

PARSHA

EKEV

AUGUST 8TH, 2015
AV 23RD 5775

607

THE MISSING DESCRIPTION IN SEFER
DEVARIM

It is written, “Do not say to yourself, when Hashem your G-d has repelled them from before you, saying: ‘Because of my righteousness, Hashem has brought me to possess this land’ – but for the wickedness of these nations, Hashem drives them out from before you. Not because of your righteousness, or because of the honesty of your heart, do you come to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations [does] Hashem your G-d drive them out from before you, and in order to establish the word that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Devarim 9:4-5).

In the book *Degel HaMussar*, my teacher Rabbeinu Gershon Liebman asks why it would have been wrong for the Children of Israel to think that their righteousness is what earned them the land of Israel as a heritage. They obviously knew that the wicked conduct of the foreign peoples who lived in it justified their expulsion from the land. Yet why did this mean that Israel’s worthiness had to be disregarded? Admittedly, the warnings contained in these verses ask us not to yield to the attitude described in the verse, “My strength and the might of my hand has made be all this wealth” (Devarim 8:17). Instead, we must never lose sight of the fact that “it was [G-d] Who gave you strength to make wealth” (v.18). Even our strength and abilities stem from Him, and therefore we must not grow proud.

Nevertheless, what harm is there in thinking that due to their merit and piety, G-d helped the Children of Israel to inherit the land? On the contrary, it would be beneficial to view things this way! As the Alter of Novardok once said, anybody who wants to strengthen his faith in G-d can proclaim that he is personally infused with faith. Likewise, if the Children of Israel felt and declared that they were tzaddikim, they would strengthen themselves in this path. Therefore why would it be incorrect to think along these lines?

We have heard our teachers affirming that they are always filled with faith in G-d. Even my teacher, my father Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon, had the custom of saying: “I have faith in Hashem” in order to strengthen his faith still more. That being the case, why does the Torah here demand that we distance ourselves from all such sentiments, whereas everyone can use it to strengthen themselves in their own service of G-d? I would like to point out that there is an essential difference between faith in G-d (which is very important to cultivate) and faith in our own piety. Let us expand upon this issue: Whoever affirms that he has faith in Hashem will demonstrate neither conceit nor pride. He will only seek to augment this sacred virtue and strengthen his faith in G-d. He will obviously not want to signal that he has attained perfection in this area, which is comprised of many levels. As the author of *Chovot HaLevavot* notes, faith in Hashem is comprised of ten primary levels, each of which in turn is composed of numerous elements. Thus a person who has attained a certain level has still a long way to go before being able to consider himself a perfect believer. Therefore when

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

we regularly repeat that we have faith in Hashem, we must not brag about it or demonstrate pride. We must not claim that we have already reached the summit of faith, but instead we must simply strengthen ourselves. This is the good and proper approach that will prove only beneficial: Because we speak about it, faith in Hashem will be rooted in us, as King David said: “I believed when I spoke” (Tehillim 116:10).

On the other hand, whoever is convinced of his own piety and the righteousness of his heart – whoever boasts of his own good deeds and claims to have numerous and powerful merits that even allow him to inherit the land – demonstrates by such an attitude that he thinks he has already attained spiritual perfection. However he is wrong. Who can claim to be so righteous and just and that he merits goodness and blessing by virtue of his piety? This is nothing but pride and self-importance. He even demonstrates conceit by thinking that he has already rectified all his faults and is now a righteous and pious person.

It goes without saying that such an attitude will seriously damage his service of G-d and lead him to a precipitous spiritual fall. Since he considers himself perfect in all his ways and upright and all his deeds, he will never think of examining his actions or questioning himself. That is why the Torah prohibited the Children of Israel from believing such ideas or thinking that it was their piety or the righteousness of their own hearts that allowed them to inherit this good land.

True piety consists of never glorifying ourselves during our time on earth. It means always feeling incomplete in our service of G-d, and being aware that the path leading to perfection is lengthy.

Thinking that we are perfect is a sin, a terrible demonstration of wretched pride, the only consequence of which is sin. That is why the Torah is very strict in regard to this subject.

