

Bechatzrot Hachaim

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Rabbi **David Chananya Pinto**, shlita



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No. 18 - Elul 5774

Letter from the Editor

The seventh year of *Shemittah* has arrived.

The *Shemittah* year teaches important messages regarding the life of the Jew. We are promised that the years preceding and following it will be blessed with abundance of produce.

During *Shemittah*, one stops working his land and works on improving his Avodat Hashem.

City people cannot fathom what it means to let the land lay fallow. Country people who have grown up observing *Shemittah* in its full glory, cannot fathom any other way.

Our Sages have taught that each holiday is a station on our journey through the Jewish calendar. The influence of the festival at hand is as tangible nowadays as it was thousands of years ago, when the actual event transpired. For example, the month of Elul contains the power of forgiveness, as it was the month that Moshe spent on High, pleading for Heavenly Mercy for the Sin of the Golden Calf. Finally, on Yom Kippur, he heard the long-awaited words, "I have forgiven, as you asked." On Sukkot, we are under the protection of the Clouds of Glory. On Pesach, the joy and Divine inspiration which prevailed in the Beit Hamikdash imbue us with freedom, and Shavuot is auspicious for re-accepting the Torah.

Similarly, every seven years, blessing descends upon those who observe *Shemittah*. This bounty is the product of the Jew's faith throughout history. With steadfast belief that Hashem is the Ultimate Provider, the Jews have always abandoned their fields, vineyards, and orchards, proving that their trust in Him is more solid than the untilled earth. Open your arms wide, dear fellow Jew, and accept the blessings which rain down upon this year, and which overflow into the years of working the land. Coming close to Hashem builds the most effective pipeline to convey abundance of good, which one earns in merit of the unswerving, pure faith that beats in his heart and is manifested by his deeds.

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You are holding a copy of the publication **Bechatzrot Hachaim**, which is published by our institutions under the auspices of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, **Rabbi David Chananya Pinto**, shlita.

Select passages of his holy lectures have been printed here. These are culled from talks he delivers across the globe. His speeches have become famous everywhere, for they ring with the unvarnished, pure truth.

We have included inspirational stories full of faith in our Torah luminaries. We have also added customs of Torah Sages regarding the current period of time. We can learn from them how to draw blessing upon ourselves and how to serve Hashem appropriately during these days.

This is a wonderful opportunity for us to keep in touch with you and to connect with each other, to become one unified, beloved nation.

With best wishes for a good new year to all the readers of **Bechatzrot Hachaim** throughout the world,

The Editors



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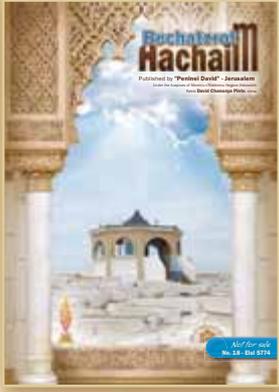
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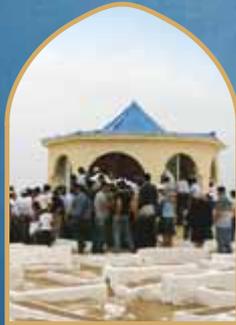
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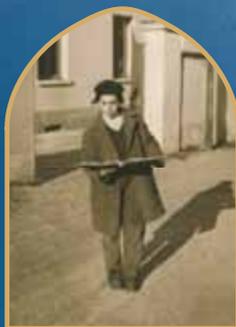


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ROSH HASHANAH

JUSTICE WILL BE SERVED

“Seek Hashem when He is found; call to Him when He is near”
(*Yeshayahu 55:6*)

In the month of Nisan, we are required to check for all physical chametz and completely eradicate it. Similarly, in the month of Elul, we are obligated to burn every last vestige of spiritual chametz from our hearts. We must examine every crevice of our souls and uproot all spiritual dross which has settled there during the course of the year. Whoever truly wishes to purify himself in this month receives Heavenly assistance. The *Navi* states, “Seek Hashem when He is found; call to Him when He is near” (*Yeshayahu 55:6*). David Hamelech tells us (*Tehillim 145:18*), “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him.” Let us pay attention to the end of this pasuk, which is, “to all who call upon Him sincerely.” Only one who seeks Hashem with every fiber of his being is granted this wish.

There is good reason why these days are called Days of Awe. Our situation is truly fearful. We all stand in judgment before Hashem Yitbarach, with no idea of the outcome. Certainly, we hope for the best and believe that, *Be’ezrat Hashem*, we will be inscribed for a good and peaceful life. We believe that in the merit of our forefathers, we will emerge innocent in judgment. We rely on Hashem’s infinite kindness. However, nobody knows for sure how the

new year will look and what is in store for him.

Whoever reflects on the past year will see how many tragedies occurred. How many people suffered illnesses and other forms of affliction, *rachmana litzlan*. May Hashem spare us from our enemies, who desire to destroy us. Everything is written and sealed at the beginning of the year. It is therefore our moral obligation to purify our minds and sanctify our souls. We are adjured to remove the *Yetzer Hara* which lurks within us. In this manner, we will prove to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that we seek closeness with Him and want nothing other than to live in the shadow of His *Shechinah*. When Hashem sees this, He will have mercy upon us and grant us a good new year.

The Midrash describes the first Rosh Hashanah of the world’s creation (*Vayikra Rabbah 29:1*): Rabbi Eliezer says that on the 25th of Elul, the world was created. In the first hour, Hashem thought of creating man. In the tenth hour, man violated Hashem’s will and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. In the eleventh hour, he was judged. In the twelfth hour, he was exonerated. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him, “This is a sign for your children. Just as you stood before Me in judgment on this day and emerged innocent, so will your children stand before Me on this day and be vindicated.”

This Midrash raises the obvious

question. Adam Harishon received a terrible punishment for his sin. From eternal life in the paradise of Gan Eden, he and all generations afterward were reduced to a life of materialism, suffering, and eventual death. How can he be said to have “emerged innocent”? What type of mercy did Hashem display toward Adam, which provides a sign for his children that they will also have a good verdict on Rosh Hashanah?

Moreover, a person must take the first step in order to draw down the influence of Heavenly compassion. Where do we see that Adam did an act to earn Heavenly compassion?

Let us analyze Adam’s actions and try to understand his intention in eating of the Tree of Knowledge, in violation of Hashem’s word. Adam was no ordinary human being. His sanctity and piety were unfathomable. How, then, could he have blatantly defied Hashem’s command?

While the Serpent conducted a conversation with Chava, in order to seduce her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam Harishon was walking together with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Gan Eden. Why didn’t Hashem see fit to inform Adam of the perverse intentions of the Serpent and hasten him to halt it in its tracks before it succeeded in convincing Chava to eat the forbidden fruit?

