

## CRITICIZING PRIDE AND PRAISING HUMILITY

*Rabbi David Pinto Chlita*

**A**t the start of this week's parsha we read, "Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: Let none defile himself for a soul among his people" (Vayikra 21:1). As Rashi points out, our Sages (Yebamot 114a) interpreted this verse to mean the following: "Say... and say – to admonish gedolim ['adults'] regarding haketanim ['the minors']." Hence the text is here warning adults to watch over minors so they are not rendered impure through an intermediary.

As for myself, I think that this verse is addressed to Torah sages: "To admonish gedolim ['great men'] regarding haketanim ['the small']" – that the wise man should not act contemptuously, nor should he exploit the Torah (G-d forbid) for his own ends (Pirkei Avoth 4:5). Instead, he should consider himself small and act humbly and modestly. "Let none defile himself for a soul among his people" is a Torah command! It means that if we fail to act with humility, then our entire Torah will be diverted from its goal, and only our outer shell will benefit and become prominent. In fact the Torah confers sanctity to man and draws him closer to G-d, but only if he remains humble and self-effacing. The Mishnah takes this approach by stating, "Rabbi Levitas, man of Yavneh, said: 'Be very, very humble, for the expectation of mortal man is but worms'" (Pirkei Avoth 4:4).

Our objective in this world is to fight the evil inclination and build our character by constantly learning Torah, observing mitzvot, and doing good deeds. If we stop learning Torah or doing good deeds, our character may crumble and we will have to start building it again.

Such is the meaning of the aforementioned Mishnah: Man of "Yavneh" (a name that evokes the term "to build") – man must be a fighter and build his character. It is in this regard that the Tanna offers advice to those who are great in Torah: "Be very, very humble." Just as the Torah repeats the term "say" ("Say...and say"), the Tanna also repeats the adjective "very," pointing out that if our yearning to build our character is to remain constant, and if it is not to crumble, then we must be humble and consider ourselves small, for "the expectation of mortal man is but worms." If the inevitable fate of every man is worms, then why should he grow proud over his fellow?

As servants of G-d, we yearn for the World to Come. However if we are crude and filled with pride, character traits that drive man from the world (Pirkei Avot 4:21), we will lose on the one hand what we have gained on the other (Sotah 5a). All our hopes will end in failure, and only worms will profit from our thick and corpulent bodies. In fact a self-satisfied person, even if physically thin, becomes thick and

corpulent through pride. Hence the advice that every servant of G-d must retain is the following: Remain humble and modest, for this is the only way to achieve your hopes.

Let us examine just how greatly pride is abhorred by the One through Whose word the world was created. As we know, it is forbidden to sacrifice an animal that possesses a blemish (Vayikra 22:20). Only a perfect animal may be placed upon the altar and serve as an atonement for the person offering it.

I found the following question in the book Avkat Rochel: Why is an animal with a blemish not suitable to offer as a sacrifice? The main thing is for the sinner to regret his deeds and possess a broken heart, as it is written: "The sacrifices G-d desires are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise" (Tehillim 51:19)! What does it matter if the animal is perfect or not, since the main thing is a broken heart?

I understand this in the following way: It is obvious that whoever has sinned and wants to bring a sacrifice as an atonement must, before all else, sincerely repent and be cleansed of every defect and sin. In fact without repentance, no sacrifice is accepted by G-d, even the most beautiful and full-bodied! Above all else, Hashem wants a suitable and pure heart at the time of a sacrifice, and if the sinner is still infused with a defect on the inside, his sacrifice will not be accepted.

Since our own flesh must be free of every sin and transgression, and the animal comes as an atonement in our stead [everything done to the animal should have been done to us – Ramban on Vayikra 1:9], it follows that the animal must also be perfect and without blemish. In reality, this sacrifice is a reflection of the person who offers it: If it possesses a blemish, this indicates that the person offering it also possesses one, meaning that he has not completely repented. That is why such an animal is not suitable to offer as a sacrifice.

In our days, however, since we no longer have the altar upon which to bring our sacrifices, this process has been replaced by prayer, as it is written: "Let our lips substitute for bulls" (Hosea 14:3). In fact our Sages have affirmed that "prayer takes the place of sacrifice" (Berachot 26a; Bamidbar Rabba 18:21). Furthermore, we can replace sacrifice by studying those parts of the Torah that deal with the subject, as it is said: "Whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as though he were sacrificing a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering" (Menachot 110a).

