saw a student who was sad or depressed, he would try to change his mood.

It was in this context that he would get angry with students when they expressed themselves harshly. One day he welcomed a student from another yeshiva who was passing through Slabodka on his way from Lithuania to Poland. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi pointed

out to him several times that his facial expressions were too serious, and that he should put on a smile. However this student, who had been raised strictly and seriously all his life, could not change his habits and did not smile.

Rabbi Nathan Tzvi saw a serious character flaw in this, and from it he drew some far-reaching conclusions. At first the Rav decided that his grandson would travel with this young man all the way to Mir, and that together they would cross the border between Lithuania and Poland. Yet after the conversation in question, the Rav cancelled his plans and did not allow his grandson to accompany him, explaining that he questioned the merits of the young man and feared the dangers of the road.

One of Rabbi Nathan Tzvi's students once came to see him in Hebron in order to tell him of his engagement. Rabbi Nathan realized that this student was too serious, and he reprimanded him for not having a more pleasant demeanor. He added that it was a great duty to have a welcoming face, especially with one's fiancée, towards whom one must act properly.

Joy and Happiness from a Life of Torah

The book *Pnei Meir*, written about the life of Rabbi Meir Feist of the United States, states the following:

At the age of four, Rabbi Meir became completely paralyzed in both legs, and from then on it was impossible for him to take even a single step. He used a wheelchair for the rest of his life, and besides his paralysis, Rabbi Meir suffered from other health problems. Not only that, but he was completely alone, with neither parents nor family.

For decades, the greatest names in the medical world expressed their astonishment at his life. One of his doctors believed that from a medical point of view, there was no way he could live beyond the age of 40. However he lived 28 years longer, dying from an illness that had nothing to do with his general condition.

Although a man in his condition was liable to feel angry and bitter, resulting in depression and hopelessness, jealousy, a desire to no longer live, and awaiting death, with Rabbi Meir it was the exact opposite! He was filled with happiness and a zest for life, with patience and peace. He was filled with hope and encouragement, happy over the joy of others exactly as if it had been his own, and he had a great love for life.

His face constantly beamed with happiness, and a sentiment of joy never left him. In all circumstances and at all times, he was filled with cheer, with encouragement and contentment. How did he manage to reach such a lofty level?

It is written, "For one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand" (*Tehillim* 84:11), which Rashi explains as meaning: "To live one day in Your courtyards and die the next is better than living a thousand years elsewhere."

Each day, Rabbi Meir lived a life of happiness and blessing. Each day of his life was worth more than a thousand years of someone who did not possess Torah. That was his secret.

Joy and happiness were constantly on his face, the joy and happiness of the truth. Are there limits to the happiness of one who can learn Torah and who prays day and night, leaving behind all the concerns of this world? He finds himself in a Gan Eden on earth! As Rabbi Meir once said, "I cannot imagine a greater Gan Eden than studying at the Lakewood yeshiva!"

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz

Even as a child, people could see that the *gaon* Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz was destined to become a great figure in Israel. Originally from the Polish city of Krakow, the name “Eibeshutz” comes from the city where his father, Rabbi Nathan Neta, served as Rav. Rabbi Yehonatan had an extraordinary memory and an extremely sharp mind. Well-educated and possessing deep insight, these two attributes supported him during complex discussions in every field of Torah. Witnessing to this fact are his *halachic* works *Kereti OuPeleti* (on the *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah*) and *Urim VeTummim* (on the *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat*). In his thought-provoking works *Ya'arot Devash, Ahavat Yehonatan, and Keshet Yehonatan*, he reveals himself to be a commentator who “draws closer with his arm those who are far.” The *gaon* Rabbi Yechezkel Landau *Zatzal*, author of *Noda B'Yehuda*, said of him: “Who in his generation knows how to reprimand like him?” His reprimands addressed the weaknesses of the generation. He protested against *Lashon Harah*, coarse language, frivolity, praying without concentration, shaving the beard, and immorality.

He combined *gematriot* and allusions in his sermons, and in his book *Tiferet Yehonatan* on the *haphtarot*, he reprimanded those who shaved. He wrote that the cry of the Prophet Isaiah, “*Am zu* [This people] which I have fashioned for Myself, *yesaperu* [they shall declare] My praise” (Isaiah 43:21) pertains to them. In other words: The people for whom I created *zu* (numerical value: 13) rows of hair in the beard, so that the beard may be My glory, it is what will declare (*yesaperu*, which also means “to shave”).

Nevertheless, despite these harsh reprimands, he expressed great admiration for the Jewish people, “Israel, in whom I glory” (Isaiah 49:3). “The Children of Israel are above the wings of the *Shechinah*, and they shine in exile. In darkness we have seen a light. The idol-worshippers humiliate them, and this holy people accords no importance to their faith. He who is wise of heart, let him open his eyes to fully understand their unity, for the Children of Israel are alert, even in times of trouble, and therefore absolute unity is the truth.”

