

The Path To Follow

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Without Good Middot, It's Impossible to Repent!

It is written, "The heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people, and they said, 'Why have we done this, to have let Israel go from serving us?'" (*Shemot* 14:5).

From the words, "I will strengthen the heart of Pharaoh, and he will pursue them" (v.4), I understand that Pharaoh regretted the fact that he sent the Children of Israel out of Egypt. This needs to be understood, for while the Children of Israel were in Egypt, Pharaoh and his people endured plagues without respite, plagues in Egypt and by the sea. In fact our Sages in the Midrash (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 6) counted the number of plagues they endured, with Rabbi Akiva stating that the Egyptians experienced 250 plagues by the sea. Can anyone possibly think that once Pharaoh sent the Children of Israel away by saying, "Rise up, go out from among my people" (*Shemot* 12:31), he would still pursue them? Did he not realize that as long as the Children of Israel were in Egypt, they would endure plagues, both he and his land, and that all the firstborn of Egypt had died, as it is written: "There was not a house where there was no corpse" (v.30)? Nevertheless, he fervently pursued the people in order to bring them back, to the point that he harnessed his own chariot, as the Sages have said: "He [Pharaoh] harnessed his chariot" [*Shemot* 14:6]. He did it with his own hand. Kings usually stand by while others prepare their chariot and harness it. The wicked Pharaoh prepared and harnessed his own chariot. As soon as his courtiers saw what he was doing, they followed suit" (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 1).

Hatred Ruined Everything

Our Sages have taught, "Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from this world" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:21). From where did they learn this? From Pharaoh. Although he saw that the land of Egypt had been laid waste – to the point that the magicians told him, "How long will this be a trap for us? Send out the men so they may serve Hashem their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" (*Shemot* 10:7) – he still did not listen to them. Why? Because he desired royalty and honor, not wanting other kings to say: "Look at how weak Pharaoh is! He had hordes of slaves who built him numerous cities, and yet he sent them out of his land because Moshe and Aaron, the leaders of the Children of Israel, asked him to! We once thought that the king of Egypt was a god who had created the Nile. Yet now that he is afraid of these two leaders, we know that he is not a god and that he did not create the Nile."

Pharaoh was afraid that other kings would say this. Furthermore, because he sought honor, he hardened his heart during all this time and refused to let the Children of Israel go. He would send Egypt to its ruin, but he would not let anything get in the way of his honor!

The teaching, "There is nothing that cannot be found in the Torah," is evoked by the verse: "It happened [*vayehi*] when Pharaoh sent out the people" (*Shemot* 13:17). The Sages state, "Wherever in Scripture we find the term *vayehi*, it indicates sorrow" (*Megillah* 10b). Here it states *vayehi beshalach*, teaching us that Pharaoh suffered from having become weak in the eyes of other kings, for the term *beshalach* contains the letters of the word *halash* ("weak"). Everyone knew that he was not a god, that he had not created the Nile, and so he felt disgraced.

The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately said to Moshe: "I will strengthen

the heart of Pharaoh, and he will pursue them. I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am Hashem" (*Shemot* 14:4). The Sages have explained, "When Hashem exacts vengeance on the wicked, His Name is magnified and glorified in the world" (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 1). Therefore once Pharaoh expelled the Children of Israel and G-d strengthened his heart, Pharaoh and his servants grew hostile towards the people as soon as they pursued them, and the Holy One, blessed be He, exercised His justice upon them. Hatred ruined everything, and Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot, something he had never done before. That is why Hashem acted in this way, to show Pharaoh that he had already lost his kingdom, and that it was useless for him to pursue the Children of Israel. Hashem only strengthened his heart in order to increase His glory in the eyes of every living being.

In general, no person can eliminate envy and honor-seeking from his heart unless he works on character-building. As long as a person does not put an effort into perfecting his character, good *middot* will not come to him on their own. Even if he studies Torah for his entire life, he will not improve his character traits and he will never be able to eliminate bad *middot* from his heart. Pharaoh, who was arrogant and said, "Mine is the river, and I have made myself!" (*Ezekiel* 29:3), did nothing to improve his character, and in the end he fell.

We find proof of this with Jeroboam the son of Nabat. Since he sought honor, he descended into Gehinnom and was judged for all the generations (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a). Although he studied Torah and is said to have expounded new Torah teachings that nobody had ever heard of (*Sanhedrin* 102a) – and although in comparison to him the *talmidei chachamim* seemed like the grass of the field, the mysteries of the Torah were revealed to him, and there was no fault in his Torah – he was still driven from this world because he grew proud.