This question pertains to the Sin of the Golden Calf, as well. Bnei



Yisrael sinned in a terrible way by establishing a foreign deity upon themselves. Precisely then, Moshe Rabbeinu was on High, studying Torah from the mouth of Hashem. Why didn't Hashem halt the lesson so that Moshe could descend and prevent the nation from sinning?

Hashem's intentions are hidden from us. But we must understand that inherent in the very challenges which He gives us are the tools to withstand them. Hashem gave Adam and Chava one mitzvah: To refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge. Together with this command, He gave them the tools to obey it. Subsequent to Adam's sin, man has the power to make his own choices. Will he choose to heed Hashem's word, or, *chalilah*, not? Our Sages teach us that Hashem never gives a person a test too difficult for him to pass.

Chava, therefore, had the resources to overcome the persuasions of the Serpent, had she wanted. Likewise, concerning the sin of the Golden Calf, Am Yisrael had the wherewithal to stand up to temptation and not deviate from Hashem's word. Regrettably, they did not.

After Chava ate of the Tree of Knowledge, she saw the Angel Death before her. She was terrified that she would die.

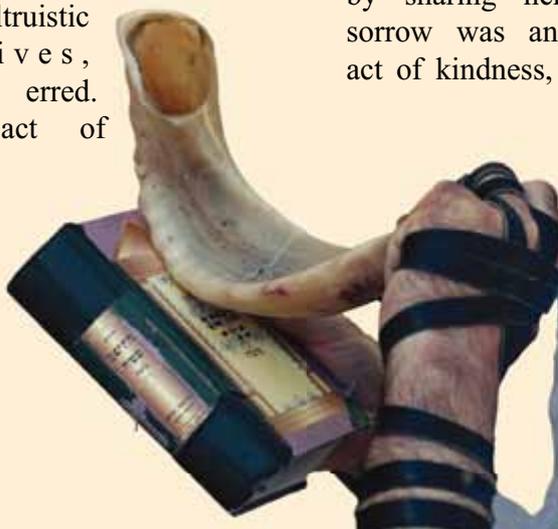
Then she decided to offer her husband of the forbidden fruit. She was afraid to die, lest he remain alive and marry another woman (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*). The commentators (*Ba'al HaTurim*) state that Chava struck Adam with a stick in order to force him to eat. This is implied in Adam's words to Hashem (*Bereishit* 3:12), "The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

When Adam saw how shaken Chava was by the experience of eating the fruit, fearing that she alone would be put to death, he thought that perhaps, just this once, he would violate Hashem's word and eat, as well. This would be a form of kindness toward his wife, he rationalized. Although he had altruistic motives, Adam erred. An act of

kindness that comes at the expense of sin is not kindness at all. One may not disobey the word of Hashem in order to do a good deed.

However, since Adam's intentions were pure, Hashem took pity on him and mitigated his punishment. Instead of immediately putting him to death, Hashem allowed him to live and rectify the damage he had caused.

Now we might answer our questions. What action of Adam's enabled him to draw the attribute of Heavenly kindness upon himself? His partaking of the fruit in order to appease his wife by sharing her sorrow was an act of kindness,



“HASHEM IS CLOSE TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM, TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM SINCERELY.” ONLY ONE WHO SEEKS HASHEM WITH EVERY FIBER OF HIS BEING IS GRANTED THIS WISH.



albeit misplaced. Since his intentions were pure, he brought charity upon himself, and "emerged innocent."

Wasn't he punished most severely for his offense? With all the harshness involved, Hakadosh Baruch Hu sweetened the justice by diluting it with mercy and kindness in comparison to the gravity of his deed. Had Hashem dealt with Adam in the strongest manner possible, He would have summarily removed him from this world and cut him off from the World to Come. Adam would never have been offered the opportunity to rectify that which he had damaged.

Hashem saw his intentions and took pity on him. He allowed him to live in order to correct the problem and do complete teshuvah. As long as a person lives, he can correct that which he spoiled. In *Eichah* (3:39), we read, "Of what shall a living man complain?" The Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* 3:40) adds, "It is enough for him that he is alive." Adam Harishon

recognized his sin and immediately repented. He set an example for all generations to come. If a person sins and causes damage through his wrongdoings, he has the power to do teshuvah. If he takes advantage of this opportunity, Hashem will deal kindly with him and allow him to emerge innocent in judgment.

Angels are exalted. However, they do not face the challenges of mortals, since they do not possess a *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, when man serves Hashem in spite of the temptations of the *Yetzer Hara*, he is greater even than the angels. Before Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge, he had no connection to the *Yetzer Hara* at all. He believed it was preferable to eat of the forbidden fruit, thereby inviting the force of the *kelippah* to rest within him. The *Yetzer Hara* would constantly rear its ugly head, tempting him to sin. Then, he would attempt to withstand its challenges, fulfilling the ultimate purpose of man in this world.

However, as soon as he swallowed the first bite, Adam realized his mistake. The *Yetzer Hara* was now revealed to him in its true colors. Adam saw how awesome and dreadful this force actually is. How much self-sacrifice is demanded to overcome it. As soon as he understood that he had made a fatal mistake, he was filled with deep remorse and did complete teshuvah.

Hashem observed Adam's sin, which was done with pure intentions, and lessened the punishment. He told him that this would be a symbol for all time. When his children would recognize their sins and regret them, doing complete teshuvah, they, too, would be acquitted in judgment. Hashem would decree upon them a verdict of kindness and mercy.

May Hashem always confer kindness upon us. In His unlimited mercy, may He inscribe us in the book of tzaddikim, for long life, Amen.

IF ONE TAKES
ADVANTAGE OF THE
OPPORTUNITY TO DO
TESHUVAH, HASHEM WILL
DEAL KINDLY WITH HIM

SUKKOT

THE SECRET OF THE JOY OF THE FESTIVAL – THE ARAVAH



THE ARAVAH HINTS THAT, ALTHOUGH IT DOES NOT POSSESS ANY GOOD QUALITY, AS LONG AS IT IS CONNECTED TO THOSE THAT ARE DOING MITZVOT, WHEN IT IS BOUND TO THE OTHER THREE SPECIES, IT ALSO BECOMES AN INSTRUMENT FOR DOING A MITZVAH. SO MUCH SO, THAT AT THE END OF SUKKOT, ON HOSHANA RABBAH, IT IS SPECIFICALLY THE ARAVAH THAT IS TAKEN WHEN WE CIRCLE THE BIMAH DURING THE HOSHANA PRAYERS.

On Sukkot, we have a specific mitzvah to “rejoice on your festival and be only joyous.” Thus, we increase our joy during the festival and rejoice at the Simchat Beit Hasho’eivah with drums and flutes. What is the reason for the exceptional level of joy that we experience on Sukkot?

A person is sad when he does not feel satisfied with his portion. Chazal (*Pirkei Avot*) ask: Who is rich? They answer clearly: One who is happy with his portion. They also say that “jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor remove a person from this world.”

