

PARSHA

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THE POWER OF PURITY VS. THE POWER OF IMPURITY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "You shall offer the one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep you shall offer in the afternoon" (Shemot 29:39).

Rabbi Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai, explains the significance of the daily burnt-offerings: The burnt-offering of the morning atoned for the sins of the night, and that of the afternoon atoned for the sins of the morning. These daily offerings were purchased with public money, and they had the power to atone for the sins of the entire people. The Ben Ish Hai adds that the term olat (burnt-offerings) is similar to tole'ah (worm): There are destructive angels that stem from the forces of evil and resemble a worm, which devours and nibbles at everything before it. By making the daily burnt-offerings, we weaken these angels and prevent them from reaching and destroying us.

G-d created them as counterparts to one another. Just as there is an angel of punishment named Tole'ah, there is an angel of purity that is also named Tole'ah, the objective of which is to diminish the forces of the evil worm and prevent it from fulfilling its harmful objectives. From where does the good worm draw its strength to counter the evil worm? From the daily burnt-offerings of the morning and afternoon, which were offered by the people. It is by the merit of these offerings that the good worm is able to annul the forces of its adversary. It is in this regard that G-d turns to Jacob and says: "Fear not, O worm [tola'at] of Jacob" (Isaiah 41:14), meaning: "Do not fear the forces of impurity, for you also have a worm that can destroy your enemies."

Nevertheless, a question arises: How did the nations of the world succeed in destroying the land of Israel? The question is that much more relevant, given that eminent Torah scholars used to live in Jerusalem, men who possessed a spirit of prophesy and whose exceptional greatness was immeasurable. These same Torah scholars made the ministering angels swear to fight destructive forces and prevent the nations of the world from destroying the land of Israel. In that case, how could that have happened? "This question was put to the sages and the prophets, but they could not answer it – until the Almighty Himself did so, as it is written: 'And Hashem said: "Because they have abandoned My Torah..." [Jeremiah 9:12]'" (Nedarim 81a). In other words, it was because they stopped bringing the daily burnt-offerings. Since these offerings atoned for the sins of the day and the night, the Jewish people were left without protection. They could overcome their enemies only when they offered the daily burnt-offerings, the symbol of spiritual greatness and self-mastery, which granted power to the worm of holiness. The daily burnt-offerings must necessarily include the concept of daily spiritual growth. Thus when the Jewish people stopped bringing these offerings, the worm of holiness no longer had the power to overcome the husk of impurity, the result being that the nations of the world were able to destroy Jerusalem.

A Call to Repentance

It was on Tammuz 17 that the Jewish people stopped making the daily burnt-offerings, for there were no more sheep remaining, as the Gemara explains (Ta'anit 16b). Nevertheless, instead of worrying about a lack of sheep and reflecting upon their situation, they remained passive and did not realize the divine sign that was calling them to rectify their deeds. We can explain this with a parable: When a mother realizes that her son is not maturing and developing normally, that he tends to sleep more than usual and is not eating correctly, she will automatically fear that something is wrong with him, and she will seek out doctors to determine the cause of the problem. Likewise, when someone feels that he is not growing spiritually – and on the contrary is stagnant, even experiencing a spiritual decline at times – then he must worry about it and not rest easy until he finds a solution to his problem.

It was for this reason that G-d created people in such a way that their hair becomes grey as they grow older. Likewise, a person's face does not remain supple and radiant as in youth. Why is that? G-d could have easily arranged things in such a way that a person leaves this world as youthful and vigorous as in his youth. Why instead do we become old and frail prior to death? In reality, the signs of old age come to remind us that our energy is not eternal, that the years of our life on earth are measured, and that a day will come when we must leave the world and be buried. We must all realize this and devote our lives to the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot, for a day will come when the ability for spiritual growth will be taken from us, and we will be judged for our actions without any way to correct them. Thus the Jewish people should have awoken and questioned the significance of not being able to make the daily burnt-offerings. In fact the absence of sheep for these offerings testified to a deficiency in regards to Torah, meaning that the Children of Israel were not fulfilling it in its entirety. Since the Jewish people remained indifferent to that fact and failed to strengthen the worm of holiness, forces of evil triumphed and Jerusalem was destroyed.

