

“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”

It Is Every Jew's Sacred Obligation to Sacrifice Himself in order to Personally Fulfill the Torah

In this week's parsha, parshas Chukas, we find a passuk that relates to every Jew, on every day of his life, regarding his commitment to Torah (Bamidbar 19, 14): **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות—this is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in the tent shall be “tamei” for seven days.** We find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Berachos 63b) based on this passuk: **“אמר ריש לקיש, מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל—according to Reish Lakish, this passuk teaches us that Torah knowledge is only preserved and maintained in someone who sacrifices himself on its behalf.**

This is reiterated by the teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 6, 4): **“כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל, ואם אתה עושה כן אשריך וטוב לך, אשריך—This is the way of the Torah: To eat bread with salt, to drink water in small amounts, to sleep upon the ground, to live a life of hardship, and to toil in the Torah. If you do so, you are praiseworthy and it will bode you well. You will be praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh and it will bode well for you in Olam HaBa.** Along these lines, we find another elucidation in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 111a) regarding the following passuk which extols the virtues of the Torah (Iyov 28, 13): **“לא ידע אנוש ערכה ולא תמצא בארץ החיים - לא—Man does not know its true value, and it is not found in the land of the living” . . . the Torah is not found in someone who is self-indulgent.**

Concerning the matter of self-indulgence, let us learn a lesson from Rabeinu HaKadosh (Ketubos 104a): **“בשעת פטירתו של רבי זקף עשר אצבעותיו כלפי מעלה, אמר רבוננו של עולם גלוי וידוע לפניך—as Rebbe was departing from this world, he straightened his ten fingers upwards toward the heavens and declared, “Master of the**

Universe, it is revealed and known to You that I toiled with my ten fingers in Torah, and I did not derive pleasure even from my little finger!” Apropos this declaration, Tosafot write in the name of the Midrash: **“עד שאדם מתבלל שיכנס תורה—while a person prays that Torah should permeate his being, he should pray that earthly delights should not permeate his being.** The Midrash proves its point from Rabeinu HaKadosh, who was zocheh to his extensive Torah knowledge, because he refused to benefit from Olam HaZeh.

In truth, none of us can come close in comparison to Rabeinu HaKadosh. Nevertheless, we learn from all of the above that is appropriate to try to follow his example. We should minimize our indulgence in the pleasures of Olam HaZeh in order to fulfill the message conveyed by the passuk: **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”—to preserve Torah-knowledge demands self-sacrifice.**

David HaMelech's Error

With this vital principle in mind, let us examine a teaching from our blessed sages in the Gemara (Sotah 35a). David HaMelech made a tragic error when he transported the Aron in a wagon. This event is described in Shmuel II (6, 3): **“וירכבו—they placed G-d's Aron in a new wagon.** The Gemara addresses the question of how David could have erred in a simple, well-known halachah known even to schoolchildren:

“דרש רבא, מפני מה נענש דוד, מפני שקרא לדברי תורה זמירות, שנאמר (תהלים קיט-גד) זמירות היו לי חוקיך בבית מגורי, אמר לו הקב"ה דברי תורה שכתוב בו (משלי כג ה) התעיף עיניך בו ואיננו, אתה קורא אותן זמירות, הריני מכשילך בדבר שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותן, דכתיב (במדבר ז-ט) ולבני קהת לא נתן [משה עגלות] כי עבודת הקודש עליהם בכתף ישאו.”

Rava expounded: Why was David punished? because he called the words of Torah “songs.” For it is stated: “Your statutes were as songs to me, in my dwellings of fear.” HKB”H said to him: Words of Torah, about which it is written: “Close your eyes to it and it is gone,” you call them songs? Behold, I will cause you to stumble regarding a thing that even schoolchildren know! For it is written: “And to the sons of Kehat, he (Moshe) did not give (wagons), because the sacred service was upon them; they must carry it on the shoulder.”

The Yearos Devash (Part 1, Drush 16) explains how David was punished “midah k’neged midah”—the punishment corresponded to the transgression. The sons of Kehat were instructed to transport the Aron on their shoulders--בכתף--“**יִשְׂאוּ**—because it housed the luchot, representing the Torah. It is impossible to attain Torah-knowledge without toil and effort, as the Gemara explains (Megillah 6b): **“אם יאמר לך אדם --יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן”**—**if a person claims: “I labored and did not succeed,” do not believe him; “I did not labor and I succeeded,” do not believe him; “I labored and I succeeded,” believe him.** Therefore, it was prohibited to transport the Aron in a wagon; **“בכתף יִשְׂאוּ”**—Torah demands hard work and self-sacrifice.