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz was a prolific writer. He left behind 98 works, most of which are still in manuscript form and can be found in various libraries around the world.

Besides his greatness in Torah, Rabbi Yehonatan was also versed in the sciences and respected by prominent non-Jews for his riddles, vast intelligence, and great insight.

The Jewish People Live Forever

Numerous communities had the chance of having him as their Rav. In each place that he served as Rav, Rabbi Yehonatan elevated the Torah and encouraged those who were faithful to Torah and *mitzvot*. Thus for example, it is said that a Bishop once enacted a decree expelling Jews from the city of Metz. When Rabbi Yehonatan learned of it, he went to find the Bishop and asked him to annul the decree. The Bishop read a phrase from a non-Jewish book to him, and said that he would not annul the decree unless the Rav gave him the correct answers to the following questions:

“How many words are in the phrase that I just read to you?”

“Seventeen words,” replied the Rav, “the same number of letters as in the saying: ‘The Jewish people live forever.’”

Stunned by this response, the Bishop continued:

“How many Jews live in this city?”

“Forty-five thousand, seven hundred, and sixty.”

The Bishop lowered his head and said, “You are known for your

amazing amulets. Take some parchment paper, the size of that found in a *mezuzah* at the entrance of your homes. On it, write the expression that you just mentioned the same number of times as the Jews who live in this city. If you show me this parchment within the hour, I will annul the decree!”

Rabbi Yehonatan answered him with certitude: “The G-d of Israel can do anything! The number of letters in this expression is also 17!”

In fact Rabbi Yehonatan left, and within an hour he brought the Bishop a parchment the size of a *mezuzah*. On it was the expression, “The Jewish people live forever.”

For several minutes, the Bishop carefully thought about what was written, and then he rescinded his expulsion order. It is said that for an entire year, he described the number of ways to read “the Jewish people live forever” on the amulet, to the point that he believed that Rabbi Yehonatan was right!

Three Great Communities

After tremendous activity in the city of Metz for nine years, Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz was appointed as the Av Beit Din of the three great communities of Altona, Wandsbek, and Hamburg. These three cities were considered as a single community, to the point that people applied the following verse to them: “For Hashem has chosen Zion; He desired [*avah*] it for His habitation” (*Tehillim* 132:13) – *avah* being formed by the initials of the three cities.

During the time that he served as the Rav of Prague, a prohibition was enacted against the printing of the Talmud. It also prohibited the importing of the Talmud from abroad. It once happened that a certain Jew was caught secretly bringing in eight Gemaras with the commentary of the Rif. The books were ordered burned, and the man was sentenced to clean the streets of the city for an entire year, all while in chains. Since the honor of Rabbi Yehonatan was dear to all the civil and religious leaders of Prague, he succeeded in obtaining permission to print the Talmud, something that wasn't easy to do. In his wisdom, he dismissed the numerous arguments of the Bishops against the Talmud. The Bishops, however, placed a condition on the printing of the Talmud, namely that every teaching it contained which shamed their religious should be suppressed, and that the name “Talmud” should not appear in it. Thus tractate *Berachot* was printed under the name of “*Hilchot Berachot*” along with the Rosh, the Maharshal and the Maharsha, and the commentaries of the Rambam (Prague 5477). These deletions were authorized by Beit Din of Prague, which was headed by Rabbi David Oppenheim.

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz lived until the age of 74, passing away on Elul 21.

Guard Your Tongue!

Another Problem

The prohibition against *Lashon Harah* applies even when a person reveals nothing new to the listener. If the listener already knows what another person has said about him, but did not think about its implications, it is still prohibited to inform the listener of it.

For example, suppose that the court rules against Reuven, and Shimon meets him and asks about the ruling. If Reuven says, “The court ruled against me,” and Shimon replies, “They were harsh with you,” this is called *Lashon Harah*, for by making such a statement – although nothing new was revealed to Reuven – animosity will be aroused in his heart.

– Chafetz Chaim

On the Wings of Eagles

It is written, "He brought us to this place and gave us this land" (*Devarim* 26:9).

The commentators have pondered the fact that the Children of Israel first entered Eretz Israel, and only then did Hashem build them a Temple. In that case, why does the verse say: "He brought us to this place [i.e., the Temple] and gave us this land"?

In his book *Etz Haim*, Rabbi Haim Abouafia *Zatzal* tries to explain the order of the verse according to the comments of the Tanna Yehonatan ben Uzziel on the verse: "I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me" (*Shemot* 19:4). Here the Tanna wrote that on the night of Passover, the Children of Israel were brought on eagles' wings all the way to the place of the Temple, where they ate the Passover offering, and then immediately returned to Egypt.