In my opinion, it was for this reason that the Torah did not repeat the description of the Sanctuary’s construction in Sefer Devarim. In fact the Sanctuary’s construction is not considered a historical event that is over and done with. In reality, it is incumbent upon each of us to constantly work on the construction of our own sanctuary. In other words, we must push ourselves for Torah and make an effort to fulfill mitzvah, all while yearning for perfection, so that the Shechinah will seek to dwell in us. The only way to achieve this is not to be convinced of our own piety, nor to rely on our own righteousness, but to know deep down that we are still far from perfection and that only a great effort will allow us to draw closer to it. Thus by making an effort for Torah and fulfilling the mitzvot that are repeated (nishnu) in Sefer Devarim (which is also called Mishneh Torah), we transform ourselves into a dwelling place for the Shechinah.

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.comEditor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

A Question that No One Asks

It is written, “In order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live” (Devarim 8:3).

One of the ten miracles performed for our forefathers in the Temple was that the rain never extinguished the perpetual fire on the altar. This despite the fact that, as the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin points out in Ruach Chaim, it was not difficult for Hashem to prevent rain from descending upon the Temple and the altar, and that nothing about this miracle required a change in the nature of the world. The lesson this miracle teaches us is that someone who is constantly immersed in the service of Hashem should not let himself be troubled by any problems whatsoever. He should remain firm in his resolve, just as the fire on the altar constantly burned and was not extinguished by the rain.

There is another lesson to learn from this. In our time, most people believe that they cannot study Torah and practice mitzvot because it is so difficult to earn a living. The Tanna responds that this is a grave error. All that is required of a person is that he put his faith in Hashem, which will allow him to study Torah, for “the rain did not extinguish the fire of the woodpile on the altar” (Pirkei Avot 5:5). Water alludes to sustenance, meaning that a person must ensure that his study of Torah (which is called “fire,” since all the words of Hashem are of fire) is not extinguished by anything.

The author of Machaneh Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Sofer Zussman Zatzal, who was among the greatest figures of Hungarian Jewry, had the habit of helping needy Jews who had been struck by the hand of Hashem, Jews whom he would welcome to his home.

One day, just as he was about to deliver a sermon to thousands of people, he warmly smiled to one poor person in particular who was in synagogue and appeared truly miserable. When he asked him to sit next to him during the sermon, the entire community, which had gathered together for the occasion, was intrigued. Although the gaon would often display such a kind attitude, he had never asked a poor person to sit next to him during a sermon. At the end of the discourse, the members of the community came to ask him about this poor man, and how he had merited such an honor.

The Machaneh Chaim explained what had happened: In Budapest, there was once a famous Jewish doctor whom all the residents of the city went to see for healing. One day, this doctor came to see the Machaneh Chaim’s parents and asked them about their children. Since they were all studying Torah day and night, how could they feed their family?

His parents answered that it is written in the Torah, “You shall teach them to your children” as well as, “You shall bind them as a sign upon your arm,” and that just as nobody asks what will happen if we bind them – for we know that it is a mitzvah we must fulfill even if we derive no material benefit from it – likewise there is no reason to ask about the mitzvah to teach Torah to one’s children.

The Machaneh Chaim said, “Do you know who that poor man was, the man whom I seated next to me during my discourse? It was the son of the doctor who had come to see my parents. The Holy One, blessed be He, clearly proved that the righteous are not forsaken and that a person who studies Torah is assured of receiving sustenance. And it was precisely that doctor, who apparently was earning a very good living and had the ability to bequeath a sizeable inheritance of his children, whose children became so poor that they had to beg for bread.”

With Paper or Letters?

The gaon Rabbeinu Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai (may his

merit protect us), would often recount the following story: People wanted to arrange a match between a certain Torah scholar and a young woman. However the mother of the young woman said, “I don’t want to give my daughter in marriage to this scholar, for how will he support her – with his paper and books? Or with the letters he studies?”

She wanted her daughter to marry someone who was rich, which is what happened.

Some time later, the wheel of fortune turned and this couple lost all their money. The woman and her husband both learned how to bind books, and the woman would take books from the scholar in question and bind them in order to earn a living.

