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The Pinto Associations

around the world, along with Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, send you their best wishes for an exceptional new year 5770. Shana Tova! May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.

שנה טובה ופרטוקה תכתבו ותחתפו
לחיים טובים ולשלום אמן

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THE \$25 MILLION FUNERAL

By David Damen

An amazing saga, told here for the first time. It began with a father and son, separated in Auschwitz. A secret revealed, after sixty years. A race against time, across oceans and continents, to the deathbed of a long-lost dying father, a fabulous fortune to be divided, a halachic dilemma, and a conflict in human relations. The full story has been described by Gedolei Torah as "a story atypical of our times," yet its hero shrugs it off as no more than the simple compliance with Jewish law that any observant person would see as his minimal obligation.

It was just another routine day at one of the cemeteries in central Israel. Dozens of family members walked, heads bowed sadly, behind their deceased loved one. A standard funeral, at first glance. Strangers who encountered the throng on its way out barely cast a glance at the group. Even the passionate sobs of the man leading the procession, who seemed to be the only son of the deceased, didn't transform the funeral into anything extraordinary in this land of the dead, where wails and sobs are the order of the day until that time when death will be forever vanquished.

No one could guess that this funeral, which was held about three months ago, was far from another routine funeral. It was the closing of an amazing saga, a rare collusion of events stunning in their intensity, Divine in their essence, and containing all the elements of an almost inconceivable story. Had it not actually occurred, it is doubtful that anyone would believe the tale.

The first part of the unbelievable puzzle was woven in Auschwitz during the terrible war years. The thousands of downtrodden human skeletons walking through the camp were joined one day by a father and son, named Moshe and Yitzchak (not their real names). The father, a householder from a certain well-known town, clutched his only son tightly, desperately attempting to protect him from any harm. The Nazis separated the father from his son. They were taken to different places, and never met again.

A short while later, the war came to an end. The survivors, who were slated to be next in line

for the ovens, rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Then they began their odyssey toward living a normal, free life. Moshe, the father, tried to locate his son. When he failed to do so, he quickly despaired. The boy must have been killed, he thought to himself. The loss overtook him and broke his spirit. In a moment of emotional weakness, he decided to abandon his religion and completely disconnect from the past. Wounded, angered, and filled with resentment, he decided to turn over a new leaf in a place where he would be unrecognized. He wandered through several countries, finally setting in a country in South America.

In his new home, Moshe began a new chapter, albeit not a smooth one. He married a local non-Jewish woman. The young son that he'd left behind in Poland, and the possibility that he might still be alive somewhere, didn't occupy his thoughts all that much. Perhaps covertly, when no one noticed, he thought about the child. But to his non-Jewish wife and son, he never revealed his secret memories. The son, a non-Jew, never imagined in his wildest dreams what his father was hiding in his memory box. His father's financial successes veiled his previous traumas. When it came to money, Moshe did quite well. He made many successful deals and amassed tremendous wealth.

A few months ago came his turning point. Moshe felt unwell, and at his advanced age he didn't want to take any chances. He visited the local doctor, and after comprehensive examinations, was informed that his life was coming to an end. "You have just a few months left," his doctor told him with an impassive expression.

Distressed, Moshe's conscience began to trouble him greatly. Thoughts of his lost son began to race through his mind, and spurred him to take action before it would be too late. Lying on his sickbed, he summoned his non-Jewish son and recounted the untold portion of his history. "I never told you this," he

said in a weak voice, "but you should know that there is a possibility that my other son, a Jew, is living somewhere in the world. I ask of you, try to locate him! When you do find him, give him 25 million dollars." This sum was exactly half of Moshe's estate. Fifty million dollars was the sum that Moshe would be leaving behind. Now, he had decided to divide it in two.

Moshe supplied his son with two pieces of information: The exact name of his missing son and his birth day. With the help of those two minute details, the non-Jewish son began a fascinating search attempt. It was a race against probability and a race against time. Any day now, his father was apt to breathe his last.

A Few Hours Too Late

Aided by advanced electronic media, which hadn't existed in the days after Auschwitz, the son slowly drew closer to his goal. He searched throughout the United States, carried on to Europe, and ... did not find a trace of his half-brother. As a last alternative, he tried searching in Israel. The name that he located was a perfect match to the name his father had mentioned. Not only that, but the birthday was also the same. He didn't waste any time, and contracted the fellow, his new brother. The man, whom we'll call Yitzchak, a Torah-observant Jew living in Tel Aviv, heard the stranger on the other end of the telephone and was moved to tears. "Father is about to die," his non-Jewish brother informed him. "The sooner you come, the greater your chances of meeting him."

The man, greatly moved, took the first available flight and flew to South America to meet



his biological father, for whom he had recited Kaddish for the last sixty years. He reached his destination and was met at the airport by his brother, whose saddened face said it all. "I am sorry to inform you," the brother said, "that our father died last night in the hospital." Yitzchak had arrived just a few hours too late.

The only thing left to do at that point was to arrange a respectable funeral. On the way to town, as the two discussed the tremendous inheritance waiting for them, Yitzchak tried to clarify the details of the funeral. "The funeral won't be held for another few days," the non-Jewish brother said.

"Why?" Yitzchak couldn't understand the reason for the delay.

"Because that's what I've already arranged with the church," his brother answered serenely. After a few moments Yitzchak learned that his Jewish father was slated to undergo a non-Jewish burial with all the trimmings. The funeral would be held in the church, the priest would deliver a fiery eulogy, and then the corpse would be sent for cremation. His father's body may have escaped the ovens of Auschwitz, but it would now be burned in a magnificent non-Jewish ceremony.

Yitzchak was terribly disturbed. "How could you do this to father?" he tried to reprimand his brother. "After all, he was a Jew!"

"Leave me alone," the brother rejoined. "He never instructed me otherwise. He behaved exactly as a non-Jew. There is no reason that you, a newly-arrived guest, should spoil this ceremony for me."

The biting argument spiraled into a serious fight, with each side staunchly defending its position. The non-Jewish brother could not understand what the Israeli Jew, the fellow who was supposedly his brother, wanted from him. Just a few days ago, he had informed the Jew that he was about to become a millionaire. Now that he'd arrived, this stranger was making his life miserable over such inconsequential matters.

Everything For a Jewish Burial

Yitzchak didn't waste any time. He telephoned his lawyer in Israel, one of the country's top attorneys, and asked him to recommend a talented lawyer in the South American country where he was located. Yitzchak decided to prevail over his brother through the legal system. The Israeli attorney referred him to a local law-

yer, and a hearing was quickly scheduled.

In the interim, a court order was issued forbidding the burial until a final verdict would be reached. A few days later, the case was heard.

The judge, who apparently didn't quite understand the great furor, suggested what seemed to him a most logical arrangement. "The corpse shall be cremated," he ruled. Still, in an attempt to satisfy the Jewish brother, he informed him that the ashes would be divided equally between the two brothers. Half would be given to the non-Jew, and the other half to Yitzchak, who would be free to bury it in a Jewish cemetery.

In any other situation, Yitzchak would have burst into uncontrollable laughter, remembering the famous verdict of King Solomon. But in this case, the subject was his father, whose body was about to be terribly violated. He could not permit himself to lose this battle.

Yitzchak summoned his brother and tried to convince him in other ways. "You know that my portion of the inheritance is 25 million dollars," Yitzchak began in a soft voice. "Take 10 million of those dollars for yourself and give me the body in exchange," he offered.

The brother looked at him with flashing eyes and spit out angrily, "Aren't you ashamed? Here I made such efforts to locate you, and then you are shaming me like this, suing me in court, and embarrassing me in public! I don't even want to talk to you!" he concluded vehemently.

Yitzchak wouldn't give up. In a flash of inspiration, he decided to make a much improved offer. "I will give you my entire share of the inheritance, all 25 million dollars, as long as you give me father's body," he told his brother, his voice shaky but sure. The brother thought for a moment, and then immediately concluded the deal. What was a dead body worth to a non-Jew, compared to 25 million dollars?

And don't think that Yitzchak is a wealthy person. Not at all. Yitzchak is just a Jew who always managed to make as much money as he needed to get by, and who managed to marry off his children honorably. Nothing more than that.

The deal was closed on the spot. The non-Jewish brother received the entire inheritance, while Yitzchak flew back to Israel together with the most precious treasure possible: His father's unviolated body. Not only did Yitzchak lose his inheritance, he also had to pay \$50,000 in legal funds.

Back in Israel, the entire family assembled

to pay their final respects to their forgotten grandfather. Yitzchak said Kaddish in a crushed voice, and began a year of mourning.

Facing the open grave, Yitzchak began to think about the strange series of events that he had endured over the past few days. He had found his father, discovered a non-Jewish brother, lost 25 million dollars, and succeeded in granting his father a Jewish burial. His family members were also immersed in thought. Who had greater merit: The father, whose body had miraculously made its way to Israel for burial, or the son, who had turned down such tremendous wealth for that purpose?

As the family stood there, still immersed in thought, the undertakers steadily continued their work. Not one of them imagined that this body, which they were slowly lowering into the ground, had "cost" the family 25 million dollars.

Yitzchak, the hero of the story, is a modest man. He never intended to publicize his story, and had no plans of gaining any glory from his actions.

This story eventually reached the ears of the gaon Rabbi Chaim Yerachmiel Kleinman Shlita, the mashgiach of Yeshivat Ateret Yisrael, who is personally acquainted with several of the people involved in the story. In a conversation with the family, Rabbi Kleinman verified all the details of the account, and even mentioned that he had presented the story to gedolim, who had expressed great amazement upon hearing the tale. One of those gedolim was the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein Shlita, the Rav of the Ramat Elchanan district, who later retold the story at one of his lectures.

"It is unbelievable," says Rav Kleinman excitedly. "It is a story that is totally atypical of our times. It is nothing less than a 'Berditchover tale.'" Rav Kleinman has retold the story many times, but each time he is moved anew.

The family attempted, in any case, to establish contact with the hero of the story, but the latter's lawyer responded that he was not interested in being interviewed.



THROUGH FAITH IN THE TZADDIK, ONE ATTAINS FAITH IN HASHEM

by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita



It is written, “They believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant” (Shemot 14:31).

Our Sages of blessed memory have said that the Holy One, blessed be He, concerns Himself with the praise of the tzaddikim and spreads it throughout the world (Bamidbar Rabba 21:3), for in this way a person attains even greater faith in Hashem, his fear of Heaven increases, and his soul is purified. When a person hears about the miracles and deliverances brought about by the tzaddikim, he will immediately take things to heart and think: “Why did they, of all people, merit for the Holy One, blessed be He, to listen to their prayer and do their will?” The answer, of course, is that these tzaddikim devoted their lives to perform-

ing Hashem’s will and keeping His mitzvot – all of their deeds being solely for the sake of Hashem’s honor, to elevate His Name in the world – and therefore Hashem repays them measure for measure, listening to their requests and doing their will.

Our Sages say that Hashem longs to hear the prayer of the tzaddikim (Yevamot 64a). The prayers of the tzaddikim are also likened to a deer, for as long as it grows, its antlers form additional branches each year. Likewise with the tzaddikim: The longer they remain in prayer, the more their prayer is heard (Yoma 29a). Our Sages of blessed memory also say that the merit of the tzaddikim is so great, they can transform the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy (Bereshith Rabba 33:4). Hence a person who prays to Hashem and asks for the merit of the tzaddik to protect and save him, his prayer will be heard and the tzaddik will stand by his side to help. Such is the way of the tzaddikim, for they do good for others, just as our Sages have said: “As the mountains are suitable for planting and producing fruit, so the tzaddikim produce fruit and do good for themselves and for others” (Vayikra Rabba 27:1). Hashem gives a tzaddik the authority to bless the nation in the merit of his good deeds, as our Sages of blessed memory have said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, declared: Previously I blessed My creatures.... Henceforth, however, the kohanim and the tzaddikim will bless you” (Tanchuma, Vayechi 7). Happy is the person who walks in their ways and cleaves to

them and their Torah. Happy is one who learns their deeds and always recounts their praise. Their merit is so great that it is preserved for a person in this world and the next.

I shall describe just the tip of the iceberg regarding the wonders performed by our sanctified forefathers, and we shall examine how their merit and prayer is able to protect and save each person, regardless of the circumstances. My righteous brother, Rabbi Haim Pinto Shlita, may Hashem send him a refuah shelema, told me that he read in the book *Vayaged Moshe* by Rabbi Moshe Izgan Zatzal a wonderful story about how Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol had the merit of building a luxurious synagogue. Since Rabbi Haim Pinto was the head of the Beit Din and the Rav of the city, he would go to a different synagogue each Shabbat and deliver a discourse on Torah and chizuk. During one such discourse, the Rav heard a Jew complaining about how long it was, saying *barka* (meaning “enough”). Rabbi Haim was not insulted, nor did he take it to heart. However he immediately kept quiet and ended his discourse, and afterwards he raised his hands to the heavens and said: “Sovereign of the universe, when will I have the merit of having a private synagogue, so I won’t be dependant on the favors of others?” That same week, a distinguished Arab came to his home. This Arab wanted to deposit a very large sum of money with the Rav while he went on a journey to a distant place. At first the Rav refused to accept responsibility for such a large sum, but then he said to the Arab: “If you agree, I will use this money to build a synagogue.” The Arab immediately agreed, and he even added: “Don’t be in such a hurry to return the money to me. You can pay me back little by little, whatever you

can.” Indeed, the Rav built a large and luxurious synagogue with that handsome sum. His synagogue stands to this very day, and from that era till now people come from all over the world to pray there. As for the Arab, he never returned. From here we see how Hashem heard the prayer of the tzaddik and carried out his will, for his only goal was to please his Maker. All he wanted to do was increase Hashem’s honor and glorify the house of our G-d, building Him a synagogue for praise and honor. His prayer was therefore answered that very same week.

Our Sages of blessed memory have said, “The tzaddikim are greater in death than in life” (Chullin 7b). On the final day of the Hilloula that we held in honor of Rabbi Haim Pinto, a woman by the name of Mrs. Biton came to pray, along with many others, by the grave of the tzaddik. As in every year, we blessed all the participants, each according to his request, and I blessed her as well. When we returned from the tzaddik’s grave, I saw her standing to the side. I don’t know why, but I summoned her again

and blessed her from the depths of my heart for success and a refuah shelemah. Afterwards, when she returned to her home in Casablanca, she told her husband what had happened. When her husband heard it, he grew fearful and said to his wife: “Since the Rav blessed you for a refuah shelemah, it probably means that you should get checked,” and he urged her to go to the doctor. Indeed, tests revealed the presence of a terrible illness, though it was still in its early stages. The woman immediately underwent treatment, and thank G-d the doctors managed to completely cure her illness. I had the merit of participating in a seudat hodaya (thanksgiving meal) which the family held to thank and praise Hashem for having saved her. I instructed her to publicly tell people about Hashem’s favor, since it results in a great Kiddush Hashem. Of course it had been the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, by whose grave she had prayed, that saved her. I was only a messenger who urged her to go see her doctor, which thank G-d resulted in her recovery.

Mrs. Tzipporah Lok, the daughter of Rabbi Avraham Maman Zatzal, told me that her son traveled from Morocco to the United States for a job interview that involved a difficult and complex test. Very few applicants successfully complete the test, and only three out of about a thousand are chosen for the sought-after position. Of course there was no chance for her son to be chosen, since only Americans, who possess a complete mastery of the language, are supposed to pass. Nevertheless she lit a candle in honor of Rabbi Haim Pinto, and she prayed and trusted in the Holy One, blessed be He, for the merit of the tzaddik to help her son and enable him to be chosen. As it turned out, with G-d’s help he successfully passed the test and was one of the three candidates chosen for the position. He later said, with complete sincerity, that during the exam he felt that someone was standing nearby and revealing the answers to him one by one. He even managed to successfully answer the questions that he had no clue about. This shows us the tremendous power of the tzaddik’s merit to



help those who sincerely trust in him.

Our Sages say, “So it is with the tzaddikim: He who does not guard himself against them [will find that] their bite is the bite of the fox, their sting is the sting of the scorpion, their hiss is the hiss of the serpent, and furthermore all their words are like fiery coals” (Bamidbar Rabba 3:1). During my stay in Montreal, Canada, Mr. Yehuda Dahan told me in the name of his father (who actually witnessed the awe-inspiring event) that Rabbi Haim Pinto was a guest in their home, and from there he was to travel to Marakech. When the Rav reached the outskirts of the city, all the members of the community, both young and old, came out to welcome him with great honor. Suddenly, a non-Jew emerged from the crowd and brazenly spit in the Rav’s face! It was hard for this non-Jew to see such great honor being bestowed upon the tzaddik. Upon seeing this, the Jews became enraged and wanted to hurt him, but the Rav prevented them, saying: “Hashem will take revenge on him.” As he was speaking, a French soldier arrived and accidentally discharged his rifle, which struck the non-Jew in the head, killing him on the spot. “May all Your enemies perish in this way, Hashem.”

One person told me that he had seven sons and one daughter. His daughter was born paralyzed, and since her birth he would pray for a long each day and bitterly weep for her recovery. He would also light candles for the elevation of Rabbi Haim Pinto’s soul, so that his daughter could be saved by the merit of the tzaddik. Each morning after prayers, he returned home and helped his wife to prepare the children for school. Their lives went on like this, with joy and sadness mixed together. One morning, the man carried on with his prayers at great length, praying from the depths of his heart and asking the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto to help him by interceding for his daughter’s recovery. When he returned home, he was afraid that wife

might shout at him because he was late in returning to help her. He said, “Hashem, may it be Your will that in the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal, my daughter will recover and be the one to open the door for me, and shouts and arguments will be replaced with sounds of joy.” And so it was, as he stood by the door and knocked lightly, he suddenly heard sounds of joy coming from within, and his beloved daughter was the one who opened the door for him! At that point he was speechless, and everyone thanked and praised the Almighty because they saw His direct salvation, achieved through a sincere belief in the tzaddik.

A man by the name of Rabbi Levi told me that he suffered greatly in his married life, for he had already been married and divorced twice. He once went up to pray by the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto, beseeching Hashem to save him from his troubles by the merit of the tzaddik. That night Rabbi Haim appeared to him in a dream and told him to go to the city of “Tiznik,” where he would find his soul-mate. She would give birth to his son, whom he was to name Haim. He therefore traveled to that city and found his soul-mate, after which he had a son whom he named Haim. Our Sages of blessed memory have said, “Happy are the tzaddikim, and happy are those who cleave to them.” In other words, happy are all who believe in them, for by having faith in the tzaddik, a person’s faith in Hashem is strengthened.

My father, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto Zatzal, the crown of my head, was able to grasp this ability from his father. He also ascended the latter of purity and sanctity, devoting his life to Torah study and mitzvot observance. As people know, he enclosed himself within his home for 40 years, and during all that time he learned Torah day and night, not speaking any profane words at all. Therefore Hashem carried out his will, and his prayers were accepted in Heaven. As our Sages

say, “The words, ‘Whoever keeps the mitzvah’ [Kohelet 8:5] allude to the tzaddikim who perform the mitzvot of the Holy One, blessed be He, and it is their decree that He fulfills” (Tanchuma, Vayeira 19). I was once told by Mr. Mordechai Ben Shoshan of Paris about a sick person who needed to take certain medication that resulted in severe memory loss. This person went to pray by the grave of my father, who is buried in the city of Ashdod. There he wept bitter tears before Hashem, asking to be helped by the merit of the tzaddik. He had a pure and sincere belief, and when he finished praying he felt a tremendous sense of relief. He believed that his payers had been granted, and while still at the grave of my father, he took his medication and threw them into the nearby garbage. He then went to his doctor and asked to be examined once again, and his doctor discovered that his disease had disappeared and he no longer needed his medication. Such is the reward of sincere belief, and great is its ability to save a person from his troubles.

About 35 years ago, when I was 24, I was a guest at the home of Mrs. Tzipporah Lok in Agadir, Morocco, where I slept for the night. The following morning, when I wanted to be on my way, her husband gave me a very large sum of money and said, “This is in honor of your father the tzaddik, who used to visit our home. It’s been many years since I last gave to your holy father.” At first I refused, saying that it was too much money. However he insisted that I take it. Many years later, his wife told me what happened afterwards: Once I left their home with the money, she started arguing with her husband about why he had given such a large sum to this young fellow. Her husband replied, “If his father, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, were here, you would obviously agree on giving him the money. So what difference does it make if his son gets it?” He added, “Don’t forget that before he moved to Eretz Israel, his father the tzaddik blessed us for success in business, and

thank G-d his blessing has been with us till today. So why are you complaining?" Nevertheless, she continued to argue with her husband. While they were talking, an Arab knocked at the door and asked, "Do you recognize me?" "Absolutely," replied her husband. "I remember that I lent you some money ten years ago, and that you still haven't repaid me." The Arab replied, "Very well, that's why I'm here." He then explained: "Last night I was warned in a dream to immediately return the loan to you, or otherwise I would be severely punished." Mrs. Tziporah Lok told me that when the Arab left their home, they counted the money he had returned, and it was precisely the same amount that her husband had given to me that morning. They saw divine providence in this, and peace immediately returned to their home. Of course my father Zatzal, who always loved peace and pursued peace, did not want any arguments or disputes among them. He therefore appeared in a dream to the Arab and told him to immediately repay the loan, thereby allowing peace to return to their home. Such was the greatness of my father, may his merit protect us, whose life was dedicated to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to His Torah. Hashem therefore ensured that no sin or dispute should arise through him.

Approximately 30 years ago, about two years before my father's death, we were fortunate enough for him to join us for the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto in Morocco. Among the participants was Mr. Massoud Ben Hayun Zatzal, who was a very pleasant man. He had personally helped me when I was starting out, assisting me to establish my organizations, and he had a profound love for my family. However he experienced many hardships prior to participating in the Hilloula. When I told my father that Mr. Ben Hayun would be attending, he asked me to welcome him at the Casablanca airport. When he arrived at the airport, the authorities did not allow him to enter, since

his passport had expired. Naturally, there was really nothing he could do but to return to his home in Paris. I stayed with him overnight, however, and told him: "Since my father asked me to welcome you, it means that he gave you a blessing to participate in the Hilloula. Come morning, I suddenly saw one of the clerks and told Mr. Hayun to explain the situation to him. After listening to him, the clerk sent Mr. Hayun to see the general manager, who met with Hayun for a long time in his office. I was standing outside in the meantime, eagerly waiting to find out what would happen. I noticed that the airplane which Mr. Hayun was supposed to board for Paris had now closed its doors and was beginning to depart. Some time later, my friend came out with a large smile on his face. He told me that they had given him permission to stay in Morocco without a passport for one week only – the exact duration of the Hilloula. We saw G-d's hand in this, in the fact that my father's prayer was granted, enabling Mr. Hayun to participate in the Hilloula. Hashem had saved him. Mr. Ben Hayun told us that when the general manager of the airport began to question him, he suddenly realized they were childhood friends who had attended the same school! They hugged each other, and of course Mr. Ben Hayun was allowed to stay. When we arrived at the Hilloula, I asked him to wait outside for a few minutes. I went inside and tried to pull my father's leg: "You should know that Mr. Ben Hayun went back to France," I told him. My father replied with great confidence, "That's impossible. I see that he will get to the Hilloula." At that point I laughed, admitting to my father that Mr. Ben Hayun had indeed arrived by a miracle, and we were all very happy. From here it's clear that my father could see far and wide, knowing that Mr. Ben Hayun would eventually arrive at the Hilloula and overcome every obstacle standing in his way. This was because my father's prayer had been accepted in Heaven, as the verse states: "He ful-

fills the desire of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and delivers them" (Tehillim 145:19).

The Sages of blessed memory have said, "Happy are the tzaddikim! Not only do they acquire merit, they also bestow merit upon their children and children's children to the end of all the generations" (Yoma 87a). How many times did Hashem help me by the merit of my holy forefathers! When I stayed at the home of Mr. Mordechai Knafo (may Hashem save him) in Morocco, I was invited to be a Sandak at a Brit Milah. This mitzvah is especially dear to me, and I don't refuse it even when it involves great effort and hardship. Yet in this case, I suddenly found myself refusing to go through with it, even though there was nothing preventing me from doing so. I refrained for some reason, something that struck me as very odd. A few days later, I heard that the baby had passed away after the Brit. Here I saw the workings of divine providence, which protected me in such a way that no desecration of Hashem's Name would occur through me, for people would have innocently claimed: "Rav David was the Sandak, so how could the baby have died? Where's the merit of his forefathers?!" Thankfully, G-d saved me from this, and it was certainly the merit of my holy forefathers that protected me from this stumbling block.