Now, David’s statement: **“Your statutes were songs to me,”** suggests that the acquisition of Torah is a simple matter, akin to singing a song. Hence, HKB”H punished him “midah k’neged midah”; he forgot an explicit passuk: **“בכתף יִשְׂאוּ”**—requiring that the Aron be carried on the shoulder, exhibiting toil and effort. Instead, he placed the Aron in a wagon, demanding no human effort. This mistake revealed to him his initial mistake—cavalierly referring to the precepts of the Torah as songs: **“זמירות היו לי חוקיך”**.

The Imrei Emes’s Exalted Idea

Notwithstanding, it is astounding! It seems inconceivable that David HaMelech—who was well-versed in the entire Torah—erred and was unaware of the elucidation concerning the passuk: **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”--this is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent**—Torah is only retained by someone who sacrifices for the sake of the Torah. Torah-study demands hard work, as it is written (Yehoshua 1, 8): **“לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיך והגית בו יומם ולילה”**—**this book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; rather you should contemplate it day and night.**

Furthermore, what person labored over the Torah more than David HaMelech?! He studied Torah every day of his life to the

point that he woke up every night at midnight to study Torah until the break of day. Concerning his nocturnal routine, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 3b): **“כנור היה תלוי למעלה ממטתו של דוד, וכיון שהגיע חצות לילה בא רוח צפונית ונושבת בו ומנגן מאליו, מיד היה עומד ועוסק בתורה עד שעלה עמוד השחר—a harp hung over David’s bed, and when midnight arrived, the northern wind came and blew on it, and it played by itself. Immediately, he would arise and engage in Torah study until the break of day.**

We find a wonderful explanation regarding this topic from the Imrei Emes of Gur, zy”a, (Nasso 5689). Seemingly, the Torah’s directive to the sons of Kehat--**“בכתף יִשְׂאוּ”**—is baffling. After all, we learn from the Gemara (Sotah 35a): **“נשא ארון את נושאיו—the Aron carried those transporting it.** That being the case, why did HKB”H command them to transport the Aron on their shoulders? The answer is simple. They were rewarded for their effort! In the merit of making an effort to carry the Aron on their shoulders, the sons of Levi merited being carried by the Aron.

Let us spice things up a bit. We quoted the Gemara’s statement (Megillah 6b): **“יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן”**—if a person claims, **“I labored and I succeeded (in my Torah studies),” you may believe him.** The Sefat Emes (Toldot 5649) explains in the name of his grandfather, the author of the Chiddushei HaRim, the nuance of the Gemara’s language: **“הגם - יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן”**—**כי מציאה היא שבאה בהיסח הדעת, ואיך שייך יגעתי ומצאתי, רק שבאמת אין ערך שיוכל אדם בכח יגיעתו להשיג דבר ה’, רק שבשכר היגיעה נותנין לו במתנה ובדרך מציאה.** The Gemara refers to one’s success in learning Torah as a **מציאה**—finding something inadvertently. So, how can the Gemara describe this process as **יגעתי ומצאתי**—laboring and finding? In truth, there is no way that a person can merely exert his own powers and comprehend the words of Hashem; it is only as a reward for his laborious effort that the knowledge of Torah is given to him as a present, as if he found it inadvertently.

In this light, the Imrei Emes justifies David Hamelech’s description of the Torah as “songs.” David HaMelech labored all night long until the break of day studying Torah. Thus, he fulfilled the dictum: **“יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן”**. As a reward for his efforts, he was granted tremendous revelations and comprehension of Torah subjects. Accordingly, he praised and thanked HKB”H: **“זמירות היו לי חוקיך”**—for the tremendous treat and pleasure he was granted with regards to his Torah endeavors.

Nevertheless, he was punished for this cavalier utterance in accordance with the admonition of the Mishnah (Avos 1, 11):

should not despair. Rather, he should try with all the strength he can muster, and then he will merit HKB”H’s assistance.