On Sukkot, everyone moves out of his house to a temporary home – the sukkah. This is to impress upon him that this world is secondary and transient. It is a corridor to the palace of the World to Come. Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men, expresses this idea as follows: “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” When one integrates this message, he will be truly happy with his lot. He will rejoice in his material situation, knowing that it is a temporary condition.

During Sukkot, the distinctions between the wealthy and the poor are less noticeable. The rich man must leave his comfortable and well-appointed mansion in order to live in a sukkah made from scraps of wood and left-over greenery from the fields and vineyards. He cannot fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah by dwelling in a firm and permanent structure.

THE FOUR SPECIES REPRESENT UNITY

It seems that there is another reason to be happy on Sukkot. This is because it is a time of unity, more than any other festival.

The concept of unity is demonstrated by the Four Species. They represent the different members of the nation. The *etrog* (citron) represents the tzaddik, who has both “taste and smell,” possessing Torah and mitzvot. The



arava (willow branch) represents the wicked person, without “taste and smell.” When all four species are bound together, the tzaddik influences the wicked person. There is no greater joy than this. It is comparable to when Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah as “one man with one heart.”

Let us examine the essence of the Four Species. Three of them, the *etrog*, *lulav* (palm branch), and *hadasim* (myrtle), have beneficial qualities. However, the *arava* is bereft. It seemingly has no beneficial attribute, since it neither emits a pleasant scent nor gives fruit for man to enjoy. It is not even particularly beautiful. However, its name hints to a hidden quality, since it is called ערבה, denoting ערבות (guarantee).

The *arava* hints that, although it does not possess any good quality, as long as it is connected to those that are doing mitzvot, when it is bound to the other three species, it also becomes an instrument for doing a mitzvah. So much so, that at the end of Sukkot, on Hoshana Rabbah, it is specifically the *arava* that is taken when we circle the *bimah* during the Hoshana prayers.

THE SECRET OF THE ARAVAH

Perhaps the secret of the *arava* is connected to the essence of Bnei Yisrael. The Jewish people are said to be “ערבין זה לזה” – responsible for one another.” Each person is necessary to ensure the complete and perfect service of Hashem of the entire nation. This is not merely an external quality, but denotes the innermost connection between each member of the nation.

This is expressed by the following words of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, in his sefer *Tomer Devorah* (Ch. 1, *L'Sheirit Nachalato*):

“Man and his fellow, all Israel, are one flesh, these with these, because their souls are intertwined. This one contains part of the other in him, and the other contains part of his fellow. Therefore, when many people do a mitzvah it cannot be compared [to when one person does a mitzvah], since they are all connected... Due to this, Israel are responsible for one another. This is because in each person there is literally a part of his fellow. When a person sins, he damages himself as well as damaging the part of his fellow that is within him, and because of this part, he is also responsible for his friend. Therefore, they are together one flesh. Thus, it is fitting that a person should desire the good of his fellow and view his fellow’s good in a generous manner...”

Let us think about this. If we would feel that the other person, who sinned, was truly our brother and part of our flesh, we would be concerned for him. We would shed buckets of tears in our prayers, beseeching the Creator to enable him to do teshuvah. We should feel, in the words of the *Ramak*, “Man and his fellow, all Israel, are one flesh, these with these.” One must realize that his friend’s situation affects him. We are all parts of one body. Just as the mitzvah of taking the Four Species cannot be fulfilled by taking three, since the

aravah is also necessary, so too, the nation’s service of Hashem is incomplete if one Jew is lacking. It is essential that all Jews serve Hashem together. This should strengthen us tremendously. For, even if a Jew has sinned and serves Hashem in a low spiritual state, He always desires his service.

When one experiences a spiritual descent, he may feel there is no point in any spiritual endeavor. If he has already reached the depths, what point is there in praying? Surely, Hashem does not want to hear the prayers of such a person. Or, what point is there in going to a *shiur*? What will saying a chapter of Tehillim or one Mishnah achieve?

This is faulty reasoning. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants even the *aravah*! He does not “desire the death of the dead, but that he should return from his ways and live.” If he will only cleave to the rest of the nation, just as the *aravah* is bound with the other three species, Hashem will take pleasure in him, and in all the mitzvot he does. Each pasuk one learns and each prayer he offers brings him closer to Hashem. This is even if he is very distant from Him. When he is surrounded by darkness, just a tiny ray of light will disperse the gloom and enlighten his path.

All the above helps us understand the great joy of Sukkot. On this festival, each Jew feels close to Hashem. This is the time when the least distinguished members of the nation, those who possess the least knowledge and are the least involved in learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, are able to cleave to Him. Each person dwells in the “Shadow of Faith” of the sukkah and tangibly feels how Hakadosh Baruch Hu is with him and desires to be close to him. It is a time when one can experience the *Shechinah* and become truly united with all members of Klal Yisrael.

There is no greater joy than feeling close to Hashem. This is expressed by David Hamelech, “And I, closeness to G-d is good for me.” David Hamelech was the king. He was incredibly rich and blessed with many children, one of whom was Shlomo Hamelech. Yet, he testified that his most prized possession was his closeness to Hashem. The greatest pleasure is to take pleasure in Hashem. The greater the connection one has with Hashem, the greater the pleasure he experiences. May Hashem enable us to use the days of Sukkot to rejoice and be only happy.



THE NIGHT OF HOSHANA RABBAH - THE CONCLUSION OF THE FESTIVAL

HOSHANA RABBAH IS THE DAY OF THE USHPIZIN OF DAVID HAMELECH, THE SWEET SINGER OF ISRAEL AND FOURTH LEG OF THE MERKAVAH. IT IS A WONDERFUL PRACTICE TO SAY TEHILLIM DURING THIS EXALTED AND HOLY NIGHT.

The night of Hoshana Rabbah is the conclusion of the *Yamim Nora'im*. On this night, the gates of Heaven are opened to receive our prayers. It is thus customary to stay awake, immersing oneself in Torah learning and prayer. Through this, we trust that we will merit a "*pitka tava* – a good note" and be sealed for a good and peaceful life for the coming year.

Hoshana Rabbah is the day of the *ushpizin* of David Hamelech, the Sweet Singer of Israel and fourth leg of the *Merkavah*. It is a wonderful practice to say Tehillim during this exalted and holy night.

It seems that the reason for staying up all night is due to the sanctity of the day. We want to make use of every moment for Torah and prayer.

Since Hoshana Rabbah is connected to David Hamelech, it is also fitting to stay up all night since he was accustomed to sleep for only

a short time each night. This is described by the Gemara in *Berachot* (3b):

Rav Oshia taught in the name of Rabbi Acha: David said, "Midnight never passed me by in my sleep." Rabbi Zera said: Until midnight, he used to slumber like a horse (Rashi explains that a horse does not sleep fully, but

always naps and awakens). From then on, he would strengthen himself like a lion. Rabbi Ashi said: He involved himself in learning Torah until midnight, and from then on, he sang songs and praise.

