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maskil Le'David

The Greatness of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (*Vayikra* 26:3).

Every Friday night, we have the custom to sing the song "Bar Yochai." One of its stanzas is "Let us make Man" — was said concerning Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai." Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 38b) that when Hashem wished to create man, He took counsel with the ministering angels to decide whether or not to create man. The commentaries explain that when Hashem looked at the future generations and saw Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, He immediately said "Let us make man," for it was worth creating all of mankind, even if they were to be unworthy — as long as the *neshama* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai zy"ta would arrive.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai achieved such a lofty and exalted level through toiling in Torah. It is no coincidence that his *hilula* always falls during the week of parshat Bechukotai, where it is written "If you will follow My decrees." Rashi explains these words to mean, "That you should toil in Torah." Torah is chiefly acquired through toil and exertion, as the Tanna says (*Avot* 6:4): "This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation — but toil in Torah!" This is the only way to acquire Torah. Who is a better example of this than Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who lived a life of deprivation and suffering, in a cave, for thirteen years? He inserted his entire body until his neck into the earth, and as a result his entire body became full of fissures, and in this state he toiled in the holy Torah unabated and with great exertion. What was his sustenance during these years? The fruit of a carob tree and water from a spring. This was the life of deprivation that he lived and this is why he merited achieving such lofty levels in the holy Torah.

The gemara (*Shabbat* 33b) tells us that when Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai came out of the cave, Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair took him to the bathhouse and when he noticed that his back was full of fissures he started to cry. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, why are you crying? He answered: "Woe to me that I saw you in this state." Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai responded: "Fortunate are you that you saw me in this state, for had you not seen me like this, you would not have found me at this level."

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was implying that this is the

way to achieve greatness in Torah. Only Torah that is learned with toil, exertion and pain, is absorbed in the person and has the power to change his essence and elevate him. However, if a person seeks life's pleasures and wishes to follow the impulsiveness of his heart, he will not merit Torah.

The Torah writes, "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their right time" (*Vayikra* 26:3–4), and later we are also promised: "I will provide peace in the land" (*ibid.* 6). According to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the words "I will provide your rains in their right time" mean that he will be given his material needs — rain [גשם] is a reference to material needs [גשמיות] — by the angels. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai also promised that with his power of Torah he will protect the entire world and pardon us from exact judgment. This is the meaning of "I will provide peace in the land" — the world will achieve perfection through the merit of toiling in Torah.

Now we can understand the great joy and happiness that is inherent in the *hilula* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. All of mankind — from Adam HaRishon until today — is joyful, for not only can Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai annul harsh decrees in the merit of the concealed Torah that was revealed by him, but in addition, through the power of toiling in Torah we can achieve the innermost essence of the Torah — we bring the redemption closer and are able to redeem the essence of *hod* from the *klippah*. We have much to rejoice about, and through this happiness the *klippah* of sadness and sighing will be annulled. Due to this it is a great mitzvah to rejoice on the *hilula*. The holy Arizal tells us that sadness and sighing are manifestations of the *klippah*, so if, G-d forbid, one is sad on this day, this lends power to the *klippah*.

Once on the *hilula* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the holy Arizal was in Meron and out of great fervor he started to dance. A tall man, whose face shone with glory, came toward him and danced with him. As they were dancing, the sun joined them and danced with them too. All those present were amazed at this sight. First of all, they wished to know, who is this tall man? And secondly, what is the sun doing with them? Later on, the holy Ari explained that the man who came to dance with him was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai himself, and the sun was Rabbi Elazar Azkari, a lofty tzaddik, who until now had remained concealed.

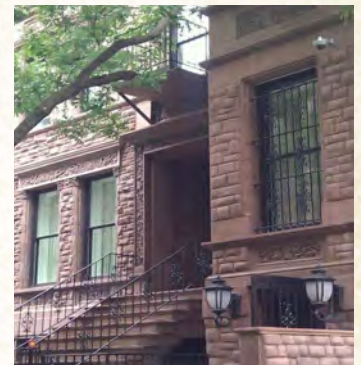
The situation of today's generation is most inferior. Due to our many sins we are lacking faith, a result of the ever increasing lures of this world, for example the computer, cellphone and other similar devices. We must therefore work to strengthen our faith in the power of tzaddikim.

