



## The Path To Follow

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HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

RABBI DAVID HANANIA

PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau

75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

### GUARD YOUR TONGUE

#### An Instant Multiplied One Hundred and Twenty Times

A student of the Chafetz Chaim came to him and uttered his bitter complaint, "Rebbe, I gave a lecture of nearly two hours on the subject of paying attention to what we say, but I saw nothing come of it. People continued to act according to their sad habit." The Chafetz Chaim replied, "I'm surprised by your words. We know what the Vilna Gaon said about this, namely that for each instant a person remains silent, he merits a hidden light that no angel or created being can even imagine! Think about it: Such a reward is given for just a single moment of controlling one's tongue! Now imagine the tremendous reward and pleasure that people merit for not speaking any forbidden words for an entire two hours! Can you possibly imagine what you have done for them?"

– Netzor LeShoncha

## "CHOOSE LIFE" – PREPARING FOR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

**I**t is written, "I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you: I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life so that you may live, you and your offspring" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Rashi explains, "Heaven and earth exist forever, and when evil befalls you, they will be witnesses that I warned you regarding all this."

Rashi also states, "Another explanation is that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: 'Look at the heavens that I created to serve you. Have they ever changed their ways? Has the sun ever failed to rise from the east and illuminate the entire world, as it is stated, "The sun rises and the sun sets" [Ecclesiastes 1:5]? Look at the earth that I created to serve you. Has it ever changed its ways? ... They were created with neither reward nor loss in mind – for if they are meritorious, they still do not receive reward, and if they sin, they are not punished – and yet they have never changed their ways! So you, who will be rewarded if you are meritorious and punished if you sin, how much more should you do so!' " In fact Hashem fixed the paths of all the stars in order to do His will.

Likewise on earth we never see a person planting a tree in one place, only to discover it growing elsewhere. Only the moon has no fixed position in the sky, for its path is constantly changing because "the strength of His deeds He declared to His people" (Psalms 111:6). Moses adds, "You shall choose life so that you may live, you and your offspring." Here Rashi explains: "I instruct you to choose the portion of life. It is like a man who says to his son, 'Choose for yourself a fine portion of my estate,' and then directs him to the best portion, saying to him, 'This is what you should choose for yourself!'" It seems that we need to understand the meaning of, "You shall choose life." After all, which fool would not choose life if given the choice between life and death?

To explain this, we must say that when a person becomes accustomed to the vanities of the world and this fleeting life, materiality then seems to constitute true life, and conversely spirituality appears as nothing in his eyes. In fact to him, the "lazy and foolish" who spend their time studying Torah in the Beit Midrash seem to be "dead." When a person is immersed in the vanities of this world, he cannot tolerate being reprimanded or hearing words of Mussar. They seem like a heavy burden to him, something completely foreign in his eyes.

Thus Moses warned the Children of Israel: "Choose life." In other words, choose true life – a life of Torah and moral values – and carefully consider what your responsibility is in this world in order not to be drawn to meaningless pursuits, to the point that such pursuits seem like true life to you. In fact if you follow these vanities, they will lead you to spiritual death. When you eventually leave this world, you will not be able to take anything with you.

The Sages have said, "Provide yourself with a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend" (Pirkei Avot 1:6), and in his wisdom King Solomon said: "Rejoice, young man, in your youth" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). This means that a person will be happy if he chooses, while still young, Hashem's path in the holy Torah and makes it a personal acquisition. He will be happy if he cleaves to it like an inseparable friend, be it for a single instant, as King David said: "I am a friend to all who fear You" (Psalms 119:63).

A person's primary service of Hashem begins in his youth. The reason is that a youngster can fight the evil inclination with tremendous vigor. Happy is the person who will not be ashamed of his youth when he reaches old age, for his youth was not lost pursuing the vanities of this world.

