Rabbi Portaleone And The Four-Hours A Day Tora Curriculum

EARLY LIFE

Rabbi Abraham Portaleone (1542-1612 , □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□) was born in the city of Mantua (Mantova), Italy. The family of Rabbi Abraham was in a comfortable economic position and that allowed the family, among other things, to provide the children with the best possible education, both in Tora and secular studies. The young Abraham began studying Tora with his father, as was the tradition at that time. Then, his father hired for him private tutors who were great Tora luminaries, like Rabbi Moshe Kazés, and Rabbi Ya'aqob MiPano. He also studied in depth the books and ideas of Maimonides with Rabbi Yosef Sinai. His rabbinic ordination was given to him by his mentor, Rabbi Abraham Provenzal, who was his constant source of inspiration (□□□□□□ □□□). With him, Rabbi Portaleone emphasizes, he had the merit to study Gemara, that is, the Talmud. Seemingly, this observation seems to be an unnecessary emphasis, unless we remember that the endless persecutions that Jews had to endure in Christian Europe included the confiscation and burning of every copy of the Talmud that the Church and its officers were able to find. In 1553, for example, the Inquisitors confiscated every copy of the Talmud and in Rosh Hashanah of that year (September 9th) the Talmud and many other Jewish books were burnt in the Campo dei Fiori. In 1559 by the order of Paul IV, one of the most antisemitic Popes ever, Jews had to deliver their Talmud or risk to be expelled and their properties confiscated. From April to May of that year, the Church burned between ten and twelve thousand volumes of the Talmud. Thus, throughout the remainder of the sixteenth-century, a complete edition of the Talmud could not be found anywhere in Italy.

DOCTOR IN MEDICINE

Parallel to his Tora studies, the young Rabbi Portaleone studied medicine. For Sephradic and Italian rabbis, practicing medicine became the source of a dignified income. The Portaleone family already had four generations of doctors. Rabbi Provenzal himself taught the young Abraham the basics: physiology, sciences and Latin, the language of academic studies. After three years of intensive studies, Rabbi Portaleone received his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Pavia, a city near Milan, at the age of 21 (sic!). In his book Shilte haGibborim he asserts that even during those years that he studied medicine intensively, he never spent a day without studying Tora. And he credits his consistency in Tora studying to the inspiration of Rabbi Provenzal. At the age of 24, he received his license to practice medicine from 35 doctors in the city of Mantua. At the beginning he worked under his father in his medical practice and little by little he replaced him, since his father was no longer in good health. In those days, Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jewish patients, unless they had special permission. In 1573 Pope Gregory XIV granted Rab Portaleone a special dispensation to treat Christian patients. He was also appointed as the Doctor of Don Guglielmo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantova and at his request he wrote two treatises on medicine: the best known is a book about the healing properties of gold. Throughout his life, he also served as the Mohel of the community: he reports to have performed the circumcision of 360 babies. He was also the chief physician of the Jewish community, and treated the needy members of the community for free.

SHILTE HAGUIBBORIM

At the age of 62, Rabbi Portaleone was affected by hemiplegia, a paralysis on one side of the body. He spent nine months prostrated in bed. When he finally recovered, he began to

write his masterpiece, the book “Shilte haGuiborim”. This text was written as a guide for prayer and Tora study for his three children (two of them were also physicians), and most of the book’s 90 chapters are dedicated to the Bet haMiqdash, the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, since the prayers that we recite are actually instead of the service in the Holy Temple. The author describes the building and architecture of the Temple, the utensils that were used there, the Divine Services, –the sacrifices, the incense, etc. *Shilte haGuibborim is perhaps the most comprehensive book ever written on the Temple of Yerushalayim.* It is practically an encyclopedia of everything you need to know about the Bet HaMiqdash. In addition, the author enriches our knowledge comparing every topic with contemporary scientific, technical and historical information, showing that the Tora anticipated present knowledge by centuries or thousands of years. The book describes, for example, the different songs the Levites used to sing, and the musical instruments used in the Temple; gemology and mineralogy to identify the stones Cohen Gadol used to wear. My favorite is the eleven chapters (78-88) he devotes to explore and identify one by one all the plant and species used in the Qetoret (Incense).