We try to emulate the deeds of David on the night of Hoshana Rabbah, which is "his day," spending it in prayer and songs of praise to the Creator.

On the day he died, David Hamelech occupied himself so intensely with learning Torah that the Angel of Death had no power over him. Only when David halted his learning for a minute could death overpower him. On this night of the sealing of the decree, we imitate David's actions, learning constantly in order that the Prosecutor will be unable to harm us.

THE SEVENTH DAY

Hoshana Rabbah is the seventh day of Sukkot. What is the significance of the seventh day that it is a propitious time, more than the other days of the festival? The sefarim state that the twenty-one days between Rosh Hashanah and Hoshana Rabbah correspond to the twenty-one days between Shivah Assar b'Tammuz and Tishah b'Av.

This number is significant. The *Kad Hakemach* (section on the *aravah*) writes, "The seventh day of the *aravah* (i.e. Hoshana Rabbah) is the twenty-first day of Tishrei, corresponding to the *gematria* of the Name י"ז, with which the world was sealed according to the Kabbalistic term "*shes ketzavot*." It is the twenty-sixth day after the





creation of the world, which was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul.”

Thus, according to this explanation, Hoshana Rabbah is the day of sealing the judgment because it is twenty-six days after Creation (corresponding to the *gematria* of Hashem’s Name 7-1-7-7) and because of its date, the twenty-first of Tishrei, corresponding to the name of Hashem that “sealed creation.”

AFTER SIX DAYS OF SEPARATION

There are seventy ways to explain the Torah; let us offer another explanation. It is a tremendous kindness on the part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu that He gave us six days to prepare for the final day of the sealing of the judgment. The days of Sukkot are a time for introspection. Throughout these days, we separate ourselves from the material world, each according to his ability, and enter the sukkah, which is a taste of the World to Come. The sukkah is the “Shadow of Faith.” During these days, we continue to live as usual – we pray, learn, eat, and sleep. But we do all these things in a different way. We live in a temporary dwelling, absorbing the lesson that our lives in this world are temporary. Our lives are seventy years, and if in strength, eighty

years. This world is not the end goal. It is the corridor that we use to gain entry into the World of Truth.

These days of elevation in our service of Hashem are a wonderful gift from Him. He grants us more time to continue perfecting our character traits and actions. After these days of preparation, He grants us special assistance and opens the gates of Heaven before us. After all this, He will surely give us a *pitka tava*.

Surely, after we have cut ourselves off from the material world and elevated ourselves spiritually, in the company of the exalted *Ushpizin*, Hashem will open the gates to our prayers and requests – “Open the gates of Heaven, and open Your treasury of good, and save us, G-d of salvation.”

We can compare Hoshana Rabbah to Shabbat. After the six days of the week, we experience the spiritual elevation of Shabbat. Similarly, after the six days of spiritual preparation of Sukkot, we reach the pinnacle of Hoshana Rabbah, the day of the sealing of our judgment.

FOR THE CLOSE AND THE DISTANT

Some might say that they do not experience any elevation during Sukkot. They do not feel any closer to Hashem than they were before. On the contrary, they do not enjoy dwelling in the sukkah and wish they were able to sit in the comfort of their homes with the air conditioner on full blast. They feel this way due to their distance from all spiritual matters. They are so engulfed by materialism that they cannot sense the subtle sentiments of the soul.

Even such a person must know that every deed he does will be rewarded. Even if he has no feeling for the mitzvot he is doing, wearily waving his lulav and rushing through the meals in the sukkah, the joy inherent in the festival and its prayers will automatically have an effect on his soul.

Those who dislike sitting in the sukkah will gain even greater reward than those who enjoy it. This is because it is much more difficult for them.

WHEN ONE SERVES HASHEM WITH SELF-SACRIFICE, RISING TO HIS CHALLENGES AND OVERCOMING THEM, HE PROVES THAT HE HAS A STRONG CONNECTION TO HIM. HE DEMONSTRATES THAT HE IS PREPARED TO DO THE WILL OF HIS CREATOR. HIS SERVICE OF HIM IS NOT MERE LIP-SERVICE.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

There is no comparison between serving Hashem when everything is calm and serene to serving Him while beset with troubles and difficulties. Hashem wants the heart. Hakadosh Baruch Hu takes great pleasure when one expends effort and toil in serving Him. Our Sages say (*Pirkei Avot* end of Ch. 5), “According to the difficulty is the reward.” The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8) teaches, “R’ Chiya the son of Rabbi Abba says: One who learns Torah in suffering takes one thousand, and one who learns Torah without suffering takes two hundred as his reward.” The one who is beset with suffering, yet still learns Torah, gains five times as much reward as one who “has it easy.”

The Rambam explains the Mishnah “According to the difficulty is the reward” as follows, “Ben Hei Hei says that the reward is according to how greatly he labors in learning Torah. This means that he does not gain reward according to his intellectual abilities but through learning with effort and toil.”

When one serves Hashem with self-sacrifice, rising to his

challenges and overcoming them, he proves that he has a strong connection to Him. He demonstrates that he is prepared to do the will of his Creator. His service of Him is not mere lip-service.

The nations of the world act in a very different manner. This is described by the Gemara at the beginning of *Avodah Zarah*:

In the future, may the time come soon, on the great Day of Judgment, the nations will come to be judged before Hashem. When they will see that they have no merits to their name, they will ask Hashem to give them a mitzvah to do. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will be angered by this and will say to them, “Fools! Whoever troubles himself on Erev Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. But whoever does not trouble himself on Erev Shabbat will not eat on Shabbat.” Nevertheless, because His mercy is on all His works, He will say to them, “I have an easy mitzvah, sukkah is its name, go and keep it.”

The Gemara continues, describing the initial enthusiasm of the nations, “Immediately, each one goes to make a sukkah on the roof of his house.” But Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to test them, and causes the sun to shine as strongly as during the hottest days of Tammuz. “And each one of them kicks at his sukkah and leaves it, as it says (*Tehillim* 2:3): Let us cut their bonds and throw off their thick ropes.”



The gentiles say they want to fulfill the will of Hashem. But this is mere lip service. They are not prepared to suffer for this. They are not prepared to sublimate their desires to His desire. They want to free themselves from the fetters of obligation. They intend to keep mitzvot only if it serves their purpose, not in order to serve Hashem. As soon as they face any difficulty, they immediately kick at the one mitzvah they are given.

When one is beset with difficulties, but does not kick and submits himself completely to the will of Hashem, he proves that he is His true servant. This will gain him unlimited Heavenly assistance, opening the gates of Heaven for him. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will recognize his plight and answer his pleas.

WHERE BA'ALEI TESHUVAH STAND

The principle of “according to the difficulty is the reward” applies also to one who is accustomed to sinning. It is much more difficult for him to do a mitzvah than for a person who is accustomed to doing mitzvot. Consequently, he gains more reward for doing a mitzvah which might seem to others small or insignificant.