About two months ago, I was staying in Miami at the home of Mr. Ben Hamo, the son of Rabbi Amram Zatzal. While I was meeting with the public, a woman arrived and told me that she had been childless up until a year ago. However I had given her a blessing to have a son, and thank G-d she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. She was now pregnant once again, and she came to thank me for the blessing. As a gift, she brought me a bottle of fine whisky. At that point, I remembered that I had asked my assistant to purchase a bottle of whisky for Shabbat when we returned to the airport. Yet for some reason, I said to



the woman: "You're returning to Paris now, so please take the bottle with you and bring it back when I arrive in Paris." The woman and her husband were surprised by this, but they did as I asked, thinking that they would be mitzvah messengers for me, since the bottle was meant for the mitzvah of Shabbat. When they boarded the plane, the woman said to her husband: "G-d willing, we'll have a good flight on account of the mitzvah." About two hours later, the worst almost happened: The plane went out of control for a few seconds and almost crashed. A few passengers lost consciousness due to a lack of oxygen, and others were injured. Everyone was terrified. However the couple felt at peace and confident, for they told themselves that as mitzvah messengers, no harm would come to them. In fact the plane was able to continue on its journey, and they returned home safe and sound. A day later, while I was at the airport waiting to return to Paris, I told my assistant to buy a bottle of whisky for Shabbat, and I wondered why I had refused to accept the bottle

from the woman on the day before. After all, I needed a bottle of whisky, and the bottle I gave her would only be for the following week. When I arrived in Paris and heard about the miracle that the couple experienced, I realized that it was the merit of the mitzvah that had saved them, and I saw how divine providence governs everyone.

Hashem will help every single person who possesses a sincere belief in the tzaddik, and He will do his will. I once remember when I urgently phoned our family doctor, Dr. Bizmit, and asked him to come to our home because a family member was not feeling well. Now it is very difficult to find parking where I live. In fact it's almost impossible, and people have to walk a long way to reach us. Wondering where he was going to park, the doctor prayed to Hashem in the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto, asking to find a spot because he was now coming to help his grandson. Before he finished praying, he reached my house, at which point a person suddenly got into his car and drove off, leaving him with a parking spot. The doctor saw divine providence in this, for "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him." When he told me this, I replied: "Since it was a favorable time in Heaven, it's a pity that you didn't ask that we do complete teshuvah and for Mashiach to come." The doctor told me that almost every time he visits my home, he miraculously finds a parking spot after praying for one.

Last summer, in 5768, we had the merit of experiencing an uplifting Shabbat in Mexico amid a wonderful Torah atmosphere. Everyone enjoyed Shabbat in an uplifting environment, rejoicing in the Torah. Their hearts were receptive to Mussar talks and to G-d's word. When I saw that the time was right, I took 70 tallit katanot out of my bag, hoping that people would accept the yoke of Heaven and put one on. I said that whoever would accept to wear a tallit katan could pray

for whatever he wanted, and Hashem would do his will. I thought that only a few people would get up, but to my amazement everyone got up and grabbed a tallit and put it on. Happy is Israel! One of the participants, Rabbi Haim Krason, later told me what happened on account of one tallit: For a long time, a Mexican woman had been imprisoned on account of tax evasion, and her distraught husband had come to receive a blessing for her. Rabbi Haim explained what happened next: "I said to him, 'Yesterday Rabbi David brought us 70 tallit katanot, which have great segulot. I'm prepared to give you mine. Put it on your clothes, and you'll witness miracles.' He took the tallit and wore it with complete and sincere faith, and it did not take long for a miracle to happen. In Mexico, it is very rare for judges to hear appeals, but in this case the judge did: As soon as the woman entered the courtroom, the judge ordered her to be released and instructed the officers to return her passport, her ID, and all her other documents that had been seized by the court. This miracle amazed everyone living in the area, for they saw that Hashem saves and protects a person from all evil if he sincerely observes mitzvot and accepts the mitzvah of wearing a tallit katan."

One of the people closest to me is Mr. Rosenthal (may Hashem grant him success), a man who has helped me tremendously and supports our institutions. He participated in our annual trip to the graves of the tzaddikim in Ukraine, after which we traveled to Morocco and visited the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal. On the way, he addressed a personal request to me: "Thank G-d, I've been fortunate enough to do teshuvah, and I am happy. My request is that you pray for my relative and her husband, that they should also do teshuvah." He asked me to do whatever I could, and in response I said to him: "May it be Hashem's will to help me say the right words and convince them to agree."

Some time later, when I was receiving people near their home, Mr. Rosenthal brought his relative and her husband to see me. As they sat in front of me, I asked them why they had come. They said, "We don't know why. Mr. Rosenthal just asked us to come." I asked them, "Is everything all right in your daily life?" When they said that everything was fine, I really had no idea how to start a conversation with them that could lead to a spiritual awakening. I prayed to G-d for help, at which point – without meaning to do so – I mentioned the name of a woman who had come that very morning to ask me for a blessing to recover from an illness. She had a Spanish name, and it was very difficult to pronounce. Nevertheless, her name escaped my lips. They were surprised that I mentioned her name, and wondered what my intentions were. When I repeated her name, I saw that they were upset, even shedding tears. When I asked them why this name was so unsettling, they told me that this woman had been making their lives miserable for a few years, and that she had caused them a great deal of suffering.

Surprised, they asked me how I knew where to probe. I realized that Hashem, in His great kindness, had helped me find a way to their hearts, and from that point on their hearts were open, enabling me to exert a positive influence on them. I said to them, "Know that if you take upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, the laws of family purity, and keeping Shabbat, I promise that this woman will never be able to harm you again. Thus a few days later, Mr. Rosenthal arrived and told me in amazement that he was seeing a positive change in them. Thank G-d, they are now in the process of doing teshuvah. I asked him for the names of the people who had come to see me that day, and I showed him the name of the woman with a Spanish name. It was the same name as that of the non-Jewish woman who had embittered the lives of Mr. Rosenthal's relatives. May

Hashem always help me to sanctify His Name in the world.

If a Jew does teshuvah through my blessing, I experience great joy and thank G-d that another Jew has returned to Torah and mitzvot. He has returned to our Father in Heaven!

While I was staying at the home Mr. Abadi in England, a reform Jew came to see me for a blessing to have sons. I said to him, "How can I give you a blessing when you don't believe in the Torah of Moshe?! I'm prepared to bless you, but only if you take it upon yourself to wear tefillin and keep Shabbat." He willingly agreed, and I gave him a sincere blessing for children. As he was leaving, a woman stood in the doorway and asked for a blessing, sadly explaining that she had been childless for years. I raised my hands and said, "Master of the universe, in the merit of the Jew who committed himself to wearing tefillin and keeping Shabbat, may this woman also have a son." I gave her the book *Zocher HaBrit* by the Ben Ish Hai, telling her that G-d willing she will have a son next year in the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto and the Ben Ish Hai. I told her that she could return the book when comes back to give me the good news. A year later, when I returned to England, I was told that these two individuals had newborn sons on that same week, and I was asked to be the Sandak. We see that their deliverance came primarily from the merit of the reform Jew who agreed to repent and accept upon himself the yoke of mitzvot. Hashem therefore heard my prayer and the merit of my holy forefathers helped both of them have children. Through repentance, a person certainly avoids a great deal of problems and suffering. Such was the case of the reform Jew, when a severe decree was removed from him and with Heaven's help he immediately had a son. Merit is conferred through someone deserving, and this woman was able to have a son through his merit.

Of course I do not credit my own abilities in any of these stories. It is solely the merit of my holy and pure forefathers, as well as the merit of their Torah, that enables me to help others. G-d willing, I too will merit deliverance for myself and my family. Regardless of the circumstances, a person who prays to Hashem from the bottom of his heart, and who adds to his prayer the merit of these tzaddikim – the faithful servants of Hashem – will certainly be answered and Heaven will carry out his will. All a person has to do is pray. As the Ben Ish Hai says (Parsha Terumah, first year), the Menorah is compared to prayer, standing just as a person stands in prayer. Thus we read, "You shall make a Menorah of pure gold and of one piece" (Shemot 25:31), alluding to a person who stands in prayer before Hashem, all his intentions being one. He must be focused on prayer, having no foreign thoughts in mind, nor should he have any ulterior motives, G-d forbid. During Shemoneh Esrei, a person should not even be thinking of Torah, and all his requests should be for the sake of Heaven. Upon reaching the blessing, "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah," one should wholeheartedly implore Hashem to grant him complete repentance, for he will then be close to Hashem. Thus when a person prays properly, Hashem hears his prayer and saves him in times of trouble. If he includes a tzaddik in his prayer, asking for his merit to help him, his prayer will be of the highest order and accepted in Heaven, for that tzaddik will stand before Hashem in order to fulfill his prayer.

May it be His will for my holy forefathers and the tzaddikim in every place to help us and our children. May the entire Jewish people be delivered from all their troubles and enjoy the best, both spiritually and materially, and may we soon merit the Final Redemption. Amen and amen!

THE INTERNET: A MODERN FORM OF IDOLATRY

(By Rabbi David Pinto Shlita)

“You shall not bring an abomination into your home and become banned like it. You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned.”

The Torah describes the order given by Moshe Rabbeinu to the Jewish people, before they entered Eretz Israel, to burn, destroy, and eradicate all the idols of the non-Jewish nations that occupied the land, these idols being designated as cherem (“banned”). As the verse states, “You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned” (Devarim 7:26). Now the Children of Israel not only had to eliminate all the idols of these nations, they also had to flee from and abhor them with a sense of repulsion. The fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered the Children of Israel to consider these idols as abhorrent teaches us just how seriously He considered the prohibition against worshipping foreign gods, which our ancestors did not heed.

There exist few idolatrous peoples in our time. Among those that do exist, there are small groups from the east that worship created objects, such as stars for example, as well as Hindus, who worship cows. In the past, idolatry spread to almost every place in the world, but such beliefs have diminished over the course of time, and today only a small minority of nations have remained faithful to their idolatrous past. Nevertheless, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that idolatry has completely disappeared from the world. Today it is not classic idolatry per se, but a certain kind of contemporary idolatry – specific to the modern era – that has emerged in our generation. Due to euphoria over the progress that accompanies it, this

form of idolatry has managed to ensnare numerous individuals, including good people.

In regards to its name, we are speaking about the Internet. With all the good that it brings to man, it nevertheless causes a great deal of harm. It’s true that we cannot deny the effectiveness of this invention, thanks to which we can have an entire world before us just by typing on a few keys. Instead of running from one place to another, all we have to do is use a keyboard and a mouse to see the whole world unfold on a monitor. Furthermore, its effectiveness as a means of communication, which is now an integral part of most people’s homes and businesses, has been used to give Torah classes and transmit spiritual messages. In former times, people could avoid going to a Torah class by saying that they had no time for it. Yet technological progress has now placed the Torah at people’s fingertips. Attending a Torah class no longer requires any great effort, and people can now connect to a Torah class of their choosing in a few seconds, strengthening their fear of G-d in their spare time.

As I have said, I am not trying to ignore or underestimate the effectiveness of the Internet as a means of communication, which at times is useful to achieve beneficial results. However I cannot close my eyes to the terrible dangers to which it also exposes us. Moreover, because I often meet people from the community who share their problems and difficulties with me, I am aware of their spiritual situation, and I fully realize that the Internet represents a real threat to the integrity of the family unit and the education of the young. I have even heard of cases where adults themselves have fallen

into this trap, despite thinking that their maturity would be able to immunize them from the enticements of the street. While doing their work on the Internet, they have often fallen into the trap of certain websites because there were no controls to exclude unwanted sites.

Personally, I am still embarrassed to mention my own failings in this area. I once had to travel to Israel during the first Intifada, and in the absence of a direct flight, I had to make a stopover in London. As everyone knows, every airport is equipped with a giant monitor on which the news of the day appears. Because I had to wait for my connecting flight, and because I was worried about my Israeli brothers, I suddenly found myself watching the news, which was being presented by a woman. To my great regret, the image of that woman engraved itself in my mind, to the point that five years later, while I was praying the Amidah, she suddenly sprang to mind, distracting me from my prayer. It was only after I had completely repented of this sin, pouring out tears and imploring the Creator to remove this vision from my mind, that my request was granted and this woman stopped disrupting my thoughts.

What I want to demonstrate by this is that nobody is shielded from the attacks of the evil inclination. Furthermore, human nature is such that the heart desires what the eye sees, meaning that a person must also protect his eyes from forbidden sights. No person can claim that he is not exposed to the enticements of the street, in keeping with the teaching of our Sages: “Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die” (Pirkei Avoth 2:4). Even myself, considered by people as a Rav who works for the community, didn’t

know how to confront my evil inclination, and I was entrapped by its snare. Woe to me on the day of judgment and the day of reprimand! How will I appear as shame and humiliation cover my face? I can only hope that the Holy One, blessed be He, will accept my sincere repentance, and that in the future He will not be strict with me for it.

It is important to recognize that the Internet is nothing but a modern form of idolatry. A person is exposed to the most indecent sights on account of it, and nothing and no one can protect him from it. Who will not tremble with fear on account of this grave danger that threatens Jewish homes, since we know that such an abomination has now found a place there? The benefits that the Internet sometimes brings to people prevent them from recognizing the grave danger to which it also exposes them. I remember how a couple once came to see me and complained about their bitter situation. They said that their four children were wasting all their time and energy on the Internet, to the point that they had lost all desire to focus on their studies. Despite the sorrow of the parents, I placed the blame on them by saying that they were responsible for the situation. They should have realized the danger before it was too late, thereby preventing their children from using this destructive contraption. Recently, in fact, even parents in a non-Jewish area were asked to supervise their children's use of the Internet in

order to protect them from a new website that was attracting youngsters and corrupting all their values and morals.

In Parsha Terumah we read, "Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Shemot 25:8). It does not say, "in it," but "among them." This teaches us that every Jew is obligated to make himself into a fitting vessel for the Shechinah. Let us think about the command, given by Hashem, to construct a



Sanctuary. It had to be built with 48 beams, and the term *keresh* ("beam") is composed of the same letters as *kesher* ("tie"). In other words, man is tied to his Creator by the beams of the Sanctuary. The fact that it was built with these 48 beams reminds us that a person is obligated to cleave to the Shechinah by making his own body into a fitting vessel to receive it. How can a person merit for the Holy One, blessed be He, to come and reside in him? It is by cleaving to the 48 characteristics by which the Torah is acquired and by elevating himself through them. In reality, we

must realize that the Internet does the very opposite, for it severs the tie that binds us to our Creator. In fact when the Holy One, blessed be He, detects immorality and a lack of modesty in a person, He withdraws His Shechinah from him, as the verse states: "Your camp shall be holy, so that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you" (Devarim 23:15).

Furthermore, if a person wants the Shechinah to dwell with him, he must first remove every abomination from his home. Then, once his heart is free of everything indecent, he will be able to elevate himself in all the 48 characteristics needed to acquire the Torah – alluded to by the 48 beams of the Sanctuary – and he will cleave to the Creator, blessed be He.

It is therefore incumbent on each of us to realize that, in the same way that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe to command the Children of Israel to eradicate all idols and abhor them, likewise today we must also reject and abhor modern idolatry, meaning the Internet. As we know, a person who seeks to purify himself will be given divine help. Furthermore, it is certain that when Hashem perceives a person's intention to draw closer to Him and rid himself of the abomination that the Internet represents, He will help him in this endeavor. By this merit, such a person will also benefit from an abundance of holiness and purity, and he will be blessed with the best of everything. He will experience only joy from his children, and his home will be filled with peace and blessings. Amen, may it be so!

A JOURNEY INTO THE UKRAINE – ELUL 5768

by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita



Selichot at the Hilula of Rabbi Chaim Pinto (Essaouira - Morocco)

“These are the tzaddikim, who in their death are called alive.” – Berachot 18a

“No one knows his burial place to this day.” – Devarim 34:6

As in every year during the month of Elul, we again traveled to Eastern Europe this past year to visit the graves of the tzaddikim, whose renown in Torah fills the world. These graves are often found in remote areas, some even deserted, and in certain cases the location of some graves is unknown.

This year for the first time, we also traveled to the grave of Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen of Radin Zatzal, the author of Chafetz Chaim. He is buried in a remote area where no one ventures. On the other hand, his Torah has spread throughout the world. Every Jew knows a law or a saying from this Kohen Gadol because of his numerous writings, especially the Mishnah Berurah, the laws of Lashon Harah, and

other works. He left humanity with the reason for his existence, so what does it matter if his grave is located in a place far from inhabited regions? Is it not more important for his Torah to occupy a primary place in our lives? This teaches us that the Torah which he studied during his lifetime is what is most important. What does it matter if his physical body now lies buried in some isolated place; the main thing is his Torah and sanctity occupy a primary place among Torah scholars.

Likewise the Vilna Gaon, may his merit protect us, is buried in a remote area despite the fact that his Torah moved worlds during his lifetime. It is said that Eliyahu HaNavi offered to teach him the entire Torah, but the

Vilna Gaon refused, stating that only personal work and effort are the keys to acquiring Torah. When his sister paid him a visit after numerous years, he welcomed her with joy and spoke with her for a few moments. He then explained how precious his time was, and what a pity it was to lose even a moment of Torah study. They would meet again in the World of Truth, and there they would have time to talk. Having said that, he returned to his studies. Yet this tzaddik is also buried in a remote area, at the end of the world. How could this be? Is this the reward for his sacrifice in Torah?

Who was greater than Rabbi Yonatan ben Uzziel, whose might in study was incomparable? Any bird that flew over his head as he studied would be consumed by the fire emanating from his Torah (Sukkah 28a). He too is buried in the heart of a thick forest, in Amuka, a desolate and isolated region. Why have the tzaddikim not been laid to rest in beautiful areas surrounded by trees and flowers, amid a peaceful atmosphere and in a more centrally located place?

We also visited the grave of the Baal HaTanya, may his merit protect us, a holy place where we were overcome with emotion. We then traveled to the grave of the Baal Shem Tov,



may his merit protect us. These tzaddikim are also buried in desolate places, where access is difficult, and so again I asked myself: “Why did these tzaddikim not merit to be buried in more honorable places?”

In the parsha we read, “No one knows his burial place to this day” (Devarim 34:6). Here too, there is reason to ask why it was decreed that the location of Moshe’s grave should not be known to anyone. Why is it impossible to visit his grave? Moshe brought down the Torah from Mount Sinai, transmitted it to us, and also devoted his body and soul to his people. Is this his reward? Why did he not deserve to be buried in an honorable place, one known by all?

Therein lies the secret of their greatness. During their life, the tzaddikim forsake all the vanities of this world and became like a desert, accessible to all. They scorn all the delights of this world without ever asking for rest or tranquility for themselves. They concern themselves only with the holy Torah, and in this way they merit greatness. When they leave this world, they ask to be buried in remote places, places that epitomize modesty and humility, just as they fled from fame and honor all through their lives. Nevertheless, their Torah is famous and their holy words are the subject of conversation at the table of our venerated teachers. Their names are accompanied by praise, and their Torah teachings are uttered with reverence and respect in all houses of study.

This is one of the reasons why our Sages said, “These are the tzaddikim, who in their death are called alive” (Berachot 18a). They “gave their lives” for the Torah, fulfilling the teaching of our Sages on the verse, “When a man dies in a tent” (Bamidbar 19:14), namely: “Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it” (Berachot 63b). They have already known death in their lifetime by abandoning their bodies and giving their lives for the Torah, and it is only

after death that they begin to live. In death, it is no longer necessary to exert an effort and toil for Torah, for at that point one may rest in peace and tranquility. Thus the tzaddikim are called alive in their death.

We also had the merit of praying by the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, may his merit protect, as well as by the grave of Rabbi Avraham HaMalach (the son of the Maggid of Mezritch), may his merit protect us. Numerous people say to me, “But you don’t belong to that Chassidic group! Why are you going to visit

Much to the contrary, on the Hilloula of our Rav and teacher Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal, all these tzaddikim will join him and say: “We know your great-great-grandson. He came to our graves a few days ago.” My great-great-grandfather will reply, “I derive immense joy from his tremendous emunat chachamim.” All these tzaddikim will therefore become defenders for us and the entire Jewish people, for their merit is without limit. This is because they devoted themselves to the fire of the Torah during their lifetime.

When we arrived at the graves of



those graves?” This question contains a fundamental error, for ever since we were young, our parents instilled in us emunat chachamim [faith in the sages], regardless of religious affiliation, for they are all holy and pure, resembling angels. This is a heritage that we received from our holy ancestors. Our fathers always told us stories about the great men of Israel, such as the Baal Shem Tov, the Vilna Gaon, and others. Therefore why not take advantage of such an opportunity by going to pray by their graves, thereby receiving newfound inspiration in the service of G-d?

the Vilna Gaon and Baal HaTanya, may their merit protect us, I realized that the initial of the Vilna Gaon’s first name (Eliyahu) and the initial of the Baal HaTanya first name (Shneur) together form the word esh (“fire”). This alludes to the fire of the Torah which they studied during their lifetime. Furthermore, the name Shneur is a combination of shnei orot (two lights). The Baal HaTanya wrote a Shulchan Aruch that is known as the Shulchan Aruch HaRav. Rabbi Yosef Karo Zatzal also wrote a Shulchan Aruch, and together these two lights, these two great luminaries, have been accepted by all Israel. They carry the force of law, deter-

mining the conduct that all Jews must adhere to in every situation. Fortunately we have had the merit of praying by the graves of these tzaddikim.

The essential greatness of these tzaddikim stems from the fact that they studied Torah in hardship, devoting themselves to it constantly. They ignored all the obstacles and trials they encountered, for it is only in this way that one acquires Torah: By overcoming various difficulties. It is known that the Torah was given amid “thunder and lightening...and the

prevent the Jewish people from learning Torah. G-d arranged things precisely in this way, for therein lies a basic Torah principle: It must be studied despite all the disruptive influences that surround it. It is for this reason that it was given amid great pomp and ceremony: In order for the nations of the world to hear it, to be filled with hatred for the Jewish people, and to come and disrupt their learning. It is incumbent upon Israel to overcome such difficulties. Such is the greatness of Torah.

come different trials and ignore the various obstacles to learning. It is by devoting and sacrificing ourselves to Torah that we testify to the love we have for it.

Thus the verse states, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (Bereshith 27:22). G-d arranged things in such a way that when “the voice of Jacob” is heard in the Beit HaMidrash, “the hands of Esau” come and try to disrupt his learning. Unfortunately, the wicked Esau comes in various forms. As soon as a person sits down to study, Esau appears as a cell-phone that starts to ring. However if he perseveres, determined to study and overcome all disruptive influences, G-d will definitely help him overcome his inclination, and it is precisely in this way that he proves his love for Torah. When the voice of Jacob is heard despite the hands of Esau trying to disrupt him, then his Torah learning will be of great value. Given that he devotes himself and puts an effort into learning, his Torah will become an integral part of his personality. The Jewish people must therefore study Torah and cleave to it during this difficult exile.

We now headed towards a large bridge in Ukraine that was built over a river. It is said that the Nazis, may G-d blot out their names, murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews in this area, may G-d avenge their blood, throwing so many of their bodies into the river that it became red. These are



sound of the shofar was very powerful” (Shemot 19:16). Why did the Torah have to be given amid such noise? Why was it not given discreetly? How can we say that it was in order for non-Jews to hear the giving of the Torah, since they refused to accept it? What advantage was there in making them hear the Jewish people receiving the Torah?

I thought that I would explain this according to the words of our Sages, namely that when non-Jews heard the Torah being given on Mount Sinai, hatred penetrated their hearts. Hence the mountain is called Sinai, for the nations of the world felt sin'ah (hatred) for Israel (Shabbat 89a). Since that time, they try by all possible means to

Thus our Sages recount that G-d gave three gifts to Israel, and all of them were given only through suffering (Berachot 5a). One of these gifts is Torah, in order for a person to over-



among the terrible hardships that the Jewish people have endured, and yet Jews still cling to G-d and His Torah. As King David said, "Because for Your sake we are killed all day long" (Tehillim 44:23). These tzaddikim, whose graves we visited, also had the merit of overcoming every difficulty they faced in life, devoting themselves entirely to the Torah. Hence they were able to elevate themselves and reach such high levels.

This is why G-d fulfills their wishes, as the Sages say: "The tzaddik decrees and G-d executes." He even changes nature for them, for just as a tzaddik overcomes his own inclination, changes his nature, and submits his will to that of the Torah, likewise G-d changes nature for a tzaddik and makes it submit to him.