In the Aggadah our Sages say, "The pride which possessed Jeroboam drove him from the world, as it is written: 'Jeroboam then thought, "Now the kingdom will revert to the house of David. If this people goes to bring offerings in the Temple of Hashem in Jerusalem, the heart of this people will revert to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah"' [I Kings 12:26]... He reasoned as follows: It is a tradition that none but the kings of the house of Judah may sit in the Temple Court. Yet when they see Rehoboam sitting and me standing, they will say, 'The former is the king and the latter is his subject'" (*Sanhedrin* 101b).

It therefore seems that although Jeroboam the son of Nabat studied Torah and given truly novel interpretations, he descended to Gehinnom and will never return because he was proud!

The Gemara also says, "The Holy One, blessed be He, seized Jeroboam by his garment and urged him: 'Repent, then I, you, and the son of Jesse [*i.e.*, David] will walk in Gan Eden.' He asked, 'Who will be the leader?' 'The son of Jesse shall be the leader.' 'If so, I do not want it!'" (*Sanhedrin* 102a).

We therefore see that because of his pride, Jeroboam was unable to return to G-d.



Excuses Don't Make Great Men

The *gaon* Rabbi Eliezer Yehudah Finkel *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, demanded that his students use their time to the utmost, encouraging them to aspire to greatness. He would always tell his grandson, "How can a person sleep today if he has not yet studied for at least 14 hours? I don't know how anyone can sleep otherwise!"

When his grandson lived 15 minutes away from the yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Yehudah tried to convince him to move: "Leave your home and come live in the yeshiva building. I'll give you two rooms, and you can save time walking from your home to the yeshiva."

To the *avrechim* who had various excuses for arriving late at the kollel, he would say: "That's fine in terms of having an excuse for being late, but it's not in this way that a person becomes great!"

Then I Would be at Rest

The Chatam Sofer *Zatzal* would usually study for 24 hours straight after Shabbat ended, without sleeping or eating, until Sunday night. Then after praying *Arvit* on Sunday, he would sleep until 11 pm, at which point he would get up and have some cake and coffee. He would then study for the entire night and following day, until Monday night. He then prayed *Arvit*, ate some cake, and began to study for the entire night once again, without sleeping, until the following night. In fact he slept only once every two whole days. He adopted this practice for two years straight. He would often say: "I would be asleep, then [az] I would be at rest" (Job 3:12) – if I sleep *az* (numerical value: eight), meaning eight hours, I would be at rest. I would have enough strength for 40 additional hours, not like the allusion of the Rambam.

For five years in Dresnitz and nine years in Mattersdorf, the Chatam Sofer studied while standing and did not sleep in a bed. If he felt overcome by sleep, he would place his feet in ice-cold water to chase it away. When his fatigue increased and he felt that he was falling asleep, he placed his forehead on a key, and when the key fell, he would awake after dozing off. For all those years, he used various tricks in order not to sleep, but to study Torah.

I Feel Sorry For You!

Early one morning, the *gaon* Rabbi Israel Salanter *Zatzal* went to the Kovno Beit HaMidrash for *Shacharit*. As he entered, he saw a young man lying on the floor in a deep sleep. It turned out that he had stayed awake all night learning, and had fallen asleep on a bench before dawn. While he was deep in sleep, the bench broke apart beneath him, and he had fallen to the floor without feeling a thing.

When the *ba'alei batim* came to pray and saw this example of the teaching, "This is the way of Torah...sleep on the ground" (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:4), they shook their heads and said: "What a terrible sight!"

Rabbi Israel said to the *ba'alei batim*: "I feel sorry for you, for having slept all night. You should certainly not feel sorry for him, since he is the one who is happy in life. He studies Torah and profits from life, and of him it is said: 'If you do this, "you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you" [*Tehillim* 128:2]. "You shall be happy" – in this world; "and it shall be well with you" – in the World to Come' [*Pirkei Avoth* 6:4]."

He Who Collapses Under Work

The *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik *Zatzal*, the Rav of Brisk, had in his hand the book *Ha'amek She'ela* by his great-grandfather, the Netziv of Volozhin *Zatzal*. In passing he asked some people: "Why did the Netziv

always sign his name as: 'He who collapses under work'?" He asked this question and answered it at the same time, recounting a story told to him by his father, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik.

This story took place in the year following the *Shmita*. As we know, the Netziv made certain to recite a blessing on an *etrog* from Eretz Israel, and Rabbi Chaim (who was married to the Netziv's granddaughter) would also recite a blessing on the same *etrog*. That year, following the *Shmita*, the Netziv did not change his custom, and he recited a blessing on an *etrog* from Eretz Israel. However Rabbi Chaim had a doubt with regards to an *etrog* from Eretz Israel in the year following the *Shmita*. Hence he found another *etrog* upon which he said the blessing. He did not go to the Netziv, as he usually did every year, to recite a blessing on his *etrog*.