Instead he will have served Hashem in his youth and filled his days with studying Torah, fulfilling mitzvot, and doing good deeds. He knew how to distinguish between the eternal life that is within us – the holy Torah that Hashem implanted in man's body – and the life of this world. The latter only appears to be a good life that is filled with pleasure, but in reality leads to nothing other than death, chasing a person from both this world and the World to Come. In the word *u'vacharta* ("and you shall choose"), we find the letters of the word *bachur* ("young man") and *chaver* ("friend"). This means that when a person cleaves to the Torah in his youth, choosing it exclusively and acquiring it as his own possession, he will never leave it. Instead he will keep it for his entire life, and the Torah will never depart from him either. In this way he will acquire for himself the World to Come, which is life and length of days, and he will study Torah day and night. Hence this is the advice of the Torah: It is only when a person is young that he can cleave to the Torah and make it his true friend, in which case he will never leave it.

Likewise King David said, "Taste and see that the L-RD is good" (Psalms 34:9). How can one "taste" Hashem? If a person fulfills the Creator's mitzvot in the proper way, he will merit tasting the delights of Hashem. In fact there is no taste, pleasure, or desire in this world that is more pleasant, delicious, and exquisite than the taste and delight of His light, which reveals itself to those who seek it. When a person tastes the flavor of the Torah and Mussar, he will immediately notice that the material life he has lived up to now has no taste, being completely filled with vanity.

This has special significance to the last week of the year, in the month of Elul, as a preparation for Rosh Hashanah and the day of judgment. How greatly should everyone fulfill mitzvot and taste the pleasantness of Hashem! If he does this, he will come to the day of judgment in a state of spiritual purity, and both he and the entire Jewish people will have a good year. Amen, may it be so.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## The Greatness of Ba'alei Teshuvah

*It is written, "You will return to the L-RD your G-d and listen to His voice" (Deuteronomy 30:2).*

Our Sages state, "Rabbi Abahu said: In the place where ba'alei teshuvah stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand" (Berachot 34b). The Rambam explains why: "His reward is very great because he tasted of sin, yet he turned away from it and conquered his instincts. ... A penitent's standard is higher than that of someone who never sinned, for a penitent exercises more control over his instincts" (Hilchot Teshuvah 7:4).

We can understand this with a parable: There was a certain king who possessed three bottles of wine that had been passed down to him from his forefathers, bottles that he guarded with great care. This king once had to journey to a distant land, and he called three of his friends and entrusted a bottle to each of them. He cautioned them not to open any of the bottles. These men were overcome with curiosity, for they wanted to know why the king had ordered them not to open the bottles. This could only be, they thought, on account of the wine's exquisite taste, which is why they wanted to open the bottles and taste a little. Reuven opened his bottle, drank a little, and was overcome with a desire to drink it all. At that point he couldn't control himself, and he drank the entire bottle. Shimon wanted to open his bottle, but because of his love for the king he was content on leaving it closed. Levi opened his bottle, drank a little, and had a strong desire to drink the rest. Yet because of his love for the king, he closed the bottle while still half of its wine remained. When the king returned, he called his three friends to find out what had happened to the bottles. Reuven, who drank the entire bottle, was ordered to the gallows. Shimon, who had not touched any wine, was given 10,000 gold coins as a gift from the king. Finally Levi, who drank half of his bottle, was given 20,000 gold coins. When Shimon saw this, he asked the king why he had given Levi twice as much. The king answered, "Although you didn't drink any wine, it is very possible that if you had tasted some of it, you would have consumed the entire bottle, for you may not have been able to control your desire for such good wine. However Levi drank a portion of the wine – he experienced its delicious flavor – and yet controlled himself and didn't drink the rest, which proves that he loves me. That's why I gave him twice as much." Likewise a tzaddik, who has never sinned or tasted of sin, has no such trial to overcome, for he has been accustomed from his youth to performing mitzvot. He has not tasted of sin, which is why he has no problem refraining from it. This is not the case for a ba'al teshuvah, who did taste of sin for a great part of his life and became used to it. However he now overcomes difficult trials on a daily basis, which is why he is at a greater level. Hence the Sages said of him, "In the place where ba'alei teshuvah stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand."