24 Iyar 5784
1 June 2024

1063

Bechukotai

Shabbat Mevarchin



Hilula

24 Iyar
Rabbi Yaakov M'Lissa

25 Iyar
Rabbi Chaim Churi

26 Iyar
Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto

27 Iyar
Rabbi Yitzchak
Bar R' Yissachar Abulapia

28 Iyar
Shmuel HaNavi

29 Iyar
Rabbi Meir of Parmishlan

1 Sivan
Rabbi Meir HaLevi Horowitz





PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

Bound with Tefillin Throughout the Day

"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (*Vayikra* 26:3).

The Torah tells us that the mitzvah of tefillin is considered to be a *chok*, as it says, "You shall observe this decree (חוקה) at its designated time from year to year" (*Shemot* 13:10), referring to the commandment of tefillin.

Accordingly, the holy Or Hachaim, zy"a, explains that this is the explanation of "If you will follow My decrees," meaning there is a mitzvah to wear tefillin, called "*chukah* (decree)" the entire day. But this is only on condition that he is careful to observe the particular mitzvot that are applicable when wearing tefillin, as the continuation of the verse says, "and observe My commandments," meaning he should observe those mitzvot that apply when wearing tefillin.

Indeed, the holy Ohr Hachaim and his students were accustomed to wearing their tefillin the entire day. In a letter about the manner of learning in his holy yeshiva in Yerushalayim, he testifies to this: "And the manner of learning is with tallit and tefillin the entire day, with holiness, *yirat Shamayim* and humility and every pious act."

Born for the Sake of Toiling in Torah

"If you will follow My decrees" (*Vayikra* 26:3).

Rashi's explanation of these words is famous: "That you should toil in Torah. "Rabbi Chaim Brisker quotes the Chazal, "Man is born to toil — to toil in Torah" (*Sanhedrin* 92b), and explains that while the fetus is still in its mother's womb, it learns the entire Torah with an angel. It lacks for nothing but the experience of exerting itself in the study of Torah. "Man is born to toil" — the benefit of being born is that now man has the opportunity to toil.

Yaakov Took a Security from Eliyahu Hanavi

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov" (*Vayikra* 26:42).

The word *יעקוב* is written here with the addition of the letter vav. Rashi explains that on five occasions Yaakov took a letter vav from the name of Eliyahu HaNavi, as a guarantee that he would come and announce the redemption of his children.

The sefer *Avnei Shoham* gives a hint for this: The word *יעקוב* is an abbreviation of *יעקב ערבון בחמשה* — From Eliyahu, Yaakov received a pledge five times."

The five instances in which he took a pledge is a reference to the Five Books of the Torah, for through learning and observing the Torah, one hastens the arrival of Eliyahu HaNavi.

Why was specifically the letter vav chosen to be added to his name?

The letter vav, when written out in full, has the numerical value of thirteen. This hints to the idea that we must cleave to the thirteen attributes of Hashem — "Just as He is Compassionate and Gracious, so must you be compassionate and gracious."



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust
penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu
Hagaon Rabbi David
Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

True, Lasting Love

A woman once came to see me with tears pouring down her face, greatly distressed about her many troubles. Her marital harmony was very unstable, she had no *nachat* from her children, she was in a bad state financially and her health was failing too.

Her pain touched my heart and I asked her what kind of blessing she wished for. She answered that she was not seeking anything for herself; she had come on behalf of her neighbor who was lying on her deathbed, her days numbered owing to her acute illness... Her only desire was that I bless her friend.

"As for myself," the woman said, "Despite all my troubles, I am still alive. My neighbor, however, is in a far worse situation — for her I wish to ask for a blessing from the honorable Rav *shlita*."