Therefore before devoting ourselves to Torah, prayer, and learning about the sacrifices, we must ensure that we are beyond reproach and without sin. In the opposite case, our prayers and Torah learn-



Publication of  
**HEVRAT PINTO**

Under the Direction of  
**Rabbi David Hanania  
Pinto Shlita**

**CHEVRAT PINTO**

207 West 78th Street  
New York - NY 10024

Tel: 1 212 721 0230  
www.hevratpinto.org  
hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief:  
**Hanania Soussan**

ing will not be acceptable to G-d. There exists no greater sin than pride and the pursuit of honor. In fact how can a self-satisfied person stand in synagogue or the Beit HaMidrash and study the Torah passages dealing with sacrifices, while his entire character is deficient? Moreover, Hashem has said in regards to such a person: "I and he cannot both dwell in the world" (Sotah 5a). Such a person is therefore an insult and offense to the

One by Whose word the world came into existence.

This is why we must pay great attention to acting humbly and modestly. This is the meaning of "to admonish great men regarding the small" – we must always act with humility, submission, and self-effacement, learning Torah without any ulterior motives. Our prayers will then be accepted, and our soul will light our path in this world and in the World to Come. Amen.

## The Words of the Sages

### *Sometimes One Hour Can Be Equal to a Thousand*

It is written, "For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall not do any work. It is a Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places" (Vayikra 23:3).

The seventh day is the most important day of the week, and we must devote it to learning the holy Torah. The Midrash teaches us a great deal about this subject: "Hashem said to the Children of Israel, 'My children, have I not written for you in My Torah: "This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth" [Joshua 1:8]? Even if you must work for six days, on Shabbat you must occupy yourselves only with Torah' " (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu, Rabba 1). From here, our Sages deduced the following Halachah: "We must always wake up early on Shabbat and study. We must go to synagogue, where we will read the Torah and from the Prophets, and then return home for a good meal in order to fulfill what is written: 'Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart' [Kohelet 9:7]."

Regarding this subject, Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim (Orach Chaim 290), points out: "The Midrash states that the Torah addressed G-d and said: 'Sovereign of the universe, when the Children of Israel enter the land of Israel, one will run to his vineyard, another to his field... but what will become of me?' He therefore responded, 'I have a partner for you, and it is called Shabbat. On this day, the Children of Israel will be free of their activities and devote themselves exclusively to you.' Hence we must establish a place of study in order to transmit to the people the laws of Hashem and His teachings."

#### Resting, But on Whose Time?

The Maggid of Dubno, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz Zatzal, used a parable to tangibly explain to a group of followers that Shabbat is a day devoted to the service of G-d and to spirituality. He wanted to sensitize them to the importance of not having mundane occupations on this day. He said the following:

A long time ago, a man decided to devote even more time and energy to his business. In order to do this, he left his small, native village and moved to a large, distant city. After a few years of great success in business, he was overtaken by a sense of longing for his village, since he had been completely disconnected from his old friends. From time to time, his thoughts strayed, and he found himself wondering about his relatives, his close friends, and even about the members of the synagogue that he used to frequent.

Many years passed, during which time he was unable to get news about his relatives or friends. Then one day, there was a knock at his door. Standing at the entrance was a beggar looking for tzeddakah. Surprised, the businessman suddenly realized that this beggar was from his hometown. He fact he was one of his childhood friends!

"Welcome," the man exclaimed with emotion. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to collect tzeddakah," responded his friend.

"Come in. Please have a small l'chaim!"

The businessman, who could not control his burning curiosity, implored him: "Please tell what's happened in our small village."

Upon hearing this question, his childhood friend looked at his watch and stammered: "I really don't have time. I'm collecting money, and each minute is precious for me."

However the businessman, who did not want to let this golden opportunity pass, quickly said to him: "How much do you usually collect in a day?"

"About two or three rubles," was his response.

"In that case, I'll give you the same amount if you just agree to sit down and tell me everything that's happened in our village," said the businessman.

His guest could not refuse such a generous offer. Thus after eating and refreshing himself, he began to tell his friend everything that had happened in their hometown since he left.