MAAMADOT

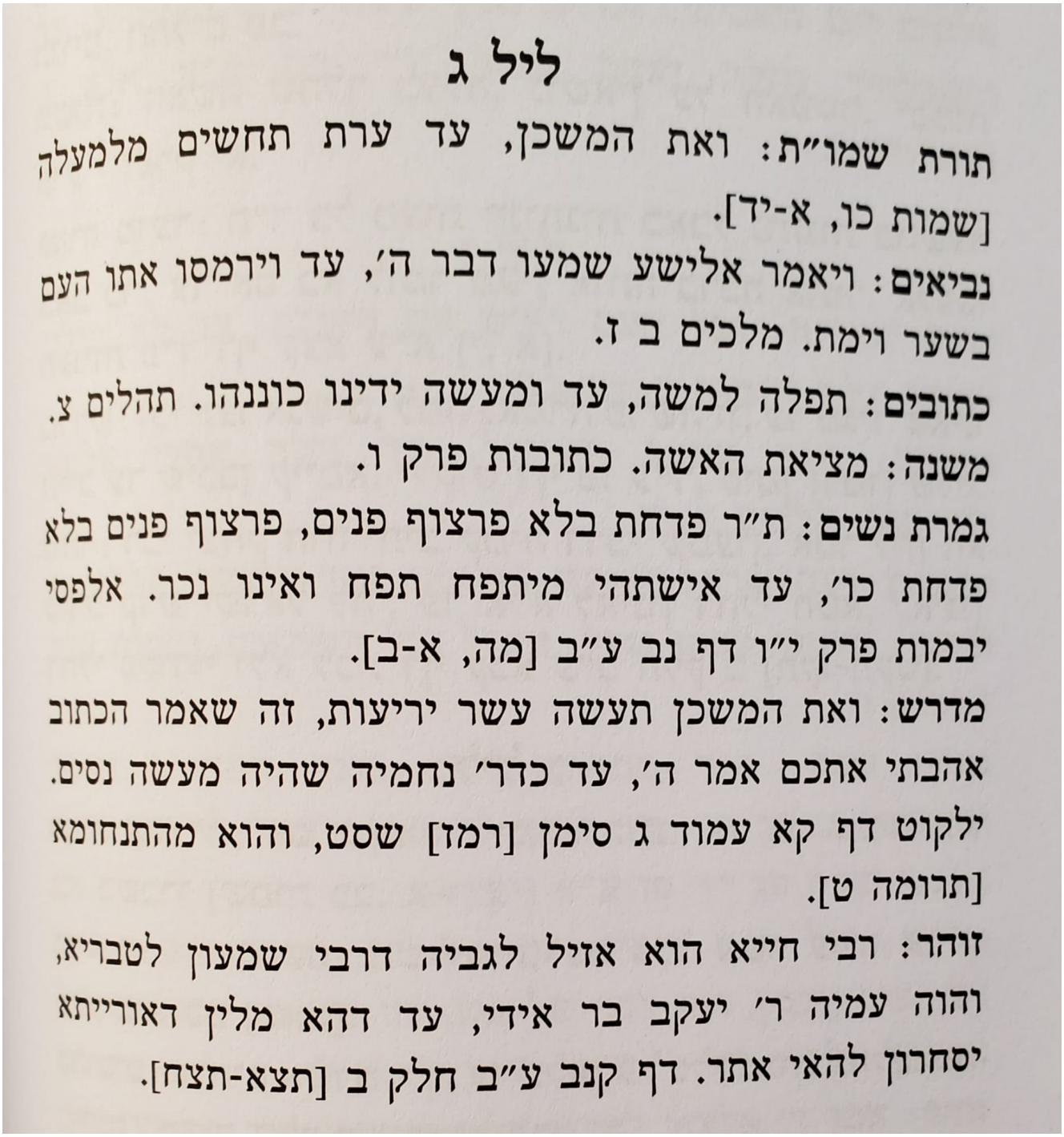
In the times of the Bet HaMiqdash, sacrifices and incense were offered daily. These tasks were performed by the Cohanim and Leviim. The 24 guards of Priests who served two weeks every year, are known as Mishmarot. While the services were performed in the Temple, inside the Temple (see main picture) and outside the Temple in towns across Israel. A select groups of volunteers, 24 groups, mostly Israelites, but also Cohanim and Levites, participated in a different kind of Divine Service: devoting a few hours a day to intense prayer, fasting and Tora study: focusing each day of the week on a different text. These groups were known as Ma’amadot (see more information here). Now, the sacrifices can no longer be