On the first day of Sukkot, after prayers, Rabbi Chaim went to the home of the Netziv to wish him a *Gut Yom Tov*. As soon as he entered, the Netziv said to him: "I know why you didn't come to recite the blessing on my *etrog*. It's because of a *halachic* doubt that you have. G-d willing, I'll show you that even according to your opinion, there is no problem."

Rabbi Chaim replied, "I realize that this is your opinion, but it seems to me that a certain doubt still exists." The Netziv replied, "I will prove to you that I'm correct." At that point they said their goodbyes, and Rabbi Chaim departed.

At three o'clock in the morning, the *Shamash* came knocking at Rabbi Chaim's door to tell him that the *Zaide* (grandfather) wanted to see him. Afraid that something had happened to the Netziv, who was extremely old at the time, Rabbi Chaim woke up all his children, and everyone rushed to see the Netziv. As they approached his *sukkah*, they saw a light coming from inside, and on the table they saw a great pile of books that reached up to the *schach* (which is how the Rav of Brisk described it in his story). The Netziv was pouring over these books, leafing through them and consulting one after another. Everyone calmed down at that point, for it was clear that there was nothing to worry about.

Rabbi Chaim sent his children home, and he entered the *sukkah*. The Netziv immediately said to him, "I called you here to show you that even according to your opinion, there is no problem in reciting a blessing on my *etrog* in the year following the *Shmita*." Rabbi Chaim excused himself and said, "Please forgive me, but first I would like to say the blessing on the Torah, and then I can discuss it."

The Netziv was stunned. "What? Is this what I've merited in my old age, that my grandson has not yet said the blessing on the Torah at three in the morning?"

He clasped his hands together and let out a giant sigh: "*Vey iz mir* [Woe is me] that at three in the morning, you have not yet said the blessing on the Torah because you were still sleeping!" Rabbi Chaim recounted that the sigh of the Netziv shook him so greatly that he had nothing to say in response, and so he turned back and went home.

"Now we can fully understand," concluded the Rav of Brisk, "why the Netziv signed his name as: 'He who collapses under work.'"

Guard Your Tongue!

Before Having Checked Properly

If word spreads that someone has said or done something improper according to the Torah – be it a grave or light transgression – even in that case it is forbidden to accept it as the truth and believe it completely. We must simply be cautious before having checked properly. - *Chafetz Chaim*

Not to Hashem

It is written, “Speak to the Children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi Hahiot, between Migdol and the sea, before Ba’al Tzephon” (*Shemot* 14:2).

The *Ba’alei HaTosafot* ask the following question: How could it be written that they encamped before Ba’al Tzephon, which is the name of an Egyptian idol, since the Sages say that a person is forbidden to tell others to meet him by the name of such-and-such an idol (*Sanhedrin* 63b)? The *Tosafot* answer that this prohibition applies to men, not to Hashem, Who judges the entire world even on Shabbat and Yom Kippur, which is not the case with men.

Moshe’s Arm

It is written, “And you – lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it” (*Shemot* 14:16).

In his book *Maskil LeDavid*, Rabbi David Eidan *Zatzal* writes that he heard a nice explanation from Rabbi David Halevi *Zatzal*. He had asked, “The verse should have stated, ‘Lift up your arm and stretch out your staff,’ for it is the arm that is raised and the staff that strikes! Furthermore, in the words that follow, ‘Moshe stretched out his arm over the sea’ [v.21], why is the staff not mentioned at all?”

He explains in the name of the commentators that Moshe’s staff was made from the *sanpirin* stone, which naturally dispels water. Thus in order for witnesses not to say that the water was dispelled only because of the staff, meaning that they did not see Hashem’s hand in this, He told Moshe: “Lift up your staff.” This would separate it from his hand so witnesses would not claim that it was the staff, with its natural properties, that had dispelled the water before him.

Hashem also told Moshe to “stretch out your arm,” meaning that the miracle was to be accomplished with his arm. This is what he did: “Moshe stretched out his arm over the sea” – he did what Hashem had commanded, without changing a thing.

Living off the Ephah

It is written, “The *omer* is a tenth of an *ephah*” (*Shemot* 16:36).

In *Me’am Loez*, Rabbi Yaakov Couli *Zatzal* writes: “We need to ask why this verse does not appear at the outset, when the manna is first mentioned.”

