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PEACE AND IDLENESS PREVENT THE STUDY OF TORAH

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

Our Sages have said, “Jacob desired to settle down in peace when he was struck with the tragic news concerning Joseph” (Bereshith Rabba 84:1).

Jacob truly wanted to enjoy peace in this world, a world that did not belong to him because he had shared worlds with his brother Esau (Tanna d'bey Eliyahu Zutah). How could he have wanted to rest peacefully in this world? And why was he struck with the bad news concerning Joseph, as opposed to another child?

It is because Jacob, a man who symbolizes the toil of study, didn't want peace for enjoyment's sake. Rather, he wanted to alleviate the burden of exile for his children. G-d, however, didn't want Jacob to rest in tranquility, for in such a case his children would have been at risk of diminishing their studies and would have forgotten the Torah. The word **וישב** (“and he rested”) can be restructured as **וי שב** meaning that if Jacob had only aspired to rest in peace (**שב**), he would have misled future generations to search for comfort. This would have had consequences that are disastrous (**וי**) because the Torah is only acquired through toil.

Thus it was the tragedy of Joseph (and precisely Joseph) that grabbed hold of Jacob because of his name; Joseph means, “who adds, who grows” (Taanith 31a). One must put in extra effort, without respite, to study Torah because this is the only thing that can rectify our exile.

The Mishpat Tzaddik confirms our hypothesis. He cites the amazing words of the Zohar as follows: “If the Children of Israel knew why G-d reprimands them more than any other people, they would understand that G-d gave up on what is due to Him” (Zohar III:66a). He explains that G-d created His legions of angels to serve Him. When He created the Jewish people, He fashioned them on the model of the Celestial Assembly (Zohar II:169b; III:66a). G-d made it such that everything that happens in the world depends on Jews. When Israel abandons the Torah and the service of G-d, the angels also stop short, for everything depends on the acts of men. When Israel abandons the path of Torah and no longer serves G-d, the Celestial Court ceases to fulfill the will of G-d, as it is written, “When Israel does not conduct itself with perfection in this world, the Name of G-d is not complete in Heaven. And so G-d says, ‘If you know that

your actions prevent all the numerous legions from serving Me, you also know that you don't deserve to continue living in this world, not even for an hour” (Zohar III:4b).

It's thanks to the Torah of Jacob – who is the head of the Celestial Chariot (Bereshith Rabba 82:7), “whose portrait is engraved on the Divine Throne” (Pesikta Zutah Gen 28:13) and “who himself is a throne” (Zohar I:97a) “whom G-d is so proud of” (Isa 49:3) “that is the foundation of His splendor” (Zohar III:32a) – that we glorify G-d. If Jacob rests, be it only in thought (even for the intention of devoting himself to Torah), he commits a sin that is transmitted to all his descendants.

On the basis of this, I would like to explain the expression “the voice is the voice of Jacob” (Gen 27:22). Why is the word “voice” used twice? It is because in this world, when one hears the voice of the Torah being uttered by the Children of Israel, the voice of Jacob is also being heard in Heaven. It is towards him that all the legions of angels turn. They know that the voice of the Torah is also being heard here in the world below and that men serve G-d, as it is written, “When Israel is united in this world to serve G-d, the Name of G-d is praised in the Celestial world” (Sifre Brachah 33:5). When the voice of the Torah is heard, the hand of Esau does not prevail (Bereshith Rabba 65:20), and no people can conquer Israel when he follows the ways of the Torah (Ketubot 66b). If not, Israel could not survive, not even for an instant. Why? Because when the Children of Israel forget the Torah, G-d also turns His face away in the world above, angels can no longer see the image of Jacob engraved on the Throne of Glory, and so they halt their service. Only G-d has the image of Jacob before Him, and thanks to him G-d does not punish his children with the severity that they deserve, as it is written, “when the Children of Israel sin, G-d acts as if He were sleeping” (Yalkut Shimoni Esther 1057).

May the Name of G-d be praised, Who granted more importance to the honor of the Children of Israel than to the heavenly angels that carry out His word, for it is only the study of Torah and the service of the Children of Israel that give the angels the strength to sing G-d's praises. The Children of Israel count more than the angels because the angels stand “upright”, whereas

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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

the Children of Israel “walk about”, as it is written, “I will grant you passage among these [angels] who stand here” (Zec 3:7). The Children of Israel can be compared to the electricity that makes a motor function, which in turn runs mechanisms. In the same way, Israel makes all the worlds function.

