

הנה הדרך ללכת אחרי ה' **THE PATH TO FOLLOW**

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TORAH STUDY LEADS TO BLESSING, TO THE LIGHT OF TORAH AND TO THE SHECHINAH (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, that you hearken to the commandments of the L-RD your G-d that I command you today. And the curse: If you do not hearken to the commandments of the L-RD you G-d" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

Two questions arise concerning these first verses of Pasha Re'eh:

1. In dealing with the blessing, why does Scripture not stipulate, "If you hearken..." as is the format of the curse?
2. Why does Scripture begin with the singular verb re'eh, then continues with the plural lifneichem ("before you")? Why not use the plural re'ou?

We know that in this world, a man should primarily aim at understanding his obligations and seek to conform himself to G-d's will. If he realizes that he will have to give an accounting for all his deeds at the time of his death, how can he then spend his life pursuing trivialities? The Gemara teaches that at the giving of the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, raised the mountain over the Children of Israel like a barrel and told them, "If you accept the Torah, good. If you do not, here will be your graves" (Shabbat 88a). Why this threat, since they had prepared themselves for 49 days to receive the Torah? They had purified themselves and reached the level of "we will do, and we will hear," uttering this with all their heart like a single man (Mechilta Yitro).

It was because the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted the Children of Israel to understand the devastating effects of the evil inclination, which strives to place obstacles before the one who engages in Torah study. It overwhelms him with ordeals in order to dissuade him from studying and to bring him down to Gehinnom. This was represented by the threat of

the mountain over their heads. A man should always learn to endure suffering with love (Berachot 5a). He will then dominate the evil inclination and come even closer to the Holy One, blessed be He. In effect, Hashem told the Children of Israel: "If you are content with receiving the Torah and you rid yourselves of the evil inclination, all will go well with you. If not, you will fall into its trap and it will bury you." Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, sought only the good of His people.

This is like a doctor who compels his patient to take a bitter-tasting medicine. In the beginning the patient refuses, thinking that the doctor wants to try him even more. Yet when he takes the medication, he comes to the realization that the doctor only wants what's good for him, and that it is because of the doctor's medication that he has begun to get better. He therefore expresses his gratitude and from then on is careful to take his medication on time in order to completely recover from his illness.

Hashem tells the Jew, "See? If you put an effort into diligently studying a book of Torah, you will arrive at shmiyah (listening), to understand and to carry out its directives, and then you will be blessed. Do not behave like those who are content with following a Torah course without consulting any book. If you do not study, the Torah will not penetrate into you, and in such a case you will risk neglecting My mitzvot."

The numerical value of re'eh with the kollel (i.e., plus 1) is 207, the same value as ohr (light). If we open a book and perceive light in it, everything that we study will embed itself in the heart and mind. The ears will also hear what we study and we will be protected from all sicknesses brought about by the evil inclination. Concerning the blessing, the passage stipulates "that you hearken" in order to teach us that it is only by

Torah study that we can conquer the evil inclination and overcome the obstacles that it places before us (*Torat Kohanim Bechukotai 3*). This is our duty, our obligation. Like the doctor who compels his patient to take the medication that he has prescribed, the Holy One, blessed be He, obliges us to engage in Torah study, the best medicine against the evil inclination (*Kiddushin 30b*).

If we abstain from doing so, our faith in Hashem will begin to falter. We will sometimes follow G-d's way (by listening to Torah lectures from time to time), and sometimes (G-d forbid) the way of the evil inclination from the net in which we will end up falling into. The evil inclination acts in the following way: At first it tells a man, "Just do this" (*Shabbat 105b*), and in the end he is completely separated from G-d. At first a man goes less and less often to Torah classes, and at the end he does not go at all.

We can thus understand the proximity of Parsha Eikev to Parsha Re'eh. To be worthy of seeing (re'eh) the light of the Torah, a person must humble and abase himself completely (like the heel – eikev – which is at the bottom of the body). A person must even observe the mitzvot that are trodden underfoot by the heel (again, eikev) in order to carry out the more difficult mitzvot and in this way to completely observe the Torah.