I learned a great lesson from this extraordinary woman. Her entire thoughts were with her friend's pain and she was not focused on her own troubles. She reached a level where her friend's distress made her forget her own sorrows and she learned to be happy with what she had and see the good instead of focusing on what she was lacking. We can learn from this astounding woman the extent to which a person must try and be happy with his lot and accustom himself to say about everything, "This too is for the good," and as the Tanna teaches us, "According to the effort is the reward."

I am also familiar with the experiences of an acquaintance who is a patron of our institutions and a supporter of Torah. Several years ago, the wheels of fortune turned and he became very hard pressed. His marital harmony was also affected to the degree that he almost became divorced, but I constantly encouraged him and told him not to give up and to continue to serve Hashem wholeheartedly and attend his regular Torah classes. Indeed, after a time his *mazal* changed and his situation began to improve.

Our Sages teach us (*Avot* 5:17): "Any love that depends on a specific cause, when the cause is gone, the love is gone."

If a person thanks Hashem and serves Him and observes His mitzvot when everything goes well, but when he encounters difficulties he distances himself from avodat Hashem — this shows that his observance was dependent on something, and if this is the case, this is not love.

However, if his love is not dependent on receiving material benefits, but instead stems from his innermost being and his observance remains unwavering even in times of trouble and hardship, this is the service of Hashem that Hashem longs for and desires. This shows that even when he is experiencing tranquility and all his needs are fulfilled, he is not enjoying this world for his own pleasure but recognizes that whatever he has only assists him in his avodat Hashem.



WORDS OF THE SAGES

On the Contrary —
I Will Offer My Assistance

"If you will follow My decrees" (Vayikra 26:3).

The *Ba'al Haturim* reveals a wonderful idea which is hinted to in the above verse: "אם בחקתי תלכו" — the first letter of each word spells אבת (fathers), which hints to the message "שתלכו בדרכי אבות", that Bnei Yisrael should follow in the ways of the fathers.

When the Alter of Slabodka, Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, was asked how he encapsulates his main occupation in life, he replied with a profound sentence: "I tried to convey to my students the obligation to be wise and good-hearted."

Rabbi Eliezer Turk, shlita, describes Rabbi Aryeh Finkel's zt"l, integrity of *middot*. He was the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir Brachfeld, and his personality was a live, tangible example of purity and refinement of *middot*. He was a symbol of perfection in Torah, in his behavior, in his fear of Hashem and in his *middot* — everything Hashem wishes from a Jew.

One day, during the time the Finkel family lived on Rechov Malachi in Yerushalayim, Rabbi Aryeh was sitting at the dining room table immersed in his gemara with his customary diligence, when he suddenly heard deafening sounds of drilling and banging from the floor above them. At first Rabbi Aryeh was unsure as to the reason for the noise, but a few minutes later, the peeling paint and bits of plaster that started falling from the ceiling were a clear sign of what was going on just above his head.

"What is happening?" Rabbi Aryeh asked his wife. "What is this banging that we can hear from upstairs? Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine. The neighbors upstairs are expanding and renovating their apartment."

A smile lit up Rabbi Aryeh's kind face. He closed his gemara, got up from his place, put on his hat and jacket and went upstairs. His knocking on the door could barely be made out due to the deafening noise of the building work. Only after a few long minutes one of the children realized and went to open the door.

"Is your father home?" Rabbi Aryeh asked.

"Daddy, Daddy!" the child called out, "the neighbor Finkel is at the door!" The father's face went red with embarrassment. "Harav Finkel?! Oh no! I didn't tell him about our plans to renovate. Who knows how he is going to react?" he thought to himself.

But as he approached the door, he was in for a surprise:

"Shalom Aleichem," Rabbi Aryeh received him with a smile and shook his hand warmly. "Could I possibly come inside and discuss something with you? I was so happy to hear that you started building! For a long time I have been wondering to myself how you manage with such a small apartment!"

