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The Path to Follow

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THE FINAL REDEMPTION IS CLOSE AT HAND

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

Because of our numerous sins, today we find ourselves in a bitter exile, and Mashiach has still not come to deliver us. Hence we must mourn over Eretz Israel and Jerusalem, each of us having the responsibility to feel connected to Eretz Israel, of which it is said: "The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end" (Devarim 11:12). As a result, even if we find ourselves in a foreign land, our eyes must always be turned to Israel. In this way, we will draw to ourselves the light and abundance that Hashem spreads over Eretz Israel.

The Sages have said, "Everyone who mourns for Jerusalem merits to share in her joy" (Taanith 30b). In fact Eretz Israel and Jerusalem have been punished because of us, for we have sinned before G-d. Instead of punishing us, however, He poured out His wrath upon wood and stone (Eicha Rabba 4:14). Consequently, the reparation of wood and stone depend on us, on our actions and repentance. Hence we must ask G-d to quickly rebuild Jerusalem, and for it to never be destroyed again.

Nevertheless, we must absolutely not think that if the Final Deliverance is delayed, then perhaps Hashem has forsaken Jerusalem. Not on your life! The verse states, "He will choose Jerusalem once again" (Zechariah 1:17). In other words, it is true that non-Jews live in Jerusalem and even want to take it for themselves. Hence they believe that Hashem has perhaps forsaken Jerusalem and that it does not belong to the Jewish people. In response, the verse tells us: "He will choose Jerusalem once again." The Holy One, blessed be He, will choose Jerusalem and never abandon it. Even if we are far from Jerusalem and think that it is far from us, this is not true. It is close to us, and the Final Redemption is also close to us, for Mashiach waits to come and deliver us. Although he lingers, nevertheless we must await his arrival each day, doing so by improving our deeds and our conduct.

Yet people have already started to despair, for numerous years have passed and Mashiach is still not here. Nevertheless, we must not lose hope. In previous generations, two tzaddikim dared to ask when Mashiach would arrive. These were Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (Sanhedrin 98a; Yalkut Shimon, Tehillim 95:852) and the holy Baal Shem Tov. Mashiach answered them, "Today, if you will but listen to His voice" (Tehillim 95:7). In other words, Mashiach has already been waiting for

many years to come and deliver us – but everything depends on us, not him!

We have also heard that numerous tzaddikim have wanted, and have had the opportunity, to bring about the arrival of Mashiach. Included among these were the Chozeh of Lublin, who agreed with several other tzaddikim, men such as Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov and Rabbi Israel of Koznitz (the author of Avodah Israel), to hasten the coming of Mashiach. The attribute of strict justice was against this, and did not permit it to happen. Furthermore, they died at that time. Why? Because the coming of Mashiach does not depend on an individual, but on the community. All Jews have the duty to do everything possible to hasten the Final Redemption and the coming of Mashiach. We must all yearn for his coming, and only then will he come. This is why he told Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, "Today, if you will but listen to His voice" – the term "listen" being in the plural, not the singular, for the coming of Mashiach depends on the community. This means that we must listen in truth, without cheating, hypocrisy, or false pretenses. We must truly want it, for the voice of Jacob must be heard in its desire to bring Mashiach.

I Just Bought a New Home

As long as the Jewish people are still in exile, and as long as the nations of the world want Jerusalem for themselves, it means that the voice of Jacob in learning Torah is not yet perfect, which is why Mashiach's arrival is delayed. A certain Jew once told me, "I don't want Mashiach to come right now." When I asked him why, he replied: "I just bought a new home and haven't had a chance to enjoy it yet" – which clearly indicates that the voice of Jacob is not yet perfect, and so our exile continues. However the days of exile are a test for us, to see if we have corrected everything that needs to be corrected. Have we perfected ourselves in light of the coming of Mashiach? Furthermore, let no one think that today we already have a country and are therefore no longer in exile. Let no one think that there is no longer any reason to wait or hope for the coming of Mashiach. That is an absolute lie. We are indeed in exile, and all the peoples of the world want to wipe us out and take Jerusalem from us. She is not yet free, nor will she be free until Mashiach liberates her at the same time as all Israel.