When I was eight years old, still an unruly child filled with energy, I was once jumping upon the roof of a synagogue named after Rabbi David ben Baruch, may his merit protect us. I suddenly fell through a gaping hole in the roof and remained hanging between heaven and earth. I was utterly terrified, for I found myself between life and death. For several hours, I held on with my two hands with all my strength, calling out for help, until finally a woman came into the synagogue to prepare the lights. When she saw me hanging there, she immediately called for help from people passing by, and thank G-d I was saved in a miraculous way. They brought me to my

father Zatzal and told him what had happened. When I saw him, a large smile lit up his face. He then said, "Know, my son, that it was the merit of the Torah that I was now studying

him stay alive. About ten years ago he came to see me in tears, explaining his terrible illness to me. He wanted me to pray so that he could live for another year and have the merit of seeing his



In the Ohel of Baal Shem Tov

that saved you." My father, may he rest in peace, had already seen by Ruach HaKodesh what would happen to me. His merit had therefore protected me, for the tzaddik decrees and G-d executes.

A Jew in the United States by the name of Bernard Cohen has been afflicted with a serious illness for ten years. In fact he should have died long ago, and his doctors cannot understand why he has survived. Yet it is the merit of my holy ancestors that helps

only daughter, who had recently married, give birth. He explained that he had tremendous faith in the tzaddikim, especially Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, may his merit protect us, and he wanted him to be his defender and to save him. I therefore implored Hashem to save him by the merit of my holy ancestors, and six months later he came to tell me that, thank G-d, his daughter was pregnant. He later returned to tell me that she had brought a son into the world, at which point he began to weep, asking me to bless him so he could live to see his grandson's Bar Mitzvah. I saw his great anguish, and my heart was filled with compassion for him. I again prayed on his behalf through the merit of my holy ancestors, and now here we are, ten years later, and thank G-d this man functions like a normal person despite his illness. The greatest medical experts in the United States do not understand why he is still alive. Moreover, they have told him directly: "You should have already died. We don't under-



Hilula of Rabbi Chaim Pinto (Essaouira - Morocco)



On the grave of Rabbi Itzchak Levy of Berditshev

stand what's keeping you alive." For his part, he tells them that it's faith in the Creator of the world that keeps him alive. Such is the sincere faith of a simple man in these tzaddikim and their sanctity. All those who believe in them and learn from their ways will merit deliverance from G-d, for their merit is immense.

May the merit of their Torah and piety help us grow in Torah and the fear of Heaven. May they constitute a defense both for us and the entire Jewish people, for a good life and for peace. Amen and amen.

A Wall and a Refuge for Us on the Day of Wrath

"When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d." – Devarim 32:3

After our extensive pilgrimage to the graves of the tzaddikim in Ukraine, we traveled to Morocco for the great Hilloula of our Rav and teacher, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol Zatzal. It was already the fourth consecutive year that we had prayed by the graves of the tzaddikim in Ukraine and its surroundings before traveling to the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us. By doing so, we hoped to acquire even more advocates and defenders to act both for us and all Israel, that we may all be sealed in the book of the tzaddikim for a good life and for peace. Amen.

joy in the shadow of the tzaddikim, and our neshama (soul) certainly felt great satisfaction and delight, amassing immense faith in G-d and the sages.

Wealthy businessmen from the four corners of the globe joined us, abandoning their businesses, closing their offices, and losing days of work. The main thing was to participate in this journey, whose nature was entirely spiritual. They also understood that emunat chachamim (faith in the Sages) is a great thing. By having faith in a tzaddik, who is G-d's servant, a person also increases his faith in G-d. Therein lies man's primary nourishment, without which his life would not be a life, as the prophet Habakkuk said: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

A person who wants to succeed in life must strengthen his faith in G-d and realize that this world is a place of falsehood. Yet man, in his foolishness, naively thinks that he will live forever. He seeks to acquire ever more honor and prestige, corrupting his soul with bad character traits in order to lower his fellowman and appear better by comparison. Thus he transgresses the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah, concerning which our Sages have said, "The sin of Lashon Harah is greater than adultery,

murder, and idolatry" (Tanchuma, Metzora 2), as well as: "When the wicked become guilty of Lashon Harah, Gehinnom says to G-d: 'Sovereign of the universe, I cannot punish them according to what they deserve, nor can the whole world punish them sufficiently. This habitual speaker of Lashon Harah has sinned from here to the heavens' " (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu 18). Who will not tremble upon reading the words of this Midrash brought by the Chafetz Chaim? Even the fires of Gehinnom will not suffice to punish the speaker of Lashon Harah! This is why a person must reflect upon and realize that he must not invest any time or energy into increasing his own honor or lowering that of others. This world is ephemeral, and even if a person has been hurt, he should forgive. When I did some soul-searching at the end of 5768, I realized that a great deal of Lashon Harah was said about me. I accepted everything with love for the atonement of my sins. Such are the trials of life, and fortunate are those who are among the offended rather than among those who offend. We must draw our inspiration from the tzaddikim whose graves we visited. How greatly did they distance themselves from evil and devote themselves solely to the holy Torah!

The merit of the tzaddikim is enormous. Our Sages tell us, "Rabba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, 'In time to come the tzaddikim will be called by the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said: "Everyone who is called by My Name" [Isaiah 43:7].' ... Rabbi Elazar said, 'There will come a time when kadosh will be said before the tzaddikim, just as it is said before



Rabbi Avraham Ha-Malakh son of the maguid of Mezrich

the Holy One, blessed be He' ” (Bava Batra 75b). In fact each Jew already carries G-d's Name in himself, since the numerical value of the term adam (“man”) is 45, while the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton (yud-kei-vav-kei) is 26. Now when we spell each of these letters out in full, we obtain the following values:

“yud” = yud [10] + vav [6] + dalet [4] = 20

“hei” = hei [5] + aleph [1] = 6

“vav” = vav [6] + aleph [1] + vav [6] = 13

“hei” = hei [5] + aleph [1] = 6

Adding these values together (20+6+13+6), we obtain 45, the numerical value of “Adam.” As the Gemara tells us, the Jewish people are called “Adam,” but the nations of the world are not (Yebamot 61a). Thus each Jew has tremendous importance and his soul shines because he carries G-d's Name. Nevertheless, because of the impurity that reigns in the world, we do not sense this sanctity, just as it is impossible to see a person's beauty in a dark room. Real beauty can only be perceived in the light, and the same applies to the sanctity of a Jew. Today the darkness brought about by impurity acts as a screen. In the future, however, G-d will remove all forms of idolatry and every spirit of impurity from the world, at which point we will be able to see the Name of G-d in every Jew. On the other hand, the tzaddikim draw their strength from the World to Come, not the present world, whose impurity does not affect them. Furthermore, brightness and splendor emanate from them, for they bear G-d's Name upon themselves and their

sanctity shines from afar. Such is the greatness and sanctity of the tzaddikim.

We can now understand the statement that we cited above: The Jewish people are called “Adam,” but the nations of the world are not. We need to think about this: Do the peoples of the world not look like human beings? Then why are they not worthy of being called “Adam,” especially since the first man was called “Adam,” for he was created from the earth? The nations of the world were also created from the earth. Furthermore, after the first man sinned, why did G-d curse him by saying: “For dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” (Bereshith 3:19)? Why “dust” and not “Adam,” given that this was his name at the beginning?

To me the answer seems to be the following: Before the sin, the first man was at a very great spiritual level, as the Gemara tells us: Adam's heels were like two orbs of the sun (Bava Batra 58a). This is why he was initially called “Adam,” in order to illustrate his immense greatness. As we explained above, the numerical value of “Adam” is 45, which alludes to G-d's Name. It is for this reason that he was called Adam, for he sensed the pure soul that G-d had breathed into him at the time of his creation, and he wanted to draw as close to G-d as possible. Yet after his sin, all the sanctified lights within him faded, until G-d eventually asked him: “Where are you” (Bereshith 3:9). In other words: Where are you spiritually? Can you still be called Adam, whose numerical value is the same as My Name? Do you still sense My Name



At the synagogue in Uman

which you carry? From now on, you no longer merit the name “Adam,” which contains an allusion to My holy Name, but rather apha (dust) – composed of the same letters as pa'ar (chasm) – for a huge chasm has opened between you and I on account of your sin.

Nevertheless, we must realize that through Torah study, a person has the ability to regain the level of the first man before his sin and to rectify what he ruined as a result, thereby shrinking the chasm created by the sin. It is for this reason that G-d made coats of skin [ohr: ayin-vav-resh] for the first man. The Midrash (Bereshith Rabba 20:12) tells us that in Rabbi Meir's Torah, it is written “coats of light” [ohr: aleph-vav-resh]. Now light designates Torah, as it is written: “For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23). In fact G-d told the first man, “Devote yourself to the light contained in the Torah, and through it you will be able to regain your name Adam, which alludes to My holy Name.” This is why the Jewish people, who study G-d's Torah, are called “Adam,” for they regain this title through the study of Torah.

In the expression atem keruyim Adam (“you are called Adam”), the word atem is composed of the same letters as emet (truth), an allusion to Torah Emet – the Torah of Truth. It is only through Torah that we merit the title of Adam, which refers to



At Kiev with the man that Rabbi David was the Sandak

G-d's Name. However non-Jews, who do not possess Torah, cannot be called Adam. This constitutes a clear warning to Jews: If you do not devote yourself to the study of Torah, despite being a Jew, you will not be worthy of being called Adam. Instead you will be called aphaar, which is composed

tzaddikim. We were thus fortunate to have been able to pray by their graves, for their merit is sufficient to help us, especially during the month of Elul, in order that we may be inscribed and sealed for a good life and for peace.

We have a great need for the

go through will be for the good, and that these tzaddikim will protect us and all Israel.

I also experienced various health problems this year. I won't go into detail, but suffice it to say that I needed a great deal of strength to overcome all that I went through. Without a doubt, it was my visit to the graves of the tzaddikim at the end of the past year that gave me the strength to overcome these obstacles. In fact I absorbed a great deal of faith in G-d during that time. I know that everything G-d does is for the good, and that we must bless Him for all that we receive, both good and bad. Who knows what evil decree could have ensued, G-d forbid? However the trials that I went through annulled them, G-d willing, and these curses will end as the year comes to a close and a new year filled with blessing begins.

From an economic point of view as well, this year was one of the worst that people have seen. Financial markets crashed and the wealthy went bankrupt one after another. Many of these individuals had made numerous promises to me which they were unable to keep, given that they lost their money. In fact it would have also been logical had I collapsed financially, since I'm responsible for maintaining numerous institutions that operate on enormous budgets. However the goodness of G-d prevailed, for "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place" (Esther 4:14). Places from which I did not expect any help at all were the very places that came to my rescue, for G-d has various means at His disposal. Each year I spend thousands of dollars distributing numerous books around the world for free, the main thing being for people to study them and thereby strengthen themselves in Torah and the fear of G-d. That is my consolation and joy in this world, to see Jews who were far returning to G-d and doing teshuvah on account of my writings. Thank G-d, our institutions include numerous



of the same letters as pa'ar, for there is a great chasm between you and G-d. Only through Torah alone can a Jew once again merit the name "Adam."

We can now understand what our Sages meant by saying that the first man is ashamed when he sees the tzaddikim leaving this world and arriving in the World of Truth. In fact when he sinned, G-d removed the title of "Adam" from him, which contained the Name of G-d. Now these tzaddikim, by studying Torah throughout their entire lives, have regained this title and become superior to the first man, having attained his level before the sin and carrying G-d's Name. By doing so, they testify to the honor of G-d. In fact were it not for Adam's sin, for which G-d decreed death upon all of humanity, the tzaddikim would not need to die. They are actually punished on account of Adam, and it is for this reason that he is ashamed. From here we understand the greatness of the

merit of these tzaddikim. Let them help and defend us in the coming year. Personally, this past year has been very difficult for me. Adversaries rose up against me, trying to spill my blood and extort money from me, as the verse says: "There is no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me" (Bereshith 20:11). I do not understand how people can try and appropriate money destined for sanctified endeavors. How can they not be afraid of touching tzaddikah money and pocketing it? This money was given to me by people who wanted to atone for their souls so they could be saved from grave illnesses. Their money was intended for avrechim who devote themselves to Torah, in order for their merit to bring them healing. How can these hollow individuals dare steal such money? Have they no shame? Don't they fear the consequences of their deeds? I trust in my Creator, however, not to abandon me, believing with all my heart that everything I

high-caliber bnei Torah who are also bnei aliyah (people who constantly seek to grow and perfect themselves spiritually). They diligently study Torah with all their might, one tractate after another, and thank G-d we can hear the sounds of Torah. This expansion has strengthened and encouraged me, which is comforting.

I thank G-d for having done a tremendous kindness to me by letting me maintain not only our own Torah institutions, but also numerous other Torah institutions around the world. We all have but one and the same goal: To spread Torah and to glorify it. We all have a single heart for our Father in Heaven. Each place in which the Torah is found gives me joy and satisfaction, all this due to G-d's goodness, "for His kindness is everlasting."

Baruch Hashem, G-d has provided me with fine administrators who have been sacrificing themselves for their sacred institutions in various places for over 20 years. These are good people, devoted individuals who faithfully carry out their task: Rav Eliyahu Sitbon Shlita, Rav Itshak Marciano Shlita, Rav Moshe Mirali Shlita, Rav Gabriel Elbaz Shlita, Hanania Sussan and others. Everyone will be mentioned for the good, and they will succeed in all that they do to spread Torah and glorify it. Now I know that many people have had their eyes on them, wanting to take their place. However I know that they are upright men, extremely loyal to me. Therefore may it be His will for them to succeed in everything they do.

May G-d allow us to constantly increase the honor of the Torah in Eretz Israel and the world for the sake of His glory and that of His Torah, and may all of our deeds be completely untainted by self-interest.

May it be His will for these tzaddikim, by whose graves we prayed, to act as our defenders so that we may be inscribed and sealed in the book of the tzaddikim for a good life and for peace. Amen and amen.

The Greatness of the Sanctified Brit Milah

"When you go out to war against your enemies and Hashem your G-d delivers him into your hand...." – Devarim 21:10

Our Sages teach that this verse is speaking about the war against the evil inclination, which is man's greatest enemy. The Ben Ish Hai states that the evil inclination constantly tries to make a person stumble in the prohibition of arayot (forbidden relations), G-d forbid. The passage continues: "...and you see among the captives a woman of beautiful form" (Devarim 21:11). This shows us just how precise the Ben Ish Hai's statement is, as we see from our verse in Parsha Ki Teitzei: "When you go out to war" – against the evil inclination, which tries to make a man stumble when he sees a beautiful woman. Now the evil inclination makes its way into man from birth. Hence to protect himself from it, G-d ordered him to be circumcised on the eighth day. We shall now discuss the importance of the brit milah.

Yesterday we prayed by the grave of the Chafetz Chaim, may he rest in peace, as well as by the graves of the Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov, may their merit protect us. Today with G-d's help, we shall be visiting the grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev Zatzal, the defender of Israel. Here in Ukraine, G-d has granted me the merit of being the Sandak for the circumcision of a young man who is 18 years old.

It is known that in the Soviet Union, the communists wanted to make the Jewish people forget its Torah, just as the Greek empire tried to do in its time. The Greeks did not even allow circumcisions to be performed. Nevertheless we have G-d's promise that this mitzvah will never disappear from among the Jewish people. It is a sign of the covenant between us and

our Father in Heaven, and if the fathers were not allowed to perform circumcision, we see that their sons are returning to their roots, thank G-d, and diligently fulfilling this mitzvah even when they are older.

The merit of the brit milah is great. Through this mitzvah, in fact, the body of man becomes subservient to G-d. I have known many people who have committed numerous sins, but they eventually did complete teshuvah. I am convinced that this was due



to the merit of the brit milah, which is sealed in their flesh. This mitzvah had a profound effect on their souls, and although it wasn't their intention, they drew closer to G-d and cleaved to Him. Our Sages teach that when King David entered the bathhouse and saw himself naked, he said: "Woe is me, for I stand naked without any mitzvot about me" (Menachot 43b). Yet he had great joy when he recalled the mitzvah of the brit milah on his body, for it constitutes a sign: The seal of the King engraved in our flesh.

I have read the following discussion in the writings of my forefather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto Zatzal: On account of the brit milah, a man is able to be upright and becomes acceptable and appreciated by G-d. Why then have we been commanded to perform circumcision at 8 days, since an individual is not cognizant of the mitzvah at that time? Why not wait until he grows up and understands the mean-

ing of the mitzvah? Why not have it performed with the necessary attention and with complete awareness?

My forefather answered this question in the following way: Man is important in the eyes of the Creator, Who exerts His providence upon the entire Jewish people – to whom He is connected with bonds of love – at an individual level. G-d also wants to protect man and give him a way of saving himself even as a newborn. Then when he grows up, he will be able to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, thereby benefiting from even more protection. If a man's circumcision were to be delayed, G-d forbid, and he was still devoid of Torah and mitzvah, the kelipah [a shell or "husk" of impurity] would cleave to him. Even if he were to study Torah as an adult, it would be too late; it would be difficult to separate him from this impurity. Hence when a baby is only 8 days old, G-d commands that his foreskin be removed, thereby protecting him from the kelipah until he grows up, becomes an adult, and starts devoting himself to Torah and mitzvot. The term shmona ("eight") is formed by the same letters as neshama ("soul"), for through the mitzvah of circumcision on the eighth day, a man's soul cleaves to the Creator, Who protects him.

The remarks of the Ben Ish Hai (Parsha Lech Lecha, First Year) are well-known: Until a man is circumcised, he resembles a shed (evil spirit), for the kelipah is found on him. A grave spiritual danger threatens him, for such impurity can lower him into the abyss without any chance of repentance, G-d forbid. During the brit milah, the foreskin is removed and the letter yud is added to him. He thereby becomes Sh-ddai (one of G-d's Names), henceforth belonging to G-d alone. This new name constitutes a great spiritual protection for his soul.

The Name Sh-ddai contains the initials of Shomer Daltot Israel ("Guardian of the Gates of Israel"). By removing the foreskin, G-d pro-

protects man from the kelipah, which can no longer penetrate his gates. Here the gates of Israel refer to the openings of the body, such as the eyes, ears, and mouth. These body parts require great protection in order to prevent impurity from making its way inside. Forbidden words must not reach the ears, forbidden words must not be spoken by the mouth, forbidden food must not enter the mouth, etc. As the verse states, "Officers and judges shall you appoint at all your gates" (Devarim 16:18). Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin Zatzal explains that a man must place officers at the various gates of his body: Ears, eyes, etc, in order for the evil inclination not to make its way inside. In that case, due to the mitzvah of brit milah, the name Sh-ddai ("Guardian of the Gates of Israel") takes affect, meaning that G-d will start helping a man to protect his gates and his openings from all impurity and blemishes.

Not only does a man carrying this seal in his flesh have the merit of drawing closer to G-d, so too does a man who (although still uncircumcised) finds himself among circumcised Jews. An atmosphere of sanctity will already start to surround him and lead him to purity.

An acquaintance told me that he once circumcised a 65-year-old man. When he asked the man why he had waited so long, he replied that his parents and all the members of his family had been deceived by the communist authorities, and they completely abandoned G-d's mitzvot and His Torah. Nevertheless, two years earlier he had seen his friends returning to their roots and sealing an eternal covenant through the brit milah. A spirit of sanctity came upon him at that point, and he decided to also get circumcised. The mere fact of being with Jewish friends who were attached to the Divine Presence had an influence on him. He too would become circumcised and thereby draw closer to Judaism. How much more is a man moved by a spirit of sanctity when he permanently carries

the seal of G-d in his flesh, being able to cleave to G-d and His Torah much more easily.

This young man of 18 years for whom I served as a Sandak was named Israel Zalman David. It was a merit for me to hear his first names, to serve as a Sandak, and to make the Kiddush, for "a three-ply cord is not easily broken" (Kohelet 4:12). In his name I saw a nice allusion. Israel Zalman David: The numerical value of his initials (yud-zazin-dalet) is 21, like the Divine Name Eheyeh. The book Sha'arei Orah states that of all the sacred Names, this one is the most honored. Just as the branches are second to the tree, likewise the other sacred Names are less predominant than this Name. In his Guide to the Perplexed, the Rambam states that G-d revealed Himself to the Jewish people when they were in Egypt through this sacred Name: Eheyeh asher eheyeh ("I shall be what I shall be" – Shemot 3:14). This is an existential Name that contains past, present, and future. In this I saw an allusion from Heaven. We are in the month of mercy, and it is certain that G-d, through the sacred Name Eheyeh – alluded to by the name of the young man being circumcised – infused us with a great sense of holiness and love for G-d during his brit milah.

I was overcome with emotion when I saw the young man of 18 years lying on a bed, being careful not to move, like in the Akeidah of Isaac. This certainly constituted a great defense for the Jewish people, those who devote themselves to fulfilling mitzvot. Our entire journey in Ukraine was worth the effort, if only to participate in this circumcision, thanks to which I was able to draw even closer to G-d and strengthen myself in Torah and mitzvot.

We later traveled to Uman, towards the grave of the tzaddik Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. On the way, a ferocious dog appeared before us and began to bark, and then it jumped on us. I moved to push the dog away, and it ran towards the road. At that point

a motorcycle traveling at great speed struck the dog and killed it. I began to wonder: What's the message in all this?

I noted that the name Eliyahu has the same numerical value as kelev ("dog"). Eliyahu designates Eliyahu HaNavi, who goes to every circumcision, mentions the merit of the Jewish people, and records them in a book. In Heaven he defends the Jewish people who guard the holy covenant, thereby annulling accusations. On the other hand, we know that the dog alludes to the forces of impurity that seek to accuse us, as King David said: "Rescue my soul from the sword, my essence from the grip of the dog" (Tehillim 22:21). Our Sages have also said, "Whoever speaks Lashon Harah...deserves to be cast to dogs" (Pesachim 118a). It is obvious that we are speaking here about the forces of evil and impurity that cleave to a person because of the sin of Lashon Harah. Our Sages have also said, "A woman who has relations with a non-Jew becomes tied to him like a dog" (Zohar III:259b), for impurity attaches itself to her. We also read, "When dogs howl, [this is a sign that] the Angel of Death has come into town" (Bava Kama 60b). The dog is the only one to meet the Angel of Death when it arrives in town, for it symbolizes the satan (i.e., the evil inclination) and the kelipah. It was for this reason that King David prayed for G-d to save him from the impurity that is this insolent "dog."

Come morning, we had the merit of participating in the brit milah and finding ourselves in the presence of Eliyahu HaNavi, who is a source of sanctity. On the other side was the dog, a source of impurity, that had come to disrupt us and prevent us from partaking of this sanctity. This happens because G-d creates things and their opposites, both having the same numerical value. Nevertheless, thank G-d, Eliyahu HaNavi's sanctity was greater and overcame the forces of impurity symbolized by the dog, which

was crushed and died. If the sanctity of Eliyahu takes shape in us, then the impurity of the kelipah, symbolized by the dog, will automatically disappear.

The young man's other name, Israel, made me think of our father Jacob, may he rest in peace, to whom G-d said: "Your name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel shall be your name" (Bereshith 35:10). I began to wonder why, at first glance, G-d had changed his name. The name "Jacob" comes from eikev ("heel"), alluding to the modesty and humility that one must possess in order to merit the crown of Torah. Why change his name to "Israel," which embodies the notion of supremacy and domination? Furthermore, why did G-d later call him by his initial name, "Jacob"?

I would like to explain this by saying that G-d wants to teach us that one thing depends on the other, meaning that one name is connected to other. It is precisely when our father Jacob is seated in the tents of Torah – when he is modest and humble, and he "kills himself" for Torah – that his greatness and essence are expressed. G-d told Jacob that he would henceforth be called Israel, for a person cannot possibly remain at the bottom if he devotes himself to learning Torah his entire life and sacrifices himself for it. This is because the Torah elevates a person and makes him grow. It is for this reason

that he was called "Israel," using the language of domination and greatness. Yet all this is on condition that Jacob continues along the right path, in the path of modesty and humility that is embodied by the name Jacob.

The name Israel also contains an allusion to the holy Torah. The first and last letters of this name – yud and lamed – together have a numerical value of 40. This alludes to the Torah, which was given in 40 days. In the middle of the word are the letters resh, aleph, and sin, which together form the word rosh ("head"). The lesson is the following: Only a person who studies the Torah that was given in 40 days will merit being the "head," for the crown of Torah is upon his head and makes him grow. It is for this reason that he is called "Israel," but only when he continues along the path of "Jacob." It is also for this reason that in regards to his descendants we read, "Jacob's thigh," for they are "the tribes of Hashem, a testimony for Israel" (Tehillim 122:4). They emerged from Jacob's thigh in holiness and purity.

May it be G-d's will that we merit to cleave to His Torah and mitzvot, and may we walk in the path of our father Jacob, may peace be upon him, "a wholesome man, living in tents" (Bereshith 25:27), who humbled himself to the ground. May the merit of the Torah protect us. Amen and amen.