Let us illustrate with the following example. A boy is born and grows up in a Chareidi family. It is not difficult for him to refrain on Shabbat from opening the refrigerator, which would cause the light inside to go on. This does not present a test for him. It is not difficult for him to refrain from eating food without a *hechsher*. Far from being a test, it is part of life, as far as he is concerned.

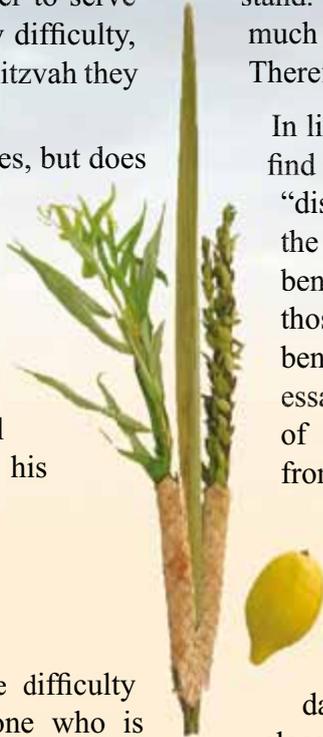
On the other hand, for a person who is taking his first steps toward a life of Torah and mitzvot, it is extremely difficult not to drive to the beach on Shabbat, to refrain from eating milk after meat, or to pass up a tasty dish that has no *hechsher*.

But the reward he will receive for passing these tests is tens of times greater than the

reward received by the boy who grew up in a Chareidi home. The tests they each face cannot be compared! This is expressed by the Gemara in *Berachot* (34b), “Where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand complete tzaddikim cannot stand.” One who is on a lower level faces much greater difficulty in keeping the Torah. Therefore, he gains much greater reward.

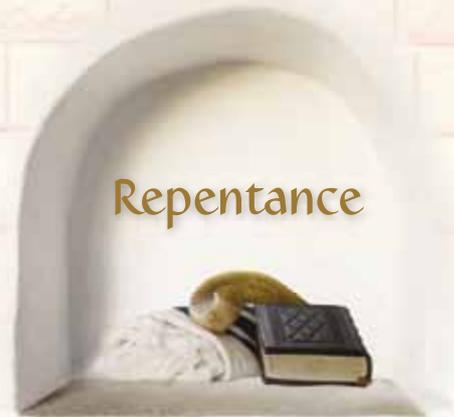
In light of this, we can say that those who find it difficult to sit in a sukkah, who are “distant,” will merit being illuminated by the light of Hoshana Rabbah. This day benefits both those who are close and those who are distant. Those who are close benefit, as we said at the beginning of this essay, because they sit in the “Shadow of Faith.” Those who are far benefit from Hoshana Rabbah, since they find it difficult to sit in the sukkah without their home comforts. According to the difficulty is the reward. Through fulfilling mitzvot in difficult circumstances for the six days of Sukkot, they gain the reward of closeness to Hashem on Hoshana Rabbah.

On this last day of the festival of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, the gates of Heaven are opened for all. May it be His will that this day will offer us protection, and may we all merit a *pitka tava*, with the coming of Mashiach, may it be soon in our days, Amen.



Repentance, Prayer, and Charity

Rescind the Harshness
of the Decree



Repentance

Ending on a Good Note

Even if a Jew sinned all his life, yet expressed true regret and repented upon his death, Hashem accepts his teshuvah and is pleased with it.

The same holds true at the end of every year. On Erev Rosh Hashanah, a person is awakened to closely examine his deeds. He does teshuvah and resolves to improve. In this manner, he corrects the wrongdoings of the past year. The good intentions of the end of the year have the power to raise the deeds he did throughout the year and transform them into goodness and blessing.

The author of the sefer *Ketzei Hamateh* interprets the verse (*Bereishit* 43:10), "For had we not delayed, by now we could have returned twice." The letters of לולא (had not) can be transposed to spell אלול (Elul). Even if we procrastinated doing teshuvah the entire month of Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness, we are told that עתה (now), an acronym for ערב תחילת השנה (the eve of the new year), is an auspicious time for "we could have returned twice." The power of teshuvah is doubled on Erev Rosh Hashanah.

Earning Forgiveness

The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 581) states that Ashkenazim have a custom to fast on Erev Rosh

Conduct and
Customs
Taught by
Our Torah
Luminaries

By: Rabbi Binyamin Cohen

Hashanah. The Midrash Tanchuma (*Parashat Emor*) offers an analogy to explain the reason for this:

A colony owed the king a large sum of money. The king kept sending messages, but the people did not pay their dues, since it was such an exorbitant sum. What did the king do? He told his men, "We will pay them a personal visit." They walked a distance toward the colony. When the colonists heard this, they sent their most distinguished dignitaries to go out to meet the king.

"Who are you?" the king asked.

"We are the colonists whom you seek."

"What would you like?" he inquired.

"Please deal kindly with us, for we do not have the means to pay you."

"Fine," he acquiesced. "I will remove half of the debt."

A delegation of more minor officials went out to meet the king. "Who are you?" he asked.

"We are from your colony. We do not have the means to repay our debts. Please have mercy!"

"I already forewent one half of the debt. For you, I will remove one half of the remaining half."

As the king was rising to leave, all of the colonists, men, women, and children came out to greet him. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Our esteemed king, we cannot afford to pay a cent of what we owe you!"

"I already forewent one half of the debt, and then one half of what remained. For your sake, I will overlook the entire debt. You will now start over with a clean slate!"

The King of kings sees how His colonists, Bnei Yisrael, accrue sins throughout the year. He tells them to do teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah. Yom Kippur follows, and Hashem forgives them. How is this? On Erev Rosh Hashanah, the Torah

scholars fast. Hashem forgives a third of the nation's sins. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, individual righteous men fast. Hashem pardons another third of the nation's sins. On Yom Kippur, the entire nation fasts and pleads for mercy. Hakadosh Baruch Hu then forgives them for everything.

The sefer *Chayei Adam* (siman 138) writes: Erev Rosh Hashanah is the last day of the year. Chazal state that whoever does teshuvah on one day of the year is considered having repented throughout the entire year. Therefore, they established this day as a day of fasting.

We follow the custom of the Rema, who says that one who attends a *seudat mitzvah*, such as a *siyum* or a *brit milah*, is exempt from fasting. This is quoted in the sefer *Peninei Rabbeinu Hakehilot Yaakov*.

The Last Fast of the Year

The Beit Yosef cites a custom of *Hagahot Maimuniot*:

There are those who have the custom specifically not to fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah, for the gentiles have the custom to fast on their holiday eve. However, the *Pesikta Rav Kahana* states that it is a mitzvah to fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah, as quoted in the Yerushalmi: Rabbi Yonatan fasted the entire Erev Rosh Hashanah. This is proof for our custom.