offered because the Temple no longer exists, but following the Rabbis' idea, we "replace" the sacrifices with our prayers: Shacharit, Mincha and Arbit. From the other side, we don't need to "replace" the Ma'amadot. Rabbi Portaleone was of the idea that we should "reenact" the Ma'amadot through an elaborated study program, a Tora curriculum, of texts to be recited and studied every day. He exhorts his son –and his readers– to adopt this regimen of four hours of Tora study, which he calls Ma'amadot. The program includes: Biblical verses of the Parasha of the week, the Aramaic translation, texts from the Prophets, the Scriptures (Ketubim), Mishna, Talmud, Mdrash and the Zohar. Unlike the famous book Hoq LeIsrael, Rabbi Portaleone's daily program is divided into three sections or sessions: the first session, which should last for about two hours, should be studied in the morning (Shacharit). The second session, around thirty minutes, in the afternoon (Mincha). And the night session, which should take an hour and a half, is for the night (Arbit). According to Rabbi Portaleone, these four hours –a sixth of our day– is the minimum time a Jewish individual needs to devote to the study of Tora.

LEILUY NISHMAT

Abraham ben Shafia Abadi z"l

We present here a text with an example of the Tora program corresponding to Tuesday of the week of Parsahat Teruma, night session.



ליל ג

תורת שמו"ת: ואת המשכן, עד ערת תחשים מלמעלה [שמות כו, א-יד].

נביאים: ויאמר אלישע שמעו דבר ה', עד וירמסו אתו העם בשער וימת. מלכים ב ז.

כתובים: תפלה למשה, עד ומעשה ידינו כוננהו. תהלים צ.

משנה: מציאת האשה. כתובות פרק ו.

גמרת נשים: ת"ר פדחת בלא פרצוף פנים, פרצוף פנים בלא פדחת כו', עד אישתהי מיתפח תפח ואינו נכר. אלפסי יבמות פרק י"ו דף נב ע"ב [מה, א-ב].

מדרש: ואת המשכן תעשה עשר יריעות, זה שאמר הכתוב אהבתי אתכם אמר ה', עד כדר' נחמיה שהיה מעשה נסים. ילקוט דף קא עמוד ג סימן [רמז] שסט, והוא מהתנחומא [תרומה ט].

זוהר: רבי חייא הוא אזיל לגביה דרבי שמעון לטבריא, והוה עמיה ר' יעקב בר אידי, עד דהא מלין דאורייתא יסחרון להאי אתר. דף קנב ע"ב חלק ב [תצא-תצח].

How did I find this book?

This book came to my hands, literally, from heaven. Around three months ago, there was a big snowstorm in NY on a Thursday. The next day, JFK Airport was closed, and hundreds of Shomer Shabbat Jews got stacked in NY for the weekend. In our community we hosted for Shabbat 12 young boys and girls

from Argentina. And we had also an unexpected guest of honor, also affected by the storm, who visited anonymously our Synagogue: Mr. Shlomo Neeman, the current mayor of Gush Etzion, Israel.

Among many other things we discussed, he told me about a special Kolel in the city/settlement Karme Tsur, where he and his family live. In this Kolel, Bet haBehira, the students study EXCLUSIVELY the laws and subjects pertaining to the Bet haMiqdash. A short time later, Mr. Neeman graciously mailed me a copy of the book Shilte haGibborim, which I never knew before. It is a new modern and beautiful edition, published in 2010 by the Kolel Bet haBehira, with an introduction by Rabbi Shalva, the head of the Kolel, and commentaries by Rabbi Abigdor Neventzal, an expert in the field.

I'm holding the book right now in my hands…. and I can't let go!

The book Shilte haGibborim is unique. I call it "the book of the future", because B"H, very soon this book will probably serve as the main reference we will use for everything related to the Abodat haQodesh of our Third Bet haMIqdash, □"□□□□□

If any reader wants to order the book, or make a donation to this wonderful Kolel □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□, you can do it via PayPal using the following email address of the Kolel: "kolelb@gmail.com".