We note that after the passing of Moshe on Adar 7, the manna stopped. Hashem then performed a great miracle, for the amount of manna collected by each individual after Moshe’s death was enough to last him until Nissan 17. At that point, the people ate the crop from the land of Canaan. This is what the verse is saying: Know that an *omer* is a tenth of an *ephah*, and yet they lived off of it for so long.

Me’am Loez ends by saying, “From here a person must learn not to lose time from learning by amassing money, for even if he has a little to eat, he should study Torah. Hashem will then send His blessing in that small quantity, as He did for our ancestors, whose entire sustenance came from a tenth of an *ephah* each day. A

blessing rested upon it, for they feared Heaven and believed in the World to Come, without caring about unnecessary things. If a person forsakes his learning in order to earn a living, there is no punishment for this, since ‘if there is no flour, there is no Torah’ (*Pirkei Avot* 3:17). However if he forsakes his learning to amass money, to eat and drink, and to purchase unnecessary clothes, he will certainly have to give an accounting for it.”

By Allusion

Hashem Will Fight For You

It is written, “Hashem will fight for you, and you shall remain silent” (*Shemot* 14:14).

The term *yilachem* (“will fight”) may be connected to *lechem* (“bread”). This tells us by allusion that if we keep quiet by refraining from speaking useless or improper words, then “Hashem will fight for you” – He will give us bread, meaning food, and all that we need. As the Sages have said, “Whoever speaks obscenely, even if a sentence of 70 years of happiness had been sealed for him, it is reversed for evil” (*Shabbat* 33a). Conversely, one will lack nothing good if he guards his mouth and does not speak anything forbidden.

We may also explain this verse according to the Sages’ teaching that whoever conquers his natural desires, all his sins are forgiven (*Yoma* 23a).

This is “Hashem will fight [*yilachem*] for you,” which we may read as: “Hashem will forgive [*yimchol*] you” of all your sins, for “you remain silent” – you hear yourself being humiliated, but you do not respond.

– Yoshiya Tzion

We can detect another allusion in this verse, according to the decision of Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen *Zatzal* of Radin in his book *Chafetz Chaim*, which deals with the laws of *Lashon Harah* and *Rechilus*. He states that if a person is told that he will be fired unless he speaks *Lashon Harah* about someone, he must not recount it (*Chafetz Chaim* 1:6).

Thus it is written: “Hashem will fight for you” – which designates “bread” and sustenance, meaning that He will give you enough to live, and you shall remain silent – you will not speak *Lashon Harah*.

– Ohr Moshe

What Nobody Else Saw

It is written, “G-d is my strength and my song” (*Shemot* 15:2).

“Let us make a precise accounting: Our teacher Rabbi Moshe Galanti, the author of *Elef HaMagen*, calculated the numerical value of the verse, ‘G-d is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. He is my G-d, and I will praise Him; my father’s G-d, and I will exalt Him.’ It is exactly the same as the teaching, ‘A maidservant saw at the sea what nobody else saw.’”

– Parperaot LaChochma

The Jar of Manna

In this week's *parsha* we read, "Moshe said, 'This is the thing that Hashem has commanded: A full *omer* of it shall be a safekeeping for your generations, so that they will see the food with which I fed you in the desert when I took you out of Egypt'" (*Shemot* 16:32). Here Rashi cites the words of our Sages: "In the days of Jeremiah, when Jeremiah rebuked them: 'Why do you not engage in Torah?' They would say, 'Shall we leave our work and engage in Torah? How will we support ourselves?' He brought the jug of manna out to them. He said to them, 'You see the word of Hashem' [*Jeremiah* 2:31]. It does not say 'hear,' but 'see.' With this, your forefathers supported themselves. The Omnipresent has many agents to prepare food for those who fear Him."

An extraordinary event took place in the time of Rabbeinu Moshe Alsheich, an event that clearly illustrates how genuine and absolute faith in Hashem can help people receive everything they need from Him in an amazing way. This story is connected to the holy Alsheich, and the Alter of Novardok mentions it in his book *Madregat HaAdam*. It provides us with a glimpse into how the Creator of the world rewards those who do His will and have complete faith in Him:

There was a certain Jew who had always earned a living transporting clay and mortar in a cart hitched to his donkey. He once heard the weekly sermon of Rabbi Moshe Alsheich, who spoke about the greatest level of faith in G-d, namely when it is completely free of all human effort. This Jew thought to himself, "Why should I work so hard, since faith in Hashem is what feeds all living beings? My efforts are completely unnecessary!"

From thought to deed, he committed himself to trusting Hashem with all his heart, and to abandon his material worries and his donkey. Each day he sat down next to the stove and began to wholeheartedly read psalms with joy, like someone with all the money in the world at his disposal, like a person who lacks absolutely nothing.