"Listen," Rabbi Aryeh continued, "I imagine that the expense involved is enormous, but I cannot help you with money since I myself do not have. But if you need me to sign as a guarantor for a loan, I would be most happy to do so."

Another good word, another shake of his hand, and Rabbi Aryeh went back downstairs to continue his learning.

And the neighbor? He was left standing by the doorway, watching in astonishment as Rabbi Aryeh made his way down the stairs. He was deep in thought. What about Rabbi Aryeh and his own family? How do *they* manage in their small, crowded apartment? And the bigger question — how does one acquire such an *ayin tovah* (lit. a good eye — an attitude of benevolence)? To see only the good in others??

When one of his family members expressed some resentment about the renovations, Rabbi Aryeh responded in astonishment: "If the neighbor who was building was our son, would we also be opposed?"



IN OUR FATHERS' FOOTSTEPS

Nuggets of guidance based on
Masechet Avot, culled from
the teachings of Hagaon Hatzaddik
Rabbi **David Chananya Pinto**, shlita.

Chapter Five

"With ten utterances the world was created"
(Avot 5:1).

It is possible that the reason why the world was created with ten utterances, even though it could have been created with one utterance, was in order to make known to mankind that in the future Hashem will give great reward to His righteous ones who sustain the world, for a person cannot know this (degree of reward) in advance, as the Navi says, "No eye had ever seen...except for You" (Yeshaya 64:3).

Just as Hashem created the world with several utterances, even though He could have included them in one utterance, so it is with the reward of tzaddikim. There can be a single mitzvah for which the tzaddik receives great reward, for it includes many mitzvot, but this is known only to Hashem. Everything depends on the level of self-sacrifice (*mesirut nefesh*) of the one who is performing the mitzvah, and what the mitzvah achieves.

An example of this would be a rich man who gives a poor person a coin for *tzedakah*. The poor person then goes and buys a loaf of bread. When he comes home, he and his family wash their hands before partaking of the bread. They recite the appropriate blessings when washing their hands and before eating bread. After they finish their meal they recite *birkat hamazon*. The opportunity to perform all these mitzvot were made available to them by the one coin the rich person gave the poor man.

The opposite is also true. It is possible that a rich person gives a thousand *zehubim* to *tzedakah*, and at the same time a poor person gives just one coin, yet the poor person's offering is more valuable to Hashem. Why is this? Because the poor person gave his money with *mesirut nefesh*, whereas for the rich person this was not a difficult act. This is in accordance with the dictum of our Sages, "According to the pain is the reward" (Avot 5:23).

This is why Hashem is particular with his pious ones like a hair's breadth (*Yevamot* 121b), whereas with the wicked He is patient. Even though they anger Him greatly, He ignores their deeds. The good deeds of the tzaddikim bring pleasure to Hashem at every moment, and if they stumble even slightly, Hashem immediately feels that the light is diminished and punishes them. On the other hand, the wicked person does many wicked deeds, and therefore Hashem is not exacting with him on each small act. However, in the future, if he does not repent, Hashem will punish him for every single deed and nothing will be overlooked.

"LET HER BE PRAISED"

Portrayal of the True Eshet Chayil
In memory of Rabbanit **Mazal Medlin Pinto**, a"h



"She seeks out wool and linen, and her hands work willingly"

The Minchat Elazar of Munkatch, in his *sefer Divrei Torah*, brings the following amazing story: The government decided to build a new track for the local train in Hokliyua, which necessitated exhuming and relocating several graves from the local Jewish cemetery.

The Dayanim of the Beit Din, notable Rabbanim, and a large segment of the Jewish community, all travelled to the sight to supervise the removal of the graves.

Among the tombstones that were marked for exhumation were several that were hundreds of years old. Suddenly the Gaon of Munkatch heard a commotion going on around a certain grave. He was then still a young lad, just thirteen years old. His curiosity was aroused and he ran over to find out what the great excitement was.