This allows us to perfectly understand the verse in question: The Holy One, blessed be He, first brought us to that place on the night of Passover, "on the wings of eagles." Only then, and the end of our journey in the desert, did He lead us into our land.

Ordered to Rejoice

It is written, "You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem your G-d has given you and your household" (*Devarim* 26:11).

This is surprising: Why does the Torah need to command us, here in the passage on the firstfruit: "You shall be glad with all the goodness"? In general, when someone possesses something good, he does not need to be commanded to rejoice; he will automatically rejoice. Therefore why does the Torah order, "You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem your G-d has given you and your household"?

In his book *Maskil El Dal*, Rabbi Rahamim David Koscas *Shlita* replies that a person may have an abundance of possessions, lacking absolutely nothing, and yet not be satisfied with his lot. This may occur because of what the Sages have said ("He who has 100 desires 200"), or for some other reason. He will nevertheless be sad, for his wealth and possessions will not gladden his heart.

Hence the Torah judged it necessary to warn, "You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem your G-d has given you and your household." Of all the goods that you possess, you shall rejoice; you shall be completely content for the service of Hashem.

They Will Fear You

It is written, "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you" (*Devarim* 28:10).

In his book *Peninei Daniel*, Rabbi Daniel Falbani *Shlita* comments on this verse according to a statement in the Gemara: "Rabbi Eliezer the Great says, 'This refers to the *tefillin* of the head'" (*Berachot* 6b).

Now the *din* is that one who speaks between the placing of the *tefillin* of the arm and the *tefillin* of the head must return from the front [during battle]. The reason is that when a man places the *tefillin* on his head, sanctifies his thoughts, and does not distract his mind, he merits the Torah's blessing: "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you." He therefore has no reason to return from the front.

Like a Blind Man

It is written, "You will grope at noontime as a blind man gropes in the dark" (*Devarim* 28:29).

In the Gemara one Sage asks, "What difference does it make to a

blind man whether it is dark or light?" The Sage received an answer to his question when the following incident occurred: "I was once walking on a pitch black night when I saw a blind man walking along the road with a torch in his hand. I said to him, 'My son, why are you carrying this torch?' He replied, 'As long as I have this torch in my hand, people see me and save me from pits, thorns, and briars'" (*Megillah* 24b).

The book *Ohr HaMussar* states that herein lies the meaning of the curses and reprimands: The situation of the Children of Israel will be like "a blind man [who] gropes in the dark," meaning that nobody will notice them or lend them a helping hand to guide them along the right path.

The Death of the *Tzaddikim*

It is written, "Every sickness and every plague that is not written in the book of the Torah" (*Devarim* 28:61).

Here the Midrash states, " 'Every plague that is not written' – this is the death of the *tzaddikim*."

From where do we derive this teaching?

It is said in the name of the Noda B'Yehuda that within each of the five books of the Torah, the death of the *tzaddikim* is mentioned: In *Bereshith*, it is the death of the Patriarchs. In *Shemot*, it is the death of Joseph. In *Vayikra*, it is the death of Nadav and Avihu. In *Bamidbar*, it is the death of Aaron. It is only in "the book of this Torah" – the book of *Devarim* – that the death of the *tzaddikim* is not mentioned in any *parsha* until the reprimands (since Moshe's death is only stated afterwards, in the last *parsha*).

From this, we conclude that "every plague that is not written" designates the death of the *tzaddikim*.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Shechinah Dwells Only When Jews are United

It is written, "To the Reuvenite, the Gadite, and to half the tribe of the Manassite" (*Devarim* 29:7).

Why did Moshe add the letter *yud* to the end of the names of the tribes (*Reuveni, Gadi, Menashi*)?

When the sons of Gad and Reuven came to ask Moshe to give them the lands of Sihon and Og, at first Moshe refused. He was afraid that they wanted to separate themselves from the rest of the Children of Israel and not take part in conquering the land with them. Yet afterwards, when they promised to participate in conquering Eretz Israel along with all the other tribes, Moshe agreed to their request. Thus when they were united with the entire community of Israel, he gave them the lands of Sihon and Og.

Now we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, only makes His *Shechinah* dwell among the Jewish people when they are completely united and no dissension exists among them. Thus we read, "He was King over Yeshurun when the numbers of the nation gathered – the tribes of Israel in unity" (*Devarim* 33:5). Rashi explains that when they are united and at peace with one another, He is their King, not when there is dissension among them. The Sages have said, "The *Shechinah* only dwells, and the *Shechinah* only arises, when the Children of Israel form a united whole" (*Tanchuma, Nitzavim* 1). Therefore when Moshe mentioned the fact that he gave the lands of Sihon and Og to the sons of Gad and Reuven, it was because they were united with the entire community of Israel. That is why he added the letter *yud* to the end of the tribal names, alluding to the fact that Hashem was with them because they were united with all the Jewish people.