He spoke for two full hours, until finally he was exhausted and asked to rest. However that's when a surprise awaited him. "Rest?" the businessman said in astonishment. "But I just paid you for the entire day! If you want to rest, do it tomorrow, when you can relax on your own time! Why do you want to rest at my expense? I only paid you so you could tell me everything that's happened!"

The Maggid explained that likewise, Hashem sees the Jewish people working all week long, immersed in the material realm in order to earn a living. Hence He instituted Shabbat, a day when G-d addresses His children and says to them: "You are not working now, so you must take advantage of this day to study Torah and subjects related to the sanctity of Shabbat." Nevertheless, some among them devote this day solely to relaxation.

To these people, Hashem says: "If you want to rest, do it on your own time! You can use the six workdays for relaxation. However the seventh day is a 'Shabbat for Hashem' – it is My day, and I have given it to you for learning Torah and spiritually elevating yourselves."

In his book Ben Ish Hai, Rabbi Yosef Haim Zatzal writes: "Kabbalists have written that the effect of learning Torah on Shabbat is a thousand times greater than learning on regular days." This means that an hour of Torah study on Shabbat is equal to a thousand hours of Torah study during the week. From this we learn just how important Torah study is on this holy day.

## Guard Your Tongue

### *Adopting the Habit of Reprimanding*

We should always adopt the habit of reprimanding others at home in this area (Lashon Harah and slander). However we must do so gently, speaking about the gravity of the punishment that it incurs in the future, and the great reward of those who pay attention to it. The Gemara (Shabbat 54b) states that whoever has the opportunity to reprimand his family, and yet fails to do so, will be held accountable one day for the sins of his family.

### In the Light of the Lamp

It is written, “Say to them: Let none defile himself for a soul among his people” (Vayikra 21:1).

The soul of man is compared to a lamp, as it is written: “A man’s soul is the lamp of Hashem” (Mishlei 20:27).

Just as a lamp burns for as long as its oil remains, and just as its light goes out once there is none left, likewise everyone seeks man as long as his soul remains within him. Yet once it departs, everyone leaves him.

In this regard it is said, “Let none defile himself for a soul among his people.”

– Midrash HeChadash

### The Great of the Generation

It is written, “The kohen who is exalted above his brothers, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured” (Vayikra 21:10).

Can there be several Kohanim Gedolim in one generation?

It is written, “The kohen who is exalted above his brothers.” There is but one Kohen Gadol in the generation, not two.

In that case, why is it written: “On that day he killed 85 men, wearers of a linen ephod [robe]” (I Samuel 22:18)? He wore only what they were allowed to wear.

– Midrash HaGadol

### Adorned with Beauty

It is written, “The kohen who is exalted above his brothers, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured” (Vayikra 21:10).

When did he become exalted? When his head was anointed with the anointing oil. At the time of anointing, the kohanim were placed to the side, the anointing oil was placed in the middle, and it flowed on its own to be poured upon the head of the Kohen Gadol, as it is written: “Therefore G-d, your G-d, has anointed you with oil of joy from among your peers” (Tehillim 45:8). Since the anointing oil flowed towards him, if he was short, he became tall, and if he was black, he became white. Why “above his brothers”? He was better-looking and more remarkable than his brothers, as it is written: “The kohen who is exalted above his brothers.”

– Midrash Yilamdeinu

### A Broken Heart

It is written, “[An animal that is] blind or broken or [has a] split or a wart or a dry lesion – you shall not offer these to Hashem” (Vayikra 22:22).

Rabbi Abba bar Yudan said: “Whatever the Holy One, blessed be He, declared unfit in the case of an animal, He declared fit in the case of man. In animals he declared unfit the ‘blind or broken or split or a wart,’ whereas in man He declared fit ‘a broken and contrite heart’ [Tehillim 51:19].”

Rabbi Alexandri said, “If an ordinary person makes use of broken vessels, it is disgraceful. However the vessels used by the Holy One, blessed be He, are precisely broken ones, as it is said: ‘Hashem is close to the broken-hearted’ [Tehillim 34:19], ‘He heals the broken-hearted’ [ibid. 147:3], and ‘I abide in exaltedness and holiness, but I am with the crushed and humble in spirit’ [Isaiah 57:15].”