– Torat HaParasha

## A Pearl From the Rav: The Defender of Israel

*It is written, "You will lie with your fathers, but this people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land" (Deuteronomy 31:16).*

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita asks why the Holy One, blessed be He, said this to Moses, rather than supporting and consoling him. After all, Moses was about to depart from this world and leave the Children of Israel alone, after having devoted himself to them so much. Instead we see the exact opposite here: Hashem announces the bad news to Moses, namely that after his death this people would rise up and serve foreign gods! The Rav responds by saying that when a tzaddik leaves this material world and tastes of Gan Eden, at that very

moment he severs every connection he has to this world. Since Moses was the Children of Israel's defender, Hashem told him that this people would serve other gods after he dies, which was likely to arouse G-d's wrath against them. Hashem said this so that Moses, even after leaving this world, would continue to care for the Children of Israel and defend them so as to avoid arousing His anger.

## The Torah: As Indispensable as the Air we Breathe

*It is written, "It is not in Heaven...nor is it across the sea... Rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it" (Deuteronomy 30:12-14).*

In terms of sustaining the body, the more something is needed for life, the more easily it can be obtained and the more abundant it is. Thus the air that we breathe is what we need most for life, which is why we can find it everywhere and at all times. Next comes water, which can be found without much effort because it is so greatly needed.

The above verses teach us that the same applies in terms of sustaining the soul. The Torah is so indispensable to man that we should have to ascend to Heaven to search for it, or cross the sea in order to obtain it. Yet precisely for this reason, "it is not in Heaven...nor is it across the sea," but rather it is "in your mouth and in your heart to perform it." In fact just like the air we breathe, which we find everywhere and at all times (for if we had to exhaust ourselves in order to find it, we would die in the meantime), the Torah itself – which the soul needs at all times and places – is very close to us. In fact it is truly in our mouth and in our heart to study it and put it into practice.

– MiShulchan Gavoha, citing Rabbi Meir Mikhal Rabinowitz

## The Chick Inside its Shell

*It is written, "The matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it" (Deuteronomy 30:14).*

The chick inside its shell, say the authors of parables, uses its beak to strike the egg's shell from the inside in trying to come out. How does it know that a vast world exists on the outside of the egg? Its natural instincts reveal this secret to it. Thus the soul of every Jew, even without knowing or having learned anything, yearns for G-d as faith stirs within him.

– Ma'ayanot HaNetzach

## A Pilpul From the Trenches

*It is written, "I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you" (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

During the final year in the life of the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Yehuda Leib (the author of Sefat Emet), war broke out between Russia and Japan. Thousands of his chassidim were mobilized and sent to the front. Among them was the ilui of Ostrova, who wrote a long pilpul to the Rebbe from the trenches he found himself in, a pilpul on the commentaries of Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona. The Rebbe replied by writing a letter to him that began with the following words: "I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you – ha'idoti evokes the word adi, a decoration. With you – with Jews such as yourself – I decorated heaven and earth."

– Ma'ayanot HaNetzach

## Something Acceptable

*It is written, "The L-RD spoke to Moses: 'Behold, your days are drawing near to die'" (Deuteronomy 31:14).*

The Mishnah cites Rabbi Eliezer as saying, "Repent one day before your death" (Pirkei Avot 2:10). The Gemara states: "His disciples asked him, 'Does one know on what day he will die?' He replied, 'All the more reason for him to repent today, lest he die tomorrow'" (Shabbat 153a). Rabbi Yechezkel Lewinsten was asked, "Just as a person can

die tomorrow, he can also die today. Therefore why did he not say, 'lest he die today'?" Rabbi Yechezkel thought about it and said, "The Sages always teach us something in a way that we can understand and accept it. If we were to tell someone, 'Repent today, for today you are going to die,' he will not believe it. He will not agree to repent, since it is a fact that he is alive and active. Therefore how could he die? However if we were to tell him, 'Repent today, for tomorrow you may die,' then he can understand and accept it, since the fate of all men is to die."