Looking and Keeping Watch

A simple Jew listened to a lecture given by Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka on the education of children. Afterwards he went and said to him: “You have to admit, Rabbi, that what you said applies to someone who is rich and earns a very good living. Yet take someone such as myself, someone who works hard just to earn enough to live on. Why should I exhaust myself from morning till night to earn a living, while my sons are quietly seated learning Torah? Would it not be more fitting for them to also fulfill the verse, ‘By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread’ [Bereshith 3:19]? They will obviously fix times for the study of Torah as well, doing one thing without neglecting the other.”

Rav Tsadka replied, “Perhaps you can tell me why almost all the members of the human body are forced to work and make an effort to fulfill their role: The tongue speaks, the fingers break, the hands accomplish all sorts of work, the legs walk, and yet the eyes have absolutely nothing to do, being content on looking and keeping watch. Why did the Creator of the universe arrange things in this way?”

The man remained silent, not knowing what to say. “I never thought of that,” he eventually responded.

Rav Tsadka continued his explanation: “Know, my son, that the eyes have a very important role to play, which is to watch over everything else. For example, when you use a hammer, the eyes ensure that it strikes the head of the nail rather than the ends of your fingers. And when you use a knife, the eyes ensure that you cut bread rather than your hands. And when you walk, the eyes ensure that you don’t stumble over anything.

“The very same thing applies to talmidei chachamim, whom the Torah calls ‘the eyes of the community.’ The role of Torah scholars is to watch over the people and supervise everything, to pay attention to all events in life so as to guarantee that everything is in accordance with Hashem’s will, with nothing straying from the right path. This is why they are not commanded to make a physical effort or have a specific occupation. All they must do is fulfill their lofty mission, which is to watch over the entire people with an eye for sanctity.

Guard Your Tongue

The Advice of a Torah Scholar

How good and upright is it to act according to what a certain Torah scholar counselled a friend of mine. On Shabbat during the summer time, we should never linger in synagogue or at the house of study after Seuda Shelishith to hear what somebody is saying, for two people become three, and three before four, five, and six...until finally an entire group has formed. At that point everyone is recounting what happened to him during the week that has passed, and it is impossible not to speak Lashon Harah or mock someone, and all because of the first person who began speaking.

– Sha’ar HaTevunah

Lest You Forget

It is written, “This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances” (Devarim 7:12).

Further on we read, “Take care lest you forget Hashem” (ibid. 8:11). This teaches us that a person who scorns G-d’s mitzvot or performs them without conviction will end up forgetting Him, the result being that he will cease bearing the yoke of His commandments.

G-d’s mitzvot must be fulfilled with love, joy, and great enthusiasm.

– Tzohar HaBayit

Ten Mitzvot

It is written, “A land of wheat, barley, grape, fig, and pomegranate; a land of olive oil and date-honey” (Devarim 8:8).

Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim wrote the following (Orach Chaim 167):

On the bread we place both hands (which are composed of 10 fingers) in order to evoke the 10 following mitzvot, which have a connection to bread: (1) Not working an ox and donkey together; (2) Not using grafts in agriculture; (3) Allowing the poor to glean in our fields; (4) Not returning to pick up forgotten sheaves; (5) Leaving the edges of our fields for the poor; (6) Reserving the firstfruit for G-d; (7) Terumah, (8) Giving the first tithe, (9) Giving the second tithe; and (10) Challah. Hence there are 10 words in the blessing, “Who brings forth bread from the earth” (hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz), 10 words in the verse, “He causes vegetation to sprout for the animal” (matzmiach chatzir labeheima [Tehillim 104:16]), 10 words in the verse, “The eyes of all look to You with hope” (Einei kol eilecha yesaberu [Tehillim 145:15]), and 10 words in the verse, “And may He give you” (Vayiten lecha [Bereshith 27:28]).

Olive and Olive Oil

It is written, “A land of wheat, barley, grape, fig, and pomegranate; a land of olive oil and date-honey” (Devarim 8:8).

This is surprising. For the first five products on this list, it is the fruit itself (wheat, barley, grape, fig, pomegranate) that is mentioned, but for the olive the verse mentions only what is derived from it, namely olive oil. Why?