As for the proximity of Parshiot Eikev, Re'eh, and Shoftim, this teaches us that when we look downwards, to the level of eikev (meaning, when we think of our end, as Rabbi Yaakov Abuhatzera shows us in his book *Pituche Chotam*), we name judges and guards over ourselves responsible for controlling our behavior. And if we see a door by which the evil inclination wishes to enter, we then appoint a guardian who will defend the door from access. We can then be blessed with the most important blessing of all: Understanding the secrets of the Torah and elevating ourselves through intensive study. However, if we do not humble ourselves before Hashem (as we have seen, eikev implies humility), we will be studying Torah in vain and will attain nothing. This is because the evil inclination aims primarily at making us forget the concept of eikev in order to gain the advantage over us. Yet if we nullify our ego and envision our end, we can easily conquer the evil inclination and receive an everlasting blessing from G-d.

When we succeed in doing so and become worthy of sensing G-d's glory, we also influence and direct others toward the good and encourage them to engage in Torah study. Re'eh: At the beginning I was the only one to see (re'eh) and to let myself be

influenced. Later on, because to the light of the Torah in which I was bathed, I can encourage others to hear and begin studying Torah, which explains the plural tishmeun ("you will hearken").

Speaking of Moses, the verse states, "*Vehaish [And the man] Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth*" (*Numbers 12:3*). The term haish is apparently superfluous. This is because, due to his complete self-nullification before each of the Children of Israel and before G-d, the Shechinah (Y-h) resided in him and permeated all the Jewish people. It was due to his merit that Hashem was favorable towards Israel. Our Sages teach that during the time of Balaam, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not get angry with them even once (*Berachot 7a*). The vav of the word vehaish designates G-d's influence. We have Y-h (G-d) and ish (man), which denotes the enthusiasm and devotion that our teacher Moses imbued them with. We have seen that when a man makes concessions to his wife and vice-versa, they make the Divine Presence – symbolized by G-d's Name Y-h (formed by the yud of ish and the hei of isha) – dwell among them (*Sotah 17a*).

It is primarily the Tzaddikim who are endowed with this virtue of humility. The Gemara recounts that when Rabbi Eliezer was sick, Rabbi Yochanan went to visit him. Since his house was dark, Rabbi Yochanan rolled up his sleeves and the house brightened. Rabbi Eliezer then began to weep. "Why are you crying?" Rabbi Yochanan asked him. "For this beauty that must be buried in the sand," replied Rabbi Eliezer (*Berachot 5b*).

Why did Rabbi Eliezer begin to cry precisely when Rabbi Yochanan came to visit him?

It was because Rabbi Eliezer perceived the profound light that radiated from Rabbi Yochanan. He understood that it certainly consisted of the light of the Torah, and he concluded that if Rabbi Yochanan had reached such a level, it was basically because of his humility. He then began to cry from the joy of seeing the greatness of his guest. Rabbi Eliezer may have also cried because he himself had never reached such a high level. Therein lies the virtue of the Tzaddikim, men who only see the greatness of their fellow and who lament over their own deficiencies and constantly try to elevate themselves by asking when their level will reach that of their ancestors (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 25*). Because of their modesty (an aspect of eikev), they carry out their role in this world properly and merit to clearly see everything that surrounds them.

STORIES OF TZADIKIM

ENCHANTED PARADISE

Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz assembled his disciples and told them the following story:

"Before closing his eyes for the final time, the great defender of Israel, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, may his merit protect us, said to those gathered around him on his deathbed: 'Are you not surprised that all the Tzaddikim who moved heaven and earth all their lives to annul evil decrees against the Jewish people remained silent when they rejoined the Celestial Assembly? Why did they not shake the Throne of Glory? Where is the Tzaddik of Sassow, Rabbi Moshe Leib, who loved Israel so much that even a baby crying in its cradle gave him no rest? Where is the holy Baal Shem Tov himself? Why are they not encouraging Mashiach to come and put an end to the sufferings of Israel?' Nobody in his entourage, however, could answer these questions. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then gathered his strength and said, 'When a Tzaddik ascends to Heaven, a place in Gan Eden is immediately made for him. Angels welcome him with love, gather him in their arms, and lead him to palaces of glory. The utter splendor of a palace's brilliance and the radiance from on high blinds the eyes of a Tzaddik. Because of his amazement, he completely forgets the anguish of this world and the suffering of the people who remain in it. A Tzaddik would suffer if he were to separate himself, be it only for a moment, from the worlds of splendor of the Ten Sephirot to look upon the suffering of men. Everything concerning them in this lower world holds almost no interest for him.' Rabbi Levi Yitzchak reflected for a little and then assured them by saying, 'I promise you, however, that I will not be blinded there. I will not soar about in Heaven in complete serenity while here below the Jewish people live in pain and poverty as they anxiously await Mashiach. I will not listen to the voices of angels and I will not enter Gan Eden. I will stand before the Creator and shake the Throne of Glory. I will not rest until my prayer for the Jewish people is granted. Only then will I take my place with the Tzaddikim in palaces of glory.' "