LETTERS FROM OUR READERS



By the Merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto

It was Sunday, 10 Adar II, 5755 (March 12, 1995). Rabbi David Shlita was the Sandek at the circumcision of Mr. David Cohen's son, from the Sarcelles community. During the seuda that followed the brit, the Mohel (none other than Dr. Attias) arose and described a miracle that had taken place by the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal.

Coming to see Rabbi David was a person who was so ill that his life was in danger. He had come to the Rav seeking a blessing, for he had to undergo a serious operation. The Rav blessed him and gave him a small cake to eat just before the operation. He also asked him if he had faith in Hashem and the tzaddikim, and insisted that he change his ways and

strengthen himself in Torah and the fear of G-d. The sick man agreed to change his ways, and he left for the hospital with the cake.

At the hospital, come the time for the operation, the doctors did not know how to tell him that his life was in grave danger and that his chances of survival were slim. In the end, the physicians informed him of his situation, and added that if he believed in G-d, he should pray.

All the preparations for the operation had been completed, and our patient remembered that Rabbi David had given him some cake with the order to eat it just before the operation. When he informed his doctor that he had a cake that a Rav had instructed him to eat before the operation, the doctor replied that if he had received a promise from the Rav that this would help him, he should eat it. The doctor also suggested that he keep a little for after the operation, thinking that given the state of the patient, why shouldn't he enjoy some cake?

As the surgeon began to operate on the patient, he saw that it was hopeless and closed him back up. As soon as the patient awoke, the physician came to see him and reminded him that there was still a piece of cake that he should eat. The physician then informed the man's family that there was nothing they could do. However Hashem brings healing when man does not believe.

Our patient ate the remainder of the cake. Several weeks later, he told his doctors that he felt much better, to their utter astonishment. In fact the opposite should have happened, and yet the more time that passed, the more his condition improved, until the day came when our patient was completely healed!

The doctors did not understand

what was happening, and they conducted a series of tests on the man. As a result of these tests, they had to admit that our patient was in perfect health, and that his illness had disappeared! Mr. Saada was no longer sick!

A True Story

by Rabbi Nissim Bijaoui Zatzal

"Rabbeinu Yoel," a Sephardic school in Bnei Brak named after the tzaddik Rabbi Yoel of Satmar, recently organized a fundraising dinner to support its activities.

This dinner was chaired and attended by Rabbi David Shlita. It was a great Kiddush Hashem. In attendance were a great variety of people: Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Chassidim, very religious as well as less religious individuals. Everyone attentively listened to the words of Rabbi David Shlita, and one had the impression of being at the foot of Mount Sinai.

At the end of the dinner, as Rabbi David was about to leave the hall, a disabled woman approached him. She could not move on her own. She told Rabbi David that her husband had recently died in a car accident as he was driving to Netivot to give a Torah class. As for herself, the shock of this news had caused her to lose the use of her legs.

This woman asked for a bracha to walk again, as well as to be able to give Torah classes, which she used to give to women.

Rabbi David was deeply pained upon hearing this account. He was moved by the case of this woman, who wanted to be healed especially so she could continue to teach Torah.

Rabbi David blessed her. At the same time, he approached the director of the school that was organizing the dinner. Now the director had asked Rabbi David for a bracha to find

\$20,000 to cover the school's debts. Rabbi David connected both requests and exclaimed, "If Hashem performs a miracle for this woman and allows her to use her legs again, I will personally cover the school's debts!"

A few months passed. The same school organized another large dinner. Rabbi David traveled to Israel just to chair the event, which had more participants than the first dinner. Before the packed hall, Rabbi David gave an amazing discourse, encouraging people to constantly focus on the performance of mitzvot and the study of Torah. His words, which were heard amid the greatest of silence, had a great impact on everyone in attendance.

When he finished speaking, Rabbi David arose and wanted to leave the hall. At that point a woman approached him with tears in her eyes, telling him that she was the person who had asked for a bracha to walk again a few months earlier. She said, "By the merit of your holy ancestors, by the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto, the bracha was fulfilled. I now walk perfectly!" It was an extraordinary Kiddush Hashem. Everyone in the hall wanted to hear the story of this woman. Everyone, even the greatest talmidei chachamim present, wanted to receive a bracha from Rabbi David Shlita. Emotions were overflowing!

In the meantime, a slight concern appeared on the face of Rabbi David Shlita. As much as he rejoiced for this woman, he was now concerned because he remembered that he had committed himself to giving the school \$20,000 upon the woman's healing. Where was he going to find such a sum of money?

No reason to lose hope, Rabbi David said to himself. We need to have faith in G-d: "He Who healed this woman will have no trouble obtaining the necessary amount."

Rabbi David prayed and appealed to the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto to

help him fulfill his commitment.

Present in the hall that night was an extremely wealthy man who invited Rabbi David to the inauguration of a Sefer Torah written in the memory of his parents. The inauguration was to take place on the very next day at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Rabbi David accepted the invitation, and on the following day, as he arrived at the hotel, the man warmly welcomed him and demonstrated great respect for him. He also gave him an envelope containing a check for his institutions.

A little later, when Rabbi David opened the envelope, he almost fainted. It contained a check for \$20,000 – precisely the same amount that he needed! Rabbi David Shlita therefore gave the check to the director of the school.

The Bird at the Cemetery

While traveling to Morocco, in Agadir, I decided to go with a friend to Essaouira (Mogador), the city where my parents lived and where my grandparents, Meyer and Estrella Hamouth Lugassy, are buried. As we were going to the cemetery, I asked my friend to wait for me outside because I wanted to be alone when I prayed by the graves. I then began to look for them. However the old Jewish cemetery is located by the ocean, and a constant and intense wind seems to have erased all the inscriptions on the graves. After an hour of looking, it was impossible to find those graves. Having traveled so far without visiting my grandparents seemed unthinkable to me. I then asked for help from the cemetery custodian, but because of the hopelessness of the task he eventually said to me: shuff ("go look").

I then decided to go to the mausoleum of the great saint Rabbi Haim Pinto of blessed memory, and to offer a prayer to find these graves.

As soon as I returned to look for them, I saw four birds that were flying in the air. One of the birds descend-

ed and landed upon a grave, but the wind was so strong that it pushed the bird off. Time and again, however, it came back to the grave. It would hang on by flattening its body so the wind wouldn't catch it. When I approached the grave, the bird looked at me, but it didn't seem afraid. I then tried to decipher the barely visible inscription. It read "Meyer Lugassy." Tears began to roll from my eyes, and I couldn't do anything to hold them back.

Several months later, I went to see Rabbi David Pinto for a blessing. At the end of our conversation, I decided to share this incident with him. As I was about to describe it to him, saying "I have to tell you something," he cut me off and said: "Silence!" He then raised his two hands towards the heavens, and his consciousness seemed to be elsewhere for a minute or two. His face then turned back to me and he said, "What happened to you was a great miracle." At that point he described in detail the incident at the cemetery, without me telling him a single word. He explained that this bird was the soul of my grandfather, who had returned to earth in order for me to come closer to Judaism.

Dr. Laurent Lugassy
Marseille, France

The Flight that Didn't Appear on the Computer Monitor

From Mr. Maurice O. of Paris

November 4, 1999

Dear Rabbi,

I would like to take this opportunity, dear Rabbi, to describe to you what will forever remain engraved in my memory. Yet for this, and at the risk of seeming longwinded, I need to relate everything to you.

In 1999 I went through a difficult and painful period in my life. As it turned out, I was deprived of my liberty. During this time you met with my mother, who conveyed your blessings to me, as well as your certainty that I would soon be released. You also as-

sured her by saying that I would be by your side at the Hilloula in Essaouira in September.

Now at the time, my lawyers (who were quite prestigious) weren't telling me such good news. On the contrary, they expected me to be imprisoned for several months.

During my first appearance before the judge, and to the great surprise of my lawyers (and myself for that matter), I was instantly released.

It was my mother who reminded me that I had to immediately travel



to the pilgrimage that was to begin on the day following my release. I therefore took steps to book a flight, but it was impossible to make it to Essaouira without transgressing Shabbat. My mother and I agreed that I had to cancel the trip. Ten minutes after I made this decision, you called me from Essaouira and told me that you were waiting for me at the big event.

I again contacted my travel agent, who now told me that a seat was available on a flight to Casablanca on Sunday, September 5 at 6:00 am. My travel agent also found a private flight from Casablanca to Essaouira.

Arriving at Roissy in Paris for my trip to Casablanca, I found no trace of this flight on the monitors, and I was told at the information desk that the flight didn't even exist. I insisted that it did and got out my ticket, thinking

that maybe it was flying out of Orly. But it was not. A manager at Royal Air Maroc was therefore called and did a little searching. He then discovered that an empty plane was being sent back to Morocco, and that I should never have been sold a ticket for this non-commercial flight.

Thus a flight had appeared on my travel agent's monitor on a Friday (when it shouldn't have appeared), and yet on Sunday it didn't appear at all! How could that be? Only G-d knows. The pilot eventually accepted me on board as the only passenger. Without a crew, I was the only one on the plane with the pilot and copilot, as the accompanying photos show and my travel agent can attest to.

I hope to be among your guests for a long time to come. Very touched by your concern and your blessings, I wanted to present this story so everyone can believe in the power of a tzaddik's blessing. I swear before the Almighty as to the accuracy of my statements.

Rabbi, I thank you with all my heart.

Rabbi David Pinto's Comment:

A person who wishes to attribute the things mentioned in this letter to a combination of coincidences, or to chance, by finding all sorts of "logical" explanations for them, will only end up diminishing his faith and increasing his doubts. On the contrary, one must always be certain that everything is the fruit of Divine providence, not the result of chance. Hashem is present everywhere, and man's entire life is filled with miracles. The more that a person increases his faith and allows himself to be guided by Hashem, the closer he will come to Him and the more he will serve Him with a love that grows stronger and deeper.

Twins by the Merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto

From Mr. and Mrs. David Levy of New York

August 31, 1999

Dear Rav Pinto,

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, we look over the events of the past year, our deeds, our conduct, and our hopes. We put an effort into giving our life a greater spiritual meaning. We are incredibly thankful for this past year, and wish to tell you our story.

We came to see you for the first time in May 1998. My wife was having difficulty becoming pregnant, and our friends suggested that we see you for a blessing. In your office, we explained our problem and the fact that conception through natural means was no longer feasible. In desperation, we went to an in-vitro fertilization specialist. A few minutes into our conversation, you asked us: "What does Sarah represent to you?" Surprised, Carolyn asked you for an explanation: "Are you referring to Abraham and Sarah?" We then discussed the Biblical fact that Sarah had difficulty becoming pregnant, and that eventually Hashem helped her conceive. As we left your office, you told me that the next time we see each other, my wife will be pregnant. Obviously, my wife was anxious and impatient to know exactly when you would be returning to New York.

I would like to underline that after having listened to your Dvar Torah, I attended a Gemara class given by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky every morning. I also decided to make an effort to participate in the three daily prayers with a minyan.

After several fruitless attempts by our doctors, we decided to begin in-vitro fertilization treatments. The first cycle took place in August 1998. At the time, we were informed of your imminent return to New York, and we were hopeful that this cycle would be crowned with success. Yet to our great disappointment, the treatment failed. As "fate" would have it, we learned that your trip to New York had been canceled, though we were

very relieved that you weren't aboard Swissair flight 111, which as we know ended tragically.

Our next cycle of treatments began after Yom Kippur. My wife and I had started the year and the holidays with a heavy heart. The impossibility of having children was a heavy challenge to face. Nevertheless, the story of Hanna (the mother of the prophet Samuel) gave us hope, and we prayed to Hashem to remember and answer us this very same year. We approached the treatment cycle with optimism that was strengthened by our unwavering faith in Hashem. This cycle was a fantastic success: Ten ova were removed, and miraculously they were all fertilized. The doctors implanted three embryos, though we had to wait two weeks before knowing if Carolyn's body would reject them. These two weeks were filled with prayers and hope. We were also informed of your imminent return to New York, and we quickly made an appointment with your secretary to see you.

During the week of Parsha Vayeira (1998), the parsha that describes the birth of the Patriarch Isaac, we learned that Carolyn was finally pregnant! A few weeks later (the week of Parsha Toldot, in which Jacob and Esav are born), we saw the heart beating on the ultrasound. In his office, the doctor explained to us that we were going to have twins.

A few days later, we met you at Yad Avraham. Even before we told you the good news, you asked to see Carolyn's wedding ring. After a brief inspection of the ring, you announced that we would have two children. At that point, we told you what the doctor had said a few days earlier.

Among the different topics that we discussed, we mentioned that Carolyn (whose Hebrew name is Hannah Sarah Haya) had always thought she had been named after a single person. However her parents told her that she

had been named after her great-grandmother Hannah (on her mother's side) and her great-grandmother Sarah (on her father's side). Perhaps it was this Sarah that you were referring to during our first meeting? By "chance," when we informed Carolyn's parents that we were having twins, they reminded us that their grandmother Sarah had given birth to twins!

Our two daughters, Baruch Hashem, were born on June 4, 1999.

Shana Tova!

David, Carolyn, Margalit Ruth,
and Eliana Raizel Levy

The Mitzvah that Saved His Life

From I.R.B. of Jerusalem

December 25, 1998

My name is I.R.B. I am 28 years old, and I have two children. Eight years ago (on June 6, 1991) I had a road accident while serving in the army. I was not observant, but I believed in G-d's existence. I was a person on whom society had exerted a harmful influence.

As a result of the accident, I was in a comma for three months. The doctors gave my parents no reason to hope. Even Dr. Rekhes, a specialist in neurosurgery, declared: "It's 99% certain that he'll never get up again, and 1% depends on G-d." Another specialist said, "There's no hope. He's occupying a bed for no reason." Only Dr. Poumrenets was optimistic. My mother stayed by my side 24 hours a day. She no longer took care of the house, nor of my father, nor of my two other brothers. She was by my side day and night, and she slept on a chair. My cousin was to be married 10 days after the accident, and the entire family was very troubled. At the time, three distinguished physicians examined me and said: "There's no hope. All you can do is pray to G-d." My aunt went to see several rabbis here in Israel, in the hope of hearing some good news. Another one of my aunts

heard people speaking about a great rabbi from France, Rabbi David Pinto. She went to see him, along with my father and my uncle. As opposed to my mother, who believed that I would get up again, my father held out no such hope. Rabbi David Pinto received my father and asked him, "What mitzvah did your son purchase before the accident?" My father replied, "He used his money to purchase tefillin." The Rav then said to him, "Your son is saved by this mitzvah. He will get up and establish his own home in Israel." My father didn't believe what he had just heard, and he repeated what the doctors had said. He even showed him all the tests, as well as the reports of the doctors. The Rav got upset and said to him, "You have no faith. That's the answer given from Heaven: Your son will recover, get married, and establish a home." He even told my aunt, "Go back with joy, for a son will be born to your family." At the time, my aunt wasn't aware that her daughter was pregnant. Since Rav Pinto Shlita had declared it, I awoke from my coma, and as time passed I had the feeling that I had a new neshama. I got married and had two children, and now I give my neshama spiritual nourishment three times a day. I am including some pictures, one before I recovered and one afterwards. My family and I personally wish to deeply thank you for your blessings, and for all the hope that you gave our family. I'm living proof of the power of Hashem, Who directs the world.

The Lost Slip of Paper

From Mrs. L.S. of Villeurbanne

October 25, 1999

Dear Rabbi David,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you for comforting us, and to describe what I have gone through.

At the beginning of September, I was to enter the hospital in order to undergo a serious operation, which I had been putting off for months. The

week before the operation, my worried mother came to see you, asking that you pray for Hashem to send me a *refuah sheleimah*. Through your kindness and understanding, as well as the friendliness that you demonstrate to everyone who approaches you, you listened to my mother. After a few moments of concentration and reflection, you comforted her as you do so well, and you assured her that everything would be alright. At that point you handed her a slip of paper upon which you had written some blessings. The instructions were that I was not let that slip of paper out of my presence; I was to always keep it at the head of my bed. I entered the hospital as planned, and thank G-d the operation went well. During all the time that I was there, I watched over that slip of paper, which I carefully placed between the base of the bed and the mattress. It would often fall through the base, however, since they regularly disinfected the beds, as they do in every hospital. How many times did I have pick it up off the floor? Dozens of times!

On the day that I returned home, everyone was relying on somebody else, and the slip of paper remained in the hospital. As soon as I stepped through the front door, I asked for the paper, but then realized that nobody had taken it. I immediately called the hospital, but was told that my room was already being occupied by someone else, and that everything had been changed and disinfected. In short, I had no hope of ever finding it again. I then became very upset, justifying every ache that I felt, every bit of fatigue, by the loss of that paper. It was turning into an obsession!

The operation required that I return to the hospital every day to clean the dressings, something that continued for months. It took place in a different section of the hospital than the one I had stayed in. One Sunday three weeks later, a series of events brought me not to the floor where my dressings were

usually changed (since it was closed), but to the only room available at the time: The one I had occupied during my hospital stay! Instinctively, I lifted the mattress up, and as incredible as it seems, the slip of paper was stuck between the base of the bed and the mattress! I was stunned. My mother, who was with me, couldn't believe her eyes. How can anyone explain the presence of that slip of paper in the bed, which had known plenty of patients since I left, and which had been disinfected dozens of times?

This sign, which will forever remain engraved in my memory, is as incredible as it is unbelievable. At that instant I felt relieved and reassured, and I knew that I would now get better. Today, 12 months later, that slip of paper is still under the head of my bed, and I've completely recovered from my operation. I believe more than ever in the great merit of your ancestors.

May G-d protect you and all your family. Thank you.

The Tumor that Disappeared

December 15, 1997

Dear Rabbi David,

With this letter, I would like to tell you my story:

It took place in 1993, when I was pregnant with my last child, who was born on October 29, 1993, a boy that I named David Moshe, after you and your father.

The doctor following my progress detected a growth in my sternum. The growth, which by that time I already had for several months, was not painful. However I promised the doctor to look into it after the birth of my child. Therefore two and a half months after giving birth, I made an appointment with my physician, Dr. Draï, for a routine exam. This time he focused on this growth and recommended that I see a specialist. He referred me to Dr. Guerin at the Red Cross Hospital in Lyon.

My appointment with Dr. Guerin was scheduled for the beginning of February 1994. At the hospital, Dr. Guerin made me undergo a series of tests (blood work, biopsies, and x-rays), after which I returned home. Three weeks later, I made another appointment with the same doctor, who met me in his office. There, he announced that I had cancer in my sternum, which is quite rare. Without pulling any punches, he told me that I didn't have long to live, maybe a few weeks or months at most. There was no hope for me, other than to try chemotherapy.

My husband was unable to accompany me on that day, meaning that I was alone. In tears, I made it back home, though I'm not sure how. I was completely stunned, and from the time that I heard the news, I couldn't eat or sleep; all I could do was cry. I envisioned my husband and children all alone, and that in itself tore my heart. I wasn't feeling well; I had headaches that I wish upon no one, as well as episodes of vomiting and memory lapses. I would take handfuls of pills, but they no longer had any effect on me. I would sleep throughout the day, and I reached the point at which I was taking morphine, which took immediate effect. I was taking eight pills a day, and I had become a drug addict. I took my pills with me everywhere I went, and if I were to ever forget them, I would have a panic attack.

I had made an appointment for chemotherapy, but since the doctor said that I had no hope, I canceled it. I thought for a long time and said to myself: "If Hashem has given me four children and wants me to leave this world, then may His will be done."

Always with my morphine, I committed myself to taking care of my children, my husband, my family, and my home. I pretended that I was alright. When my husband came to see you, before he could say anything at all, you told him that I was sick, very sick. You also gave him a blessing for

me. We came to see you the following Sunday, and you treated me like a crazy woman because I didn't want to undergo treatment. I had seen my father suffer, for he was afflicted with cancer and had greatly suffered as a result of his treatments, may his soul rest in peace. I didn't want my husband and children to see me without hair, glued to the bed, and unable to help them. I had tremendous faith in Hashem, and every day I would pray for Him to perform a miracle, not for me but for my small family, which I love above all, may G-d protect them. I stayed like this for at least six months, and I became a corpse. I was angry and depressed. I made an appointment to see you just before you traveled to Los Angeles for Passover. This time, you changed my name to Sarah Bracha and blessed me for a refuah shelemah.

For his part, my husband took matters in hand and made an appointment to see another doctor. (I forgot to mention how all your prayers were for my sake, so that G-d would have mercy and heal me as quickly as possible.) Finally, the day came for our appointment, and with medical file in hand I went to see the doctor. He studied it and made me undergo some x-rays, and then he examined me. However there was no growth. He didn't understand, nor did we! We stayed in his office for at least two hours, wanting to make sure. Before leaving, the doctor said to me: "You can now leave. You're in good health."

Now I know that thanks to G-d and to you, I experienced a tremendous miracle. May G-d protect you, and may every blessing rest upon you and your family, as well as on the Jewish people. May He also send us Mashiach. Amen.

It will soon be 1998, and I have been undergoing regular examinations. Nothing has been detected, and I'm enjoying my children and my husband in complete tranquility.

May G-d bless you.

Mrs. Sarah Bracha Derai

The Microorganism that Disappeared

Kfar Saba

March 22, 1998

My mother arrives in Israel on Sunday, March 1, 1998. I go pick her up at Ben Gurion Airport. The reunion is warm, and my mother seems to be in good health. She spends two days with my sister in Bnei Brak. My sister tells me that she has "caught a cold" and can't speak to me over the phone. In fact on the second night, in going to visit her, I find that she's so exhausted that she can barely speak. We return to my home in Kfar Saba, and she spends the entire day in bed. On the following day I start to worry. At night I look at her throat and diagnose a throat infection with an abscess. I urgently take her to get some blood tests, which indicate a very serious infection. Could it be a reaction to a bacterium? I nevertheless am very worried, given the change in her overall state. I undertake more tests: Blood cultures to look for microorganisms in her blood, followed by a double dose of antibiotics, since I was afraid of septicemia, meaning a blood infection.

On the following day, I take her to see Dr. O.R.L., who confirms the diagnosis (a throat abscess), and decides to operate. My mother refuses, and we go to my sister's home in Bnei Brak to explain the whole story (as for the blood cultures, the doctor thought that they were useless).

We called Rabbi David in Villeurbanne, and he advised us to take the advice of three doctors before operating.

In the meantime, my mother feels better and returns to France.

The story continues, for at the lab the blood cultures come out positive (meaning that a microorganism was found in her blood). This occurred on the day before Purim. I urgently make a call to France and inform my

brother (Dr. Meyer Naccache, a radiologist), who takes over for me. They (my mother and brother) go to Alexis Carel Hospital and urgently get some new blood tests done.

My brother understands the risks of septicemia, and makes sure that all the biological and radiological tests are performed.

On several occasions I ask my mother and sister to call the Rav for his advice. I was very worried about her condition, and something was telling me that her state of health was very precarious and worrisome.

On the day before Purim, I discover for the first time the kind of microorganism (anaerobic bacillus). On the following day, Purim, I continue to work on her blood to precisely identify the microorganism, and in a strange twist I discover it to be a fungus! I make an urgent call to France. They do not fully understand the problem. I redo the blood analysis. On the following day, another twist: The blood becomes sterile and no microorganisms grow in it.

To be extra cautious, I ask my assistant to redo all the tests from the starts. My assistant confirms all the results, despite being surprised that the blood has become sterile.

For people who are skeptical, I would like to stress that all the tests were conducted under the most sterilized conditions.

This is the story without any interpretation on my part. It contains nothing but recorded, objective medical facts.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the Almighty for His kindness. Second, I would also like to openly thank Rabbi David Pinto Shlita for having implored the Almighty to help my mother.

I truly think that Rabbi David Pinto Shlita represents the spiritual leader of the Jewish people in the world.

Dr. Shalom Naccache

Microbiologist

My Story I

Last year summer I started to feel lousy. I was feeling sleepy, but thought that it was a phase I was going through in life. However my wife insisted that I go to the doctor and get myself checked out. I finally went to see my general practitioner, who was very concerned because he thought that I had mononucleosis (Epstein-Barr virus). He wanted me to go see an oncologist, which at the time I had no idea what kind of doctor that was. Since I'm usually not the type to see doctors, I ignored the whole thing and said that I felt great.

However it seemed that my doctor really knew what I had. Since he didn't want to scare me, he lied about what he thought I had. Yet seeing that I wasn't doing what I was supposed to, he called my wife to warn her that I had to go see the oncologist.

After my checkup, the doctor comes in and sits down. He says that he has something to tell me, something that will sound worse than it really is: "You have CLL [Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia], which means that you have cancer in your blood. There's no cure for it, but you could live with it for a long time." People with this disease are usually 65 years and older, but I'm only 35. To add insult to injury, my father-in-law died from it 10 years ago. It was really strange to think that, of all people, I got this disease.

