

The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Lights Of The Menorah Will Never Be Annulled

In regards to Rashi's comments, who states that the expression "towards the face of the Menorah" (*Bamidbar* 8:2) means "towards the middle lamp, which is not on the branches, but on the Menorah itself," the commentators have objected that if such is the case, it would seem that there were only six lights that cast light "towards the face of the Menorah," meaning the central stem, not seven. Why, in that case, does the verse say seven rather than six, since there were only six lamps?

The Things of this World

I would like to explain this according to what our Sages have said in the Gemara: "If a man allows himself to be treated as a desert, upon which everybody treads, his learning will endure. Otherwise it will not" (*Eruvin* 54a). This means that a person must be humble. The Torah only endures with one who does not grow proud, and elsewhere the Torah is compared to water (*Taanith* 7a). Just as water flows from a higher to a lower level, the Torah departs from those who rise up and grow proud, and it descends towards those who act with humility. With them, it endures.

We need to understand why the Sages compared humility to the desert. Is it because they wanted to say that a man must make himself like dust, which people tread upon with their feet, as we read in the prayer: "Let my soul be as dust to all" (*Berachot* 17a)? In that case, they could have said that if a man makes himself as the dust that everyone treads upon with their feet, his study will endure. Yet here, they wanted to teach us another aspect of Torah study, namely that just as a desert is far from inhabited regions and few people pass through it, a person who wants his learning to endure must have, when he studies Torah, views that are far removed from the standard views found in inhabited places. Such a person must also not pay attention to the vanities of this world, but should instead depart from them. All his mundane work must already seem finished to him, to the point that he no longer feels the need to work any further. When a person wholeheartedly distances himself from the concerns of this world, he is promised that his learning will endure.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe in Heaven, which is far removed from inhabited places and from this world. In fact there is no eating or drinking in the World to Come, and therefore when Moshe ascended to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, the ministering angels asked Hashem: "What business has one born of woman among us?" (*Shabbat* 88b). This means: Just who is this son of a woman, such that he wants to resemble us and be like us, among whom there is no eating or drinking? Since he is the son of a woman, a being of flesh and blood, entirely physical, how can he endure in a world without such things, which are indispensable for life?

It is a basic principle that a person only perceives the taste of Torah when he studies it, when he is fully engaged in it and distances himself from the vanities of this world in order to cleave to its words, like a desert that is far removed from inhabited places. How can he achieve this? By studying Torah in a Beit

HaMidrash or a yeshiva. If he studies it in another place, a place that is relatively close to his everyday life, his mind will not be free to devote itself exclusively to Torah.

Far from this World

Moshe also did not receive the Torah before having been far removed from this world – on a high mountain separated from the earth, in a desert far removed from inhabited places – thereby teaching us that it is only acquired when we isolate ourselves and flee the vanities of this world. Furthermore, he could not receive the Torah here on earth, in a material place, for it is completely holy and spiritual, and it could not be absorbed into Moshe's heart in a mundane place. Once he received the Torah at the top of the mountain, he could take it with him into a physical place, into this lowly world, for he had obtained it in a sacred world, the World to Come.

Thus it is written, "When you kindle the lamps" – these lamps are the Torah and *mitzvot*, as it is written: "For a *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23). We can only elevate ourselves in the study of Torah and perceive its taste when we learn in a Beit HaMidrash; at that point, the flame ascends of its own accord.

Concerning those who learn in a Beit HaMidrash, the Sages have said: "Every *talmid chacham* who studies Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him and studies with him" (*Eliya Rabba* 18). This is alluded to in the verse, "When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light" (*Bamidbar* 8:2). The term "seven" alludes to Shabbat, the seventh day, for just as a person cannot perceive the taste of Shabbat without observing it, he also cannot perceive the taste of the Torah's words without going to the Beit HaMidrash and distancing himself from this world. Hence it is written that the seven lights shall cast light, telling us that Torah study – which is as important as Shabbat, a foretaste of the World to Come – casts light towards the face of the Menorah. This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in front of a person who studies Torah. The Menorah symbolizes Him.