Is it therefore possible to hasten the Final Redemption? The Zohar (Parsha Va'etchanan) states that the study of Torah hastens it. In fact the letters forming the term mashiach are the same as those



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**Rabbi David Hanania
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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

of yismach (“he will rejoice”), for it will occur through Torah, which rejoices the heart of man, as it is said: “The orders of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart” (Tehillim 19:9), as well as, “The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor” (Esther 8:16). Now “Light means Torah” (Megillah 16b), and it is by the light and joy of Torah that Mashiach will arrive. However we must realize that this can occur not only through Torah study, for unity can also hasten the Final Redemption. Thus the Children of Israel were completely united

before the giving of the Torah, like a single man with a single heart (Mechilta, Yitro 19), which is how they were able to annul the evil inclination and be worthy of entering Eretz Israel. It is also how they ensured that Eretz Israel would never be destroyed, but would one day be completely liberated. Yet what can we do if their sins damaged their unity when they made the golden calf, and they rose up against each other? Their unity was not perfect at that point, and the evil inclination returned to dwell among Jews.

The Parable and its Meaning

Bilam's Prophecy: Only for the Sake of Israel

It is written, “Bilam, the son of Beor, they killed with the sword” (Bamidbar 31:8).

In the middle of this week's parsha, we find the account of the war with Midian. This was a “war by commandment,” commanded by Hashem to Moshe in order to execute the vengeance of the Children of Israel upon Midian for having involved themselves in a fight that was not theirs. The five kings of Midian were killed in this war, along with Bilam the son of Beor, who was “killed with the sword.”

We must think about this: How could the wicked Bilam have merited to utter a prophecy about the Children of Israel, and even to have his prophecy written in the Torah, and yet experience such a violent death? He was killed by the sword, without his own prayer even being fulfilled: “May my end be like his” (Bamidbar 23:10).

We also have to ask why the verse is telling us about Bilam's death. In reality, whoever reads Rashi's remarks will draw a tremendous lesson from it:

“He came against Israel and exchanged his craft for theirs, for they are victorious only with their mouths – through prayer and supplication – and he came and adopted their craft to curse them with his mouth. So they too came against him by exchanging their craft for the craft of the nations, who come with the sword, as it says: ‘You shall live by your sword’ [Bereshith 27:40]” (Rashi on Bamidbar 31:8).

He Didn't Understand the Prayers

The book Od Yosef Hai goes into a lengthy explanation as to why Bilam merited for his prophecy to be written in the Torah, even though his own prayer was not granted. It was in order for the Children of Israel to be covered in the eyes of the nations for all the good they would receive in the future. In fact regarding the prophecy of Moshe and the other prophets concerning the heights which the Children of Israel would attain in the future, the nations could say that since these prophets were from the Children of Israel, they may have exaggerated in order to comfort their own people. Yet since it was someone from among the nations who prophesied for the good of the Jewish people, the nations could no longer protest. That is why Bilam's prophecy was recorded: It was for the sake of Israel, not for the sake of Bilam.

The proof is that Hashem did not grant Bilam the one thing that he personally asked for: “May my end be like his.” From here we learn that Bilam's entire prophecy was written solely for the sake of Israel.

A parable will help to explain this: There was an uneducated man who never went to synagogue except on Shabbat and holidays. Whenever he went to synagogue, he did not arrive until after the congregation said Shema, the result being that he didn't understand the prayers very well.

When the time came to get married, he wed an educated woman who knew how to learn and pray, and they went to live in a city in Spain. The first week they arrived in town, the man thought that he should go to synagogue on Shabbat and pray with the community. When he arrived, the Chazan was reading: “Hashem is King, Hashem was King, Hashem will be King forever.” Thus as soon as the Chazan said “Hashem is King,” everyone arose at the same time. Yet in his ignorance, this man thought that the congregants were rising for him.

Thus he entered the synagogue and sat next to the ark, in a place of honor. In fact he took the seat reserved for the president of the synagogue, a seat that was vacant because the president had not yet arrived.

