

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

# Nº 105 NOAH

3 HESHVAN 5766  
NOVEMBER.3.05

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## THE DUTY TO PERFORM THE COMMANDMENTS WITHOUT ULTERIOR MOTIVES (FROM RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

**O**ne must study Torah even in a selfish way, for in so doing one will arrive at studying it in an unselfish way” (Pesachim 50b). The principle goal is to study Torah for its own sake and to obey the commandments as much as possible, to the point that in the morning blessings that precede the daily study of Torah, we ask that we “know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake” (Alfassi, Berachot 11b).

The Sages say, “Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, asked Shem the son of Noah, ‘How were you saved from the flood?’ And Shem answered him, ‘It was through the merit of taking care of and feeding the animals that were in the Ark. We were always running around day and night taking care of their needs, for there are some animals that eat during the day and sleep during the night, and there are others that eat at night and sleep in the day. It even happened that a lion struck and bit my father Noah because he was late in bringing him his meal’ ” (see Bereshith Rabba 30:6).

Some questions may be raised concerning this subject:

1. The Meil Tzedakah asks how it is possible to say that they were saved for having taken care of the animals. The Torah explicitly testifies that G-d told Noah, “It is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation” (Genesis 7:1), meaning that they were saved because they were upright men. Why, therefore, did Eliezer ask by what merit they were saved? Did he not know that they were upright men?

2. Shem’s reply must be analyzed. Was it really for having taken care of the animals that they were saved? How could this be, since in order to have meat to eat after the flood, they fed the animals for their own benefit? What kind of favor did they render to the animals in that case? If the verse says that they were saved by reason of their piety, why didn’t Shem say that to Eliezer? Why did he tell him that it was for taking care of the animals?

Noah and his sons feared that they would become arrogant and consider themselves righteous, an unforgivable sin for which they would be punished (Berachot 4a). This also explains why Noah did not enter the Ark until the waters rose on the earth and G-d pushed him in (Bereshith Rabba 32:5). He did not think that he merited living while others perished. Noah and his sons refrained from believing that it was due to their own merit that they were saved.

This explains the care with which they maintained the animals. Noah and his sons did not think of taking care of the animals so that they could have something to eat after the flood. They guarded themselves against such a thought, attributing their survival to the care they gave the animals, doing so in order that no one could say that their efforts were performed out of selfishness. They obeyed G-d’s command only, which effectively directed them to make provisions for the animals, as it is written: “And as for you, take yourself of

every food that is eaten and gather it in to yourself, that it shall be as food for you and for them” (Genesis 6:21). This consisted of all types of food in order to provide for the needs of every animal (Tanhuma 58:2). They fulfilled their duty by occupying themselves with providing the animals with as much care as possible, and in the final analysis it was this that saved them from the flood. The lion is proof that they acted in conformity to G-d’s command, for the meat of a lion is not edible, yet Noah continued to nourish the lions even after one bit him. This proves that they acted in an unselfish manner.

We may yet add another reason. At the time, the attribute of Divine justice hovered over the world, and the Accuser said, “the work of His hands is being drowned” (Megillah 10b). This is why, in order that the Accuser not plead that there was no reason for G-d to save them while the entire world was being destroyed, they were busy performing good deeds, ones “that save from death” (Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Zutah 1). As it is written, “charity [tzeddakah] rescues from death” (Proverbs 10:2), and they annulled their will before the Divine will. This was because the Accuser was pointing his finger at them and demanding justice: “Why did they not reprimand their fellows? Why should they live while others die?”

The answer to this is that they held the interest of the animals – thanks to whom they were saved – as their top priority, and they forsook their own comfort in order to fulfill the task that G-d had entrusted them with. They occupied themselves with taking care of the animals (both clean and unclean) with equal devotion, and it was because of this that they were saved from the flood.

This is the question that Abraham’s servant Eliezer had asked Shem, namely: “What merit saved you from the flood? G-d’s creations perished, and you didn’t reprimand your neighbors as you should have in order to lead them to repentance and be saved. And if you think that you were saved because of being upright,

this is because your pride leads you in error! Perhaps you took care of the animals in order to gladly partake of their meat after the flood? Perhaps you only acted out of self interest!” (See Sanhedrin 108b).