In our days, when the Temple no longer stands and we cannot bring the daily burnt-offerings, we must elevate ourselves in the holy Torah. We must examine our deeds in the hope of improving them, and we must always be in a state of spiritual growth. By acting in this way, we will transmit a double share of power and strength to the forces of purity in order to confront the forces of impurity. By way of allusion, we may add that the daily offering (korban tamid) touches upon the concept of constant self-annulment (temidi), meaning that a man should submit and annul himself before the Torah. As for the term tole'ah ("worm"), it comes from the same root as hit'alut ("elevation"), meaning that there exists an elevation of purity as well as an elevation of impurity. By submitting himself to the Torah, a person brings about an elevation of purity.



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Holy to Hashem

It is written, “And you shall engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring: Holy to Hashem” (Shemot 28:36).

Our teacher, the gaon Rabbi David Luria (better known as the Radal), was considered one of the most renowned spiritual leaders of Israel in the generation that followed the Vilna Gaon. Rabbi David was an accomplished scholar, a man from whom no secret was hidden. He was versed in all areas of Torah, there being no subject that he had not studied in great depth and with vast understanding. Thus we find his works on Hebrew grammar, on the Midrashim, the Tosafot, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, as well as on the Zohar and other works of Kabbalah.

His ardent desire to study Torah knew no bounds. We cannot describe the immensity of his joy when a new work from the Rishonim came into his hands. When he would first come upon a publication of “minor tractates” based on an ancient manuscript, he would recite the Shecheyanu blessing with sacred delight, after which he immediately sat down to compose a beautiful commentary on it. Likewise he expended vast sums of money to rescue Jewish manuscripts from Christians and their libraries in order to publish them for the benefit of the community. Friends of his who traveled to distant lands were provided with extraordinary sums so they would not hesitate to acquire manuscripts concerning our teachers the Rishonim, regardless of the price.

Rabbi David Luria was characterized by his diligence in Torah study, a trait that enabled him to obtain the vast knowledge from which he benefited. The great majority of stories about him reflect this characteristic.

Despite suffering from a lung condition throughout his life, he devoted all his energies to the study of Torah, both day and night. Thus like other spiritual teachers, he had the habit of immersing his feet in a bucket of ice cold water during the glacial winter nights in order not to fall asleep as he studied.

His disciples tell us that during the day, he slept for precisely 12 minutes. During the night, he slept for a few hours at the beginning of the first third of the night. He then arose, recited Tikkun Chatzot, and returned to his studies. The Radal was among the eminent men of his generation, and therefore he was invited to countless meetings between business leaders and rabbis to discuss the needs of the community. During one such meeting, the participants noticed that he suddenly arose, moved away from the others seated at the table, and isolated himself in a corner. After a moment, he quickly moved towards one of his students, whispered something into his ear, and returned to the table.

The student later explained what had happened: His teacher had approached him because at that very instant, he had found an explanation on a problem in tractate Kiddushin (6a) dealing with the wording of the kiddushin. At that moment, he realized that he could explain this subject according to Kabbalah, and therefore he hastened to share it with his student.

Near the end of his life, the Maskilim denounced him to the authorities. To complete their slanderous accusations, they falsified a number of works in his name, including passages in his commentary on Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer in which they claimed that he encouraged people to revolt against the government of the Russian Czar.

The Radal was therefore sent to prison. He remained locked up in the Shlisselburg Tower for more than 100 days, a time that he devoted entirely to the study of Torah. When his true intentions were made clear, the non-Jewish judges were convinced of his innocence and

released him, returning him home on a journey paid by the government. Great honors were granted to him during his return. When he was asked about the conditions of his imprisonment, he responded that he had committed himself to speaking to no one until he had finished the study of the Alfasi for the 40th time, this being in addition to the 60 times that he had studied it in prison. He needed four extra months to complete that objective.

We learn even more about his diligent approach to learning, an approach rooted in him from his earliest years, by the following account, which was given by the Radal himself. It shows us the kindness of the Creator, Who revealed Himself to the Radal through exceptional circumstances.