Then he adds that maybe even Yaakov was not capable of rolling the stone off of the well by means of his own powers; however, his will to do so was intense. As a consequence, Hashem willed it that he should succeed in rolling the stone off of the well. Now, upon careful analysis, we see that these words of the Imrei Emes coincide amazingly with his own explanation concerning the directive to transport the Aron on the Leviim’s shoulders. By exerting themselves, they merited divine assistance and the Aron actually carried them. Similarly, as explained, after exerting himself in the study of Torah, David HaMelech stated: **”ומירות היו—לי חוקיך—Your statutes were like songs to me.**

Now, we can suggest that this is what David HaMelech had in mind with his statement: **”אבן מאסו הבונים”**. He was referring to the stone covering the mouth of the well. The builders are the shepherds. They despised the stone, because they were unable to roll it off of the well themselves—without the concerted effort of all of the shepherds. Thus, they had to wait for all of the shepherds to assemble; until Yaakov came along and with his own might succeeded in rolling the stone off of the well. He relied upon his **”emunah”** and his conviction that it was incumbent upon him to make an effort, mustering up all of his strength. As a result, that despised stone: **”היתה לראש פינה”**—became the foundation and source and impetus for all future generations; every Jew must exert all of his strength; as a result of his efforts, he will merit divine assistance: **”מאת ה’ היתה זאת היא נפלאות בעינינו”**.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa Carried the Stone Up to Yerushalayim

Amazingly, we can now add a third piece to the puzzle. The Sifsei Tzaddik (Pesach) presents in the name of his elder, the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a, a comment on the Midrash Rabbah (Shir HaShirim 1, 4):

”חזית איש מהיר במלאכתו, זה רבי חנינא, אמרו פעם אחת ראה אנשי עירו מעלים עולות ושלמים, אמר כולם מעלים שלמים לירושלים ואני איני מעלה כלום, מה אעשה מיד יצא למדבריה של עירו בחורבה של עירו ומצא שם אבן אחת, יצא וסידקה וסתתה וכרכמה, אמר הרי עלי להעלותה לירושלים, ביקש לשכור לו פועלים, אמר להם מעלים לי אתם את האבן הזאת לירושלים, אמרו לו תן לנו שכרנו מאה זהובים ואנו מעלים לך את אבנך לירושלים, אמר להם וכי מגנין לי מאה זהובים או חמישים לתת לכם ולא מצא לשעה, מיד הלכו להם.

מיד זימן לו הקב”ה חמשה מלאכים בדמות בני אדם, אמרו לו, רבי תן לנו חמשה סלעים ואנו מעלים אבנך לירושלים, ובלבד שתתן ידך עמו, ותן ידו עמם ונמצאו עומדין בירושלים, ביקש ליתן להם שכרם ולא מצא, בא המעשה ללשכת הגזית אמרו לו דומה רבינו שמולאי השרת העלו לך את האבן לירושלים, מיד נתן לחכמים אותו השכר שהשכיר עם המלאכים.”

Once Rabbi Chanina saw people from his city taking Olos and Shelamim up to Yerushalayim. He said to himself: **”They are all bringing Shelamim to Yerushalayim and I am not bringing anything. What should I do?”** He went to the wilderness outside his city and among the ruins, he found a stone. He cracked it and chiseled it and painted it yellow. He decided to take it up to Yerushalayim. He sought to hire laborers. He asked them if they would take the stone with them up to Yerushalayim. They requested payment of one hundred gold coins in return for the service. He said that he could not come up with that sum of money or even half that sum. So, they left immediately.

HKB”H immediately arranged for five malachim, appearing as human beings, to be available to him. They said: **”Rabbi, give us five selaim and we will take your stone up to Yerushalayim—on the sole condition that you assist us.”** He joined them in the task and they arrived in Yerushalayim. He wished to pay them and he could not find them. News of the incident reached the Lishkat HaGazis (the place of the Sanhedrin). They said to him: **”It appears, Rabeinu, as if ‘malachei hashareit’ brought the stone up to Yerushalayim for you.”** He immediately gave the sages the same sum of money he had agreed upon with the malachim.

The Chiddushei HaRim says that this Midrash teaches us a vital lesson. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa knew full well that he lacked adequate funds for this undertaking; nevertheless, due to his great desire, salvation was sent to him from above in the form of malachim. Based on what we have learned, we can postulate that the reason Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa tried so hard, above and beyond his power and means, to specifically take a stone up to Yerushalayim, was because he was following in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu. When Yaakov Avinu rolled the stone off of the well, exhibiting supernatural strength and desire, he paved the way for future generations, in keeping with the notion of: **”אבן מאסו הבונים היתה לראש פינה, מאת ה’ היתה זאת היא נפלאות בעינינו”**—**the stone the builders despised became the cornerstone; this emanated from Hashem; it is wondrous in our eyes.**

It Is Imperative to Perform Teshuvah before Engaging in Torah Study

Now, it is our obligation to solve an enigma concerning Reish Lakish’s elucidation. He taught us that the first part of the passuk: **”זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”**—alludes to the fact that Torah is only retained by someone who is willing to sacrifice

himself on its behalf. Yet, how does this elucidation concur with the conclusion of the passuk: **“כל הבא אל האהל וכל אשר באהל יטמא—שבעת ימים—anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in the tent shall be “tamei” for seven days?** Seemingly, if a person sacrifices himself and his desires in the study halls of Torah, the Torah should most definitely purify him. If so, how can the passuk state that he shall be “tamei” for seven days?