To this, Shem the son of Noah replied that they had no thoughts of this type whatsoever, and no intention of personally profiting from the meat of the animals. The attribute of strict justice did not have any grievance against them either, for everything they did for the animals was done in a strictly unselfish way. The proof for this is that they continued to feed the animals even after “a lion struck and bit my father Noah.”

From this we learn a lesson that is valid for everyone: When one obeys G-d’s will, it is proper to do so without ulterior motives, as it is said, “Fulfill His will as you would your own will” (Perkei Avoth 2:4). Do it solely because G-d commands it. If G-d testifies that a man is upright, he should not feel proud of himself, for “Every haughty heart is an abomination to the L-RD” (Proverbs 16:5) and “G-d cannot live in the same world as the conceited” (Sotah 5a). A person must submit himself to G-d with humility and feel that he is unworthy of being called upright. If not, then to make him lose any merit that he may have acquired, the evil inclination will chime in his ear: “How righteous you are!”

It is written, “Noah did according to everything G-d commanded him” (Genesis 6:22), which “consisted of the construction of the Ark” (Bereshith Rabba 31:14). Furthermore it is stated, “And Noah did according to everything that the L-RD had commanded him” (Genesis 7:5), which consisted of his entry into the Ark (Rashi ad loc). Even if he did not merit being saved by his virtues, he merited it for his good care of the animals in the Ark. He built the Ark, and in the final analysis he entered into it as G-d had commanded him, doing so without pride and solely to obey G-d to the letter.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

### RABBI YEHOSHUA LEIB DISKIN – THE RAV OF BRISK

**A**t the gates of the old city of Jerusalem, lying on the side of a beautiful hill, stands a great and imposing building that shelters orphans. This house is known as Beit Hayetomim Diskin. Who was the man whose name this institution carries?

He did an enormous amount for Jewish children in Eretz Israel, as well as for Jewish settlements in the Holy Land.

Our Rav, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, was born on Kislev 10, 5579 (1818) to the Gaon Rabbi Binyamin, the Rav of Grodno and later of Lomza.

From his youth, Yehoshua Leib was known as a child prodigy, a boy who marveled everyone around him by the keenness of his intelligence, his incredibly comprehension, his capability for diligence, and his fear of Heaven. People say that all he required was a quick glance at a wall in order to tell you how many bricks it contained. At the age of nine, he heard people saying that his father was a Tzaddik, and so in his heart he decided to walk in his father's footsteps, thus acquiring many sterling character traits.

At the age of 18 his father called to him and said, "My son, today you are 18 years old. The moment has come for you to completely take on the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." These simple words of his father penetrated his heart and made a powerful impression that he would never forget.

At the age of 25, after the death of his father, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib was called upon to replace him as Rav of Lomza. Already at that time he was known as an incredible genius, an expert in all fields of Torah, and all the great Torah figures esteemed him tremendously.

Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik considered four great men of Israel as being comparable to the Rishonim: Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the father of Rabbi Chaim), the Malbim, and Rabbi Israel of Salant (heard from Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Rav of Boston).

By nature, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib was a man of truth who held very firm views. He did not allow himself to be influenced by the wealthy or the brutal, and he feared no man. The verse, "You shall fear no man" (Deuteronomy 1:17) guided all his steps and his way of life.

Upon becoming the Rav of Lomza, he learned that one of the members of the community had the intention of opening his business up on Shabbat, given that he had allowed himself to have it operated by a non-Jew. This man was very wealthy, greatly honored, and quite stubborn. The Rav, however, did not hesitate for an instant, quickly running to the man's home and reprimanding him, "Fool! Rasha! You crude being – you want to desecrate the holy Sabbath?" The wealthy man stammered, "But Rabbeinu, what have I done already?" The Rav thundered back: "What? Am I to wait until you desecrate G-d's Name in public? I am not leaving," he exclaimed with full voice, "until you vow to the G-d of Israel that you will not open your business on Shabbat!"

After a certain time, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib was thrown out of town.

He then began to travel from town to town, without finding any rest for his turbulent spirit. He became the Rav of some large and important cities, namely Mezritch, Kovno, Shklov, and finally Brisk (in Lithuania).