At that point a friend of mine said that he was going to see Rabbi Pinto for a bracha on the next day, and asked if I wanted to join him. I said yes (I had told no one about my condition, so it wasn't like my friend was trying to get me to go because of it). On the next day, I met Rabbi Pinto and could not believe the things that he told me about a house I bought (I never told anyone that I had purchased it). He told me not to move in for now, so I started to cry because I thought that I wouldn't marry off my kids, and I was afraid for the future. However Rabbi

Pinto calmed me down and asked, "How much money do you want to give to poor people in Israel as a pidyon for yourself?" I just took out everything I had in my pocket (about \$300) and gave it all to him. He then told me not to worry about anything.

I started going to the doctor every four months, but none of my numbers changed, not for better or worse. At least I didn't have to undergo any treatments.

At one point I decided, after getting someone's advice, to see the best doctor in the field and see what he says. He gave me a lot of hope, and so I thought to myself: "You see, Rabbi Pinto promised me that everything would be fine, so there's nothing to worry about." I started to get used to my situation.

However the interesting part was that Rabbi Pinto came to America again, and I decided to go see him for an even greater bracha. The Rav laughed at me and said, "I'm telling you, you're not going to die!" My doctor then called me and said that he wanted to perform a bone marrow biopsy (remember, this disease comes from the bone marrow). I didn't want to do it, and since the Rav told me that I'm fine, I just wanted to forget about the whole thing. However my doctor persuaded me to go through with the procedure. He then called me on the following week and said that the interesting part was that he could barely find any trace of the disease in my marrow. This result made him think that perhaps I didn't have anything at all; he just didn't know. In any case, I was definitely a lucky man. What he didn't know is that we have tzaddikim who are able to pray to Hashem and help people in time of need.

My Story II

November 2000

I went to Rabbi Pinto seeking a bracha for my health. I had a year of various medical problems, some of which had not been resolved. I

thought that seeking Rabbi Pinto's bracha and guidance might help my situation. I came to him not knowing what to expect, because I had never approached a Rav specifically for a bracha. I told him this when I came into his study, at which point he started asking me various questions, spontaneously assuring me that my parnasa and shalom bayit would be fine. Although that was very nice to hear, I was there for health reasons. I started to tell him about my recent heart bypass surgery and subsequent complications, but he interrupted me to ask what was wrong with my feet. I was totally astonished by this question, because I had developed neurological problems with my legs and feet from a condition called transverse myelitis. How could he possibly have known that? I told him a little about my problem, but then he asked me who Yaakov was. I told him that I didn't know a Yaakov. Our conversation continued and he told me that I should be careful with my sugar intake and of course my cholesterol.

Again I was shocked, as I had recently been advised to monitor my blood sugar level. As our meeting continued, Rabbi Pinto appeared concerned and began to tell me that I had experienced a great ness (miracle). He repeated this several times, followed by the shocking statement that I was supposed to die on Shabbat many months ago, but had been saved because I performed a great mitzvah. He wasn't sure what mitzvah it was, only that my life was saved by its merit. How could he possibly have known that I first became ill on Shabbat afternoon? He advised me to continue performing mitzvot and to increase my Torah study. Our meeting concluded with his bracha for a refuah sheleimah.

When I came home, I told my wife what had happened, and that we needed to continue performing important mitzvot and learning more Torah. The

only thing that bothered me was the fact that I didn't know who Yaakov was.

In the middle of the night, I suddenly woke up and remembered who Yaakov was. On the Shabbat that I first became ill, I had been away at an educational seminar that took place from Wednesday to Sunday. On Thursday, I happened to see another person in the crowd wearing a kippah. I went to introduce myself, and I asked him what he was going to do for Shabbat meals. He told me that he wasn't too prepared, but that he was going to go out and try to find some kosher food. I told him that it wouldn't be necessary, since I had more than enough for both of us. He agreed and said that he would bring whatever he could. We enjoyed Shabbat together and forged a new friendship. His name was Yaakov. I went back to Rabbi Pinto in the morning and told him that I remembered who Yaakov was and how we had met. The Rav immediately understood what great mitzvah had saved my life. It was hachnasat orchim. The Rav was very excited as he explained to me the great importance of this mitzvah, and how people don't realize the power of simple acts of kindness.

Rabbi Pinto charged me with telling others about the importance of this great mitzvah, and he gave me another bracha for a refuah sheleimah. I left with a stronger sense of emunah.

In telling people this story, as Rabbi Pinto recommended, I hope that they will understand the message that the Rav was trying to convey. People should not get caught up on the way the message was related. To be honest, it's easy to focus on the uniqueness of this story. But if we do, we will unfortunately miss its important message and devalue Rabbi Pinto's gift.



Regaining My Sight Through Tefillin

From L.D. of New York

July 13, 1999

Dear Rabbi Pinto,

Some experiences are so filled with extraordinary facts that it becomes difficult for a person to know where to begin. Mine have continued since our first meeting in November 1992.

I remember just how nervous I was when Rav Kalatsky suggested that I meet you. Fortunately for me, I had the chance to attend the lecture you gave at Yad Avraham. Straightaway, I certainly felt what everyone else was feeling upon listening to your words. I felt that I was discovering the truth. I was convinced that our meeting on the following morning would be something out of the ordinary.

It was much more than that. While waiting for you in the next room, I was pacing back and forth, nervous and impatient. Upon entering, you told me that I had a serious vision problem in my left eye. My first thought was how anyone could know that! I was suffering from amblyopia, which can lead to blindness, and which only my doctor was aware of. Your advice was even more disconcerting: You told me to start putting on tefillin! Without hesitating, I replied: "Rabbi, I don't do that. I've never put them on, and I don't even know how to put them on!" You immediately replied, "I haven't asked you to pray for hours. I only asked you to put on tefillin."

I left with a profound feeling that this had been a very special encounter. Yet in no way was I going to start wearing tefillin. Deep inside, I thought to myself: "Why didn't he simply ask me to make a donation? That would have been much easier!"

Three months later, I went to Yad Avraham and asked Rav Kalatsky to teach me how to put on tefillin. At that very same moment, it happened that he was teaching another person what I had come to see him for, and so we learned it together. I asked him to order a pair for me.

As I left, I had one of the strangest moments of my life. On Madison Avenue, I could make out things that I had never seen before. The window fronts and traffic lights were now in focus, the details of the buildings were clear, and for the first time I saw just how dirty the streets of New York were. I had regained my sight – perfectly. I no longer needed my glasses. I was stunned! Since that time, I haven't stopped putting on my tefillin.

When I sat behind the wheel of my car, my wife asked me where my glasses were. I replied, "I don't need them any more!" I rushed straight to my ophthalmologist, who couldn't believe his eyes, nor mine! He was convinced that I had undergone a macrobiotic treatment, or that I had placed my finger in a wall socket! It was very difficult to tell him that it was because of the tefillin, and for his part it was even more difficult to believe me.

How can I thank Hashem for having placed Rav Kalatsky and yourself on my path in life?

With my sincere gratitude, humility, as well as my love.

L.D.

THE MUMBAI CLASS

Spreading Torah in France

Numerous classes have been established by our Rav and teacher, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, as well as by his sons Rabbi Raphael, Rabbi Moshe, Rabbi Yoel, and Rabbi Michael as part of the Torah revolution taking place in Paris and Lyon. We have already mentioned this "French Revolution" in previous articles. Not a day goes by without a Torah class taking place, and sometimes many classes occur in the same day. At first, only the Rav gave these classes. Yet when faced with the magnitude of the task and the heavy demand, he asked his sons to also participate in the mitzvah of spreading Torah and giving classes to all who wanted.

Each class has its own founder, and each class has its own story. One was established in the memory of a certain person, another for the healing of another person, and so on. Some classes require a great investment of time and energy, as well as long hours of persuasion. Others are immediately suc-

cessful and draw many participants. In some classes, one can count the number of participants on one hand; in others, numerous hands would not suffice.

It would seem, however, that the story behind the most recently established class is one that we have not faced in a long time. It is a story that crosses continents and oceans, a story of faith in the Creator, and above all a story about the power of Torah.

We are speaking of an exceptional class, one whose secret lies precisely in its origins. It is a story that has made, and continues to make, waves in the French Jewish world.

The very name of this class embodies its secret: "The Mumbai class." Mumbai? What's the connection between Mumbai and a Torah class? Let us explain.

We heard this account from numerous Jews who testified to the veracity of its details. We also spoke to our Rav and teacher, Rabbi David

Pinto, in order to hear his account. It was only afterwards that we dared to put this incredible story into writing. We feel that it is extremely important to recount this story, for it reveals the Torah's power.

A Ray of Light Amid the Darkness of Mumbai

Located in India, the city of Mumbai was once called Bombay before its name was changed. Some people still call it by its old name, while others call it by its new one. Until recently, we did not hear much about this city. What connection is there between ourselves, Torah observant Jews, and Mumbai, a city teeming with travelers, with free-spirited people, and with Jewish souls desperately searching for meaning, for spirituality? These Jews travel to India instead of looking in their own backyard, close to their home (although that's a subject for another article). We, on the other hand, are charedim (observant Jews), children of charedim, people who observe Torah mitzvot, both easy and difficult.



Therefore what connection is there between ourselves and India?

Unfortunately, India (and more specifically Mumbai) made headlines a few months ago due to tragic circumstances.

On Wednesday, November 26, a multi-pronged terrorist attack injured and killed hundreds of ordinary people, both Indians and Europeans. According to Indian police, it was a terrorist attack perpetrated both by suicide bombers and terrorists armed with guns and grenades. They seized control of certain areas of Mumbai and murdered ordinary citizens and took hostages. Little by little, the extent of the attack, massive in its scope, became known: Armed men targeted no less than seven different areas of the city, two of which were prestigious hotels (the Taj Mahal Palace and Oberoi hotels), as well as a Chabad House (Lubavitch Jewish community center) and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (central train station).

Little by little, people learned the magnitude of the horror: More than 195 people died in the attacks, including six Jews, pious and just, most notably Lubavitch representatives who ran the Chabad House in Mumbai.

In the days following the tragedy at the Chabad House and other places targeted in the attacks, newspapers were announcing the miraculous rescue of the Holtzberg child named Moshe. Yet very few people were aware of what happened at the same time in France with our Rav and teacher, Rabbi David Pinto. Very few knew of the incredible ray of light that illuminated the skies of Mumbai at the time.

A Songbook and the Power of Torah

In France, a large community finds refuge with our Rav. Among those belonging to this community is the Moyal family, which is connected to the Rav with bonds of love and affection. At one point the Rav's secretary, Mr. Marciano, called them and said that the Rav wanted to see them. Mr.



Moyal and his father arrived at the meeting, sitting in front of the Rav and waiting for him to speak. The Rav was immersed in thought, and after a few minutes he turned to them and said, to their great surprise, that he wanted to give them a gift. "In general, I usually offer gifts to men. This time, however, I want to offer a gift to Mrs. Moyal," he said without explanation. The Rav then got up and left, and a few minutes later he returned with... a book of songs for Shabbat. He said to them, "Starting this Shabbat, I want you to sing Shabbat songs. It's a great segula to sing during Shabbat meals."

Mr. Moyal and his father were taken aback by this request. What connection did they have with Shabbat songs? None! Was this why the Rav had summoned them? Furthermore, Mr. Moyal's wife was out of the country, and she would not be home on time to sing any songs this Shabbat. The Rav listened to Mr. Moyal's response, but maintained his request: "If your wife is home this Shabbat, then you should sing Shabbat songs. If not, then next Shabbat."

Just before giving the songbook to Mr. Moyal, the Rav turned to him and said: "Today is Wednesday. Are you ready to begin a Torah class at your home every Wednesday? Are you prepared to host a class given by my son Moshe?"

After discussing it, a stunned Mr. Moyal agreed to this completely unexpected request. Nevertheless, he asked if the class could take place on Tuesdays. The Rav refused, saying that he specifically wanted the class to take place on Wednesdays. Mr. Moyal accepted, and the Rav gave him the songbook, all while pronouncing blessings and good wishes for him and his father.

Thank Me for What?

Just two days later, the Rav was sitting with rabbis from the kollel and yeshiva, namely Rabbi Yehoshua Salomons, the Rosh Kollel, Rav Baruch Leibovitz, the director of our Kol HaTorah yeshiva in Paris, Rav Daniel Tzigelman, and the meshiv Rabbi David Dakelbaum. As they were discussing the yeshiva and its curriculum, the telephone rang. It was Mr. Moyal. He wanted to give the Rav two messages: First, he wanted to thank him, and second he wanted to let him know that his wife would be returning within the hour, meaning that she would be home for Shabbat.

The Rav was surprised. First of all, why was he thanking him? Second, Mr. Moyal had said that his wife would definitely not be home for Shabbat, so what changed? The Rav took the telephone and learned of the extraordinary events that had transpired that Wednesday.

As Mr. Moyal recounted the details, his emotions could be heard in his voice, emotions that occasionally prevented him from continuing. He said, "While I met with you, my wife was in India for some business meetings. These meetings were to continue into early next week, which is why I said that my wife wouldn't be back in France for Shabbat.

"However G-d had different plans. A few minutes after I left – after I had told you that I would host a Torah class in my home every Wednesday – my wife sent me a message. Terrified,

eventually wounding and killing all the terrorists. Only then was my wife able to breathe easily and leave the hotel. The first thing she did was call me. She then told me what happened: She had been sitting in the lobby of the hotel in Mumbai with a group of businessmen – it was the same time that I was sitting in your office – when suddenly, for no apparent reason, she asked the businessmen to proceed to the restaurant on the next floor. It seems that this happened because I had agreed to host a Torah class in my home. A few of the businessmen decided to remain

the floor was filled with blood and bodies. Baruch Hashem, by the merit of the Torah, by the merit of the class that I agreed to host in my home and by the merit of the Rav's blessings, my wife was saved from this hell." This is how Mr. Moyal described it to the Rav.

It was a miracle! At the very moment that the Rav asked Mr. Moyal to host a Torah class in his home, his wife was unknowingly fleeing a grave threat. Thanks to the Torah and to spreading its teachings, she was saved from a mortal danger!

Epilog

The incredible help that our friend received from Heaven did not stop there. After being rescued, Mrs. Moyal wanted to return to France and be with her husband and family. When she arrived at the airport, however, she was told that there were no flights to France, nor anywhere else for that matter. The situation in India was extremely tense, especially in places with large numbers of tourists. Many of them feared that the Mumbai incident would provoke other terrorist attacks, which is why they all wanted to return home. The airport was packed with people, and the tension in the air was palpable. When one airline employee saw Mrs. Moyal, he asked her if she was Israeli. When she responded that she was a Jew from France, the employee told her: "We have an El Al flight that will soon be leaving for Israel. Take it." Mr. Moyal summed up the story by telling the Rav, "Thanks to incredible Divine help, she was able to make it to Israel, and she's now on her way to France. She'll be joining me this Shabbat, when we'll start singing with great joy, just as you said! For all this, I want to thank you!"

This is the story behind the Mumbai class, which takes place every Wednesday in the Moyal home. It is attended by numerous friends of the family and the community, greatly spreading Torah. This story is circulating everywhere in France!



she was trapped in the Taj Mahal hotel as it was being attacked by terrorists! Afraid that she was going to die, I tried to calm her down. I assured her that she would be alright because you offered me a gift to give her for Shabbat. I was also certain that she would be rescued and return home for Shabbat to sing at the Shabbat table. I said to her, 'Are you ready to host a Torah class in our home every Wednesday from now on?' She answered, 'I'm ready for one every day of the week, just as long as I get out of this hell!'

"For the next several hours, my wife remained lying on the ground on the hotel's second floor, terrified. In the meantime, Indian commandos were attempting to take control of the hotel,

below, but most of them accompanied her to the next floor. A few minutes after she arrived, they suddenly heard shouts and screams of terror coming from the lobby, along with the sound of gunfire. A tragedy was unfolding below, for armed terrorists started firing everywhere in the lobby, murdering dozens of people. Only today, two days after the incident, do we understand the magnitude of the miracle that my wife experienced. As for the businessmen who stayed below, some were killed and others were wounded. The leader of the Indian commando unit confirmed that he saw about 50 bodies in the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, and numerous tourists who were freed from the hotel recounted that



there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for three days. No man could see his brother, nor could anyone arise from his place for three days. But for all the Children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings” [Shemot 10:22-23]. As I have explained elsewhere, the aim of most of the plagues that struck the Egyptians was to teach the Children of Israel that G-d controls everything, as the verse states: “You shall know that I am Hashem.” We need to understand what lies behind the plague of darkness. G-d could have struck the Egyptians with blindness, just as the people of Sodom were struck with blindness when the angels came to save Lot. Why did He kill them precisely in darkness?

This teaches us that sometimes, darkness is precisely what brings in light. Even when we have the feeling that darkness covers the earth – that everything is obscure, and that G-d is completely hidden – we must not lose hope: “But for all the Children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings.” Even when we find ourselves in the most difficult of situations – when darkness extends in every possible direction, when hopelessness stretches out its hand and grabs hold of us, and a sharp blade is already at our neck – we must realize that even in the depths of darkness, a ray of light may shine.

The story that you have just read illustrates this point. It enables us to see how, even in the darkest depths, when hopelessness appears everywhere, G-d watches over a person and helps him at every step, even without his knowledge at the time.

The story is the following: Living in France is a certain family by the name of Moyal. These people are warm-hearted Jews, being closely connected to everything pertaining to kedusha. For many years, they have been close to the famous Pinto dynasty, traveling to Morocco each year in order to participate in the great Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us all.

Now do you understand the meaning of the “Mumbai class”?

Do you understand the tremendous power of Torah, which can save from death?

“For its commerce is better than the commerce of silver.... It is a tree of life to those who support it” (Mishlei 3:14, 18).

This is the literal truth, for whoever supports it merits life!

The Mumbai Class – Another Perspective

After listening to this account, we also wanted to get the Rav’s perspective. Although we already presented the essential facts, this incident has a completely different tone when heard from the Rav himself. An additional light emerges from him, a light of humility and faith, of authentic modesty and deep faith in the Creator.

When we went to see the Rav, he began as follows:

The verse states, “Moshe stretched forth his hand towards the heavens, and

I wanted to speak to Mr. Moyal during the last Hilloula, and I asked Mr. Marciano to call him. However he was unsuccessful. Our meeting was delayed again and again over the course of three months, each time for a different reason.

A few Wednesdays ago, I had a deep-seated and unexplainable urge to speak with Mr. Moyal. Nevertheless, I had no specific reason for doing so. I again spoke to Mr. Marciano and asked him to phone Mr. Moyal and tell him that it was imperative that he come see me that day. He was definitely not to put off our meeting for some other time, since it had already been delayed for months without good reason. Mr. Marciano called Mr. Moyal and his father, telling them that Rabbi David wanted to meet them and talk.

When they arrived, they sat down in front of me and waited for me to speak. Now as I mentioned, I had not called them for any specific reason. I was therefore quite perplexed, and I told them that they shouldn't think I had called them for a donation. Rather, I wanted to offer a gift to Mrs. Moyal. I couldn't explain why I said this, but I couldn't retract my words, and therefore I had to find something to give Mrs. Moyal. Since there was nothing suitable in my office, I went into the office of Rabbi Hanania and asked him if he had something I could give as a gift to a woman. Rabbi Hanania jokingly replied, "Kavod HaRav, I only have a computer to offer her!" As I was looking around the room, my eyes came upon a book of songs for Shabbat. I didn't know if it was fitting to give such a gift to Mrs. Moyal, but since it was the only thing available, I took it and brought it into my office.

I told Mr. Moyal to give the songbook to his wife, and that from now on they should sing songs from it every Shabbat. Mr. Moyal looked at me and said that neither he nor his wife knew how to sing Shabbat songs. Furthermore, his wife was away on a trip and was only going to return the fol-

lowing week. I told him to still try and learn these songs, and that if his wife was not going to be home this Shabbat, they should begin on the following Shabbat.

Just before handing him the songbook, I drew it back and asked Mr. Moyal to host a Torah class in his home every Wednesday night. My son Rabbi Moshe would come to give the class. Mr. Moyal agreed, but asked if it could take place on Tuesday nights instead. I told him that I wanted a class given specifically on a Wednesday, the very same day as our meeting. I then gave him the songbook and we said goodbye.

I began to review what had just happened, the entire conversation. I was unable to explain what I had done: A songbook? A Torah class? Is that why I had called him?

Two days later, I received an answer to my questions. On Friday, as I was sitting with the rabbis of the kollel, the telephone rang and Mr. Marciano picked it up. It was Mr. Moyal, who wanted to send me a big thank you and tell me that his wife was going to be home within the hour. I was surprised when I heard this. First of all, why was he thanking me? Second, his wife was supposed to return home the following week. I took the telephone and heard an incredible account from Mr. Moyal that made me tremble.

He told me that on Wednesday, the same day that we had met in my office, his wife had been in the lobby of a hotel in Mumbai with a group of businessmen. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, she asked them to go to a restaurant on the next floor. A few minutes later, they heard a burst of gunfire coming from the lobby. A tragedy was unfolding below: Terrorists had infiltrated the hotel and killed about 80 people.

Precisely as bullets were flying through the hotel, we were sitting in my office and I asked Mr. Moyal to host a Torah class in his home every Wednesday. At the time, I didn't know

why I had asked him to see me on that day. Nor did I know why I wanted to give Mrs. Moyal a gift, especially a songbook for Shabbat. The greatest question I had was why I asked him to host a Torah class, and why on a Wednesday. Yet now, everything was clear.

While Mrs. Moyal was hiding in the hotel, still lying on the ground on the floor above the lobby, she sent a message to her husband. She told him that she was afraid of dying, and he replied that he was certain she would be home by Shabbat, since Rav Pinto had sent her a gift – a songbook for Shabbat. He asked her if she was ready to host a Torah class in their home, and she willingly agreed, just as long as she survived!

In fact they both came out winners. His wife was rescued and returned home for Shabbat, and they have been able to transform their home into a place where scholars gather for Torah classes every Wednesday.

In the end, all the pieces of the puzzle fit together, producing a clear picture. G-d guides the world, and He sometimes chooses emissaries to fulfill His will. Such people sometimes act with the knowledge that they are G-d's emissaries, and sometimes they act without that knowledge. In this story, I was an emissary of the second type, a kind of pawn. This certainly happened by the merit of my holy ancestors. Hence Mrs. Moyal was saved on account of the Torah class that was established in their home, and because of the honor of Shabbat.

As I said earlier, even in the greatest of darkness, in "deep darkness" – when it seems that there's no hope and that a sharp blade is at our neck – even then G-d controls the souls of all living things and brings deliverance, making a ray of light appear.

As we mentioned at the outset, the Rav possesses authentic modesty and deep faith. The facts speak for themselves.

Man of Faith

THE TZADDIK RABBI YEHUDAH PINTO, KNOWN AS "RABBI HADAN"

After the passing of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, may his merit protect us, his son the tzaddik Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, known as Rabbi Hadan, may his merit protect us, followed in his father's footsteps. Rabbi Hadan was known for his zeal in the performance of mitzvot, putting into practice the words of the Tanna: "Be as bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven" (Pirkei Avot 5:20).

Rabbi Hadan's greatness in Torah and the wisdom of Kabbalah also made him famous. He diligently studied holy books from morning till night, and he was also a great tzaddik and chassid, a worker of numerous miracles. Many people addressed themselves to him for his blessing.

His wisdom and intelligence in all fields attracted the greatest leaders of the city and country to him. Foreign diplomatic representatives, ambassadors, lined up before his door to receive his advice and benefit from his understanding on various current issues.

Numerous letters were addressed to him from other countries through the various consulates located in the city of Mogador. With kindness and wisdom, Rabbi Hadan would offer his keen and practical advice to everyone who asked, be it on spiritual or material matters, without mentioning the prayers that he uttered on behalf of every Jew.

All His Money to Tzedakah

Rabbi Hadan also inherited from his father the attribute of chesed (lovingkindness). This attribute was

rooted in his blood, in his 248 limbs and 365 sinews. It is said that he would distribute all his money to the needy as tzedakah.

Rabbi Hadan was very careful not to go to sleep if even a single coin was still in his pocket. In that case, he would hurry to give it to the poor.

He would purchase tallit, tefillin, and food for a boy from a poor family when he reached the age of mitzvot, thereby enabling his family to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah in complete joy, not having to worry about a thing.