This is why the Sages have said, "Aaron did not bring an offering with the other leaders, and so he thought: 'Woe is me! Perhaps it is on my account that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept the tribe of Levi?' The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore said to Moshe: 'Go and tell Aaron: Do not be afraid! You have in store for you an honor greater than this! The offerings shall remain in force only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps shall always cast light before the Menorah, and all the blessings with which I have given you to bless My children shall never be abolished' " (*Bamidbar Rabba* 15:6).

The Holy One, blessed be He, told Aaron that the offerings are valid only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps are for all time. This means that Moshe, who heard this from G-d's mouth, repeated it to Aaron, who in turn repeated it to the elders, and so on until all Israel heard. Now since Moshe had ascended towards G-d, he was the only one who perceived the taste of these words. Yet Aaron also – since he heard it from the mouth of Moshe, who had heard it from the mouth of G-d – perceived the taste more than all the others.

Concerning the Parsha

All Are Equally Summoned

It is written, "If they sound a long blast with one, the leaders shall assemble to you, the heads of Israel's thousands" (*Bamidbar* 10:4).

The order of the trumpet blasts which regulated the encampment of the Children of Israel in the desert raises some questions.

To gather the entire community, which was not a simple matter, they had to sound trumpets. Yet what need was there for even a single trumpet blast to call just twelve people? Let a messenger go and summon them, and in this way the leaders of the tribes would gather by Moshe's order!

Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, the grandson of the Ramban, answers this question in the following way:

If the leaders of the tribes had actually been summoned by a messenger, these noble figures may have ended up weighing things in their minds: So-and-so was summoned first, and only afterwards was I summoned....

This is why Scripture established a single trumpet blast, with which all the tribal leaders, equally, would be summoned to Moshe's tent, without having to think of anything else. This is the meaning of the verse, "If they sound a long blast with one, the leaders shall assemble to you, the heads of Israel's thousands."

The Rabble

It is written, "The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more" (*Bamidbar* 11:4).

In his book *Nahar Shalom*, Rabbi Shalom HaCohen *Zatzal*, the Rav of Zarzis, speaks about the direct meaning of this verse. The term *assafsuf* (rabble) designates people who are devoid of courtesy and morals. They earn this name because they *neessafim* (gather) in groups to engage in idle conversation, or because they *ossfim* (pick up) the words of one person and transmit it to another in order to incite disputes.

In Arabic, a person who lacks intelligence and acts improperly is called *safsuf*, and our Sages have said that these were the *erev rav* that assembled during the exodus from Egypt.

The Manna

It is written, "The manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like the color of *b'dolach*" (*Bamidbar* 11:7).

Four things are found in good food:

First, it is healthy.

Second, it looks appealing, having an appearance that makes people want to eat it.

Third, it tastes good.

Fourth, it should be sanitary and not repulse the eater.

In his book *Tzror HaMor*, Rabbi Avraham Saba *Zatzal* writes that this is why the verse mentions all the qualities of the manna: It was healthy and strengthened the body; it was appealing, like coriander seed, which gives people a desire to eat it just by looking at it; and it contained all the flavors that people love.

Practical Reasons

It is written, "They shall bear the burden of the people with you" (*Bamidbar* 11:17).

In reality, why did Moshe need to have 70 elders by his side? After all, it was Moshe himself who brought the quail and told the people, "Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow" (v.18). As for the 70 elders, they did nothing at all.

In his book *Shulchan Shlomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Tzadok *Shlita* answers this question by stating that since the 70 elders were among the officers of the people and the taskmasters who clearly understood the situation of the Children of Israel in Egypt, they were familiar with what the people used to eat and drink while in Egypt.

The usefulness of appointing 70 elders to stand by Moshe's side was that the people could no longer come and claim, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for nothing" (v.5). Furthermore, since meat had only been given to them once the spirit of G-d rested upon the elders at the same time as it rested on Moshe, even in regards to the plague that this eventually brought about, the Children of Israel could no longer complain to Moshe. They also could not complain to the elders, who shared with Moshe the burden of their complaints from then on.

"Moshe, Moshe!"

It is written, "Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (*Bamidbar* 12:3).

The *gaon* Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *Zatzal* was once walking along the street when he heard a voice calling out, "Moshe, Moshe!"

He looked around and realized that it was coming from someone he knew, a man who was sitting behind the wheel of his car. Without hesitation, Rabbi Moshe approached the car.