Many later commentators mention the custom to refrain from fasting on Erev Rosh Hashanah. Let us quote from the Maharal: It is a custom throughout the Diaspora that young maidens eat on Erev Rosh Hashanah before sunrise. The sefer *Darchei Moshe* adds: I have seen many who are careful to eat something small before sunrise, in order to comply with *Hagahot Maimuniot*, which states not to fast, due to the gentile custom.

Based on *sod*, one should not

Even if a Jew sinned all his life, yet expressed true regret and repented upon his death, Hashem accepts his teshuvah.

When one stands in prayer, he should be aware before Whom he is standing. This will put him in the right frame of mind, in fear and awe before the One Who created the world. This is borne out in Tehillim (2:11), "Serve Hashem with fear."

One should be extremely joyous that he has the opportunity to serve Hashem, Who has no equal in the world, as it says (Tehillim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy."

eat before sunrise. The *Sha'arei Teshuvah* proposes that therefore they were accustomed to drink coffee or tea instead.

A Year of Life

Rabbi Yosef Chaim, zy"א, in his sefer, *Ben Ish Chai* (*Parashat Nitzavim*) also cites proper customs for Erev Rosh Hashanah. Regarding the custom of fasting, he writes, "It is good for a person to undertake a fast, except for the weak, elderly, and young children."

He mentions the custom cited by the Rema, "It is customary to visit the cemetery on Erev Rosh Hashanah and make one's requests there." However, he warns, "One must never pray directly to the deceased, but rather, ask Hashem for mercy in their merit."

Likewise, it is appropriate to increase the amount of charity one gives on this day, giving generously to Torah scholars and paupers, as it says, "Charity saves from death."

Before It's Too Late

Only a select few knew his real name. He was a lonely old man, dressed in tatters. He lived his isolated life on the fringes

of society. He hardly spoke. His pleasing, deep baritone was heard only twice a year: When he would stand before the congregation on the day of his parents' *yahrtzeit*, and when he was called up to the Torah for an *aliyah*. When the early risers would enter the Beit Hakeneset, they would find him there, already wrapped in his tallit and tefillin. He patiently waited for *Tefillat Vatikin* to begin. After the tefillah, everyone would exit, yet he remained, usually hunched over a sefer, a Chumash, Mishnayot, or *Ein Yaakov*. Nobody knew if he ever slept.

His house was a one-room affair, at the end of the alley of the tailors. From time to time, good Jews would put a few coins into his pockets. Righteous women would send over their children with hot meals. Everyone called him "שוב יום אחד – Return one day (before)." With time, this name became shorter and stranger, something like "Shuvyomechad."

His concealed past, his mysterious nature, and his unusual nickname eventually melded into the background, and he became an accepted part of the community. Daily routine and the pressure of earning a livelihood occupied the townspeople more than the identity of "Shuvyomechad."

One day, the town was hit with news: "Shuvyomechad" had passed away. Suddenly, everyone was drawn to the mystery which shrouded him. As if ninety-six years were not enough time to probe into his past, rumors began surfacing like mushrooms. Everyone had another hypothesis explaining his identity, ranging from "righteous convert" to "hidden tzaddik." Even after the town's Rav assembled the people for his funeral, offering him his last honor, his story remained sealed.



Next to the open grave, the Rav began offering words of eulogy. Anticipation filled the air. All waited anxiously to hear what was coming. And indeed, they were not disappointed.

"This man lived in our neighborhood for forty years," the Rav began. "I heard his personal story from the previous Rav of the town, who passed away about twenty-five years ago. This man's full name was Reb Shraga Feivish ben Reb Yehudah Leib.

"One day, the young Shraga Feivish decided that his hometown was too small for his interests. He felt locked into the alleyways, which hardly afforded adventure and opportunity. He therefore traveled to one of the big cities. He entered the world of commerce and was most successful.

"However, he was an example of, 'Yisrael got fat and kicked.' With his material success came spiritual decline. Slowly but surely, Shraga Feivish removed his distinctly Jewish garb and donned modern clothing. After that, went his Jewish name. He embraced a life completely severed from Judaism. No trace of his childhood remained with him to deter him from a life of sin. Whenever he would remember his old friends, he felt deep disdain and contempt toward them. His heart swelled with pride at his boldness in breaking out of the bonds of his former lifestyle and paving for himself a new path.

"It was at the height of his successful career. Shraga Feivish found himself in our town. He entered an inn to spend the night. When he awoke the next morning, his entire body was burning with fever. His



condition worsened over the next few days. A doctor was rushed to his bedside, but his efforts were in vain. From one minute to the next, the situation became more desperate. Shraga Feivish felt that his hours were numbered. He then called for the Rav, the one who preceded me in this position.

"By the time the Rav came, Shraga Feivish could barely talk. In a few words, he described his life to the Rav and related the name of his hometown and the names of his parents, whom he left to bewail their fate. The Rav heard him out and then replied, 'Our Sages say: Return one day before your death. This means that it is worthwhile for a person to do teshuvah every day of his life, for nobody knows when he will die. What will happen if a person suddenly dies before having done teshuvah?' the Rav asked rhetorically. 'Moreover, we are taught: He who comes to purify himself is assisted by Heaven. If a person determinedly resolves to do perfect teshuvah, he is helped by Heaven and

even given an extension of life. Accept upon yourself to do teshuvah and perhaps you will merit additional years.' Then the Rav left.

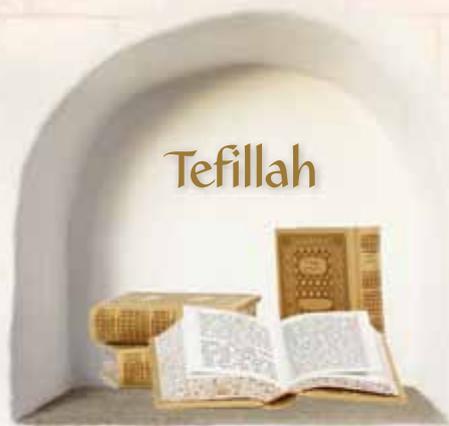
"Nobody can know the inner workings of the mind and heart of Shraga Feivish. However, it is a known fact that on that day, his condition took a turn for the better. Shraga Feivish never returned to his family in the large city. He remained in our small town, where he lived out the rest of his life. His actions reflected his desire to obey the Rav and become a true *ba'al teshuvah*. This story, which was known to the inhabitants, became forgotten with the passage of time. Only the man's nickname stuck.

"This morning," the Rav ended his moving eulogy, "it seems that the repentance of R' Shraga Feivish, z"l, was complete. He has finally been called to the Heavenly Yeshiva. In the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand."

He did not know any of the prayers by heart. All he had to greet the day was a heart full of emotion.

"Ribbono shel Olam! You are our All-Merciful Father. You know the thoughts of man's heart.