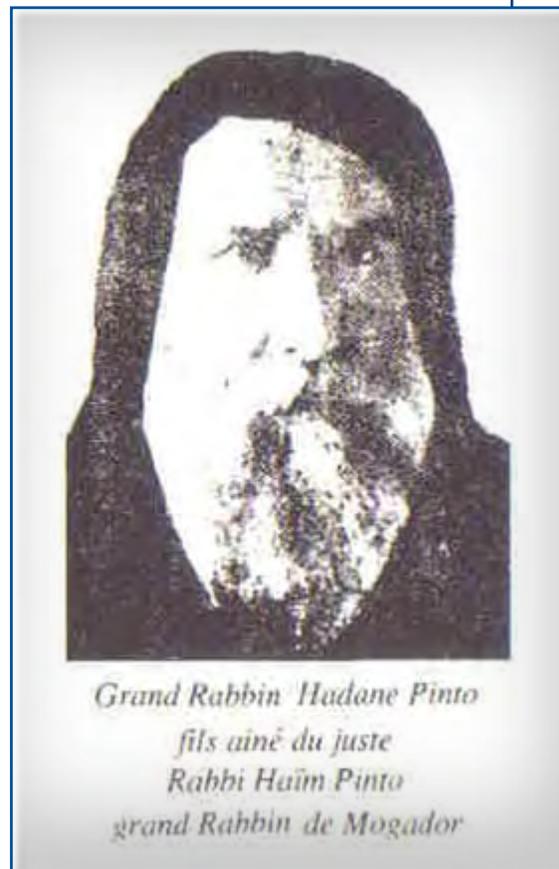
A few years later, when this youngster had grown and reached the age to get married and establish a home, it was Rabbi Hadan who would occupy himself with the great mitzvah of Hachnasat Kallah.

Sir Montefiore's Visit

In the city of Mogador, finely-made carpets were stretched out from the port to the home of the tzaddik Rabbi Hadan, who lived in the Mellah (old Jewish quarters). In 5623 (1863 CE), Sir Moses Montefiore Zal made an extraordinary trip to Mogador to meet the governor of the city. His objective was to defend the Jews of Mogador and prevent a pogrom by local residents. Pogroms had already taken place in the city of Safi, near Mogador.

Sir Montefiore stayed at the home of Rabbi Hadan for several days. He received his blessing, as well as his advice and insights. Since the climate of the city suited him, he stayed there longer than expected.

All throughout his stay, Sir Montefiore gave money to the Jews of the city and concerned himself with



the needs of the community and performing good deeds. The primary objective of his visit was crowned with success when he obtained a decree protecting the rights of the Jews of Morocco.

Sir Montefiore's visit encouraged other philanthropic organizations to initiate various programs to strengthen the Mellah. In particular, they organized aid programs for droughts and epidemics.

Don't Worry

Morocco once experienced a very severe drought, a year that was difficult on both regular individuals and farmers. Not a single drop of rain fell, and everyone was extremely worried.

During this time, Rabbi Hadan was saddened and walked with his head low. The holidays were soon approaching, and he had no money on hand to purchase clothes and basic provisions for the poor in town, as he would normally do each year.

One night his father, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, appeared to him in a dream and said: "Don't worry my son. Don't be upset about anything. Tomorrow, with G-d's help, your family will have new clothes like they've never had before."

In the morning, as Rabbi Hadan was preparing to go to synagogue for Shacharit (the morning prayer), the servant of the wealthy Moshe Aflalo came to his home. He informed Rabbi Hadan that his master wished to see him.

The fantastically wealthy Moshe Aflalo welcomed Rabbi Hadan with a friendly face and joy. He then explained what had happened:

During the night, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto appeared to him in a dream and said: "Can it be that you're wearing new clothes for the holidays, and that my son Hadan is wearing old clothes? I order you to also provide my son Hadan and his family with new clothes."

"I called for you as soon as it was morning," said the rich man, "to carry out the order of your father the tzaddik."

At that point, Moshe Aflalo took out a sizeable amount of money meant to purchase new clothes for Rabbi Hadan and his family. He also gave Rabbi Hadan a watch and chain of pure gold.

Rabbi Hadan thanked him for his generosity and left his home happy and content. With the money, he first bought clothes for the poor, and with the little that remained he purchased clothes for himself and his family.

Engulfed in Flames

Each year, Rabbi Hadan would bake matzot before Passover. The Rav himself would bake the matzot, not relying on anyone else. He was very strict, bringing his own utensils and not relying on those of the bakery. In fact the kashrut of the matzot was his primary concern.

As in every year, Rabbi Hadan made an agreement with the owner of the bakery, a certain Ben Ouhta, to use his bakery for making matzot before Passover.

On the given day, Rabbi Hadan headed to the bakery with all his gear: Flour, roller, and all the other tools needed to make matzot. Upon arriving, however, he realized to his utter dismay that the oven was already being used by someone else for baking matzot.

The Rav was very annoyed. He had made an agreement with the owner of the bakery, but the latter had not kept his word. The Rav's discontent intensified when he began to think of his large family and the poor who were relying on him to provide them with matzot for the Seder. The following day was already the eve of Passover!

The Rav approached the owner of the bakery and spoke to him about it. However the owner responded with indifference: "There are many things going on today. Perhaps you want to return some other day to bake your matzot?"

When Rabbi Hadan heard this, he left without saying a word.

He had not gone far when a large fire broke out in the bakery. The fire completely engulfed it – the oven, utensils, and matzot – as everything began to burn.

The owner of the bakery instantly realized that this had happened because he dishonored the Torah, and it cost him dearly. As his business

was going up in flames, he immediately ran after the Rav to ask him for forgiveness. He promised that he would keep his word from now on, whatever the cost.

Rabbi Hadan forgave the bakery owner, and the flames immediately died down. In fact all evidence of the flames disappeared, such that nobody could tell that a fire had just broken out there. It is said that even the matzot within the oven were not burned.

Great is the power of the tzaddik, the servants of G-d!

When our Rav and teacher Shlita recounted this story to his students, he added: "Each time that we pass this bakery, we remember the miracle that happened there."

Let What is Yours Remain Yours

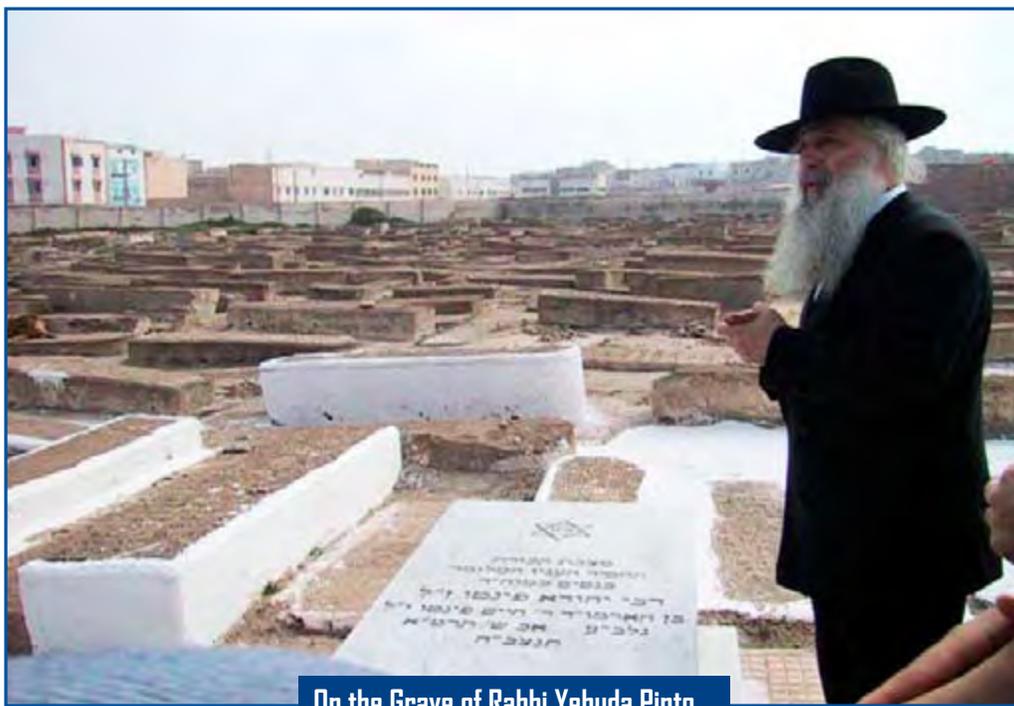
A Jew from Mogador once traveled to London for business. Upon his return, a storm suddenly arose at sea, threatening to drown him and all the ships loaded with his merchandise.

The wealthy man did as his forefathers had done before him, praying to be saved by the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto. He also vowed that if he emerged unhurt, he would give his entire fortune to Rabbi Hadan, including the very clothes that he was wearing.

The merit of the tzaddik saved him at that crucial hour, for the waves subsided and his ships were able to dock safely off the coast of Mogador.

Upon returning home, the wealthy man began to reflect. He regretted the vow he had made, for it seemed excessive. After all, how could he give all that he had to the tzaddik?!

To save himself from embarrassment, he thought of having his vow annulled (hatarat nedarim), thereby exempting him from fulfilling his promise. He did not want to ab-



On the Grave of Rabbi Yehuda Pinto

After the great deliverance and Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d's Name) that resulted from this incident, the governor of the city went to see the tzaddik Rabbi Hadan, the son of Rabbi Haim Pinto. He asked him to pray each day, from that time onwards, for the peace of the kingdom.

In gratitude for their prayers and the deliverance that the city experienced by their merit, the governor committed himself to defending its Jewish inhabitants. He also reached out to the community by liberating many Jews who had been unjustly arrested and imprisoned. He also reduced the taxes imposed on

the Jewish inhabitants. From then on, the governor knew that in times of distress he had a place where he could go to ask for divine help.

A great kabbalist and tzaddik, the gaon Rabbi Hadan Pinto left this world on Av 16, 5641 (1881 CE). His grave is located in the new cemetery of Mogador, and inscribed on his gravestone are the following words:

“The grave of the faithful and complete sage, benefactor of the community, zealous in the observance of mitzvot, from a holy family, Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, may his merit protect us. He rendered his soul on Av 16, 5641.”

It is important to note that due to his great modesty in life, and also in death, no titles were inscribed on his tombstone. It was enough to write “zealous in the observant of mitzvot.” That is the essential thing, for as the Sages say: “Not study, but practice is the main thing.” May his memory be a blessing, and may his merit protect us all.

solve himself completely, but would instead give a small gift to Rabbi Hadan, nothing more!

While still immersed in thought, messengers from Rabbi Hadan suddenly came to his home. “The Rav wants to see you right away,” they informed him.

The man was surprised when he heard what the Rav had to say: “Your entire fortune, all the ships that you returned with from England, belongs to me. Even the clothes that you're wearing belong to me, not to you!”

“How did you know this? I told no one what happened, nor did I ever mention the vow I made!”

“My father appeared to me in a dream and told me everything.”

Rabbi Hadan continued to surprise the wealthy man, telling him: “So as not to annul your vow, since you don't want to respect it, I am giving you everything back as a gift. Let what is yours remain yours.”

Deliverance Comes from G-d

After the death of Sultan Mohammed in 5634 (1874 CE), a group of Moroccan rebels tried to seize power. They besieged Mogador and mounted an assault against the

city. The rebels burned the gates of Mogador and tried to make their way inside to pillage the city and kill its inhabitants.

When Mogador's governor realized the danger, he immediately sent one of his soldiers to the synagogue that carried Rabbi Haim Pinto's name, asking the faithful to implore the Creator to prevent these evildoers from making their way into the city.

That faithful complied, addressing their prayers and supplications to G-d, Who saved them from violence and death.

Deliverance comes from G-d, Who immediately heard their prayers by the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto. The guards at the city's walls reported that when this prayer had finished, they saw horsemen dressed in white and riding on white horse. They came from the place where Rabbi Haim Pinto was buried, and they headed towards the walls of the city.

These horsemen fiercely attacked the rebels beneath the city walls, making them flee, half-dead. Later on, the inhabitants could see the corpses of many rebels who had been killed in the violent battle.



HEVRAT PINTO'S IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

ISRAEL

The Orot Haim OuMoshe kollel in Ashdod, founded in 1995 by the tzaddik Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, has become a great Beit HaMidrash for the study of Torah and Judaism. Today, the kollel continues to enjoy success in spiritual activities throughout Ashdod by the merit of the bnei Torah and distinguished avrechim who devote themselves to learning Torah day and night, as well as to the service of the community. The kollel is located in the Be'er Moshe neighborhood of Rovah Gimel in Ashdod.

This neighborhood was built under the supervision of Rabbi David Pinto, who wanted to establish a Sephardic community that was a center of Torah study and where life conforms to Jewish tradition transmitted from generation to generation by our holy ancestors. The neighborhood was built near the grave of the holy tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto Zatzal, giving it an atmosphere of sanctity that the residents can vividly feel. People travel to the tzaddik's grave from all over Israel and around the world in order to pray and pour out their supplications before G-d, prayers that are heard. At the heart of the neighborhood stands the kollel for learning Torah and Judaism, a kollel whose reputation is already well-established both inside and outside the city. It also acts like a magnet for bnei Torah and people in the community, who gather at the door of the Beit HaMidrash.

The kollel is obviously a source of pride for the warm local community. The inhabitants of Ashdod are happy to have merited its presence, as well as to have the guidance and spiritual support of Rabbi David Pinto.

The avrechim, who have studied in excellent yeshivot, have been carefully selected after a series of difficult and demanding tests. In his program, Rav Pinto wanted to place an empha-

sis on in-depth and continual study. He wanted the program to be sanctioned by demanding exams, and for the students to learn according to a strict schedule, without mentioning the work that they must do on themselves.

The kollel is directed by Rav Avner Revach Shlita and Rav Yedidya Assaraf Shlita, formerly the Rosh Yeshiva of the Lyon kollel. These men are extremely well-versed in all areas of Torah, guiding the avrechim with enthusiasm and a love for Torah.

The atmosphere of sanctity that reigns throughout the kollel, as well as the seriousness of the students, has prompted other high-caliber avrechim to enroll in the program. It is thanks to the kollel that the Gimel district is considered as one of the most dynamic, with regards to Judaism, in Ashdod and its surroundings.

Noting the growth of the religious community and the number of avrechim wanting to join our kollel, Rabbi David Pinto built an exquisite Torah center and inaugurated it in 2005.

Today this building, a worthy representative of the Beit HaMikdash, houses two kollelim (one for the dayanut) as well as a yeshiva ketanah.

All this has only been possible due to the devotion of Rabbi David Pinto, who leaves his family to journey around the world in order to collect the necessary funds to finance the kollel and find donors for his institutions. By the merit of Rav Pinto and his donors, the avrechim can study without worrying about parnasa, their minds free to spread Torah and Judaism among the Jewish people.

Rav Pinto closely follows everything that happens in the Beit HaMidrash through the director of the yeshiva and his liaison, Rav Eliyahu Sitbon Shlita. Rav Sitbon is in constant communication with the Rav, continually updating him in regards to everything pertaining to the learning that goes on in the center. Each night in the Be'er Moshe neighborhood, there is an evening kollel for

the ba'alei batim who return late from work, making the center a focal point for the residents of the area and its surroundings.

The Rav and Tzedakah

Baruch Hashem, the Rav's deeds are known around the world, not only in regards to his objective of spreading Torah and the name of the holy and venerated Rabbi Haim Pinto, but also in terms of the material support that he provides to our brothers living in Israel. In fact beyond the obsessive litany of images de-



The Kollel Orot Chaim U Moshe in Ashdod

picting terrorist attacks and reprisals, the social reality in Israel is that the subject of poverty has been largely trivialized.

Despite being a very real and increasing phenomenon, the media does not mention poverty because it is not a subject that sells.

"One Million Israelis Go Hungry," read the headline in the August 28 edition of one of Israel's largest newspapers. Four out of five families say that their situation has worsened over the past two years. According to an international report on poverty, the poverty

rate in Israel is 2.5 times greater than in other countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). This means that 24.5% of Israelis are classified as "poor."

If this is true, then why don't we see it? Can there be 1,750,000 needy people in the country, and yet we don't realize it?



The steady rise of poverty among large and religious households is the result of Israeli social policies in the past five years. Between 2002 and 2007, family benefits have simply been cut in half.

Case in point: Benefits for a family of five children have gone from 2,260 NIS per month in 2002 to 1,132 NIS (about \$285 US) in 2007, meaning a 50% reduction for these families.

Thank G-d, our teacher the Rav has seen these difficulties in Israel and pro-

vides financial assistance to our brothers living there. In fact this year the Rav distributed more than 30,000 basic food packages to Israeli families for Passover. Each package includes meat, wine, coffee, and matzot, or money for those who prefer cash.

This also takes place during the year and for each Shabbat. In our building in Ashdod, a distribution network has been set up that provides the needy with vegetables and chickens for Shabbat and the rest of the week. Of course, let us not forget what the Rav has done for the residents of Sderot, who live under constant fear. In addition to distributing food, he also helps residents repair and reinforce their homes after being damaged in rocket attacks that occur on a daily basis.

During the last Lebanon war, the Rav went to encourage people in northern Israel, who at the time were forced to live in shelters. He spoke with them and lifted their spirits.

This is only what happens in Israel, for if we were to mention everything that our Rav does around the world, we wouldn't be able to describe it all.

We therefore bless our Rav. May Hashem help him in all that he undertakes and will undertake, and may He grant him long life. Amen!

THE COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA

When Israel was controlled by the Romans 2,000 years ago, Judaism almost disappeared. The Romans banned Jews from learning Torah, and the threat of assimilation grew increasingly greater. The Talmud relates that when Rabbi Chiya saw the drastic situation, he took it upon himself to transmit the Torah to the next generation: He planted flax, made nets from it, trapped kosher animals, and made scrolls from their skins; upon these skins he wrote the Torah. He did all this in order to teach children. Since Rabbi Chiya devoted his entire life to teaching them, the Talmud considers him to have saved the Torah (Bava Metzia 85b).

In the past century, Judaism was once again threatened, this time by the Nazis. Jews who could flee Europe did so, and many of them arrived in Argentina. At that point they completely committed themselves to their new country, and as a result they abandoned their ancient traditions, their culture, and their Torah. Nevertheless, a few German Jews had no intention of sacrificing their children or their Torah, and they opened cultural centers starting with a synagogue in a small room, followed by a Talmud Torah (elementary school), a mikveh (ritual bath), and finally a yeshiva (Talmudic school). Unfortunately, 70% of the Jewish population of Argentina had already assimilated. Hence for the last decade, our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto has made several trips to the community in Argentina. He travels there each year in order to give classes, as well as to offer his advice, blessings, and financial support.

In the last year, Rabbi David visited and supported the HaMakom Sheli Center, a school for children with Down's Syndrome (see photograph). Addressing the school's committee, the Rav pointed out that when they





chose a name for their school, they surely thought that it referred to “my place” (hamakom sheli), a place that these children could call their own. Yet in reality, it refers to the fact that this place shelters truly special souls, and that Hashem must have certainly said: “This is My place!”

To aid the school, the Rav suggested that they organize a dinner in which he would participate, thereby enabling them to collect numerous funds.

Rabbi David also suggested the establishment of a religious high school that would enable them to continue giving their children a Jewish education throughout their school years. Thus the Rav recently had the honor of inaugurating Yeshurun High School this year.

Similarly, during an earlier trip to the Jewish community of Lanus (a suburb of Buenos Aires), the Rav encouraged the construction of a college, a mikveh, a kosher supermarket, and a gan (Jewish kindergarten). Baruch Hashem, the Rav was again invited this year for the inauguration of a college and mikveh carrying the name of Rabbi Haim Pinto Zatzal.

Finally, let us add that Rabbi David personally met with hundreds of people this year and gave shiurim (Torah classes) and lectures to large public gatherings, thereby bringing about a great Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d’s Name).

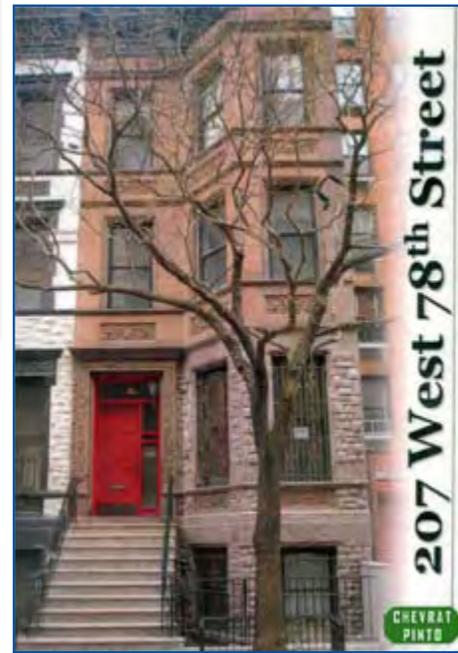
Rabbi David therefore pursues the work of our Sages, much as Rabbi Chiya did.

The gaon Rabbi Sebag Shlita, the director of the Tiferet Moshe institute in Bnei Brak, spoke about the significance of the verse: “As the deer longs for brooks of water” (Tehillim 42:2). This means that it finds refuge against predators in the vegetation that grows by the water. Similarly, the merit of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto protects Jews around the world by bringing them under the wings of the Shechinah (Divine Presence).



The Communities in North America

With regards to the United States, Hevrat Pinto has recently acquired a building on the west side of Manhattan. Scheduled to be inaugurated at the end of 2009 (see photograph), this building will house a Beit HaMidrash that is specifically dedicated to the French-speaking residents of the city. This will allow them to have a place where they can meet and, with G-d’s



help, be able to slow the assimilation seen in the community. Furthermore, Rabbi David has been giving classes, advice, and blessings to both French and English speakers for many years.

Finally, let us mention the support offered to the Pinto Torah Center of Los Angeles. Directed by Rabbi Yaakov Pinto, the brother of Rabbi David, this institution is dedicated primarily to ba’alei teshuvah.



Yissmach Moshe of Toronto



Yissmach Moshe Torah Center in Toronto

The activities of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita lead him to make frequent trips to the United States, Canada, and elsewhere in North America. Thus in Toronto, Rabbi David supports Kollel Yissmach Moshe in the memory of the tzadik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto Zatzal, whose new building was inaugurated in May 2009 (see photograph). This kollel is open to everyone who wants to fix a time for learning Torah, and it offers courses in several languages (English, French, Hebrew, and even Spanish) for everyone from beginners to experts. It provides a place for people to learn Torah whenever they want, since it is open both day and night to best respond to the needs of this fine community. The essential thing is to allow everyone who comes to Kollel Yis-

mach Moshe to feel united in the study of Torah. We must realize that it is not only a place to study, but also a place to improve the education of a new generation and transmit understanding and traditions to them.

Thus each Motzei Shabbat, an Avot U'Banim class unites fathers and sons from various communities in Toronto, not to mention the weekly classes that are held for women. A typical day at Kollel Yissmach Moshe begins at 6:00 am with a Daf HaYomi class that is open to all, followed by Shacharit at 7:00 am. The kollel takes over at 9:30 am, and there is even an evening kollel from 8 to 10 pm.

Of course, Rabbi David supports this institution. Yet more than this, by his various travels he contributes to spreading spirituality and encourages the avrechim who will become the pillars of their community, meaning that he gives them a desire to learn the holy Torah.

Thanks to Kollel Yissmach Moshe, which contributes to the growth of the Toronto Jewish community, everyone can agree that bracha (blessing) resides in the city!



Rav Prosper Lugassy Shlita, President of Yissmach Moshe (Toronto) at the Hilula of Rabbi Chaim Pinto in Morocco

PARIS

A Kollel to Earn the Riches of the Torah

At 11 Plateau Street, learning Gemara is a daily holiday for the avrechim of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto's kollel. There they can develop a love and understanding of Torah, which will benefit the entire Jewish people.

When a new visitor opens the door to 11 Plateau Street, the first thing that surprises him is the noise. Before him are about 30 young men seated in groups of two, each energetically discussing Torah and wholeheartedly defending his point of view, proving his point by referring to a passage from the gemarot placed between them. The visitor's ears eventually get used to this, and what he initially thought was shouting becomes a melody filled with love for Hashem. This melody corresponds to the fervent Torah study of the avrechim in Rabbi David Hanania Pinto's kollel. Located in the same building on Plateau Street for about 15 years, this study program for married men has actually existed since 1986, the year in which the project initiated by the Rav began on Hauteville Street. Since that time, the kollel has become one of the most important in France, with its reputation extending all the way to Eretz Israel. The great rabbis of Jerusalem and Bnei Brak never fail to visit the kollel when they are in France. In total, there are about 30 avrechim studying full-time during the day and about 15 at night, not to mention the Sunday kollel, which has also met with great success.