– Vayikra Rabba 7:2

### Sacrifices from the Hunted

It is written, “An ox or a sheep or a goat” (Vayikra 22:27).

“G-d seeks the pursued” (Kohelet 3:15). Rabbi Yudah the son of Rabbi Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Yossi bar Nehorai: “Here too, the ox is pursued by the lion, the sheep by the wolf, and the goat by the leopard.”

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Do not bring sacrifices before Me from the hunters, but only from the hunted.”

– Pesikta d’Rav Kahana 9:4

### The Sevenths are Favored

It is written, “Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first of the month’ ” (Vayikra 23:24).

All sevenths are favored in the world. The seventh is favored above, for there are [seven heavens]. ... The seventh is favored among the days... Among the months as well, the seventh is favored, as it says: “In the seventh month, on the first of the month.”

– Vayikra Rabba 29:11

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Learning Torah for the Sake of Teaching

It is written, “Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: Let none defile himself for a soul among his people” (Vayikra 21:1).

The Sages have asked (Yebamot 114a) why the verse repeats the term “say.” It is also difficult to understand why the verse initially addresses the many (“say to the kohanim”), while at the end it addresses the individual (“among his people”). We may explain this according to a statement in the Mishnah: “If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself” (Pirkei Avot 2:8). From here we learn that we must teach without thinking: “If I teach others for my entire life, when will I have time to study for myself?” The Sages have said that in the verse, “Man is born to toil” (Job 5:7), the term le’amal [to toil] is an acronym for lilmud al menat la’asot [study for the sake of teaching]. This means that there is no greater act of devotion than to give your time to others.

Hence when someone teaches others and renounces his own working time, G-d pays him back measure for measure, and his Torah endures with him as if he had studied it himself, even as he is teaching. The Sages have said, “He toils in one place, the Torah toils for him in another” (Sanhedrin 99b).

This is why the verse states, “Say... and say to them” – the Torah thereby hinting to us: “Say to yourself that you have the ability to say to others.” You shouldn’t think, “I only want to study for myself,” for if you do, your Torah is liable to defile you, as the Gemara states: “May a sword fall upon the neck of... talmidei chachamim who sit and engage in the study of the Torah alone and apart. Not only that, but they also grow foolish. ... Furthermore, they also become sinners” (Makkot 10a).

This is why Parshiot Emor and Behar are connected to Parsha Bechukotai: “Say” – to yourself; “and say to them” – to others. “On Mount Sinai” – this alludes to humility, for Sinai humbled itself before Hashem. When a person forgoes his own learning in order to teach others, it indicates that he will not grow proud. This is all found near Parsha Bechukotai, which deals with the study of Torah, as the Sages have explained: “If you follow My decrees [Vayikra 26:3]. This means that you must toil in the study of Torah” (Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1). This alludes to the fact that there is no greater act of devotion than for a person to humble himself like Sinai and to teach the Torah to others.

In his marvelous book *Alei Shur*, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe provides us with an outline of the kind of prayers that should ascend from the “mouths of Your people Israel”:

Each word must be pronounced “in a composed fashion and with supplications.”

Even a scholar who is occupied exclusively with Torah cannot use this as an excuse to rush through prayer. Likewise, one who prays in a synagogue with those with who work for a living should not rush through prayer in order to reach the silent part [the Amidah] at the same time as others. He should start praying before the congregation begins, taking measures to pray without omitting anything and to reach the blessing *Ga'al Israel* with the congregation.

Hence it will probably be essential to get up early, and consequently to go to bed early. Preparing for *Shacharit* therefore begins on the night before, meaning by not going to bed late! These are the measures to adopt in order to say a sincere prayer: Going to bed at a reasonable hour, getting up early in order to pray in a composed fashion, and to mediate for at least a minute before prayer, besides the other preparations upon arising in the morning.

### *A Sacred Flame*

It is said that Rabbi Aharon Cohen, one of the directors of the Hevron yeshiva, demonstrated lion-like strength by serving his Creator even when he suffered from a medical condition that assailed him with pain and left him extremely weak. For most of us, waking up at a suitable time already requires an effort, but for him it consisted of overcoming the angel of illness, which confined him to bed with iron chains.