The Maharsha cites a statement from the Gemara: “Our Rabbis taught: Five things make one forget one’s learning: Eating something from which a mouse or cat has eaten, eating the heart of a beast, frequent consumption of olives, drinking the remains of water that was used for washing, and washing one’s feet one above the other. Others say: He who also puts his clothes under his head. Five things restore one’s learning: Wheat bread, and especially wheat itself, eating a roasted egg without salt, frequent consumption of olive oil, frequent indulgence in wine and spices, and the drinking of water that has remained from kneading. Others say that dipping one’s finger in salt and eating is also included. ‘Frequent consumption of olive-oil’ – this supports the view of Rabbi Yochanan, who said: ‘As the olive causes one to forget 70 years of learning, olive oil restores 70 years of learning.’” (Horayot 13b).

Thanking G-d

It is written, “You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 8:10).

Rabbi Yehudah Leib of Ger, the author of Sefat Emet, asks the following question:

Why did our Sages not institute the blessing, “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to recite Birkat Hamazon?”

After all, they instituted similar blessings for other Torah mitzvot, as well as for mitzvot that were instituted by our Sages, such as the reciting of Hallel.

He answers by noting that Birkat Hamazon differs from the other blessings that we recite for the fulfillment of mitzvot. In fact we do not recite it because G-d has sanctified us with His commandments, but because it comes directly from the verse: “You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d.” We must thank G-d, Who has enabled us to eat and be satisfied.

In the Light of the Parsha

He is Considered to Have Brought an Abomination into His Home

It is written, “The carved images of their gods you shall burn in the fire. You shall not cover and take for yourselves the silver and gold that is on them, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to Hashem your G-d. You shall not bring an abomination into your home and become banned like it. You shall surely loathe it and you shall surely abominate it, for it is banned” (Devarim 7:25-26).

The Torah commanded those entering the land of Israel to destroy the idols that the peoples of the land had fashioned out of silver and gold. A person could therefore think, “I will burn their gods, but recover the silver and gold.” Hence Hashem warned them: “Do not yield to the temptation of keeping the silver or gold that covers them, for that will be your downfall.” In other words, if you take that wealth it will harm you. They were also not to tell themselves, “I’ll take the silver and gold in order to distribute it to the poor or give it to a yeshiva.” Whoever does this will not only end up destroying himself, but will also desecrate the Divine Name. In fact the nations of the world will say, “The Jewish people did not rid themselves of idols! They simply changed their form, and they use them as we use them!”

The underlying principle is the following: We have no right to derive any profit from idolatry, even if our goal is to serve G-d. What is “idolatry”? It is everything that G-d has not commanded. Whoever acts in this way and claims that he is wiser than Hashem’s word is setting the stage for his own downfall, as was the case with Saul.

In the Gemara (Yoma 22b), our Sages explain that when G-d commanded Saul: “Now go and smite Amalek” (I Samuel 15:3), Saul thought: “If on account of one person the Torah said to perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck must be broken, how much more for all these people? If the people have sinned, what have the cattle done, and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done?” A celestial voice came forth and said, “Be not be overly righteous” (Kohelet 7:16). Although Saul acted with good intentions, G-d’s spirit still left him and the monarchy was taken from him, for his goal should have been to obey G-d’s orders without personal considerations coming into play.

A person who excessively seeks wealth – which is compared to idolatry – and engages in business when he should be studying Torah, Scripture regards him as having taken silver and gold from idols. How so? If a person has a fixed study hour at the Beit HaMidrash, for example, but a business opportunity presents itself to him at that time, a deal that requires immediate attention or he will incur a financial loss, the Torah tells him: “You shall not bring an abomination into your home.” It is preferable to endure a financial loss than to forgo the study of Torah. Better to lose your physical life than to lose your eternal life.

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

The Source of Bad Middot

It is written: “You shall not bring an abomination into your home and become banned like it. You shall surely loathe it and you shall surely abominate it, for it is banned” (Devarim 7:26), and “Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem” (Mishlei 16:5).