"For Kavod Harav Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, it is very important for a place of Torah such as this one to exist in Paris," recounts the Rosh Kollel, Rav Yehoshua Solomon. "From his teachers he learned that the basis for kiruv – bringing

Jews closer to observing mitzvot – is the presence of bnei Torah in a makkom [place] of Torah. He himself draws great strength from it.” As with all the activities undertaken by the Pinto institutions, this one was initiated by using every human and material resource necessary. As for the avrechim, they have been chosen with care, having been selected from the best yeshivot. The result is an immense mitzvah being constantly

without worrying, so that nothing disrupts their Torah study,” explains Mr. William Marciano, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto’s secretary.

Spending their days discussing the infinite subtleties contained on a page of Gemara goes against the false values of contemporary French society, namely “success” at all costs, consuming ever more things, amassing possessions, and constantly seeking out diversions. The avrechim have chosen another way: “If Jews could understand just to what point the Torah makes a person rich,” says one avrech with a smile.

Fortunately things change, and just as Jews return to the Torah, they discover a new concept: Torah study for its own sake. Devoting several hours each week to learning Torah has in fact become the norm for many Jews. Ba’alei batim sit side by side with the avrechim on the benches of the Beit HaMidrash and benefit from their deep understanding of the texts. This strong bond between Jews has always been the engine of the Jewish people. Although in the last few decades we may have feared that this bond might break, it

has since grown stronger. This is especially true on Plateau Street, where the avrechim and ba’alei batim study together at night and on Sundays.

“We help them learn, and they enable us to benefit from their new perspectives on the Torah,” confides the same avrech, who like all his friends prefers to remain anonymous due to discretion. However when it comes to describing his days on Plateau Street, we can’t stop him.

Enthusiastic, he speaks of learning focused on the Talmud, learning that teaches him to ask good questions and probe the Gemara’s holy words until they have divulged all their meaning. “The Gemara is Hashem’s way of thinking,” he reminds us. Nevertheless, being an avrech does not limit itself to the walls of the Beit HaMidrash. Rather, it is a way of life, one shared by all bnei Torah. Since we demand a great deal from those who are capable of much, they take upon themselves an essential degree of strictness, fearing that the smallest departure may be construed as a chillul Hashem. In the eyes of their fellow Jews, they actually represent the world of mitzvot. They take this heavy responsibility upon themselves with emunah and bitachon – faith in G-d – which is maintained by their daily exploration of the Torah.

They derive their strength from the days they spend on Plateau Street. “There’s tremendous respect for the avrechim here,” says one of them. “We receive great strength from our teacher, Rabbi David. During his sichot, his talks, he speaks to us like a father speaks to his son. His friendliness and middot inevitably influence us.” Moreover, it is upon these very principles that the reins of the kollel were entrusted to Rav Yehoshua Solomons two years ago. Rav Solomons’ clear way of teaching, his patience, and his immense understanding are mentioned by all the avrechim.

As an uninterrupted chain going back to the Patriarch Abraham, Judaism has been transmitted by tzaddikim to their students over the course of the generations. As such the Jewish people receive the benefits of this hashkafa – this Torah outlook – which inevitably influences them. For this, the effort of learning Torah must never diminish. The avrechim of Plateau Street work there relentlessly.



The 11 rue du Plateau in Paris

fulfilled here, since it is said that the world endures on account of Torah study. As for the kollel – like those established by Hevrat Pinto in Villeurbanne, Toronto, Bnei Brak, Jerusalem, and Ashdod – it rests upon solid foundations. For the avrechim, it provides them with the assurance of being able to provide for their families every month. “This obviously requires a very large budget, but it is essential for them to study

The Community's Foundations Rest Upon the Avrechim

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto entrusted the direction of his kollel to Rav Yehoshua Solomons. Since then, Rav Solomons divides his time between Bnei Brak and Plateau Street, where he works on making it one of the main Torah centers in Paris.

Question: What is the importance of an advanced place of study such as the kollel on Plateau Street?

Answer: *It consists of establishing a place where everyone can elevate themselves in the study of Torah and service of Hashem. For this, we have received the love and support of the teachings of our Rav and teacher, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita. In concrete terms, we take care of the avrechim individually and make sure that they are progressing. They must be provided with the means to feel connected to the Torah, to their friends, and to their rabbis. They are very demanding in terms of wanting teachings and shiurim. Actually, they are talmidei chachamim from the best yeshivot. This desire to study that I sense in them gives us the strength to continue providing them with the very best. In this way, we mutually nourish one another.*

Q: For many years now, Torah study is taking on an increasingly greater status in the community. How can you explain this need, from the Jews of France, to know their Torah?

A: *History has taught us that each time a yeshiva, kollel, or house of study is established in a given area and frequented by bnei Torah, the Jewish community in that area progresses. It happens automatically! Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. This means that a Jewish community prospers not only from a spiritual point of view, but also from a material point of view because of the avrechim. Rabbi David learned this from his teachers and forefathers, the tzaddikim of the Pinto dynasty. He therefore built a place of Torah here. Again, it is the essential foundation upon which everything can be built.*

Q: In a society where personal glory and wealth are highly valued, what can a kollel offer? In other words, what does a person gain by spending his days studying the Gemara?

A: *What's now happening in the world provides the best answer to your question. We see that with the economic crisis, businessmen who had everything, extremely wealthy men, lost their entire fortune in an instant. What better proof is there that we depend solely on the Holy One, blessed be He?*

If we do His will, He gives. In the opposite case, oy vey! That is what we believe in. For example, I studied in the Ponevezh yeshiva; I did not learn a profession. And yet look – the Holy One, blessed be He, gave me the ability to teach others and earn an honorable living! This is also the case with our avrechim, thanks to our teacher and Rav, Rabbi David Pinto.

Baruch Hashem, the Torah advances in this way! However we must realize that this demands that we, for our part, forgo excess. A person who is only interested in the material world cannot succeed in Torah study. Hashem takes care of our needs. When He sees that His children are studying in Batei Midrashot, as He asks us, He takes care of us like a father takes care of his children.

Q: How do you choose avrechim who will honor the reputation of the kollel?

A: *We only accept candidates who have studied in a yeshiva. This means that they have at least eight previous years of Torah study behind them, and that with us they will continue to reach new levels. Later on they will become teachers, rabbis, dayanim, etc. In fact it's essential that after having received, they give back in return.*

The Yeshiva: Fertile Soil for Torah

The scene is repeated every Friday night around a Shabbat table that is covered with a white tablecloth: It is well past midnight, and about 20 bachurim are listening to the shiur of Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz. Fascinated by the words of their Rosh Yeshiva, they forget about their exhaustion after a week of intensive Torah study. In fact they are not even thinking about sleep. Everything is summarized in this sliver of life within the yeshiva that Rabbi David Hanania Pinto opened last Elul on Plateau Street in Paris. The efforts of the students are rewarded by putting tremendous resources at their disposal, beginning with a team of five exceptional rabbis brought in by Rav Yehoshua Solomons and Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz. The student of Rav Shach Zatzal and the great-grandson of Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibowitz Zatzal (the author of Birkat Shemuel and favorite student of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk Zatzal), Rav Baruch does not hesitate to fly from Bnei Brak in Israel to Paris each week in order to spend Shabbat with his bachurim!

Recruited from among the most promising yeshivot ketanot of London, Saint Louis, Armentières, Marseille, Israel and elsewhere, these students live and study at 11 Plateau Street, where two floors have been reserved for them. As always, everything is new, clean, and tidy on the premises of Hevrat Pinto. For them and their parents, the wager has been won: Running a new yeshiva is in fact a leap into the unknown. However the reputation of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto has sufficed to remove all doubts.

Nevertheless, welcoming youngsters into the heart of a capital city that is filled with tumah [impurity] in order to immerse them in a Torah environment is not the usual practice of French yeshivot. Yet Rabbi David Pinto decided to go against the current: "It was my decision to establish a yeshiva in the heart of Paris. I don't see where the harm is! Today we must educate children to receive the Torah wherever it is found. We must help them to protect themselves from what is happening in the streets. You

know, yeshivot in Eretz Israel are found in the middle of the city, whether it be Jerusalem or Bnei Brak," he explains.

"It's the same for the Sunderland yeshiva, where I studied in England. I'll tell you something more: In front of that yeshiva, there was a very 'dirty' park, not tzniut at all. Yet it was up to us to be very cautious. As far as I know, it didn't prevent gedolim such as Rav Nissim Rebibo Zatzal, Rav Israel Zatzal of Sarcelles, or Rav Gabriel Ittah Shlita of Strasbourg from studying Torah there."

In order to help them stay focused and not turn aside from their page of Gemara, an intensive session of Torah study was established (see opposite page). Thus in arriving at Plateau Street, the bachurim enter directly into a world of Torah study, joining the best among the Jewish people. It is a path whose direction will be primarily determined by the yeshiva.

In fact over the course of these exciting years, this is where everything happens that will turn them into bnei Torah. Just as the generations that preceded them, they will grow accustomed to Torah study, cultivating it until it has become both a necessity and a central pillar in their lives, as comfortable as a glove. However the yeshiva is also the place where people learn to live as a group, a place for mutual respect and sharing, for the need to develop good middot.

Paradoxically, it is also these life lessons – acquired in an exclusively male environment – that will allow them to properly manage the great adventure of family life among the Jewish people.

They encounter this future, so filled with promise, each day at the Beit HaMidrash on Plateau Street, where the bachurim and avrechim of the kollel study. It is with tender nostalgia that one of them remembers these years: "Once you've left and become a father, along with all the responsibilities that it entails, you often find yourself wanting to return to the yeshiva. Who else but a yeshiva bachur can store so much Torah without having to worry about anything else?"

The yeshiva is based on the premise that everyone comes out a winner: In exchange for their desire to constantly learn more and for their enthusiasm,

rim leave yeshivot in Israel earlier than they should. There, they can lose themselves. It is very important, during their initial years at a yeshiva, to establish the foundations of a life of bnei Torah in a yeshiva made for them."

For the time being, the bachurim of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto's yeshiva are pioneers. Like all first year students, they develop unique relationships. Later on, when they look back on their first year, they will certainly realize just how fertile the seed they planted was. After all, was it not in France that the Ba'alei Tosaphot prospered?

Great Will be the Glory of this House



The New Torah Center at 32 rue du Plateau in Paris

the bachurim receive special instruction from their rabbis, who in turn received it from their teachers. Such has been the case since Moshe Rabbeinu, who received the Torah on Mount Sinai: The Jewish people have been transmitting G-d's word from generation to generation.

"Our goal is to make them into men who are connected to Torah, for them to love it and find joy in it," confirms the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehoshua Solomons. "What we offer them here is an ideal and sheltered environment. Experience teaches us that too many bachu-

"A Psalm. A Song for the inauguration of the Temple, by David" (Tehillim 30:1).

"This is the day Hashem has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (ibid. 118:24).

"Halleluyah! Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good, for His kindness is eternal" (ibid. 106:1).

The Orot Haim OuMoshe institutions have the merit of inaugurating a new building in the 19th district of Paris.

In Sefer Vayikra (Parsha Shem-

ini) we read, “It was on the eighth day, Moshe called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel” (Vayikra 9:1-2). On the eighth day of the inauguration, Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in setting up the Sanctuary, and Hashem rested His Presence among the Children of Israel. Moshe had set up the Sanctuary on the previous seven days, but he dismantled it at night after seeing that the Divine Presence did not rest upon it. Finally on the eighth day, Hashem made His Presence rest upon the Sanctuary, among the Children of Israel.

Regarding the above verse (“it was on the eighth day...”), the Midrash asks why the expression “it was” is used. It replies that this is the same expression used in the description of Creation: “It was evening, it was morning.” In other words, the joy felt by Hashem on the day of the Sanctuary’s inauguration was the same as at Creation.

When Moshe received the order to build the Sanctuary, the Torah states: “They shall build Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them” (Shemot 25:8). Our Sages note that the verse does not say “so that I may dwell in it,” but rather “so that I may dwell among them.” This teaches us that the Divine Presence resides in every Jew. The Sanctuary is where the Divine Presence is most concentrated in the world, and in parallel to this, it resides in every Jew. Thus the Divine Presence, concentrated in the Sanctuary, spreads out to each of us.

Rabbi Chiya bar Ammi taught in the name of Ulla: “From the day the Temple was destroyed, all that remains for G-d in this world is four cubits of Halachah” (Berachot 8a).

When the Temple stood, the Divine Presence was concentrated there. Since that time, it spread out to the entire world. Once the Temple was destroyed, the Divine Presence was confined to places of prayer and study, for that is where it is found. It is from these places that it spreads out to all the people.

Unfortunately, in our days we have neither the Sanctuary nor the Temple, and we must look in synagogues and houses of study to find the Divine Pres-

ence. Hence when we can go from a small and confined place to a new building – one that allows numerous Jews in search of G-d’s word to come and study in peace – it is a day of joy comparable to that of Creation. Each Jew who goes to this place in order to study will merit welcoming the Divine Presence within himself, for it resides in everyone who studies Torah.

In Parsha Lech Lecha we read, “Abram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother’s son, and all their wealth that they had amassed and the souls they made in Haran” (Bereshith 12:5). Rashi interprets the expression “the souls they

these people were to diminish, the work done at the very outset will have been in vain. Hence the Orot Haim OuMoshe institutions decided to construct a new building to replace the old one. Numerous Torah classes on various subjects have been given there in order to pursue and strengthen the teshuvah movement, around the world in general and in France specifically.

Thankfully, Hashem has given me the merit of having children who are ready to work with all their might in this endeavor to spread Torah and increase the fear of G-d. I am thinking in particular of my sons Rav Raphael, Rav Moshe



Lecture at Manhathan Sefaradic Synagogue

made” to mean that Abram converted the men and Sarai converted the women, such that the text considers that they made them (for the Divine cause).

Surprisingly, the Torah does not tell us what happened to those whom Abram and Sarai converted, nor does it mention their descendants. Since the Torah had not yet been given, there was no value system in place to help these people continue on the right path, and so they returned to their erroneous ways.

In our day, thank G-d, many people have returned to the Torah, and we have encouraged them along this path. Nevertheless, it is clear that if our efforts for

Aharon, and Rav Yoel, may they have a long and good life. Thanks to the merit of their ancestors, large numbers of people participate in their classes.

With G-d’s help, I want to build five new Torah centers in Paris, large and magnificent, just like their predecessors. G-d will help us achieve this.

Everyone knows that the construction and maintenance of such buildings incurs tremendous costs.

I would like, dear readers, to share with you an enlightening story that happened not too long ago in Israel. In the Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Nof, an avrech (a married man who studies

Torah full time) with a very large family was facing serious financial difficulties. One day a very wealthy man who lived outside of Israel offered to help him financially in exchange for sharing the merit of his Torah learning (like the agreement between Issachar and Zebulon). The avrech joyfully accepted this proposition, and the agreement between them lasted for many years.

Not long ago, the avrech became very ill and died. At the end of the week of mourning, his widow tried to contact their benefactor to inform him that her husband had died and therefore their agreement had come to an end.

As soon as she made the call, the benefactor's wife informed her that she had also lost her husband and was still in the week of mourning. Incredible, but true!

This story teaches us that it was not really the benefactor who was supporting the avrech and enabling him to live, but the very opposite! As soon as the avrech died, the mission of his benefactor came to an end.

Everyone must therefore realize that the essential thing in life is Torah study and the effort that one invests in it. Happy are those who, through their wealth, have the merit of supporting those who study! They should know that the Torah studied on their account sustains their families and themselves.

The development of Torah study brings with it an increase in wealth. We note that the GDPs of numerous countries have increased due to the number of people who support and study Torah.

To conclude, I ask the Master of the universe for the merit of my ancestors of blessed memory to protect all who study and everyone who supports Torah in our institutions. Despite the worldwide economic crisis, may they succeed in all their endeavors according to the declaration: "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it. Happy are those who support it" (Mishlei 3:18).

With the blessing of the Torah and its students,

David Hanania Pinto

In the Footsteps of their Father

Over the past three years, the movement for teshuvah taking place at 11 Plateau Street in the 19th district of Paris is part of a worldwide return to Judaism.

Started in 2006 with the objective of spreading Torah and bringing young Jews closer to Torah, Rabbi Moshe Pinto invites men each Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday night at 8:45 for an exceptional Dvar Torah.

This class takes place in a warm setting and is open to all men, both more observant and less observant.

"Since the return of Rabbi David Pinto and his family, I've discovered a way of life that's more in keeping with Jewish tradition, meaning the practice of mitzvot and study of Torah," explain several young men at the end of the class.

This phenomenon began when a large number of Jews opened their eyes to the world around us.

The spiritual and religious journey that Rabbi Moshe Pinto suggests to those who choose this path is what leads them to adopting all the values of Judaism. This movement continues to the present day under the supervision of his father, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto.

The first classes began in 2006 with five students on Plateau Street in Paris, close to the Buttes Chaumont subway station. It later became famous as "Rabbi Moshe's class," which today counts at least 100 young men each night.

Besides being young, Rabbi Moshe and his younger brother Yoel spare no effort in helping their father Rabbi Da-

vid spread faith in G-d and a desire to fulfill mitzvot and study Torah.

With the very same goal in mind, they have taken the initiative (with the consent of the Rav) to organize Shabbatons that are full of activities to unite the youngsters attending their classes, making for a remarkable atmosphere. Baruch Hashem, the results can be felt, and numerous young men have taken the decision to observe Shabbat after this experience.

The Torah and faith constitute the foundation of the Jewish people's existence. Today, with the situation in Eretz Israel, each of us is obligated to wake up.

Hashem sends us miracles by saving our brothers in Israel who serve as soldiers. We must be G-d's soldiers by studying for them, and may the merit of this mitzvah spread, with G-d's help, in an ever-increasing way!

Yiddishkeit Finds a Home on Plateau Street

The new location at 32 Plateau Street strengthens Hevrat Pinto's presence even more in this Paris neighborhood, the appearance of which has been changed by it. From now on, even more Jews will be able to receive the Torah there.

With its various floors and split-levels that open onto one another, along with its staircases and railings, the place makes one think of a boat. After all, nothing could be more natural, since the new location at 32 Plateau Street is destined to become



Rav Moshe Pinto giving a lecture at 11 rue du Plateau in Paris

Hevrat Pinto's flagship in Paris. The soft glow of recessed ceiling lights, walls painted clear violet, and dark wood moldings gives it a warm, almost cozy atmosphere. If the objective is to give everyone the impression of being at home in a house of Torah, that objective has been met.

"We purchased the place a year and a half ago. Since then, we've done a lot of work," recounts William Marciano, the secretary of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita. "We have to say that, ben porat Yosef, we've started lacking space to welcome all the Jews who come here." Already located at 9 and 11 Plateau Street, the Pinto institutions now benefit from an extra 4,000 square feet. It's a building in which we find a new Beit HaMidrash, a large synagogue with a woman's section, and various offices that will finally be combined in the same building. Rabbi David Hanania Pinto's office will be located at the end of the corridor. It is a square room, of medium size, designed to be set up as discreetly as the office that he now occupies at 9 Plateau Street. "I don't want visitors to be intimidated by something luxurious," explains the Rav. "I want them to see something simple. The rich will see a very simple office, with Torah books and photographs of tzaddikim. As for the poor, they will feel at ease there. It's very important for people who come here not to feel intimidated. In this way, I can ask them to commit themselves to keeping this or that new mitzvah."

Thanks to the extra space offered by "32" – as we have started calling it – the Pinto institutions will be able to expand their activities to an even greater extent. There was 9 Plateau Street, where the public would squeeze in to see the Rav, and there was 11 Plateau Street, with a mikveh, services for Shabbat, the yeshiva and a kollel. With just these locations, we began to feel a little confined, especially at night, when we had to find place for dozens of youngsters who came to attend

the class of Rabbi Moshe, one of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto's sons. His shiur has become a major gathering spot for youngsters in the 19th district of Paris.

It is a phenomenon encouraged by the Rav, convinced of the absolute need to offer Torah guidelines to this segment of the Jewish community. "Today I focus my efforts on them. I also teach this to my own children: Focus on the young! They are the future. Experience has shown that when we bring the Torah to them, their entire family changes," he shares with us. "In the new building at 32, I expect to focus my efforts particularly on young women. We have to organize Torah classes for them in order for a balance to exist. If we deal only with the boys, how will they find a shidduch who will correspond to their level of Torah? Young women are also looking for an identity."

In the meantime, Plateau Street has become even more of a focal point for Jewish life in Paris. The evolution of the neighborhood testifies to this, for it has been transformed by the flame of the Torah lit by the Pinto institutions. Fifteen years after the arrival of the kollel, we now have a kosher restaurant, caterer, and supermarket in the local area. Moreover, a kosher butcher shop has just opened at the corner of Plateau Street. Thanks to the mikveh for men and prayer services held at the Beit HaMidrash, the area has become very attractive to Jewish families. There are also more and more families moving into this quiet neighborhood, nestled by the slopes of Buttes



Chaumont Park. At the same time, the Jewish community in the 19th district has been strengthened even more: Murger Street, Petit Street, Manin Street, Flandre Avenue, Place des Fêtes, and Plateau Street – the district continues to be a robust home for yiddishkeit (Jewish life) in the Diaspora. It is a phenomenon that confirms the hunch of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, who long ago declared this blossoming of Jewish life in the eastern part of Paris.

As for the future? There's no doubt that, one day or another, the building at 32 Plateau Street will no longer be enough. Anticipation being the foundation of good management, future expansion projects are already well under way, as William Marciano reveals. It is confirmed by the Rav himself: "G-d willing, I plan on opening still more Batei Midrashot in Paris. For now, I prefer not to say where, but there will be five or six of them in the next two years. With G-d's help, we'll have great success in Israel, Lyon, and Paris."

This success can be measured by the number of institutions that Hevrat Pinto has established and supports around the world, or by the crowds that attend the Rav's lectures, or finally by the quality of Torah learning that the avrechim and bachurim engage in. After all, the Jewish people have several powerful and established Chassidic movements among them. Yet what gives the actions of Hevrat

Pinto their unique character is that all kinds of Jews are involved in it: Sephardim and Ashkenazim, rich and poor, ba'alei teshuvah and rebbes, New York chassidim and traditionalists...the list goes on. Eventually one sees them all on Plateau Street, where they come to seek advice or a blessing from Rabbi David Hanania Pinto. "Yet be careful," warns the Rav, "because anyone who thinks in terms of 'my territory' will not succeed. He will have to give an accounting before G-d, because in the end we all work for Him. My father raised me with the certainty that there's no such thing as personal territory. This world is called the territory of the Holy One, blessed be He. Each makom – each place – belongs to Him." In this case, there is no doubt that He truly feels at home on Plateau Street.

When the Young Follow

When speaking of the French Revolution, historians among the nations love to mention what happened more than two hundred years ago in France. As for those of us who believe in the Torah of Israel, when we speak of a "revolution," we only want to speak about the revolution taking place in the Torah realm. When we speak of the "French revolution," we only want to speak about the incredible Torah revolution that has taken place in France, and which began a few decades ago under the direction of our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto. The place where this revolution began is the city of Lyon-Villeurbanne, and it is with tremendous love and devotion for Torah that Rabbi Raphael, the son of the Rav, continues the work to this day.

During the last few years, the work has continued with great energy thanks to a simple and creative concept called "Lunch and Learn." In other words, people learn Torah while eating lunch.

People who work for a living have almost no free time to devote to Torah study. The companies that

employ them are not inclined to let them go study in the middle of work, and they're exhausted when they arrive home after work. This is the only solution, for by devoting their free hour to learning Torah, they can fulfill what is asked of every man, namely to fix times for Torah study.

This is not the only "Torah activity" that is offered to the residents of Lyon, however. In fact other special concepts have been put in place, with a special emphasis on adolescents. For example, soccer games are organized on Sunday afternoons in which participants must wear a kippah and tzitzit.

Rabbi Raphael explains: "We've tried to find ways to involve youngsters in Torah classes, for in order to show them the light of the Torah, we must start by making them savor its sweetness. 'Taste and see that it is good,' our Sages say. First 'taste,' then 'see' that it is good. We realized that what most interests them is soccer, and we decided to use these weekly games to further the cause. Only youngsters who attend two hours of Torah classes every week can participate in these games, and so little by little we accustom them to Torah classes."

Today, there are about 20

avrechim who study in the yeshiva. Through the initiative of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, there is a charity organization called Hessed Haim that deals primarily with the needy in the city, both on a financial and spiritual basis. The organization is led by Mr. Laurent Elbaze, who is assisted by Mrs. Hanna Zadel and her husband. Each week before Shabbat and the holidays, food packages are delivered to homes, hospitals, and other places.

There is also a seminary for women called Beit Simha. Under the direction of Mrs. Josiane Elharrar, who is assisted by Mrs. Monique Amos, classes are held for women and girls. At Beit Simha, various speakers (both male and female) and rabbis are regularly invited to give talks.