Rabbi Aharon Cohen tore himself away from bed and completely transformed into a sacred flame that prayed before the Master of heaven and earth, burning with emotion before Him.

Those who saw him realized that here was an angel of G-d, one from whom they could draw Torah and wisdom. “It is the realization that I am standing before the Creator – that is what gives me the strength to overcome my frailty,” he once explained to someone who was surprised by his energy, which he demonstrated from before the prayer service began, and continued to the point at which he extended his hands towards the Creator in supplication.

### *Melting Like Wax*

An extraordinary description of the prayer of Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, is found in his biography.

Each day as he prepared for prayer, he would hum the verse: “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel” (Amos 4:12). During the prayer service itself, he held the siddur in his hands and never lifted his eyes from the page. People could see his great intensity on his forehead and by the expressions on his face.

Upon seeing him, people felt – as Rabbeinu Avraham the son of the Rambam stated in his commentary on the Torah – “that prayer is an encounter between a faithful servant and his Master,” a cleaving to the Shechinah.

His face also reflected joy and happiness, as Rabbi Aibu advocates: “When you stand before Him in prayer, let your heart rejoice because you are praying to a G-d without equal” (Midrash *Shocher Tov*). The words that he spoke were as harmonious as the songs of a nightingale. When he sang the *Pesukei D’Zimra*, he was like a harp in the service of

King David’s songs. When he read the Shema, his face was imprinted with supreme light.

He would usually stand during the repetition of the Amidah, his eyes and heart focused on his open siddur. He stood there listening with fear and awe to the prayer of the shaliach tzibur, word after word. He never abandoned his custom of standing during the repetition of the Amidah, just like “angels who remain standing.” He did so even when he had grown old and frail, and even during the Days of Awe, when the prayer service was lengthy.

As he bowed and recited the words, “Our Father, our King; You are our Father” with an emotional voice, he put special emphasis on the expression, “Our Father.” At that point his entire body grew excited, blazing like a torch. People saw that he truly lived and wholeheartedly perceived the words: “You are the children of Hashem your G-d” and “we are Your children, and You are our Father.”

His energetic appearance during prayer evoked the image of a true believer who turns directly to G-d, as the Rambam writes in his golden language: “One who prays... stands on his feet, his lips express his heart’s delight, his hands are outstretched, his vessels of speech are active in operation, and all his other parts tremble and shake. He does not cease to sing sweet songs. He holds close, prepares himself, supplicates, kneels and bows down. He weeps, for he is in the presence of a great and awesome King” (Pirkei Hatzalah).

In reading the Rambam’s words, the sanctified image of Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka standing in prayer naturally appears before us. He was a man of humility and total self-annulment, a man who completely poured out his soul as he recited supplications that were filled with longing and repentance.

“I remember days long past,” recounted one of his relatives in the synagogue that carries his father’s name, Shaul Tsadka, “as our Rav was standing before the lectern of the shaliach tzibur as we reached the repetition of *Shacharit* on Yom Kippur. When he began to recite the vidui of Rav Nissim Gaon, his voice became choked by his constant tears, and we could barely hear him. At that point, the heart of all the faithful melted like wax, for they found themselves standing before a living Sefer Torah, weeping and confessing amid a torrent of tears. If he was so anxious and in such distress, what can we possibly say?”

### *Acquiring a Taste for Prayer*

Prayer is acquired neither by gesticulations nor by grimaces. Instead, the process of prayer starts by “comprehend[ing] and see[ing] that Hashem is good” (Tehillim 34:9).

We are all obligated to give meaning to our prayer in order for it to be fitting and just. Yet in order to achieve this, we must first strengthen ourselves in the fundamentals of faith, and we must trust in Divine providence.

In practical terms, this comes down to first understanding the words of our prayer, meaning that our ears must understand what our mouth is saying. Otherwise it is simply not prayer! In regards to someone who prays like this, it is said: “With his mouth he speaks peaceably with his neighbor, but in his heart he lays a trap for him” (Jeremiah 9:7). In fact some recount G-d’s praises while their hearts are filled with strange thoughts, even thoughts of denial. In order to utter a truly sincere prayer, we must make an effort and tire ourselves. This is the only way that we can learn to pray.

– Ohr Yechezkel