The Radal was nine years old at the time. The Duke of the city where he lived came to visit his father, who himself was a gaon. The Duke was accompanied by a skilled professor who had been specially summoned from France to tutor his own children. The reputation of the exceptional boy had reached the ears of the Duke, which is why he arrived along with the professor. He wanted to see the amazing boy and his abilities for himself.

The boy made an impression with his answers in math and physics. In his generosity, the Duke told his father that the boy could come and study with the professor as he taught his own children. The Duke therefore made a special arrangement with the boy’s father: Each afternoon, the boy would come to the Duke’s palace to learn languages and the sciences.

The boy kept quiet as he watched his father and the Duke discuss the issue. The fear of the Duke kept him from voicing the worries that were bubbling up inside, but as soon as the Duke left, the boy burst into tears. The time that he was to learn at the Duke’s palace was a sacred hour for the boy, a time that he devoted himself to reviewing his studies. Throughout that night, the boy wept because of the decree that had been imposed on him, forcing him to sacrifice a time that was so dear to him.

The Radal concluded this account by saying that at daybreak, after a night a weeping and lamentation, word spread in town that the Duke’s professor had disappeared under mysterious circumstances. It was a miracle.

Guard Your Tongue

Permitted and Forbidden

A person who desires to be innocent before Heaven should act in the following way: If an individual comes to him with the intention of slandering his fellowman, and he realizes that this individual is about to make condescending remarks, he must first ask him if the issue has a direct, future impact on him, or if he has the ability to rectify things by reprimanding someone or doing something. If the individual says that it has a direct, future impact on him, or that he can rectify things, then he is allowed to listen to him, although he is not allowed to accept his words as the truth without verifying facts. However if he realizes that what this individual is about to say has no impact on him, or that he is simply slandering his fellowman out of hatred, then it is forbidden to listen to him.

– Chafetz Chaim

Encouraging Gently

The Menorah was lit with olive oil that was *katit la'maor* (“ground for illumination”). The Sages say that the oil came from olives that were ground for the lighting of the Menorah, not ground for the meal-offering. From this law, the Rebbe of Alexander, Rabbi Yechiel, derived a principle for education in general and reprimands in particular: When someone sees the need to reprimand and guide another person, he should do it in pleasant way, with gentleness and respect, for his goal will only be reached in this way. This is the meaning of the Sages’ statement, “When reprimanding another and seeking to ‘grind’ [i.e., to break] his heart, we must do it in such a way that it is ‘for illumination’ – to teach him the way and light the path before him – not ‘for the meal-offering’ – to crush and lower him.” The book *Tiferet Shlomo* cites the holy Jew of Peshischa in stating that the Rebbe of Lelov, Rabbi Dovid Biderman, did not reprimand Jews through reproof and admonishment, but rather through gentleness. He encouraged people to repent through love, arousing a fear of Heaven in them. King Solomon teaches us, “The gentle words of the wise are heard above the shouts of a king over fools” (Kohelet 9:17). This means that the words of the wise expressed with gentleness are heeded and accepted more than the cries of a leader among fools. This is why we must train ourselves to speak with gentleness.

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk had various methods to encourage people to heed reprimand, which he lists in his book *Noam Elimelech* (Parsha Emor): “The path of the righteous is to reprimand himself at each instant, to continually remind others that his own deeds are defective, and then to describe the sins that they committed, making them believe that he himself committed them. Using this strategy, he will arouse a great fear in their hearts, and they will repent.” In this way we link deed to speech. He also had another method: He would lecture his prestigious students in public, pouring out “fire and brimstone” upon them in a public display of reproof, whereas these words were aimed at but one person among the crowd, a person who in the end realized that these words were meant for him alone. He also had the habit of telling the community a story that seemed mundane, but in doing so he encouraged his listeners to regret their misdeeds and repent of their sins. Along the same lines, the book *Ma’or Veshemesh* recounts an incident involving Rabbi Elimelech: He was in front of his home, and all around him were people forming a circle, with him in the middle. He then told them a story that deeply affected them all. In fact each of them was persuaded that this story was directed at him alone, alluding to his own misdeeds, which then pushed him to repent.

Who is Capable?