As he approached, his hairs bristled. Lying in the hundred-year-old grave, was the *niftar* with his body completely intact as if it had just now been lain to rest.

He stood rooted to the spot, astounded, and thought to himself: With what merit did this person achieve this lofty level that only a few in every generation merit? It must be that he is one of the thirty-six hidden tzaddikim who cleaved to Hashem throughout his life...

He was even more astonished as he started to read what was inscribed on the *matzeivah* –here lay a righteous woman, crowned with outstanding praises, largely concerning her great modesty. Despite her profession as a seamstress, "She seeks out wool and linen," she remained modest and pious her entire life, also in her dealings with the many customers who flocked to her to buy her modest designs...

With great honor they removed the *nifteret*, wrapped her in new white *tachrichim*, and placed her in the *aron* in order to bury her anew with the respect that she deserved.

The holy Gaon of Munkatch concludes: It is impossible to describe the great *kiddush Hashem* that this sight caused, both for the Jews and for the non-Jews who were present, as they merited to see the enormous value attributed to the trait of modesty of a righteous Jewish woman.

What Is The Kaf Hachaim Doing In The Marketplace?

If we start painting a picture of Rabbanit Pinto, if we start by praising her modesty in just a small way, we will attain a comprehensive view of an *eshet chayil*, who with wisdom and insight managed her home with true modesty and Jewish grace, despite shouldering the entire responsibility of maintaining the home. We have already mentioned that her righteous husband, the esteemed Maran Rabbeinu Moshe Ahron Pinto, zy"a, ensconced himself in his home for forty years, immersing himself in Torah and *chassidut*. The righteous Rabbanit was the one who took care of everything in the best possible way.

Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Ahavat Shalom, attests that it used to be accepted practice that the husband, the head of the household, was the one who would bring the *parnassah* to the home, while the wife used to be a personification of the verse "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home." She was like Sarah Immeinu who remained inside the tent, and she was occupied with the daily demands of the home.

Even the idea of frequenting the marketplace used to be foreign to women. One of the famous Chachamim of Hungary, who was familiar with the supreme value of the *sefer Kaf Hachaim*, describes the following scene:

He was once in the marketplace where he met a Sefardi Chacham who was buying vegetables

for Shabbat. After speaking to him for a few moments he was astounded to realize that it was Rabbi Yaakov Sofer, zt"l, the author of *Kaf Hachaim*, who had come to shop for Shabbat in the local market! He could not believe his eyes; he had always imagined that the Kaf Hachaim never left his learning for anything – what was he doing shopping in the market?

In a similar vein, the elders of Yerushalayim recounted that once when the son of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz visited Yerushalayim, he went to visit the famous *mekubal*, the author of *Shemen Sasson*, head of the Yeshiva of Kabbalah Beit E-I, after having heard about his great piety and holiness. Since he did not find him at home, he waited for him by the entrance and was astonished to see him coming home alone from the marketplace, carrying two baskets full of fruits and vegetables in honor of Shabbat!

In previous generations there were strict guidelines concerning the concept of modesty for women, especially among the Sefardic communities. For example, in 5514, the Gedolei Yerushalayim wrote up several regulations which were printed in the Book of *Takanot and Haskamot*, signed by twelve Gedolim from all over the world. All the regulations concerned the modesty of Jewish daughters: "No *bat Yisrael*, even the older ones, should go to the market without wearing an additional garment on top of her clothes (called "*lizar*"), and she should not even go from one courtyard to the next without this garment. Similarly, she should not sit at the entrance to the courtyard in order to speak to friends, and she should not even speak to them from one window to the next if there is a public area in between. In addition, a woman who is under the age of fifty, does not have permission to go to the public oven to take and fetch bread and other things."

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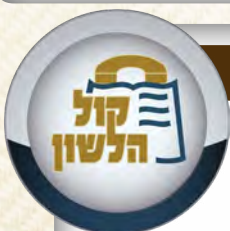
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