The Sages have said, “When G-d gave the Torah, He silenced all of creation” (Shemot Rabba 29:9). Why was that necessary? Up to the giving of the Torah, the angels obeyed the will of G-d, but from the moment it was given to Israel, the latter became the world’s bearer of destiny, and all depends on Israel’s merit.

At the moment that the Torah was given, the entire world held itself silent, and there was a brief interruption in the angels’ service. It is only through the study of Torah that the world continues to exist, and the angels and the Seraphim employed in the matters of this world pursue their affairs when they hear the voice of Jacob, the voice of Torah that makes itself heard in the mouth of the Children of Israel.

In Memory Of The Tzaddikim

Rabbi Chai Taieb Lomet

One of the great Tzaddikim of Tunis was Rabbi Hai Taieb, of blessed memory, who lived from 5504 to 5596 (1774 to 1836). He was a Gaon who knew both the revealed and the concealed matters of Torah, all while remaining humble, discreet, and modest about it.

Once, in the middle of winter, it no longer rained and so a draught ensued. The ground had cracked open with gaping fissures, and desolate fields appeared all fractured and split. The empty wells that had always quenched everyone’s thirst remained dry. Each morning, people would raise their eyes to Heaven with great hope as they awaited a rain cloud rising in the western sky. It would bring water – life. The rabbis of the community remained praying, fervently reciting psalms. They concluded by proclaiming a fast in order to arouse Heavenly mercy.

In the home of Rabbi Hai Taieb, life was taking its normal course as he rose at dawn to serve his Creator. He was always quietly pondering Torah, and when the rabbis announced the fast, he was deep in his books, far removed from everything. His devoted wife also awoke at dawn, ready to serve him.

Rabbi Hai finished his ardent prayers to his Creator.

“Please prepare me a cup of coffee,” he said to his wife.

Her eyes opened wide in astonishment and responded by telling her husband, “Didn’t you hear the decision of the Rabbis? They proclaimed a fast so that it may rain.”

“Really? I didn’t know. All right then, prepare me a cup of coffee all the same. I’ll be right back.”

Rabbi Hai Taieb left his home, raises his eyes to Heaven and, as if he were a son addressing his father, he said to Him who holds the keys, “Master of the universe, Your children are in need of rain. I beg You, don’t prevent rain from falling!”

At that moment, his non-Jewish neighbor found himself not far

However if Israel abandons the Torah, the world would not survive: “If My covenant [the Torah] with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth ...”, which means, “If it were not for the Torah, the Heavens and the Earth would no longer survive” (Nedarim 32a). For the angels assigned to the matters of this world perform their tasks dependent on the Children of Israel, and if the latter rest, the angels also rest.

Every Jew has a great responsibility to the Torah, especially during vacation time, free time, and during the long winter nights. If they don’t study, they put the world in danger. We learn from Jacob that one should not seek out comfort, and “Jepthath in his generation was equal to Samuel in his generation” (Rosh Hashanah 25b). If our efforts are not equal to our potential, our punishment will be great. On the other hand, if we elevate ourselves in the study of Torah to the degree that we can comprehend and understand, we will awaken Divine Favor in the supernal worlds, and we will glorify G-d in all His splendor.

from Rabbi Hai Taieb’s home when he suddenly heard him speaking to G-d!

He was still feeling surprised when suddenly the sky darkened and a torrential rain began to fall.

Frightened by the commotion caused by the rain and the thunder, the Rebbetzin said to her husband, “The world is liable to get destroyed by such a deluge!”

Rabbi Hai came back to the front door and implored, “G-d Almighty, I beg you, send us rains of blessing.”

The thunder immediately stopped and a gently pouring rain began filling the wells. The public fast was annulled and cries of joy resounded from all sides.

While Rabbi Hai Taieb was going back inside, his non-Jewish neighbor, who had just seen everything that had happened, ran in a panic to the owner of his house (the house that the neighbor was renting). Trembling with fear, he knocked at the door.

“What’s happening?” the owner asked.