In the winter of 5690, Torah giants and the *tzaddikim* of Poland, with the Chafetz Chaim at their head, gathered together in Warsaw for a historic conference to annul a decree affecting Jewish school-children. One of those invited to this conference, a great leader of the generation, arrived late. When the Chafetz Chaim asked him why, he justified himself by explaining that he had a personal matter to attend to. The Chafetz Chaim then reprimanded him: “Does the Rav not know the verse written in the Song of Deborah: ‘Curse Meroz... for they failed to come to help Hashem, to help Hashem against the

mighty’ [Judges 5:23]? There is a discussion in the Gemara [Moed Katan 16a] on whether Meroz is the name of a great man or Sisera’s ministering angel, who was late in coming to aid the Jewish people. From here we learn that important people and the angels are scrutinized and judged for this!” As described in the book *Pe’er Hador*, the conference hall was filled with an uneasy silence. At that point Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin arose and attempted, through his wisdom, to ease the tension. With great tact he said, “All my life, I have wondered: Ordinary people listen to the reprimands of rabbis and preachers, and rebbes teach their *chassidim*. Yet who is capable, when the need arises, to reprimand those who are used to reprimanding, meaning the great men of Israel? Now I am at peace, thank G-d, for we have the Chafetz Chaim, the great among the great, who spares no one, reprimanding both great and small alike.”

In the Light of the Parsha

The Mitzvah of the Menorah

It is written, “And you, command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, ground [*katit*] olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually” (Shemot 27:20).

The *Ba'al HaTurim* says that the word *katit* (“ground”) has a numerical value of 420 or 410 (depending on whether it is written with or without a *yud*). This alludes to the First and Second Temples, which stood for 410 and 420 years respectively, and in which the Menorah was lit. The book *Toldot Yitzchak* (Parsha Tetzaveh) adds that the term *la'maor* (“for illumination”) alludes to the Third Temple, which will last forever, as the end of the verse implies: “to kindle the lamp continually.” According to all this, we can understand why the Greeks were content with desecrating the oil for the Menorah, rather than completely destroying the Temple. What they really wanted was to destroy the Third Temple, which will endure forever. Since the Third Temple will arrive when a *katit* number of years for the First and Second Temple will have elapsed (during which time the Menorah will have been lit), the Greeks deliberately attempted to desecrate the Menorah, extinguish its lamps, and thus prevent the completion of a *katit* number of years. This would have prevented the arrival of the Third Temple, which could only occur after the Menorah had been lit for the number of years corresponding to *katit*.

Therein lies the great miracle of the flask of oil. Because of that flask, the Children of Israel were able to rekindle the Menorah and thus restart the count of *katit*. This saved the Third Temple, which in its time will be established forever, since the number of *katit* years for the first two Temples was respected.

This allows us to answer a question raised by the *Beit Yosef* (Orach Chaim 670): Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, since on the first day there was no miracle because there was sufficient oil for that day? After all, it was only on the following days that the Menorah remained miraculously lit for seven additional days. According to what we have said, we realize that the very fact of finding oil for the Menorah was a great miracle, for it saved the Third Temple and assured the Jewish people of an eternal existence, all of which occurred on the first day.

An Effort for Illumination Only

It is written, “Ground olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually” (Shemot 27:20).

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Ginz interpreted this verse allegorically: The Sages have said, “If one says, ‘I have made an effort and found,’ you may believe him” (Megillah 6b). Insofar as the Torah is concerned, if we truly make an effort to study it with great diligence and profound desire, then our effort will produce results and we will merit the light of the holy Torah. Such is not the case insofar as earning a living is concerned, for sometimes we make the greatest effort in this regard, traveling from market to market to sell our wares, but in the end we earn absolutely nothing. Now the term *katit* (“ground”) signifies continuous work, backbreaking effort accompanied by physical deprivation. Yet only the *katit* that is *la’maor* (“for illumination”) – an effort that is only for the Menorah – can earn us the great light of Torah. Such is not the case for the meal-offering, which represents a livelihood. For that, there is no reason to grind ourselves down through backbreaking effort, for our sustenance comes solely from Hashem.

– Harei BaShamayim

The Light is Undiminished

It is written, “Ground olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually” (Shemot 27:20).