"I don't know how to pray, and I have no machzor with me. Please, accept the one prayer that I know. I, too, wish to pour forth my soul and request a good, sweet new year."



The Mashgiach, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, zt"l, used to say that prayer is like *mussar* study. Just as *mussar* is meant to bring a person closer to his Creator, the purpose of prayer is to fix in man's heart the understanding that nothing happens by coincidence. Whatever happens to a person is by Hashem's decree.

In her book *All for the Boss*, the author describes the prayer of her father, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Herman:

My father prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu like one turns to his father and asks, "Father! Help me! Give me!"

One day, I was shocked to find my father in his store, extremely dejected. He sat in the corner of his shop with head bent and tears flowing from his eyes.

My strong, able father, crying? "What happened?" I asked in alarm.

"I need something from the Boss," he explained. Father always called

Hakadosh Baruch Hu "the Boss." He always felt like a servant before his master. He was a faithful servant who always, unhesitatingly, did his Master's bidding. He always felt comfortable turning to his Master with any request, like a son to his father.

"Does the Boss always grant your requests?" I asked.

With simplicity and perfect faith, Father replied, "Of course! Is there anything or anyone else that could provide my needs besides for Him?"

Those days, Father suffered from memory lapses. He forgot names and other details, which depressed him greatly.

"If it is so simple to get everything you need from the Boss, why don't you ask Him to help your situation?"

"I don't ask for unnatural things!" my father adamantly answered. "At my age, eighty-three, it is only natural for the memory to become weaker. I will not ask for something outside the bounds of nature!"

Father turned to the Boss with such ease, like a son before his father. Thus, his prayers always emanated from the heart.

The sefer *Hama'or Hagadol* cites the story concerning a close disciple of Hagaon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, Rosh Yeshivat Kol Torah. This disciple poured out his suffering to the esteemed Rosh Yeshivah. This was the response of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman:

"Know, my beloved disciple, that I never spoke about my troubles and pains to anyone. Whenever something bothered me, I would stand up and turn to Hashem in prayer, asking for His help in His infinite kindness."

A Pure Prayer

During the days of the great Torah Sage, Rabbi Yeshuah Basis, zt"l, Rav of the Jewish congregation in Tunis, the entire community assembled in the Beit Hakeneset for a day of prayer in the wake of the unbearable economic situation.

Rabbi Yeshuah stood at the helm of his congregation as the *shaliach tzibbur* cried out, "*Aneinu* (Answer us), *Elokei Avraham, Aneinu!*"

The congregation responded, "*Aneinu, Pachad Yitzchak, Aneinu!*"

Suddenly, the Rav noticed that one of the simple folk was trembling, his eyes closed and his *siddur* pressed to his chest. He did not participate in the mass declaration, but, with head turned heavenward, he repeated, over and over, "*Aneinu! Aneinu!*"

The Rav, with his holy vision, saw that this man's simple, one-word prayer was piercing the very heavens, sweetening the harsh decree and drawing downward abundance of blessing and salvation.

After the prayer session, Rabbi Yeshuah Basis approached the man and asked, "Please tell me, what was your deep intention with each repetition of the word *Aneinu*?"

The man looked at the Rav in wonder at the unusual question.

"Does the illustrious Rav not know the meaning of the word *Aneinu*? It is not only one word, Rabbi! It is comprised of two: *Ani* (pauper) and *non* (which is pronounced without the *n* and means *no* in French, the language spoken in Tunis.)

Rabbi Yeshuah was now more perplexed than ever and asked for an explanation.

"I was asking that there be 'no pauper' this year!"

Then the Rav's eyes lit up. "Your prayers were well-received and effected great things."

Go for the Gold

The tzaddik, Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz, zt"l, stated, "It is the obligation of every Jew to pray for the welfare of the entire Creation." He explained with an analogy:

The Russian Czar Nicolai studied the lineup of his troops with deep satisfaction. One of his enemies found that moment opportune to aim his rifle at the Czar. A simple soldier, who noticed the goings-on, rushed to the Czar with record speed and pushed him aside. He thus saved the Czar's life.

"What can I do for you in thanks for saving my life?" asked the grateful ruler.

"The head of my brigade is a wicked man who does not cease to make my life miserable. Please, his honor, would you convince him to stop his torment?"

"Fool!" the Czar replied, "Why do you ask for such a small thing when you can ask that I make you the head of a brigade, or even a general?"

The Jew prays for a speedy recovery, for an end to his toothache, or for a good livelihood. But these are child's play. Isn't it preferable to ask for the ultimate redemption of Klal Yisrael, when all problems will disappear?

Praying Before the Divine Presence

When one stands in prayer, he should be aware before Whom he is standing. This will put him in the right frame of mind, in fear and awe before the One Who created the world. This is borne out in *Tehillim* (2:11), "Serve Hashem with fear."

One should be extremely joyous that he has the opportunity to serve Hashem, Who has no equal in the world, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy."

Our Sages say, "One who prays must see himself standing before the *Shechinah*, as it says, (*Tehillim* 16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always."

When Rabbi Eliezer became sick, his disciples came to visit him. They asked, "Rabbeinu, teach us how to live!"

He replied, "My sons, be careful with the honor of your friends. And when you pray, know before Whom you are praying. In this manner, you will earn a portion in the World to Come" (*Ma'alot Hamidot*).

Half and Half

The following is told about Rabbi Moshe Sofer, author of Chatam Sofer, zt"l, a Torah giant of note: When he finished his prayers on the holiday, he would turn to his students and say, "Now I have fulfilled my obligation of 'one half [of the day] for yourselves.'"

The hours that the Chatam Sofer had spent in conversation with his Creator gave him tremendous pleasure, which he considered "the joy of the festival." In those hours, there was no one happier. He experienced literal physical



happiness. He sincerely believed that this was how he executed the mission of rejoicing on the festival, fulfilling the "one half for yourselves."

Conversely, when the Chatam Sofer would end his Yom Tov meal, he stated that he had just concluded the obligation of fulfilling "one half for Hashem." His poor *seudah* was eaten solely *l'shem Shamayim*. He ate only to keep body and soul together, infusing the parts of his body with vitality so that he could continue his sacred work in this world.

Continually Yearning

The holy Rabbi Mordechai MiLechovitch, zt"l, used to sigh, "There is a wonderful bird that sings to Hashem until its vocal cords snap. I, on the other hand, pray to Him, yet still maintain good health. What then is so special about my prayers?"

One time, he prepared himself for a long time before beginning his prayers. When he reached the passage of the Song of the Sea, he was so enthusiastic that he ruptured one of his lungs. All of the doctors of Lemberg were at a loss as to how to help him. Rabbi Mordechai turned his eyes heavenward, "Do You think I wanted only to pray one prayer with such intense devotion? I would like to continue praying so in the future!" Hashem restored him to perfect health.