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib did not find peace in Brisk either. An insolent

resident of that city set a trap for him that risked landing him in a Russian prison. The lawyer defending the Rav invited him to his home to speak about the case, which they discussed for two hours. During all that time, however, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib kept his eyes closed, prompting his surprised lawyer to ask why he refused to look at him.

"It is a Halachah," replied the Rav. "It is forbidden to look at the face of a wicked man, and you told me that you do not observe Torah and mitzvot." Taken aback in astonishment, his lawyer said, "I'm sure that the Rav is clean of all sin and that the accusation brought against him is a lie. A man who conducts himself according to his sense of truth – not allowing himself to be influenced even by his lawyer – it is clear to me that such a man can do no wrong."

While Rabbi Yehoshua Leib was declared innocent, he was nevertheless forced to leave the country. He rejoiced upon hearing this verdict, which allowed him to fulfill his dream of leaving for Eretz Israel.

In 5638, our teacher arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, and all the great men of the city welcomed him with considerable honor, saying that a lion had arrived from Babylon.

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib remained in Jerusalem for 21 years. He established the Ohel Moshe yeshiva, and gave amazing lectures there. He also set up courses given by exceptional Torah figures on tractate Zeraim (laws dependant on the land). People put great effort into their work, such that in a month they only managed to study one chapter.

His disciples recounted that when they sometimes had difficulty understand a passage by Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura (a commentator on the Mishnah, who was among the pioneers in settling Eretz Israel in the 16th century), the Rav of Brisk had the custom of saying: "We are forced to explain the words of the Rav according to his Halachot, for he was the Rav of Jerusalem." During the dry season in Jerusalem, he sent a minyan of Talmidei Chachamim to pray by the grave of Rav Ovadia Bartenura on the slopes of the Mounts of Olives (taken from the book *Betuv Yerushalayim*).

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib helped many of those who were building the first settlements in Eretz Israel. In 5641, heaving learned that the village of Petah Tikva was going to be destroyed, he put all his energies into supporting those who went to settle there.

The Rav of Brisk was a great Tzaddik, one whose every gesture was dictated by Halachah. He was attentive to everything concerning Judaism, such as the observance of Shabbat, Kashrut, Shechita, Jewish education, and modesty.

His influence on the public at large was extensive. G-d enabled him to succeed in all his ways and endeavors, and never was he the cause of something that was improper.

People say that he was once writing a get (divorce) at his home, when all of a sudden he stopped writing. The next day people realized that the woman asking for the divorce had lied, and that the man she had claimed to be her husband was in fact not him. Rather, she had brought some other man in place of her husband. His family said to Rabbi Yehoshua Leib, "The Rav doesn't believe in miracles, but is there no greater miracle than this?"

## STORY OF THE WEEK - JUST HOW FAR SHOULD DEVOTION GO?

**T**hey shall be to you as Tzitzit, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the L-RD and fulfill them" (Numbers 15:39).

From where did Rav Aryeh Levine learn devotion? From a story that involved two brothers, both Tzaddikim: Rav Moshe Askenaz and his brother Rav Yitzchak (the author of the Kabbalah work Brit Olam). During the entire year, Rav Moshe would enclose himself in the four cubits of Halachah, wandering about in villages and teaching Torah to the children of the townspeople. He earned a very difficult living and went about his Torah study and prayer very discreetly. He came back home only for the holidays, with a small moneybag for his family to subsist on. Now according to the customs of chassidim of times past, who would devote themselves to a particular mitzvah and cling to it wholeheartedly, this Tzaddik paid particular attention to the mitzvah of Tzitzit, and he continuously wore an Arba Kanfot (four-cornered garment) that comprised, in accordance with Torah law, Tzitzit.