The Rabbi of Munkacz went on with his story:

"When Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, the Tzaddik of Ujhely, heard what the Tzaddik of Berditchev had promised before his death, he said: 'Well, you are certainly asking yourselves what happened to the great defender, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Why did he also fail to end the exile? Had he not promised that he wouldn't be blinded, that he would shake the Throne of Glory and that the heavens would be torn asunder?' The Tzaddik of Ujhely continued: 'When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak left this world and his soul ascended to the heavens, the ministering angels welcomed him and were about to lead him to the palaces of Gan Eden, just as they had done with other Tzaddikim. However Rabbi Levi Yitzchak stubbornly said to them, "Leave me alone with your Gan Eden – I will not be blinded by it! I left the lower world where mortals suffer and await the redemption of Mashiach. I will go to the Throne of Glory and present my case before the Creator Himself! I will convene a Din Torah and not leave from there until the dark exile below is ended. Only then may you lead me to Gan Eden!" A noise was heard from the midst of the Celestial Assembly. Since the time that there had been a Gan Eden in the heavens, nothing like this had happened before. The place of a Tzaddik such as Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev had been set aside in

Gan Eden! Besides, all the great Tzaddikim, all the Tannaim and Amoraim, the entire holy congregation of the Baal Shem Tov, awaited him there. However Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was obstinate: "I beg your pardon, but I will not enter! I fear that the brilliance of the splendor of these palaces will turn my heart away from the sufferings of those living below." What did the angels do? As we know, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak loved music and also played the violin, with which he accompanied his melodies of Kaddish. The angels went to get King David and placed him near the gates of Gan Eden. King David then began to play one of his psalms on the violin, and little by little the sweetness of the melody drew Rabbi Levi Yitzchak up to its gates. At the moment that the Tzaddik's feet crossed the threshold of Gan Eden, he was blinded by its brilliance. Thus he too, the great Tzaddik, also forgot us and abandoned us to our anguish.'

'However,' the Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe of Ujhely said, 'I do not know how to sing and I have never held a violin in my hands. King David will not draw me into Gan Eden. I will stand outside, prostrating myself before the Creator. I will take a vessel filled with tears to spread out before the Throne of Glory, and I will not move from there until I hear the footsteps of Mashiach.'

The Rabbi of Munkacz was quiet. He interrupted his visionary story, lost in his thoughts. One of his disciples arose and asked, "What happened to Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, the Tzaddik of Ujhely, after he left this world? Had he not promised that he would not rest until the steps of Mashiach were heard?"

The Rabbi of Munkacz answered his disciples:

"So, you want to know what happened to the Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe of Ujhely? Before him too the gates of Gan Eden were immediately opened, but he was obstinate and refused to enter. The angels begged him, but he had only one answer: 'No! My heart will not permit me to sail into a sea of light with the greatest Tzaddikim, while below mortals drown in a sea of tears.' Once again a storm arose in the Celestial Assembly. Was it possible that a Tzaddik such as Rabbi Moshe, who had arrived in Heaven filled with Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds, was standing outside Gan Eden? This time as well, the angels found a way to make Rabbi Moshe forget his promises. What did they do? The Tzaddik of Ujhely was a tremendous Torah scholar and greatly loved to discuss difficulties in Torah. He was also a tremendous speaker who used to speak in public for hours. The angels approached him and told him that beyond the gates of Gan Eden was a group of Talmidei Chachamim who wished to hear words of Torah from him. A terribly powerful desire to utter words of Torah began to fill Rabbi Moshe. He approached the group and started to present novel teachings to them and words that ear had never heard and mouth had never spoken. Up to the present time, he is still discussing Torah with that group in Gan Eden, and once again we no longer see an end to the exile."

The Tzaddik of Munkacz finished his story by saying, "Thus, everyone in Heaven dwells in the presence of the Shechinah and forgets our world below. The merit of our holy Tzaddikim certainly protects us in this world and in the World to Come, but we can only count on our Father in Heaven, for He never forgets."