– MiShulchan Gavoha

## Unable to See the Pain of His Son

*It is written, "I will conceal My face and they will become prey" (Deuteronomy 31:17).*

Our teachers the Ba'alei HaTosfot have explained that this is an expression of love. It is like a man whose son has erred, and who tells his son's teacher to strike him. Because the man cannot bear to see his son's pain, since he has compassion for him, he hides his face in order not to see his son being struck. This teaches us the great extent of Hashem's love for Israel.

## Why Foolish?

*It is written, "For I know its inclination, what it does today" (Deuteronomy 31:21).*

The wisest of all men called the evil inclination "an old and foolish king" (Ecclesiastes 4:13). This does not mean that it is foolish, for on the contrary, we see that it has the power to ensnare even the greatest sages. After all, there is no man on earth who is completely righteous and never sins. Rather, it carries this name because of its work, just as someone who makes shoes is known as a "shoemaker," and someone who tailors clothes is known as a "tailor." Likewise the evil inclination is called "foolish" because its work consists of turning men into fools, doing all that it can to make them foolish (the Chafetz Chaim).

The story is told of a plot that was hatched against one of the leading Torah figures of the previous generation, a plot that resulted in his imprisonment. When he arrived in prison, he was amazed to find that the foolish evil inclination had come to find him there. He said to it, "I was brought here against my will on account of a plot. But you, did someone seize you and bring you here? Therefore what you doing here, you fool?"

– Torat HaParasha

## Overview of the Parsha: Nitzavim

After the terms of the covenant are introduced in Parsha Ki Tavo, the actual covenant is brought in Parsha Nitzavim, as well as the curses that it contains. The promise is made that even if the Children of Israel violate the covenant, they will eventually repent. The parsha ends with words aimed at encouraging the observance of Torah and mitzvot, and the closeness of the Children of Israel to the mitzvot are highlighted.

Overview of the Parsha: Vayeilech

After the terms of the covenant are introduced in Parsha Ki Tavo and the covenant itself in Parsha Nitzavim, Parsha Vayeilech deals with the transmission of the Torah to the Children of Israel so it can remain with them for all the generations. At the beginning of the parsha, Moses tells the Children of Israel that authority will be transferred to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the fact that he will lead them from then on. The parsha also mentions the public reading of the Torah at the end of the Shmita year.

# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## Fifty-two Different Jobs a Year

*It is written, "I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life so that you may live, you and your offspring" (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

In his book Darash Moshe, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that since it is written: "I have placed life and death before you," and since we are ordered to "choose life," it is obvious that we will live with our offspring if we make that choice. Therefore why does the verse repeat "so that you may live, you and your offspring"? How much more is "your offspring" superfluous, since one's offspring are also commanded to "choose life so that you may live"! The answer is that it is possible for a person to fulfill Hashem's mitzvot for himself, yet without influencing his offspring to follow the same path. How so? This can happen, for example, when a person fulfills mitzvot as if he were being pushed by a demon, or when he prefers to live without them. Hence the Torah commands us to "choose life so that you may live, you and your offspring." We must ensure that our choice of life is made with such joy and spiritual delight that it is "so that you may live, you and your offspring." This means that we must also exert a good influence on our offspring, in which case we will live, both us and our offspring.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was once asked, "We know that the Jews who emigrated from Europe to America two and three generations ago were placed in a very difficult situation with regards to observing Shabbat. It is said that many of them had 52 jobs during the year, for on Friday they would be fired on account of wanting to observe Shabbat. Therefore how could it happen that the great majority of the children of these people – those who feared G-d and demonstrated their devotion to Shabbat – drifted away from religion and no longer observed Shabbat at all?"