I would like to propose an explanation reconciling the two halves of the passuk with Reish Lakish’s elucidation, based on a precious introduction from our Rabbinical luminaries of the past. Before a Jew engages in Torah-study, he should entertain thoughts of teshuvah regarding his transgressions. Doing so will insure that the following chastisement is not directed toward him (Tehillim 50, 16): **“ולרשע אמר אלקים מה—לך לספר חוקי ותשא בריתי עלי פיך—“What purpose is served by you recounting My laws and bearing My covenant on your lips?”** Here is what the Maor V’Shemesh (Devarim) writes in the name of the Rabbi from Lublin, zy”a, on this subject:

“מצאנו בספרי קודש, וכן שמעתי מרבתי הקדושים נשמתם עדן, שהעיקר מעיקרי העבודה הוא להרהר בתשובה קודם ישיבתו ללמוד תורה או קודם עשייתו מעשה המצוות, ואדמו”ר הרב בוציאנא קדישא רבן של כל בני הגולה מו”ה יעקב יצחק מק”ק לובלין זצוק”ל אמר, שאם האדם אינו עושה תשובה קודם לימוד התורה, עליו נאמר ולרשע אמר אלקים מה לך לספר חוקי וגו’, מה שאין כן באם מהרהר בתשובה קודם הלימוד אזי נקרא צדיק, כמו שאמרו חז”ל בקידושין (דף מט:): המקדש את האשה על מנת שאני צדיק, אף על פי שהוא רשע גמור מקודשת שמא הרהר בתשובה, ועל כן רשאי אחר כך ללמוד התורה הקדושה.”

We find in our holy sefarim and, similarly, I have heard from our holy Rabbis, that an essential part of our service is to contemplate teshuvah prior to sitting down to learn Torah or prior to performing a mitzvah. The Admor, the holy Rabbi from Lublin said that if a person does not perform teshuvah before learning Torah, the following passuk applies to him: “But to the wicked, G-d said, ‘What purpose is served by you recounting My laws?’” . . . On the other hand, if he does contemplate teshuvah prior to his studies, he is called a tzaddik, as we see from Chazal’s statement in Kiddushin (49b) . . . Hence, he is permitted to study the holy Torah afterwards.

Additionally, let us consider HKB”H’s command to count “Sefiras HaOmer” for seven weeks prior to the festival of Shavuos, as it is written (Vayikra 23, 15): **“וספרתם לכם ממחרת—השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת תהינה—**

shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer-offering, they shall be seven complete weeks. The reason for this command, as explained by the Zohar hakadosh (Emor 97a), is so that during these seven weeks, we rectify and refine man’s seven basic midos: **מלכות, יסוד, הוד, נצח, תפארת, גבורה, חסד**—which encompass all of the midos. This is the significance of the tefilah that is recited after “Sefiras HaOmer”:

“רבונו של עולם, אתה צויתנו על ידי משה עבדך לספור ספירת העומר, כדי לטהרו מקליפותינו ומטומאותינו, כמו שכתבת בתורתך, וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהינה, עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום, כדי שיטהרו נפשות עמך ישראל מזוהמתם.”

Master of the Universe, You commanded us through Moshe, Your servant, to count “Sefiras HaOmer,” in order to purify us from our klipot and from our ritual contaminations, as You have written in Your Torah: “You shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer-offering, they shall be seven complete weeks—until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days”—so that the souls of Your people Yisrael will be should be cleansed of their contamination.

An Important Fundamental from the Teachings of the Gra of Vilna zy”a

It appears that we can explain the practical importance and relevance to each and every Jew of this protocol commanded by HKB”H—to rectify the seven midos prior to receiving the Torah on Shavuos—based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 72b): **“אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, מאי דכתיב (דברים ד-מד) וזאת—התורה אשר שם משה, זכה נעשית לו סם חיים, לא זכה נעשית לו סם מיתה—Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the significance of that which is written: “And this is the Torah that Moshe “sahm” (put)?” If one is deserving, the Torah functions as a “sahm chaim” (a potion promoting life) for him; if one is undeserving, the Torah functions as a “sahm misah” (a death potion) for him. At first glance this statement seems astounding! How can the Torah possibly be described as a “sahm misah”? For, we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **“כך הקב”ה אמר להם לישראל, בני, בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה—thus has HKB”H said to Yisrael: “My son, I have created the yetzer hara and I have created the Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.****