The similarity between these two verses prompted the following explanation by our Sages: “Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: ‘Every man in whom is haughtiness of spirit is as though he worships idols.’ ... Rabbi Yochanan himself said: ‘He is as though he denied the fundamental principle,’ as it is said: ‘Your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem your G-d’ [Devarim 8:14]” (Sotah 4b).

In his book *Nefesh HaChaim*, the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin expresses this idea even more sharply: “Pay close attention to not deriving any honor from serving G-d with pure intentions. At first glance, you will not truly realize that pride has infused you, and you will therefore have to scrupulously examine your conduct in this area.”

It is clearly written, “Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem” – even if pride is not visible to others, existing simply in the heart of a person himself, it is considered an abomination by G-d. In fact it is the source and active ingredient in all bad middot.

It is said that throughout his entire life, the gaon Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka fled from all kinds of titles and honors in the same way that people fled from the plague.

By virtue of his extreme humility, he did not even consider himself worthy of being called a talmid chacham. With genuine sincerity, and infused with an extreme sense of humility, throughout his life he feared the warning of our Sages: “Anyone who is not a scholar, but parades in a scholar’s cloak, is not admitted within the circle of the Holy One, blessed be He” (Bava Batra 98a).

Rabbi Yehudah distanced himself from all prestigious titles that his disciples would regularly use to describe him. When he received a new book with a dedication from the author, he would quickly erase all descriptions of himself. His humility and sensitivity made all praises and embellishments unbearable to him.

Too Much Honor

In Elul of the year 5685, the Chafetz Chaim and the Gerer Rebbe (the author of *Imrei Emet*) traveled in two separate passenger compartments aboard the same train to collect funds for the community. Along the way, the train stopped for a few minutes in a certain town.

In that town there lived a wealthy man who wanted the Chafetz Chaim to step off the train and wish the residents of the town a favorably judgement for the coming year.

The man therefore boarded the passenger compartment where the Chafetz Chaim was sitting and asked him to come out and bless the residents of the town, who were all gathered outside hop-

ing to receive his blessing. However the Chafetz Chaim refused by saying, “It’s too much honor.”

The man asked once again, but the Chafetz Chaim continued to refuse.

He then tried to convince the Chafetz Chaim to simply disembark, not to bless the people, so that everyone could at least see him. Yet again, he declined the request and repeated: “It’s too much honor.”

However our friend didn’t give up. He bribed the ticket inspector to tell the Chafetz Chaim that there was a fire aboard the train, and that all the passengers had to leave immediately. That’s what happened, but the Chafetz Chaim did not believe him and therefore did not leave. Still refusing to give up, the man persuaded the ticket inspector to burn some lime, the odor of which forced the Chafetz Chaim to leave his seat. According to the book *Meir Einei Israel*, the ticket inspector allowed himself to be persuaded into doing all these things. Much to the man’s disappointment, however, when the Chafetz Chaim arose from his seat to leave the train, instead of heading toward the crowd gathered outside in his honor, he walked backwards to reach the second passenger compartment. When he entered it, a crowd rushed to gaze upon the serene face of the Chafetz Chaim, but they saw the Gerer Rebbe standing up to his full height before the Chafetz Chaim.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

Serving G-d with Joy

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto recounts that his uncle, Rabbi Meir Pinto, composed 149 supplications in parallel to the 149 psalms composed by King David. Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan had a type of violin with four strings, in parallel to the four elements of nature: Mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. Each of these strings emitted seven different sounds, like the seven spheres.

I would like to explain this: When the tzaddik played his violin, he connected all the Worlds (the World of Emanation, the World of Creation, the World of Formation, and the World of Action) through his music. We know, according to Jewish mysticism, that it is man who connects all these Worlds, and that he is the path leading to their source.

In regard to this subject, we may consult the book *Chesed L’Avraham* by Rabbi Avraham Azoulay. It seems to me, the servant and grandson of our teacher Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, that these songs were necessary because the prophetic spirit only rests upon a prophet who experiences joy. In fact the Prophet Elisha, King Saul, and others received a spirit of prophesy only when the harp was played. As explained in the books of Samuel and Kings, joy helps a prophet to connect all the Worlds, and it alone allows the presence of G-d’s spirit or a spirit of prophesy.