After he had been seated for a few minutes, the Shamash approached him and whispered into his ear that the seat was reserved for the president of the synagogue. He was then led to a place reserved for people who were passing through town. Reluctantly, he had to get up and change seats. After having been seated in his new place for a few minutes, he noticed the president of the synagogue arriving. To his great surprise, he saw that not everyone was standing to honor him, for some were standing while others remained seated. He then rejoiced in his heart that he had been shown greater honor than even the president of the synagogue!

At the end of the prayer service, he returned home and told his wife that the entire congregation had shown him great honor, even more than for the president of the synagogue. The Shamash had not honored him, however, for he asked him to sit elsewhere. The man's wife, who was clever, asked him: “Tell me, when you left the president's seat to go sit in the place reserved for people passing through town, did everyone stand up for you?” When he said no, she told him: “From that, you should realize that when you first entered the synagogue and people rose from their seats, it wasn't for your sake that they did so. Instead, it was because the Chazan was saying ‘Hashem is King, Hashem was King, Hashem will be King forever,’ which is the proper thing to do.”

The meaning of this parable is that the wicked Bilam thought that his prophecy appeared in the Torah for his own sake. To demonstrate his error and prove that his entire prophecy was only written for the sake of Israel, Hashem in His Providence ensured that his prayer, “May my end be like his” would not be granted. As the woman in the parable pointed out to her husband, just as the congregants did not get up to honor him when he changed seats, it proved that they did not get up to honor him when he first entered. Rather, it was only because they were saying “Hashem is King.”

Profane Words

It is written, “He shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do” (Bamidbar 30:3).

In the book *Etz HaDa’at* Tov, Rabbeinu Haim Vital offers an allegorical interpretation of this verse:

“The expression, ‘He shall not profane his word’ alludes to the fact that one should not utter profane words. Thus of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai it was said, ‘He never uttered profane words in his entire life’ [Sukkah 28a].”

The reward of such a person will be that “everything that proceeds from his mouth, He [G-d] shall do.” Thus it is written, “You shall decree, and it will be done for you” (Job 22:28), for G-d deals with man “measure for measure.”

Yuhach and Kalach

It is written, “A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe, for all the tribes of Israel” (Bamidbar 31:4).

In this book *Od Yosef Hai*, Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad explains this verse as follows:

The last letter of each word in the expression, *Ki malachav yetzaveh lach* (yud, vav, hei, kaph) (“He will charge His angels for you, to protect you in all your ways” [Tehillim 91:11]) form the name *Yuhach*, which offers protection from the dangers of travel. These very same letters are the initials of the expression: *Yachid Verabim Halacha Kerabim* (if an individual’s opinion differs from the majority, the Halachah follows the majority).

Likewise, the name *Kalach* (kaph, lamed, kaph) protects travelers. The letter kaph alludes to the word *ki* (“for”) and *lach* is derived from the term *malachav* (“His angels”), as our teacher the Arizal says.

Combined, the numerical value of these two names (*Yuhach* and *Kalach*) is 111, which is also the numerical value of *eleph* (aleph, lamed, and peh).

The verse from this week’s parsha (“A thousand from a tribe...”) is asking Moshe to protect every tribe with the power of each of these names, whose numerical value is that of *eleph*.

Because of this, “A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe, for all the tribes of Israel” – whether they be worthy or not – “shall you send to the army,” for they can then be certain that neither the Satan nor misfortune will touch them.

The First Into Exile

It is written, “The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock – very great” (Bamidbar 32:1).

In the Midrash, our Sages teach that two great wise men once lived: One was Jewish, and the other was an idolater. Ahitophel was from Israel, and Bilam was from the nations of the world. Yet both perished.

Likewise, two strong men once lived: One was Jewish, and the other was from the nations of the world. Samson was from Israel, and Goliath was from the nations of the world. Yet both perished.

Two extremely wealthy men also once lived: One was Jewish and the other was from the nations of the world: Korach and Haman. Yet both perished.

Why? Because their possessions did not come from G-d, but instead they seized them.

Likewise the children of Gad and Reuven were wealthy, owning abundant livestock. They cherished their possessions and went to live outside

the land of Israel. Hence they were the first among all the tribes to go into exile. Why? Because they disassociated themselves from their brothers in order to occupy themselves with their possessions. From where do we learn this? From the verse, “The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock – very great.”