Furthermore, they have built in Villeurbanne, near their offices, a mikveh that is clearly one of the most beautiful in all of Europe. This is both from an esthetic and halachic point of view, according to the dayan of the city, Rav Yihia Teboul, who followed its construction from start to finish. All this thanks to Rabbi David Pinto.

Rabbi Raphael Pinto divides his time between the Lyon community and Israel, where several Shabbatons have been successfully organized throughout the year, gathering young Israelis of French origin.

May the Holy One, blessed be He, help Rabbi Raphael follow in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestors. Amen!



THE SANCTITY OF THE SYNAGOGUE

By the Gaon Rabbi Yossef Ben Adahan Zatzal

According to Rabbi Yosef Karo (Orach Chaim 151:1), one is forbidden to act in a light-hearted manner while in synagogue, such as by laughing, joking, and speaking about secular matters. One is also not allowed to eat and drink in synagogue, nor to enter it because of rain or on account of the heat. Torah scholars and their students are allowed to eat in synagogue if they have no other choice. One must not calculate accounts in synagogue unless it is for the purpose of a mitzvah and the like, and eulogies should not be made there unless it is for one of the great sages of the city. If one has to enter a synagogue for personal reasons, such as to summon someone, he should enter and read a little, or say a Dvar Torah and the like. If he does not know to read, he should tell one of the children there, "Read me a verse from what you are reading," or he should sit a little and then leave. This is because sitting in a synagogue is a mitzvah, as it says: "Happy are those who sit in Your house."

The Magen Avraham (151:9) states that the Arizal would refrain from spitting in synagogue. He would also be careful not to say anything in synagogue other than prayers, even avoiding words of Mussar and teshuvah, in case they might lead to secular conversation. Rabbeinu Yaakov used to sweep the floor with his beard before the Ark, as mentioned in Sefer Chassidim (ch. 128). A person should wipe the mud off his shoes before entering a synagogue, and neither he nor his clothes should have any dirt on them, as the Shulchan Aruch has mentioned (Orach Chaim 151:8).

Observe and see the great sanctity of the synagogue! The holy Zohar states, "Israel is kept in exile for three reasons: Because they pay scant respect to the Shechinah in their exile..." (Zohar III:75b). The author of Reshith Chochma explains this to mean that they engage in secular conversation while in synagogue, the place where the Shechinah resides. There is no greater insult than



leaving the king's presence and engaging in frivolous conversation, especially during prayer. Orach Chaim 124:7 states that one who talks during the Chazan's repetition incurs a very grave sin, for which he must be reprimanded. Also see Orach Chaim 51:4, which states that one must be careful not to talk from Baruch She'amar until the end of Shemoneh Esrei, even for the sake of a mitzvah. One must also not talk from Yishtabach to Yotzer, which is a sin. In fact in former times, a person had to leave the battle front and return home on account of this sin, as it says in Orach Chaim 54:3. Rabbi Yosef Karo also wrote (Orach Chaim 146:2) that once the Torah reading has begun, a person cannot even say a divrei Torah, not even between one aliyah and the next. Some authorities do allow this, but only in regards to divrei Torah, not secular conversations, which must never take place in synagogue. As the commentators say, this is included in the verse: "Those who forsake Hashem will perish" (Isaiah 1:28). Concerning such a person we read, "For he has scorned the word of Hashem" (Bamidbar 15:31), G-d forbid, and he will be punished with excision from both this world and the World to Come, for "he closes his ear,

not listening to the Torah."

I'm very surprised when I see people who are extremely careful in regards to the prohibition of chelev, and even more so in regards to chametz, even the tiniest amount, implementing one stringency after the other. This is especially true for prohibitions whose punishment is extremely grave, such as karet [excision], the Torah being so strict as to say that chametz should not even be seen or found in one's possession during Passover.

If you were to tell such a person that he has eaten chelev or blood, or that he has transgressed the prohibition of chametz on Passover or he has eaten on Yom Kippur, he will become very angry and start screaming at you. In fact he will confront you to the point of physical harm, since you have suspected him of having transgressed a prohibition whose punishment is karet; he might even kill you if a weapon were in his hand. All this is in regards to incurring the punishment of karet, which is excision from this world only, and for having violated a once-in-a-year prohibition. That being said, how can a person not have mercy on his own soul by transgressing 36 prohibitions a year – each of which

incurs the punishment of karet – by engaging in secular conversations during the reading of the Torah? How can he not care about cutting himself off from both this world and the next? This is the harshest of all punishments, a common prohibition that no one can avoid, and yet it has become trivial in the eyes of many! A person will flippantly claim, “I was only talking, not doing something!” However we note that speech is worse than deed, as we find in the case of the spies. Speaking has an effect on things, and “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Mishlei 18:21). Thus in the incident with the spies, the Children of Israel sinned and were punished. This sin led to others, including the incident at the “waters of Meriva.” Thus a sinner leads others to sin, meaning that he carries the responsibility of their sins upon himself. He must therefore be vigilant and recognize the punishment that he incurs by doing so, and tell others about it. He will then understand, repent, and never return to his former ways, thereby saving his soul from the abyss and conferring merit upon the community.

In the laws regarding the correct use of the term “Amen,” the Orchot Chaim states: “From the time they respond ‘Amen,’ children merit the World to Come.” Woe to those who engage in secular conversations or jokes during prayer, thereby preventing their sons from entering the World to Come. We must learn from the nations of the world, who despite being idol worshippers, remain silent while standing in their places of worship. How much more should we, who stand before the King of kings, remain silent! We have already seen with our own eyes how many synagogues have been destroyed because congregants fail to act seriously in them, turning these houses of worship into places of Avodah Zarah. As the prophet says, “Has this house, upon which My Name is proclaimed, become a den of criminals?” (Jeremiah 7:11). Therefore each individual must be careful to fear his Creator and not talk during prayer.

I have seen among the commentators, who cite the Midrash, that Hashem engages in war each day against the Satan, who accuses Israel by saying:

“Master of the universe, Your nation Israel are thieves.” Hashem answers, “Have you not found anyone else but Israel? Go and see how many robbers and thieves are among the nations.” The Satan repeats his accusation by saying, “Your nation are adulterers,” to which Hashem answers: “Go to Esau and Ishmael.” This occurs for each and every transgression. Yet when the Satan says, “Your nation has secular conversations in synagogue,” Hashem apparently cannot reply, and they are judged to have transgressed this prohibition. Thus the commentators explain the verse, “Hashem will fight for you, and you shall remain silent” (Shemot 14:14) to mean that for all transgressions, Hashem will fight for us, but only if we “remain silent” in synagogue. Otherwise, there will be no answers to our transgressions.

We therefore see how grave this transgression is, and how much evil a person brings upon himself by engaging in it. According to the Zohar in Parshiot Terumah and Vayakhel, “Woe unto him who engages in conversations of a secular nature in synagogue...for he has no part in the G-d of Israel.” Therefore why should a person lose his world in an instant without any benefit and enjoyment? There is no greater foolishness than this, for if a person trusts in the words of Chazal and believes that the Shechinah dwells in synagogue, how can he possibly think of ending his conversation with the king in order to have a frivolous chat? Of course the king will be angry with him, and he will shout: “Remove this lout from my presence and punish him sevenfold for his transgression.” If a person does not believe this, then he is truly ill; he is an apikoros, one who will be taken down and not brought up. Who asked such a person to come to synagogue and trample His holy house? He comes to synagogue without any real intention, only out of habit, which is what I call Avodah Zarah, as we read: “Into it will come lawless people who will profane it” (Ezekiel 7:22) and, “A boor cannot know, nor can a fool understand this” (Tehillim 92:7). However, “Lips of knowledge are a precious jewel” (Mishlei 20:15). An individual learns

not only for himself, but for the community. Adults are obligated to warn children, and they will be rewarded for having brought them to synagogue. As Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah explains in the Gemara, “Why do the little ones come? In order to grant reward to those who bring them” (Chagigah 3a). Tosaphot explain that it is from here that we learn to bring children to synagogue. In his book Shtay Yadot, the Maharam Lunzano writes that in our time, people are punished for bringing their children to laugh and play in synagogue, for they make so much noise that the adults cannot hear. These children grow up without any fear, and “even when he grows old, he shall not swerve from it” (Mishlei 22:6).

The Yalkut Tehillim (Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabba 13, Bamidbar Rabba 4:20) describes a man whose son used to make disparaging remarks in synagogue. When the congregants recited Hallel and replied “Halleluyah,” he would reply with profanity. The father was told, “Listen to what your son is saying!” However he replied, “He’s just a little boy, so what can I do?” Thus the boy continued to act like this during all eight days of the festival. Within three years, the man and his wife were dead, along with 15 members of his family. Only two survived: One crippled and blind, and the other insane and wicked. See what happened because this man did not reprimand his son! This may be what the verse is referring to by stating, “Discipline your son, for there is hope. Do not let your soul be swayed by his protests” (Mishlei 19:18). That is, he and his children were punished by death because he did not discipline his children and teach them the fear of Heaven, as we read: “You shall revere My sanctuary” (Vayikra 19:30), and the synagogue is called a miniature sanctuary. A man should at least try to infuse the fear of Heaven in the heart of his children and instill good habits in them, this being the right path to follow.

By becoming a “miniature sanctuary” and guarding his tongue from all evil, a person can sanctify all five parts of his mouth, which encompass all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet: Those

pronounced with the throat (aleph chet, hei, ayin), with the lips (beit, vav, mem, peh), with the pallet (gimel, yud, caph, kuf), with the teeth (zayin, shin, samech, resh, tzadi), and with the tongue (dalet, tet, lamed, nun, tav). The prayers of such a person will pierce the Heavens and arise like a sword. In fact Chazal explain that this is why the prayers of our forefathers were heard and took effect, for they sanctified the five parts of their mouths and were careful not to defile them with secular words, especially not with blasphemy, profanity, or light-hearted comments and the like. This is hinted at in the verse, "He shall do all that proceeds from his mouth" (Bamidbar 30:3). That is, if a person does not defile his words, then whatever he says shall take place and his words will not be annulled, even if uttered unintentionally. As Chazal say in this regard, "It is like an unintentional word spoken by the king." Whoever defiles his mouth also defiles the covenant, for speech is connected to the covenant. This is hinted at by the verse, "I shall not profane my covenant, and I shall not alter the utterance of my lips" (Tehillim 89:35). When shall I not "profane my covenant"? It will be when "I shall not alter the utterance of my lips." This is a very grave sin, and one who transgresses it is not allowed into Hashem's presence, as we read: "No evil dwells with You" (Tehillim 5:5). We also read, "You shall guard yourself from all evil" (Devarim 23:10), which Chazal understand as "evil speech." By being careful in this regard, a person's prayer will be pure and ascend before the Master, the G-d of Israel,

meaning that whatever he asks for will be granted. Honor and glory will crown him, and he will shine as brightly as the heavens.

In the book Kav HaYashar (ch. 12), we read about a chassid who appeared to his wife in a dream, his face and beard shining like a bright torch. When she asked him how this happened, he replied: "Although I was a chassid, I did not merit this light on that account. It was only because I was careful to only speak words of Torah and the fear of Heaven. Hashem therefore rewarded me for having avoided mundane conversations. Furthermore, my desires were always directed towards the fear of G-d and Torah, which lengthens days, contrary to mundane words."

The time for Torah study and the time for prayer should be distinct, for both are necessary. One without the other cannot take effect in the supernal worlds. In the Gemara we read, "Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rabbi Huna, 'When a man leaves the synagogue, he should not take large steps.' Abaye says, 'This is only when he leaves the synagogue; when he is going to synagogue, it is a mitzvah to run'" (Berachot 6b). All the commentators ask which new principle we learn from Abaye. The Ein Yaakov and commentators explain that Abaye was only speaking of situations in which a person leaves synagogue without the intention of returning. If he leaves with the intention of returning, however, it is a mitzvah to run out.

This introduction allows us to understand the meaning of the term haloch ("to go"), which is used in the following four instances: Haloch ve'chassor ("diminishing" - Bereshith 8:5), haloch ve'nassoa ("going and traveling" - Bereshith 12:9), haloch ve'gadel ("growing greater" - Bereshith 26:13), haloch va'shov ("going and coming" - Bereshith 8:3). The explanation is the following: Our Sages say that a person must not walk quickly when leaving synagogue without the intention of returning (haloch ve'nassoa). However if he has the intention of going and coming (haloch va'shov), thereby growing greater (haloch ve'gadel), he may walk quickly.

We therefore see that everything depends on the mouth: The mouth that has forbidden is the same mouth that has permitted. In the verse, "In all toil there is profit, but talk of the lips only brings loss" (Mishlei 14:23), the word etzev ("toil") is formed by the initials of the terms erev ("evening"), tzahorayim ("noon"), and boker ("morning"). This corresponds to the three daily prayers that were instituted by our Patriarchs, as the Gemara tells us (Berachot 26b). The letters forming the word etzev correspond to the second letters in the names of the Patriarchs: The second letter in the name Abraham (beit) corresponds to boker ("morning"), for Abraham established the morning prayer; the second letter in the name Isaac (tzadi) corresponds to tzahorayim ("afternoon"), for Isaac established the afternoon prayer; and the second letter in the name Jacob (ayin) corresponds to erev ("evening"), for Jacob established the evening prayer. The Patriarchs are also mentioned in the following order: "I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham" (Vayikra 26:42). Such is the meaning of, "In all toil there is profit," meaning that by these three prayers, a person will grow and his prayers will be accepted. When will this happen? When he puts an effort into speaking little, which will be beneficial to him. Hashem will then answer his prayers, for as we said earlier, silence is extremely useful and greatly augments prayer. In fact the word tefillah ("prayer") is formed by the initials of tachsom pikha letoetele ha'tefillah ("seal your lips for the benefit of prayer").

The Ba'alei HaMussar recount that they received a tradition that the fear of Heaven cannot penetrate the heart of someone who is talkative. Each time that a person allows frivolous things to enter his heart, words of Torah leave and the fear of Heaven departs from him. This is because both things cannot exist in the same place: When one enters, the other departs. Hence a person must put an effort into speaking as little as possible, even at other times and in places besides the synagogue.



YOU SHALL CHOOSE LIFE

By Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Chlita

It is written, “And Lavan and Hazeroth and Di-Zahav” (Devarim 1:1).

The Gemara states, “What is ‘and Di-Zahav’? They said in the school of Rabbi Yanai: Thus spoke Moshe before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the universe, the silver and gold [zahav] that You showered upon Israel until they said “Enough [dai]” – that is what led them to making the calf.’ ... Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: ‘How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, in the end agreed with Moshe? Because it says, “I lavished silver and gold upon her, but they used it for the Baal” [Hosea 2:10]’ ” (Berachot 32a). The Holy One, blessed be He, loves His nation with an eternal love, and therefore He judged them favorably and agreed with Moshe Rabbeinu that an abundance of silver and gold is what brought about the sin of the golden calf.

Yet any person, wherever he may be, obviously has the power to withstand trials if he wants to, since the Holy One, blessed be He, does bring a trial upon a person unless he can withstand it. Everyone can choose to use the wealth that Hashem has given him for the right purposes: To increase the honor of Hashem in the world by supporting those who study Torah, by helping the needy, by distributing food to the poor, and by using his money for acts of charity and kindness. If a person has been wise and chosen this path, meaning that he has merited to withstand the trial of wealth, then this merit will remain for him in the World to Come. However if

the evil inclination has overpowered him, G-d forbid, and he has become haughty on account of his wealth – turning into a materialistic person who indulges in pleasures and is obsessed with the desires of this world, all his thoughts being directed to worldly vanities – then he has used his freewill for evil and his fate is uncertain. The more his wealth increases, the more distant he will grow from Hashem and His Torah, G-d forbid. In fact the verse, “Yeshurun grew fat and kicked” (Devarim 32:15) will be fulfilled in him. The Torah warns, “Beware lest... your heart becomes haughty and you forget Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 8:11-14), meaning that this person’s possessions were his downfall. As the verse states, “Riches hoarded by their owner [are] to his misfortune” (Kohelet 5:12).

I have often had the opportunity to address wealthy people who have abandoned a life of Torah and mitzvot, and I have reprimanded them harshly and directly without fear. “It’s a pity that Hashem gave you so much money,” I say to them. “Before you became wealthy, you used to keep Jewish traditions and know Hashem. But now money has blinded you, and you have forgotten your G-d.”

To distinguish between the holy and the mundane, the holy Patriarchs were also given great wealth by Hashem. Nevertheless, the more their wealth increased, the more their love for Hashem increased, for they knew that everything comes from His generous hand. The more good He bestowed upon them, the more they cleaved to Him and used

their wealth solely to praise Him and pursue spiritual endeavors. We therefore see that the power of judgment and choice was given to man, who possesses freewill to choose between good and evil.

So it is with anyone whom Hashem has blessed with sons and daughters: It is that person’s decision to choose either good, by guiding the heart of his children along the right path, or evil by lowering them to the abyss, G-d forbid. Why did Hashem promise to bestow numerous blessings upon our father Abraham? He said, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Hashem, to perform righteousness and justice” (Bereshith 18:19). The main purpose for bringing children into the world is to educate them in the ways of Torah and mitzvot, in order for them to become bnei Torah, servants of Hashem, and for the fear of Heaven to appear on their faces. Happy is the one who chooses the right path. Yet to our utter dismay, there are people who choose the wrong path, educating their children in an improper way, a way that is filled with thorns, a way devoid of Torah and mitzvot. How can such children not sin? Eventually, to their parents’ surprise, such children will leave their heritage behind and turn their backs not only on the Holy One, blessed be He, but on their parents as well! Only then will the parents think of questioning the disastrous education that they gave to their children, something for which they will weep bitter tears. As our Sages have said, “Bad upbringing in a man’s house is worse than the war

of Gog and Magog” (Berachot 7b). What is responsible for all this? It is the foolishness and vanity of parents in choosing such detrimental education for their children – the education of the nations – an education devoid of all spiritual content.

In contrast, let us examine the way of our father Abraham of blessed memory. He chose the path of Torah and raised his son to love Hashem, even ready to give up his life for His sake. He was therefore willing to joyfully surrender his life in the Akeidah. As the Beit Yosef writes, “Why do we say, ‘Isaac shall rejoice’ during Mincha of Shabbat? When Abraham said, ‘The lamb shall be for an offering, my son’

[Bereshith 22:8], Isaac immediately rejoiced and sang a song. What was his song? A song of an offering” (Orach Chaim 292). I have explained the words “Abraham shall rejoice” in a similar way: Since he realized that his son Isaac had reached such a lofty level – not only feeling no regret over being sacrificed on the altar, but also singing and rejoicing at the prospect of giving up his life for the sake of Hashem – we read, “Abraham shall rejoice.” He experienced tremendous joy and said, “Fortunate am I to have merited such a son, and this is my joy in life: To see my son cleaving to Hashem and walking in His ways of Torah.” Thus it says in the remainder of the prayer: “Jacob

and his sons shall rest in it.” That is, since Abraham and Isaac bequeathed to Jacob and his sons such an excellent way of serving Hashem, performing His mitzvot out of joy and being prepared to give all they have for such a lofty cause, including their souls, then certainly their path will always be one of rest and peace. Despite all the tribulations that may befall them, they will always be joyful because they are confident that everything comes from Hashem. Whatever they have

comes from Him, so why should they be sorrowful or complain? Jacob and his sons will always rest on Shabbat; they will always be happy in serving Hashem, following the example of Abraham and Isaac. Thus everything depends on personal choice, on how a person chooses to educate his children. Happy are those who are wise enough to choose the right path, the sanctified way in which Abraham educated Isaac.

From here we can understand the story of Lot and his two daughters. The verse states, “They gave their father wine to drink on that night” (Bereshith 19:33), and Rashi cites the Mechilta (Beshalach 2) in writing: “Wine was made available to them in the cave, in order for two nations to emerge from them.”

This is something that we need to understand. If they were helped by Heaven in this deed, insofar as a miracle occurred and wine was made available to them, then what accusation can be made against Lot? Why did the Torah shame him, as we read in regards to the verse: “Abraham journeyed from there” (Bereshith 20:1)? Here the Sages said, “He departed because of the shame [of his family], since people would say, ‘Lot, Abraham’s nephew, has been intimate with his two daughters’ ” (Bereshith Rabba 52:4). Where is Lot’s sin in this, since Heaven led him to commit this deed by providing his daughters with wine?

I thought I would explain this, with G-d’s help, according to what we said above. That is, Hashem gives a person children, possessions, wealth, and so on, and he can choose to direct them on the right path and merit eternal life. Conversely, he can direct them on the wrong path and end up in the abyss. Since Hashem made wine available to Lot in the cave, the purpose was certainly for



Lot to drink a little and rid himself of the tremendous sorrow and grief that had grown in his heart after such a difficult time. After all, his wife had died (“she became a pillar of salt” [Bereshith 19:26]), and he lost all his possessions and property with the destruction of Sodom, leaving him widowed, poor, and homeless. Lot and his two daughters were now alone, confined to a dark cave. Hashem had mercy on Lot and wanted to revive his spirits, and therefore He provided him with some wine. He could therefore drink it and rejoice, as the verse states: “Wine that gladdens a man’s heart” (Tehillim 104:15). It was now in Lot’s hand to make the right choice, to use the wine in a beneficial way, to drink a little and alleviate his sorrows. Yet in his foolishness, Lot made the wrong choice, using the wine for indecent purposes: He got drunk and sinned with his two daughters, choosing to live a reckless life.

In Gematria, “Lot” and “Adam” have the same numerical value. It was in Lot’s power to make the right choice and be an “Adam,” but instead he stubbornly chose to act like an animal. Our Sages have said that his daughters intended to act properly. In fact their deed was initially done for the sake of Heaven, as the verse states: “Our father is old and there is no man in the land to marry us in the usual manner” (Bereshith 19:31). Here the Midrash states that they thought the whole world had been destroyed, as in the generation of the flood, and they wanted to have offspring (Bereshith Rabba 51:8). Yet in the end, they chose an evil path, and their intentions were also abhorrent. Thus one daughter had the audacity of calling her son “Moav,” making it public knowledge that she became pregnant through her father. From here we learn that everyone must weigh

each of his deeds, for sometimes a person undertakes an action with the purest of intentions, for the sake of Heaven, but later forgets his primary objective and focuses on personal honor and desire. Hence a person must always be careful and direct his deeds towards sanctity, for the correct purpose, and be wise enough to make the right choice and distance himself from evil.

Regarding the Internet, which exists in our generation, if people would be wise enough to make the right choices, there would be no end to the benefits arising from this tool, for it can be used to learn the holy Torah and other beneficial purposes. Yet to our great dismay, people have chosen to use the Internet for abhorrent and terrible sins, turning it into a vile and repulsive tool. They have chosen to use it in an indecent way, negating all the good in it. Great responsibility rests on whomever has this tool in his home, for a grave spiritual danger lies at his door. He must carefully ensure that his family members don’t fall into the trap of the evil inclination by using this tool improperly. Happy is the person who keeps it out of his home entirely.

I was once staying in somebody’s home and given a private room to sleep in, when suddenly I discovered a television in a corner of the room. When I asked the owner of the house to take it out, he said to me: “Kavod HaRav, the television is turned off and it’s not even plugged in.” I replied, “I’m not prepared to stay in a room while this impure device is in it. It’s an *issur yichud*, and even when it’s turned off it can exert a bad influence, G-d forbid.” A person must be very careful to stay away from impurity, as if running from a burning building.

Bnei Torah need to be extra cautious in making the right choices.

A person may sit and learn Torah, but he also has to examine his deeds to see if perhaps his choices have changed a little, even while he is learning. As our Sages have said, “If a man sees that hardships come upon him, let him examine his conduct. ... If he examines and finds nothing, let him attribute it to neglect in the study of Torah” (Berachot 5a).

We need to understand this: If a person has sinned by not learning Torah, how could it be that he examined his conduct but did not find anything wrong? It must be that he did not properly examine his conduct. However this relates to a ben Torah, one whose profession is learning Torah. He invests his time and energy in the holy Torah, trying not to waste his time on useless matters. Therefore he initially examined his conduct and found no problems in his Torah learning, meaning no sin in that regard. Upon not finding anything, our Sages tell him to attribute his hardships to neglect in the study of Torah. This is because, despite learning Torah for a living, there may be a slight deficiency in his learning. Perhaps he does not study in sufficient depth, or without the proper concentration, or he sometimes stops to deal with personal issues. Therefore even bnei Torah should be careful to make the right choices in every area of their lives.

Just as Hashem has chosen us from among the nations and given us His Torah, may it be His will for us to choose His holy Torah, which is a way of life, and not to stray from it either to the left or the right. Amen and amen.





With Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik Zatsal



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With the Gaon Rav Barukh Salomon Zatsal



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On the Grave de Rabbi Chaim Pinto en 1988