With his moneybag in hand prepared for the expenses of the Passover holiday that was soon approaching, Rav Moshe decided to return home one Nissan after an absence of several months. He hired a carriage driven by a coachman who was a simple man. The driver knew that Rav Moshe was very meticulous concerning the mitzvah of Tzitzit, to the extent that he would give his life for it. At one point, Rav Moshe descended from the carriage and walked over to one of the rocks by the side of the road, at a distance from the beaten path. However his Tzitzit got entangled in a rock and tore off from his Arba Kanfot. Because of his great attachment to the mitzvah of Tzitzit and his commitment to not walking without wearing Tzitzit, he remained frozen in place, not moving at all. He called to the coachman from afar, but he didn't reply because he perceived a type of misplaced severity in the chassid's custom. After a long discussion, however, the coachman agreed to go to the nearest town and bring him a new Arba Kanfot, but only on condition that Rav Moshe give him his entire moneybag in exchange. Rav Moshe instantly agreed, although it contained everything that he and his family were supposed to subsist on. This he did so as not to detract, even to the slightest degree, from the custom that he had taken upon himself. The story goes that in the end, the coachman did not return, and the chassid was forced to stay in place during an entire day, until finally a passerby had pity and him and lent him an Arba Kanfot so that he could go back home. However the suffering in the Tzaddik's household during that Passover holiday was unimaginable.

Later on Rav Moshe's brother, the Tzaddik Rav Yitzchak (who was respected by all the residents of Lithuania) fell ill, and the doctors gave up hope that he would survive. People sent for Rav Moshe, who was at that time traveling from town to town, and asked that he come and pray for his brother, for the gates of tears are never closed. He arrived and asked those present to leave the patient's room. As soon as the two brothers were alone, the chassid Rav Moshe got up and extended his Tzitzit over his brother's bed. He then said, "Master of the world, there is a mitzvah that I have carried out with all my strength, the mitzvah of Tzitzit. I hereby renounce all reward for this mitzvah in the World to Come if its merit can help my sick brother recover."

Several inhabitants of the town witnessed this event, for they were looking through the cracks of the old wooden house in which Rav Yitzchak lived. They also witnessed the heart-wrenching tears and powerful emotions of the chassid, as he forfeited his entire reward in the World to Come so that his brother the Tzaddik might be healed. All this they saw and recounted to others. In fact, the Tzaddik Rav Yitzchak recovered from his illness because of his brother's prayer and lived another 15 years.

In relating this story, Rabbi Aryeh would say in conclusion, "We learn from here just how far we must go to save our brothers. Where devotion is required, a Jew must lovingly give his very life, not only his body and his possessions, but also his life in the World to Come. That is true devotion!"

### IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM (CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 3)

He replied, "It was not a miracle, but rather the intelligence that G-d gave to man to deduce one thing from another. The couple that came to me to receive a get had a young dog. When I was writing, I saw that the dog was going back and forth from the man to the woman. This surprised me, for was it possible that the dog was familiar with both of them? Before they had decided to divorce, they had surely separated because they could not get along, and so the dog must have remained with only one of them. If the dog had remained with her, why would it run to him? And if the dog was his, why would it come to her? I therefore understood that it was not her husband, and that the dog was familiar with both of them. That is why I stopped writing the get. Later on my suspicions were proved well-founded."

Rabbi Zerach Braverman, the Rav's disciple, tells the following story: "My Rav once sent me to one of the great men of Jerusalem to reprimand him in the Rav's name." Now since Rabbi Zerach was a Tzaddik, it was difficult for him to do this, and upon learning of his hesitation the Rav of Brisk got up, took Rabbi Zerach by the hand, and led him to a drawer by his desk. He then opened it before him and showed him his books of Mussar, books that he studied every day. The Rav made him understand that he didn't undertake even the smallest step without thoroughly thinking things through, and that in this case as well he had properly weighed the matter that he had charged Rabbi Zerach with.

Nevertheless, it was in the field of education that Rabbi Yehoshua Leib invested all his strength. He was absolutely adamant that no modifications, nor any foreign cultural influences, be allowed to penetrate Jewish schools. When he learned that the English missionary hospital was stealing Jewish souls – those of poor and starving children above all – he founded an institution for these neglected children, which is the shelter that is today called Beit Hayetomim Diskin.

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib lived a long time. At the end of Shabbat, on the evening of Tevet 29, 5658, the perpetual flame of the Lomza Beit Midrash was extinguished, and at that very moment Rabbi Yehoshua Leib's pure soul departed from him in Jerusalem.