The man then realized that Rabbi Moshe thought that he had been called out to him, and so he grew red with embarrassment. He said, "While I was driving, I saw my son Moshe in the street, and I called out to him. I would never think of calling out you in such a way! And if I had wanted to speak to you, I wouldn't have even asked you to come over. I would have gotten out of my car and come to you. I would never have asked you to come over to me!"

Rabbi Moshe assured him that there was nothing to worry about. "It's been many years that I place no importance on such things."

In the Light of the Parsha

The Character of the "Man" Moshe

From the Teachings of the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita*

It is written, "Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (*Bamidbar* 12:3).

We should reflect upon the expression "on the face of the earth," which seems superfluous. What is the Torah trying to teach us with these extra words?

I would like to explain this by saying that the verse is telling us that just as the earth does not feel anything when *Lashon Harah* is spoken about it, or if it is scorned, the same exact thing applied to Moshe. He was so humble that he felt absolutely nothing when Miriam and Aaron spoke *Lashon Harah* about him.

We may also explain this verse by saying that Moshe possessed two characteristics:

The first is that he is called a "man," and the second is that he is called "humble." These are opposite characteristics.

How could Moshe excel in both things at the same time? The answer is that when it came to the honor of Heaven and the leadership of the Children of Israel according to the holy Torah, he acted as a "man," and he was a warrior. Yet when it came to himself, Moshe was "humble, more than any person on the face of the earth," as the holy Torah testifies.

G-d Willing

It is written, “By the word of Hashem the Children of Israel journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they encamped” (*Bamidbar* 9:18).

In the book *Shnei Luchot HaBrit*, the holy Shelah notes that in this week’s *parsha*, we have three verses in a row where the expression “by the word of Hashem” occurs twice. The Torah thereby wants to underline something very important, namely that Jews do not take a single step in life, be it to leave or stay, without saying “G-d willing” or “with G-d’s help,” or a similar expression. In fact before each request or prayer that we make, we know that it will only be granted if Hashem agrees to it. We also know that all the plans and thoughts of man depend on G-d’s will.

We find this idea alluded to in the verse, “Many are the plans in the heart of man, but only the counsel of Hashem, *hi takum* [it will stand]” (*Mishlei* 19:21). Reversed, the letters of the term *hi* form the initials of the expression *im irtzeh Hashem* (“G-d willing”). Here the verse is testifying to the fact that if man blesses Hashem before doing anything, his plans will be fulfilled with Hashem’s help.

The same thing is alluded to in the verse, “By the word of Hashem the Children of Israel journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they encamped.” Everything regarding beginnings, endings, and everything else in life – everything proceeds according to the word of Hashem and His will. From here a person must learn to evoke Hashem’s Name before undertaking anything. The Name of Heaven must always be on his lips.

The book *Sippurei Eliyahu HaNavi* (“Stories of the Prophet Elijah”) recounts an interesting story in this regard:

A rich merchant possessed a vast stretch of land that he wished to cultivate, to plant and grow various fruits and vegetables. This man demonstrated great generosity, giving large sums to *zeddakah* and performing good deeds. However he possessed one character flaw: He did not believe in divine providence. He thought that all the wealth he had acquired was by dint of his own effort, and he would never say “thank G-d” or “G-d willing.”

Before planting season began, the rich man took a sizable amount of money and headed to the market in order to purchase oxen to work his land. On the way, he encountered Eliyahu HaNavi, who appeared to him as a merchant. Eliyahu asked him, “Where are you going?”

“To the market to purchase some oxen,” he said.

“You should have added, ‘G-d willing,’” Eliyahu said to him. “You will only succeed in buying them if Hashem wants you to.”

The rich man did not agree, and so he replied: “Why will I not succeed in buying them? I have the money for it – here it is.” With that, he showed him the money he was carrying.

When the rich man was nearing the market, his moneybag fell from his pocket, but he did not realize it. After having agreed on a price with the oxen merchant, he reached into his pocket to pay him, but suddenly realized that he did not have a cent!

Very disappointed and upset, he returned home with neither his money nor the oxen he had gone to purchase.

Eliyahu HaNavi picked up the moneybag that had fallen from his pocket, and he placed it on a rock in the middle of the forest. A few days later, he again met the rich man, who was once more on his way to the market with money in hand to purchase oxen.