We read, “For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23). Why is the Torah called “light”? Because it often happens that when a person is eager to fulfil a mitzvah, his evil inclination within him dissuades him, saying: “Why do you want to perform this command and diminish your wealth? Instead of giving to others, give to your own children!” However the good inclination says to him, “Give to a just cause instead, for see what it says: ‘For a mitzvah is a lamp’ – just as the light of the lamp is undiminished even if a million candles are kindled from it, likewise anyone who gives for the fulfilment of a mitzvah will not suffer any loss of his wealth.” Hence, “For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light.”

– Shemot Rabba 36:3

When Intention is Equal to Deed

It is written, “The belt [*cheshev*] that is upon it, like its work [*kema’asehu*], shall be of the same piece [*mimenu yihyeh*]” (Shemot 28:8).

There is a well-known principle regarding the performance of mitzvot, namely that “good intentions are linked to deeds.” If our intention is to perform a mitzvah, but we cannot due to circumstances beyond our control, it will still be considered as if we had performed it. In light of this concept, the Chida cites Rabbeinu Ephraim in interpreting the verse, “The belt [*cheshev*] that is upon it, like its work [*kema’asehu*]” to mean: The intention (*ma’chasava*) to perform the mitzvah is *kema’asehu* (literally “as the deed”) – it is as if he had already performed it. When is that the case? When it is *mimenu yihyeh* (literally “from him”) – when he truly wants to perform a mitzvah, but cannot because circumstances prevent him.

Sunrise...Sunset

It is written, “You shall offer the one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep you shall offer in the afternoon” (Shemot 29:39).

The author of HaDrash VeHaIyun interprets this verse as follows: Each of us must put an effort into serving Hashem both in his youth

– the morning of his life – and in his old age – the evening of his life. In his youth he is in good health and his body is strong, however his understanding is still unsteady. In his old age his understanding is solid, but the strength of his body has diminished and he no longer has much energy. We must therefore learn from the daily burnt-offering of the morning to take the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven upon ourselves at the sunrise of our life, without getting distracted by the vanities of this world.

We must also learn from the burnt-offering of the evening that even as the sunset of our life approaches, we must not allow ourselves to neglect our service of Hashem, but rather to strengthen it.

Effecting Atonement

It is written, “You shall make a plate [*tziz*] of pure gold” (Shemot 28:36).

[Rabbi Yose said:] Our Sages teach that the arrogant and shameless have no portion in this world nor in the World to Come. All the arrogant of Israel, when they gazed upon the plate, became contrite of heart and looked inwardly into their own deeds.

This is because the plate possessed miraculous powers, being capable of making whoever looked upon it feel ashamed of their misdeeds. In this way the plate secured atonement for the arrogant and the insolent. The letters of the Divine Name engraved upon it stood out shining and flashing, and whoever looked at that flashing had to cast down his eyes in fear and become contrite of heart, and thus the plate effected his atonement.

– Zohar II:218b

Men of Faith

Charity Through Deeds and Money

Rabbi Nissim Abitsrour told the Rav, our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita, that his grandfather Rabbi Haim Pinto often summoned him to collect money among the inhabitants of the city and distribute it to the needy. Very few people had the great merit of accompanying Rabbi Haim Pinto as he collected money, an opportunity that Rabbi Nissim did not pass up.

Every Friday, Rabbi Haim would go out and collect food for the poor. On that day he would not collect money, for he knew that it was late and the poor did not have enough time to purchase what they needed for Shabbat. Hence his custom, every Friday, was to collect food from people, which he would then distribute to the poor so they could eat on Shabbat. On the other hand, during the week he would collect money and distribute it as *tzeddakah*.

When Rabbi Haim would go to people’s homes collecting food, he would speak prophetically by telling the women of the home how much food they had cooked on that day, and how much their households would be eating during the week, such that the surplus could be given as *tzeddakah*. Rabbi Nissim was often taken aback by this, by the fact that here were men whose minds were completely devoted to Torah – to mitzvot, holiness and purity – and yet they would leave everything behind in order to devote themselves to others. Such was the greatness of Rabbi Haim Pinto.

Instead of studying Torah, he humbled himself by going door to door collecting food for the poor and needy.