When his wife and children demanded that he return to work and earn a living, he rebuffed them by saying: "Have you gone mad? I heard the Alsheich clearly say that if someone has faith in Hashem, his sustenance will come to him without any external cause. So why should I go out into the cold or the heat, since money will come to me anyways? Do the same as me, and our bread will come to us on its own!"

They decided to sell their donkey and cart to a non-Jew, who took the donkey and went to dig a hole in the ground. There he found a great treasure of gold, which he placed into sacks and loaded on his donkey. When he went to dig for more, a large stone suddenly rolled off a mountain and killed him. Seeing that its new master was not returning, the donkey went to see its original master, as it normally would. This Jew heard a noise coming from his yard, where he found his old donkey loaded with sacks of gold. His family said to him, "You faith has saved you! You've found a great treasure!"

The disciples of the Alsheich came to him and asked, "How was this man more capable than us? We desperately wanted to have such faith, but we've been unable to achieve it. He heard your message just once, and yet he went to sit down by his stove and found a vast treasure!"

The Alsheich replied, "The donkey's master, when he heard me speaking about faith, took this teaching to heart. He took it at face value, without any doubt or fear, as if there was no other reality in the world. As for you, since you still possess some doubt and fear, you are still lacking in perfect faith."

The Miracle in the Room

What follows is another story regarding faith in G-d for one's sustenance: After the wedding of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us all, poverty reigned in his home. However this did not disrupt his service of G-d in the least, for he believed and had complete faith that the Creator of the world would feed him.

This poverty lasted for about two years. When Rebbetzin Mazal grew hungry, Rabbi Moshe Aharon asked her to speak to their neighbors, who would give her something to eat.

Eventually they reached a great turning point: It is said that the Rebbetzin entered a secluded room in their home, where she suddenly discovered some money. At first she thought it belonged to her husband, who had left it there. However she immediately wondered where he could have gotten such money, a question to which she found no satisfactory response. From that day on, she "discovered" money in that room every day, money that she used to buy food and take care of the household needs.

Out of curiosity, her husband once asked her where this money was coming from, since it wasn't coming from him. "What are you buying our food with?" he asked. She innocently replied, "I thought you were leaving me some money each day in the room where I find it. That's the money I'm using to buy food for the house!"

When Rabbi Moshe Aharon heard this, he initially didn't want to believe it. He asked her again, "Tell me where you're getting this money from!" The Rebbetzin replied, "I can't tell you where it's coming from, since I don't know myself! There's money in that room every day!"

They decided to lock the door of the room to see what would happen. On the following morning, when they opened the door...there was some more money! Great fear entered Rabbi Moshe Aharon's heart, who thought: "But I didn't leave any money here!" At that point, both of them understood that it was a miracle.

From the time that they discovered this blessing, however, it stopped. On the following morning, there was no more money in the room, for the miracle had come to an end.

In the Light of the Parsha

Observing Shabbat is the Foundation of Complete Faith

It is written, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'How long will you refuse to keep My *mitzvot* and My teachings? See that Hashem has given you Shabbat'" (*Shemot* 16:28-29).

The Midrash states, "Rabbi Levi said: If Israel kept Shabbat properly for even one day, the son of David would come. Why? Because it is equivalent to all the *mitzvot*... [J]ust as we find that the son of David will come as a reward for the observance of all *mitzvot* [for one day], likewise he will come for the observance of one Shabbat... Rabbi Elazar bar Avina said: In the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings we find that Shabbat is equivalent to all *mitzvot*. In the Torah, because when Moshe forgot to tell them the *mitzvah* of Shabbat, G-d said to him: 'How long will you refuse to keep My *mitzvot*...' and immediately afterwards it says: 'See that Hashem has given you Shabbat'" (*Shemot Rabba* 25:12). The Midrash describes the importance of Shabbat and its sanctity at great length.

We may say that the reason Shabbat is equivalent to all the other *mitzvot* is that the entire Torah is based on faith in Hashem, as the Sages in the Gemara have taught: "It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the *tzaddik* shall live by his faith' [*Habakkuk* 2:4]" (*Makkot* 24a). This means that only a person who believes in Hashem will study Torah and observe *mitzvot*. However if a person lacks faith, he will do nothing at all.

Shabbat is the foundation of faith. Because of Shabbat, a person will believe that Hashem created the heavens and the earth in six days. When a person does not work on Shabbat, he believes in Hashem and trusts in Him for his sustenance. That is why Shabbat is as important as all the other *mitzvot* combined.