This time Eliyahu HaNavi appeared to him as an old man, and he asked him where he was going.

“To the market to buy oxen,” replied the rich man as before.

“You shouldn’t be so sure about it. You should say, ‘G-d willing’ or ‘with G-d’s help,’” Eliyahu told him.

Yet this time as well, the rich man gave him the same response. He had not forgotten about the fact that he had lost his moneybag, but he thought that it was just a coincidence. With his money in hand, and careful not to lose it this time, he would succeed in buying them.

It was not to be, however, for Eliyahu HaNavi placed a deep sleep upon him. While he was sleeping, he took his moneybag and placed it on the rock where he had put the first one.

Thus for the second time, the rich man returned home without money or oxen. “The money was definitely stolen,” he sadly told himself on the way back. “But maybe it wasn’t a coincidence. Maybe it was the hand of Hashem, because I don’t believe that divine providence governs every detail of life. Maybe it’s to prove to me that without Hashem’s help, I can’t do anything at all, even with all the money and gold in the world!”

The third time that he went to the market, the rich man encountered Eliyahu HaNavi once again, this time as a young man who was looking for work.

“Where are you going, sir?” asked the young man.

“To the market to purchase oxen, G-d willing,” replied the rich man.

Eliyahu give him a blessing for success, and he asked him to hire him on his return trip as a helper to guide the oxen.

“If Hashem helps me to buy them at a good price, I’ll hire you and pay you well,” he promised him.

On the way back, after successfully purchasing the oxen, he hired the young man (Eliyahu HaNavi). As they entered his hometown, the oxen strayed and fled into the large forest, and the two men pursued them. In doing so, they came upon a large rock, at the top of which were the rich man’s two moneybags. He retrieved them and thanked Hashem for this find.

The rich man returned home in peace. When he wanted to pay the young man, however, he disappeared. The rich man then realized that Heaven had sent him Eliyahu HaNavi in order to reprimand and guide him in having faith in divine providence.

Guard Your Tongue!

Meriting the Life of the World to Come

A person must realize that even if he hears his son or daughter speaking *Lashon Harah*, he must protest and distance them from doing so, as it is written: “Teach the child according to his way” (*Mishlei* 22:6). This is mentioned in *Orach Chaim* 343:1 in regards to teaching all the prohibitions of the Torah.

A father must constantly guide his children, as soon as they are young, so they are careful not to get involved in *Lashon Harah* and other forbidden things, such as disputes and falsehood, as the Vilna Gaon writes. In fact a great deal of practice is required in terms of speech and conduct, and practice in all things leads to mastery. For this we merit the World to Come and all the good it comprises.

– Chafetz Chaim

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Itzkovitz *Zatzal*, better known as “Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin,” was among the greatest disciples of the Vilna Gaon. He served as the Rav of the small town of Volozhin, where he established the Etz Chaim yeshiva, known as the Volozhin yeshiva (the “mother of *yeshivot*”).

Rabbi Chaim was born to Rabbi Yitzchak, who was a leader of the Volozhin community. From his early youth, people could see the beginnings of wisdom and intelligence in the boy. For example, it is said that when a noble landowner in the region passed away, he left behind a strange will for his sons. They were to inherit his horses in the following ratio: The first son would receive half, the second son would receive a third, and the last son would receive a ninth, but only on condition that no horses be divided. The problem was inescapable, for the father left his sons 17 horses, and nobody knew how to divide them under such constraints. The brothers concluded that there was no solution, and they presented their problem to Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin, who was known for his keen insight. They sent one brother to him for advice.

Rabbi Chaim was only a boy at the time, but when he saw that nobody had a solution to the problem, he offered to help. “If you let me have a horse, I can resolve the problem,” the boy said. When a horse was given to the boy, he added it to the 17 horses of the inheritance and began to distribute them according to the will: The first son received half of the 18 horses, namely 9. The second received a third of the 18 horses, namely 6. Finally, the last received a ninth of the 18 horses, namely 2. Together, 17 horses were bequeathed to the sons, and the extra horse was returned to its owner.

“This is what your father meant,” said the boy with a victorious sound in his voice.