“I beg you, I immediately want to change houses! I can’t live in the neighborhood of a man who performs such wonders! If you had heard how he had triggered all the rain with a few words! What will I do if this Jew, who is a Tzaddik, asks G-d to kill me? Have pity on me!”

The man quickly prepared his horse in order to travel to Rabbi Hai. He regretted having to separate from his extremely well paying tenant. Soon afterwards, both of them arrived at the Rav’s.

“Rabbi, your neighbor says that a lion lives in your neighborhood. He’s afraid that one day he’ll be killed.”

“G-d prevents me,” Rabbi Hai replied, “from doing harm to anyone. But promise me as well that you will not wrong a Jew.”

The non-Jew embraced the hand of the Tzaddik, and swore with great reverence to always respect the Jews.

The Baker's Dream

A Teaching of the Maggid of Dubno

“In three days Pharaoh will lift your head from you and hang you on a tree. Birds will eat your flesh from you” (Gen 40:19).

Joseph had just come from giving a very optimistic interpretation for the chief cupbearer. The chief baker had heard everything and was anxious to present his own dream for Joseph's ruling. However the explanation he received was quite different than his colleague's – in three days he would perish! How could Joseph know that such was his destiny?

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us through a parable.

A great artist had painted a portrait of a man holding a basket of fruit. The painting was magnificent: Apples, pears, grapes, and cherries so real that people came from afar to admire the scene. One day, the directors of the city presented their greatest works of art during an outdoor exposition. Man with Basket quickly became the center of attention, not only of the people, but also of the birds! Fooled by the utterly realistic appearance of the fruit, they had landed by the hundreds on the canvas. The stunned spectators watched as they pecked at the crimson cherries, the golden and juicy-looking pears, and the brilliantly red apples.

It was only after having given a few vain pecks on the canvas that the birds left, greatly annoyed. Their hope of having a delicious meal had completely evaporated.

Remarks came from all sides:

“Astonishing!”

“Splendid!”

“Fantastic!”

“It's a true wonder!”

The mayor was delighted that his city had become, thanks to this work of art, one of the most famous cities in the country. The painting's degree of perfection was such that he offered a great reward to whoever could discover in it the least fault. As soon as he announced that, people rushed over in great number, for who didn't want to win a prize of such great value?

Yet how could a flaw be found, since the birds themselves had been fooled? It seemed completely hopeless.

However a stranger, with a very intelligent look to him, claimed to have found a small defect.

“Look here,” he explained, “if I were to stand here in the garden with a basket in my hand, no birds at all would dare approach – even if the fruits in my basket were as appetizing as those in the painting. So how does one explain that the birds were trying to grab some pieces from the painting? What's the difference?”

“It's very simple. The man in the portrait is not sufficiently lifelike. The birds are therefore not afraid to land on his hand and peck in complete tranquility.”

Everyone admitted that he was right.

The fruits were, without a doubt, a masterpiece. However the image of the man remained but a likeness.

The stranger walked away with the prize.

The dream of the chief baker was like that painting. In his dream he said, “... three baskets of fine bread were upon my head. And in the upper basket were all kinds of food for Pharaoh, the work of a baker. And the birds were eating them out of the basket from upon my head” (Gen 40:16-17).

Joseph understood that the birds didn't fear landing on his head to serve themselves because it didn't seem real to them, meaning that in his dream the chief baker was no longer alive. In three days he would be nothing but a simple reflection of his former self. And this is precisely what happened, as the passage states, “And the chief baker he [Pharaoh] hanged, as Joseph interpreted to them” (Gen 40:22).

Eishet Chayil

Lighting Candles On Hannukah

According to Rav Ovadia Yossef, Zatsal

1. Women usually do not perform any work while the Hanukkah lights burn. During the holiday, it is good to avoid heavy household work.

2. Women are under the obligation to light the candles of Hanukkah because women played an active role in this miracle. Consequently, if a woman's husband knows that he will be coming home late at night, it is preferable that he ask her to light the Hanukkah candles at sunset. He is thus discharged from his obligation.

3. Friday of Hanukkah, we light the candles of Hanukkah and the candles of Shabbat.

4. Women are exempt from reciting the Hallel during Hanukkah. However if they wish to say it, they may do so, but without pronouncing the blessing.