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein answered that it was precisely on account of their "devotion" to Shabbat that their children no longer observed it at all! These devoted people failed in an important area: When they would return home after having overcome a difficult trial, they expressed their tremendous sorrow and disappointment over having to once again lose their job in order to observe Shabbat. Their children therefore absorbed the idea that observing Shabbat in America is something that demands too many sacrifices and is connected to hardship and pain. Hence their children concluded on their own that they were not capable of such devotion, and that it was better to forgo the observance of Shabbat.

Other people, however, returned home and announced with joy, "Baruch Hashem, we've been able to once again observe Shabbat correctly. You can't imagine how happy I am that we've been able to overcome this trial!" The children of such people inherited joy and happiness over the observance of the mitzvot, and these children were also prepared to express the same devotion with a joyous heart. – MiShulchan Gavoha

# EISHET CHAYIL

## The Wisdom of Solomon

The Sages speak of the Queen of Sheba, who journeyed to Jerusalem in order to get a closer look at King Solomon's wisdom. One day she asked King Solomon if there was a fundamental difference, apart from anatomy, between boys and girls. He told her that there was. According to legend, the Queen of Sheba brought many boys and girls to King Solomon, all of them of the same height and appearance, and all dressed like girls so as to look like girls. She then said to him, "Separate the boys from the girls." King Solomon ordered his servants to bring him some candy. He then told the children to pick up the candy when his servants would throw it to the floor. When the children picked up the candy, King Solomon separated them, the boys on one side and the girls on another. The Queen of Sheba was stunned to see that King Solomon had not made a single mistake. She asked him how he could distinguish between them with such precision, given that they all looked like girls. He said to her, "I saw how they picked up the candy. Some of them lifted up their skirts and placed their candy in them; these were the boys. Others placed the candy in their pockets or kept them in their hands; these were the girls. By nature girls are modest, and they would never lift up their skirts. Boys lack the modesty of girls, and they are also not accustomed to wearing skirts, so naturally they lifted them up." – Midrash Mishlei

## A TRUE STORY

### The Segula of a Tzaddik

*It is written, “In your mouth and in your heart to perform it” (Deuteronomy 30:14).*

A certain merchant complained about his financial situation to the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin. He said, “My friend and I each own a business, and they’re as similar as two drops of water. What happened? My friend has fortune on his side, for he has so many clients that the door to his store never closes for even an instant during the day. The result is that he earns a very good living and enjoys an abundant life. As for my store, almost nobody comes in during the day, and I’ve recently found myself in very great difficulty.” Rabbi Moshe patiently listened to the irritated merchant, and upon finishing his story, Rabbi Moshe said to him: “I will give you a good segula that can open up the gates of sustenance for you. Each time that you see a client coming into your friend’s store, thank Hashem and say with all your heart: “Blessed are You, Who gives food to everyone and abundantly sustains so-and-so the son of so-and-so.” The Rav then stressed, “If you do this, be assured that with Hashem’s help both you and your household will enjoy abundance.”

The merchant was shocked when he heard what the tzaddik had to say. In fact he exclaimed, “How can I praise and thank Hashem with all my heart when my eyes see the success of my neighbor? He’s competing against me and depriving me and my family of sustenance!”

Rabbi Moshe replied, “First get used to saying these things with your mouth, and eventually you will be able to say them with your heart, as it is written: ‘In your mouth and in your heart to perform it.’”