Yet, we have an answer provided by the great luminary, the Gra of Vilna, zy" a, in his commentary on Mishlei (24, 31): **וכן בתורה אמרו (יומא עב): זכה נעשה לו סם חיים, לא זכה נעשה לו סם המות, כי ענין התורה לנפש כמו ענין המטר אל הארץ, שהוא מצמיח סמים חיים וסמים מות, כן בתורה צריך אחר לימוד, לבער הפסולת ממנו ביראת חטא ומעשים טובים.** **The Torah is to the soul what the rain is to the earth. Just as the earth produces substances that promote life and health and other substances that are poisonous, so, too, does the Torah. Therefore, after Torah-study, it is necessary to eliminate the undesirable waste by means of avoiding sins and performing good deeds.**

Accordingly, one who studies Torah—which is likened to water—and makes no attempt to refine his corrupt character traits, is comparable to someone who plants thorn-bushes in his field. Even if rains of berachah fall from the heavens, the ground will not yield decent produce, but only thorns and thistle. Similarly, a person who neglects to uproot the thorns within his being, no matter how much Torah he learns, it will be to no avail; the Torah will act as a "sahm mitah" producing only thorns.

It is now quite apparent why HKB"H commanded us to work on refining the seven midos during the seven weeks of "Sefirat HaOmer" in preparation for Matan Torah. For, as we have learned, without correcting our midos, receiving the Torah is meaningless and serves no purpose. In fact, the Torah acts as a "sahm hamavet," chas v'shalom, intensifying the bad midos; in that case, it would be preferable not to engage in Torah-study at all—so as not to add insult to injury.

Continuing on in this vein, let us address the subject of tumahs for which the Torah prescribes a seven day period of purification or clarification—such as "tumat meit" (tumah associated with a dead body) and the tumah of a metzora (requiring seven days of seclusion to determine its status). During those seven days, the person must perform a soul-searching process--taking into account what damage and contamination he may have caused to his seven midos by using them to commit aveirot. Only after undergoing this seven-day process may the tamei person purify himself in the "mikveh."

We can add to this a spicy thought based on a statement in the Gemara (Succah 52a): **"שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע, הקב"ה קראו רע... משה קראו ערל... דוד קראו טמא... שלמה קראו שונא... ישעיה קראו מכשול...**

"שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע, הקב"ה קראו--יחזקאל קראו אבן... יואל קראו צפוני" רע... משה קראו ערל... דוד קראו טמא... שלמה קראו שונא... ישעיה קראו מכשול... יחזקאל קראו אבן... יואל קראו צפוני"—the Gemarah lists the seven names of the yetzer hara as they were given by HKB"H, Moshe, David, Shlomo, Yeshayah, Yechezkel and Yoel. Based on our current discussion, we can propose that these names represent the seven midos from the aspect of tumah—corresponding to the seven midos emanating from the domain of kedushah. During the seven days of tumah, a person must perform teshuvah for having succumbed to the seven aspects of the yetzer hara. After these seven days, he can immerse himself in the purifying waters of the "mikveh" and proceed to serve Hashem with purity.

At this point, we can shed some light on Reish Lakish's elucidation. He expounded on the passuk: **"זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל—this is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent"**—deriving that Torah is only retained in a person who sacrifices himself for the sake of the Torah. Applying what we have learned, let us now address the conclusion of the passuk: **"כל הבא אל האהל וכל אשר באהל יטמא שבעת ימים"—anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in the tent shall be "tamei" for seven days.** Here the Torah is warning anyone who engages in Torah-study not to deceive himself into thinking that he has completed the task. Rather, he must realize, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that before he engrosses himself in his studies, he must contemplate teshuvah for any contamination and damage he may have caused to his seven midos—by being led astray by the yetzer hara possessing seven appellations.

Thus, we can interpret the passuk in this manner: **כל הבא "וכל אשר באהל"—whoever comes to study Torah; "יטמא שבעת ימים"—should suspect or even presume that he has contaminated his seven midos—which represent the seven days. He should then contemplate teshuvah in order to rectify and purify all of his seven midos. After accomplishing this task, he should delve into his Torah-study with intensified self-sacrifice and commitment. In this manner, he will succeed in preserving and retaining the Torah that he has learned, as it is written (Tehillim 19, 10): "יראת ה'—the fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever.** Only Torah that has been obtained under conditions of taharah possesses the quality of being retained forever!

Donated by Dr. Ralph and Limor Madeb
Lealui neshmat Refael Gavriel Simcha Chaim Ben shulamit

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