In the Light of the Parsha

When Does a Blessing Rest on Our Wealth?

It is written, “The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock – very great” (Bamidbar 32:1).

If a person runs after money to such a point that it becomes an idol for him (*Iggeret Hakodesh* at the end of the book *Noam Elimelech*), engaging in business when he should be learning Torah, the verse considers him to have benefited from silver and gold originating from idolatry. Let us explain. If a person has established a fixed time for learning Torah every day, and a business venture presents itself to him, he should not neglect his learning to involve himself in it. Doing so is forbidden by the prohibition, “You shall not bring an abomination into your home” (Devarim 7:26). He should allow such an opportunity to pass, even if it means the loss of a potential gain. He should not push off the study of Torah, for it is preferable to forgo a fleeting gain than to lose eternal life.

Likewise, a person should not claim: “I’ll give more money to *tzedakah* because of this deal. I’m only interrupting my learning so I can give to charity.” The reality of things is that the house of study is deserted because people want to make money, not because they want to give to *tzedakah*! Hence G-d declares, “I desire none of this money.” In fact it was earned to the detriment of Torah study, and such wealth is considered stolen. It is anathema, an object of loathing like silver and gold that stem from idolatry. A person who acts in this way is favoring his material life, forsaking not only eternal life but also Hashem, Who constantly desires our Torah learning. The prophet says in this regard, “Who among you fears Hashem, who obeys the voice of His servant, who walks in darkness, and has no light?” (Isaiah 50:10). Here the Sages explain, “If a man is accustomed to attending synagogue [daily], but does not go one day, the Holy One, blessed be He, inquires of him, for it is said: ‘Who among you fears Hashem, who obeys the voice of His servant, who walks in darkness, and has no light?’ If he absented himself on account of some religious purpose, he shall have light. But if he absented himself on account of a worldly purpose, he shall have no light” (*Berachot* 6b). The Gemara cites the rest of the verse, “Let him trust in the Name of Hashem” (Isaiah 50:10), stating: “Why? Because he should have trusted in the Name of Hashem, but did not.”

Whoever acts in this way, aware that he serves money rather than his Creator, will not see a blessing on such money, just as there is no blessing on what is anathema to G-d, which He despises. Even if a person thinks of helping a poor person with this money, no one has the power to change G-d’s word. If someone thinks that he can nevertheless evade it as Saul tried to do, G-d will abhor him.

Along the same lines, the Gemara teaches us: “He who works on the eve of Shabbat and on the eve of festivals – from *Mincha* and onwards, and at the termination of Shabbat, or at the termination of festivals, at the termination of *Yom Kippur*, or wherever there is the [least] suspicion of sin, which includes a public fast – will never see a sign of blessing” (*Pesachim* 50b). Why? Because he thought that he could earn a living despite lacking righteousness, the result being that wealth earned in this way will not be blessed.

In his book *Derech Chaim*, the Maharal cites the Midrash as follows: “Zavdi ben Levi was longing to behold the face of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. He appeared to him in his dream and showed him men whose heads were raised and others whose heads were bent. He asked him, ‘Why is this so?’ He replied, ‘Those whose heads are raised have their learning in their possession, while those whose heads are bent do not have their learning in their possession’” (Kohelet Rabba 9:9).

The Maharal explains that men armed with Torah will not experience any shame in the World to Come, which is a very unusual place, because the Torah will accompany them. On the other hand, those not familiar with Torah will be ashamed to stand among awe-inspiring and unique mysteries. Such people are but the “body,” since the Torah does not accompany them. Hence their heads will be bent, like someone who feels uncomfortable surrounded by great and holy men, for only Torah gives true meaning to life. Their bent heads reflect their non-existence, for a person is recognized by his face, which represents his true state.

Tractate Hagigah

The following story, taken from Midrash Tanchuma, is recounted in the book *Menorat HaMaor*:

A pious man would usually isolate himself and study tractate Hagigah. He studied all of it in detail, and he went over it several times, until he fully mastered it. He committed himself to this task for his entire life, and he knew no other tractate of the Talmud.