Everything Rests Upon the Torah

In his youth, Rabbi Chaim studied with the Sha’agat Aryeh, the Rav of the city at the time. He then went to Vilna, where he placed himself in the shadow of the Vilna Gaon *Zatzal*, for whom he had tremendous respect. It was from him that Rabbi Chaim learned most of his Torah.

After the death of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Chaim founded the Etz Chaim yeshiva of Volozhin, where Torah was studied with extraordinary diligence by hundreds of students. These students served as the basis for the blossoming of Torah and the rabbinate for generations to come.

A love for Torah burned in his bones like a fire, stirring up everyone around him. Rabbi Chaim spread among his students the principle of “believing without the slightest doubt that if the entire world, from one end to the other, were to be devoid of our Torah study for even an instant, all the worlds would instantly be destroyed and return to chaos.” He added that the way in which Creation is guided and abundance reaches it day after day all depend on Torah study. In proportion to the study of Torah, abundance for the entire world either increases or decreases.

Hence during all the years in which the Volozhin yeshiva stood, there were student “watchmen” who studied Torah in perpetuity at every hour of the day, during all the days of the week. They made sure that the sound of Torah would never stop, not even for a single instant. Rabbi Chaim himself would walk among those who studied in order to supervise them, even during the nights. At the end of Yom Kippur, when everyone was busy eating and drinking, Rabbi Chaim himself would study Torah, lest there not be anyone to sustain the world at such a time.

At the Gates of Gan Eden

One night as Rabbi Chaim, the Rosh Yeshiva, was walking along the corridors of the yeshiva, something extraordinary happened, something that contains a profound lesson. What happened is the following:

One of the students at the yeshiva fell ill. Since he needed to be treated for his ailment, he packed his bags and prepared to return home to his parents. One of his friends at the yeshiva accompanied him on the journey. As evening approached, they arrived in a village where they decided to spend the night at a local inn. In the morning, the innkeeper told them what they owed, but when the sick student counted his money, he realized that he was short seven cents. The innkeeper said that he trusted him to repay the small amount when he had the chance. From there, the two students continued their journey, until they finally arrived at the home of the sick student’s parents. At that point, his companion wished him a speedy and complete recovery. Before he left, however, the sick student remembered his debt, and he gave his friend the seven cents and asked him to repay the innkeeper on his way back to the yeshiva. His friend promised to do so, and off he went. As time passed, the sick student got worse, until he finally died. When the sad news reached the yeshiva, they eulogized and mourned for him, since it appeared that he had a very promising and bright future.

A few hours after the eulogy, Rabbi Chaim was walking among the students in the yeshiva and encouraging them as they studied around midnight. As he walked the corridors, he suddenly saw the dead student approaching him. Rabbi Chaim was not afraid, but immediately addressed him and asked: “What was the verdict in Heaven?”

The deceased opened his mouth and revealed that when he had arrived before the Celestial Court, his merits and sins were starting to be weighed. It turned out that he was free of all sin, for the suffering that he had experienced during his illness had purified his soul, so much so that he could enter Gan Eden.

When he arrived at the gates of Gan Eden, however, the Satan stood before him to block the way and claimed that he had committed theft! “You left the world owing seven cents to the innkeeper.” Although it had not been the deceased’s fault, since he had given the money to his friend, making him responsible for repaying the debt, the innkeeper had nevertheless not received his money.

This sin preoccupied the Celestial Court, and after a long discussion they decided that because the deceased was in no way guilty – since he had done everything in his power to reimburse the debt – nevertheless the innkeeper had not received his money and was deprived of seven cents. The deceased was thus given extraordinary permission to return to this world. He was allowed to appear as a living person in order to meet the Rosh Yeshiva and ask him to fix the problem by reimbursing the debt.

The Rosh Yeshiva listened to every detail of the account, and he promised the deceased to repay the debt, at which point he disappeared.

Rabbi Chaim immediately summoned the friend of the deceased. He confirmed that he had received the seven cents to repay the debt, but to his great regret he had completely forgotten about it.

As early as the following morning, the friend of the deceased went to the innkeeper to repay the debt that had prevented his friend from entering Gan Eden.

On Sivan 14, 5581, the Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin left this world. He succeeded in making thousands of disciples who, because of him, had attained the light of Torah.