– Parperaot LaTorah

## THE DEEDS OF OUR FATHERS

### Remove Anger from Your Heart

The Talmud provides us with a look into the extreme situations that anger can lead to. When the Amora Ulla traveled from Babylon to Eretz Israel, he was accompanied by two Jews from the town of Hozai. On the way, these Jews got into a heated argument that became infused with anger, and they eventually came to blows. In fact one of them arose and, in his anger, cut the throat of the other. As the victim was wreathing on the ground and the perpetrator was still holding the knife dripping with blood, he turned to Ulla and said: “Have I done well?” Ulla was afraid that if he voiced even the slightest disapproval, or if he were to criticize the man for letting his anger get the best of him, he would try to kill him as well. Hence Ulla said to him, “Yes, you did well. Moreover, cut his throat clean across so that he dies quickly.” Ulla himself had good intentions, having realized that it was impossible to save the victim due to his deep wound and the fact that the murderer would prevent all attempts to save him. Hence Ulla at least wanted to spare him a long, agonizing death. In reality, he said things in such a way that the murderer believed that he was in agreement with his actions, which pacified him. Nevertheless, Ulla himself was bothered by his own words. When he came before Rabbi Yochanan in Eretz Israel, he said to him: “Perhaps, G-d forbid, I strengthened the hands of transgressors?” Rabbi Yochanan replied, “You have saved your life,” for there is no reason for a person to let himself get killed rather than to transgress the prohibition against flattery. In dangerous situations, one is always permitted to save his own life by flattering the wicked (see Nedarim 22a).

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol

The holy kabbalist, Rabbi Haim Pinto “Hagadol” Zatzal, may his merit protect us all, was known for his charity towards the poor. He would often go to the homes of the poor and sit on the ground to partake of a meal with them, since he had tremendous respect for them. Hence he made a great effort, especially on Fridays, to collect money for the poor. One day, in the middle of a lecture that he was giving, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol suddenly stopped and went out into the street with his assistant. A wealthy Jew was passing by, and Rabbi Haim asked him to donate some money for tzedakah. When the man refused, Rabbi Haim told his assistant: “Follow him, and you will see something.” A few minutes later, the wealthy man died. Yet before his death, he merited having the Rav’s assistant recite Shema Israel with him. Rabbi Haim said to his assistant, “If he had given tzedakah, it would have saved him from death. That’s why I told you to follow him, so that he wouldn’t die without Kriat Shema, which you said with him.” The name of Rabbi Haim Pinto was known and respected by everyone in the land. Even non-Jews came to him for blessings. It once happened that a dignitary from the region persecuted Rabbi Haim and went so far as to imprison him. That same night, this dignitary fell gravely ill. In fact he was on the verge of death, and his pain was driving him mad. The members of his household did not know what to do. That night he dreamed that he had fallen ill because he had tormented the great tzaddik of the Jews. When he woke up, he immediately ordered food and provisions brought to the tzaddik, and Rabbi Haim gave him a blessing to be healed. This blessing, however, was only on condition that the dignitary promised to never harm Jews again, and to always help them. It was Rabbi Haim Pinto’s custom to always help Jews and pray for them wherever they were. He also instructed people to ask Hashem to answer them “by the merit of Rav Pinto,” in which case their prayers would be answered. May the merit of his holiness protect both us and all Israel. Amen, may it be so.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

### Do Not be Silent!

*It is written, “I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem. ... You who make mention of the L-RD, do not be silent! Give Him no rest until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a source of praise in the land” (Isaiah 62:6-7).*

In his book Likutei Amarim, the Chafetz Chaim states: “Even if everyone knows that it is forbidden to contest Hashem’s decisions and the way that He leads us, since justice is certainly on His side and His ways are just and upright, a person is still permitted to voice and present his views before Hashem regarding every trial that he faces. Thus the verse itself encourages a person to present his arguments and complaints, as it is written: ‘Give Him no rest until He establishes...’ The many calamities that come upon us, which we are not been delivered from, occur because we are not screaming and pouring ourselves out in prayer over them. If we would pray and pour ourselves out before the Holy One, blessed be He, certainly our prayers and supplications would not return empty. It is not enough for a person to pray Shemoneh Esrei three times a day. Rather, a few times per day a person needs to pour out his prayers and supplications in solitude, in his house, from the depths of his heart, for the three prayers are already fixed in his mouth, and he does not take them to heart so greatly. However if a person would contemplate in solitude and make a cheshbon hanefesh regarding his personal situation, his great poverty and his many toils... then he would pour out his heart like water before Hashem, may He be blessed, and his prayer will emerge with deep concentration, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. A prayer like this will certainly not return empty.”