One day the soul of this man, who lived alone, departed. Nobody knew of his death, however, and a certain “woman” went to his home. She stood next to his remains and wept, lamenting and then crying and moaning so loudly that a crowd gathered around her.

She addressed them and said, “Mourn for this pious man, bury him, and honor his grave. You will merit eternal life by doing so, for this tzaddik honored me during his entire existence. Because of him, I was never forgotten nor abandoned.”

All the women joined her, and they mourned intensely as the men took care of the deceased’s shroud and burial. He was laid to rest with the greatest of honor.

During this time, the unknown woman wept and moaned still more. She was asked what her name was, and she replied: “My name is Hagigah.” After the funeral, the woman disappeared. All the people then realized that she was actually tractate Hagigah, which had taken the form of a woman and arrived when this faithful man had died. She did all this in order to support, weep, and bury him with respect, for he had always studied it with great diligence.

If such is the fate of a pious man who studied just one tractate, how much greater is the fate of one who studies a great deal of Torah, teaches it to others, and educates numerous students!

The Joy of All

The Rebbe of Sanz, Rabbi Chaim, demonstrated great respect to a certain student. At one point, this student mentioned that he didn’t deserve such respect, and he cited the teaching of our Sages that if we grant honor to a person because we think that he has studied two tractates, whereas he has studied only one, that person must say that he studied only one. The Rebbe of Sanz replied, “This is true, but we

should still realize just how much honor is owed to one who studies a single tractate!”

When a student in the yeshiva of Rabbi Reuven Feinstein (the son of Reb Moshe Feinstein) completed a tractate, Reb Moshe participated in the Siyum. When the student in question entered, Reb Moshe would rise in his honor and encourage other students to do the same. When some students completed all of Shass, Reb Moshe would rise and embrace them because he was so happy! In this regard, let us cite the words of Reb Moshe himself, just as he wrote them in his book *Iggeret Moshe*: “The joy of a Siyum doesn’t just involve those who complete a tractate, but all Torah students. In any case, all Torah scholars are filled with joy when a young rabbi completes [his cycle of learning], even if he is not their student, for the joy of learning Torah – even that of a single person – is the joy of all scholars.”

Regarding this subject, the gaon Rabbi Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz wrote the following:

“Every individual who studies Torah sustains all of Creation, infusing strength and vitality into the entire world. Hence his learning belongs to all Israel, and the joy of his Siyum is the joy of us all.”

To the Very Last Page

The gaon Rabbi Aharon Kotler was always very careful to study each tractate to the very last page. When he arrived at tractate Nazir, a series of events prevented him from learning the tractate to the end. During that time, he merited to meet the Chafetz Chaim. In the middle of their conversation, the Chafetz Chaim suddenly said to him: “When you start to learn a tractate, you have to follow it to the very last page. For example, if you begin Nazir, you have to learn it from one end to the other.”

In his book *Likutei Amarim* (Ch. 6), Rav Kotler adds: “When we arrive before the Celestial Court, we will be told: ‘Arise and recite the Torah that you learned. Arise and recite the Mishnah that you learned.’ At first, we will be shown all the Torah that we studied during our lifetime. All the Talmud that we studied will be brought before us, and our soul will greatly rejoice to see the extent of our knowledge. Yet how shaken will we be when we see that all our learning is filled with holes! Such-and-such a tractate will be missing from this session, and such-and-such a tractate will be missing from that session! In certain tractates, several chapters and pages will be missing, for we were traveling for several days and never caught up with them. What will we feel like then? Our poverty will be exposed before the entire Celestial Court, be it in the realm of the written Torah, the Mishnah, the Gemara, and so on, and we will be unable to answer the questions put to us. Our shame will reach its peak when the Celestial Court will ask us about the Yerushalmi and the Midrashim, for which we will have no answers because we never studied them. How greatly will our hearts suffer then!”

Guard Your Tongue

Among Gossipers

It is forbidden to live in a neighborhood of gossipers, and it is especially forbidden to sit among them and hear them speak. This applies even if our intention is not to believe anything they say, for we are still stretching out our ears to listen. – Chafetz Chaim