Another time, Rabbi Mordechai was in Lemberg, surrounded by throngs of his followers. The doctor who had previously examined him passed by and asked what the ruckus was all about. The people told him that Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitch was in the area. "Is he still alive?" The doctor wondered aloud. Upon receiving an affirmative response, he assumed that somehow Rabbi Mordechai was able to live with only one lung (*Sifran shel Chassidim*).

The Aleph-Beit of Prayer

It was after the holy day of Yom Kippur. *Ne'ilah* had just been recited. The Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples were returning home from the Beit Hakeneset. Everyone felt pure and cleansed. Nobody imagined preparing for a journey at this hour. However, the Ba'al Shem Tov expressed his desire to travel, and everyone jumped to action.

Alexei, the Ba'al Shem Tov's wagon-driver, was used to making unusual trips at such late hours, without the destination being divulged. This was the way of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He often went on mysterious missions with his students. Many times, they merited a shortening of the way. Often, they returned home without ever being informed of the purpose of their journey.

This time, the horses went on and on. The trip was long. The Ba'al Shem Tov's disciples were on edge; what would they discover when they reached their destination? Suddenly, the horses stopped. They arrived at an isolated hamlet. The Ba'al Shem Tov instructed his disciples to find the nearest tavern.

The Jewish proprietor greeted them, surprised and not a little shaken at the distinguished group standing in his doorway. He was especially unnerved by the piercing gaze which he received from the Ba'al Shem Tov.

Suddenly he shrieked, "Rebbi! Rebbi! I have sinned severely! I know full well how terrible I am! Oy, oy, Rebbi! I thought nobody would know about it, and here you are, with full knowledge of my deed!" Hot tears of remorse streamed down his cheeks.

The Ba'al Shem Tov managed to calm him. He asked him to sit

down and relate everything that had transpired. He did not have to convince him. The Jew felt an inner need to divulge his secret to the tzaddik. Surrounded by the disciples, the man began his tale:

Every year, in honor of the *Yamim Noraim*, he would customarily travel to the nearby village, for he was the only Jew living in his village. Throughout the rest of the year, he would manage without a minyan, but for the *Yamim Noraim*, he felt it vital to pray in a Beit Hakeneset with a minyan.

This year, too, he had prepared to travel before Yom Kippur. Everything was prepared. The man and his family climbed into the wagon and headed toward the next village. Suddenly, he remembered that he had forgotten to lock the door of the basement.

This was a serious matter. The basement contained all of the drinks he sold. His entire livelihood lay there. The neighborhood gentiles were likely to come and loot the place, finishing his entire stock. Moreover, even if they just touched the wines, they would render them *yayin nesech*, which is unfit for Jewish consumption.

The hour was growing late, and the owner was growing more nervous by the minute. He figured that he had enough time to return home, lock up, and reach the nearby village before nightfall.

As soon as he reached his tavern, he was met by none other than the town squire. "What a twist of providence that you came just now," he guffawed, "my throat is terribly dry. Boy, can I use a shot of good whiskey!"

The poor Jew had no choice but to comply with this request. He just prayed that the man would hurry and leave. But things stretched out. As soon as he

opened the door of the tavern, all the neighbors began flooding in, as if on cue.

The more speedily the Jew tried to finish up and close shop, the more people poured in. Another customer here, another one there. He could not close the door in anyone's face. He caught a glance at the time, and his face fell. There was no way that he could make it to the Beit Hakeneset in time for the upcoming holiday.

What to do? He had never celebrated Yom Kippur alone before. He did not even own a *siddur* or *machzor*. He did not know any of the prayers by heart. All he had to greet the day was a heart full of emotion.

Suddenly, a prayer emerged from his mouth. "*Ribbono shel Olam!* You are our All-Merciful Father. You know the thoughts of man's heart. You know how badly I wanted to be in the Beit Hakeneset now, in the company of fellow Jews.

"I don't know how to pray, and I have no *machzor* with me. Please, accept the one prayer that I know. I, too, wish to pour forth my soul and request a good, sweet new year."

The only thing the man knew by heart was the Aleph-Beit. He began reciting the letters of the Aleph-Beit, one after another, shedding bitter tears.

"Please accept these letters, Hashem," he called out, broken-hearted. "Combine them into prayers with the proper intentions and grant me a good new year."

"Oh, Rabbi!" the man ended his narrative, "I am sure you have come to censure me for my grave sin. I know I have acted incorrectly. Please tell me how I can do teshuvah."

The Ba'al Shem Tov's eyes lit up with a special light. A smile of satisfaction spread over his face. "Have no fear," he told the man warmly. "For many years, such a pure, innocent prayer has not ascended to Heaven as your prayer this past Yom Kippur."



Forgive and Forget

Rabbi Shimshon Aharon Polanski, zt"l, had a friend named Dr. Mordechai Elias. The good doctor would give him a sum of money each month to be distributed among charitable causes. Obviously, Rabbi Polanski did not use any of the money for his personal needs. He divided it up among the poor of Jerusalem. Some came to his home, and others, who were more bashful, received the money in their own homes.

Once, his family found that he had allotted an especially large amount to a certain family. When asked about this, the Rav replied, "When I escaped from the Russian pogroms and headed toward Eretz Yisrael, my family was extremely hungry. This man, to whom I now send

"You shall take
My portion"
is a reference
to tzedakah
collectors,
about whom
it is said,
"And those
who teach
righteousness
to the public
(will shine)
like the stars
forever"
(Daniel 12:3).

These are
tzedakah
collectors, who
are held in
great esteem
by Hashem.



alms, was the *tzedakah* collector then. However, he refused to give us any money. Now that the wheel of fortune has turned, I have become the giver and he, the taker. I do not want, *chas v'shalom*, to be accused of harboring resentment. I therefore give him a most generous donation, so that I will not be indicted in the World of Truth."

Greater Is the One Who Causes Another to Act

"You shall take My portion" is a reference to *tzedakah* collectors, about whom it is said, "And those who teach righteousness to the public [will shine] like the stars forever" (*Daniel* 12:3). These are *tzedakah* collectors, who are held in great esteem by Hashem.

Hagaon Hatzaddik, Rabbi Refael Baruch Toledano, zt"l, once spent Shabbat in Casablanca, Morocco, for a family *simchah*. It was the middle of the winter, and in his speech, he related the suffering of the poverty-stricken, who could not afford warm blankets. He suggested that they make a collection among the audience. The people thought he was talking about small sums, and agreed to this. They received a shock upon hearing that Rabbi Refael himself pledged the first donation, 50,000 francs, which was a tremendous sum. Everyone else felt ashamed to give small donations. He thus succeeded in raising an enormous amount on behalf of Morocco's indigent. That very Motza'ei Shabbat, he ordered the donors to make good on their pledges.

Public Funds Are Sacred

Rabbi Yehudah Tzadkah, zt"l, Rosh Yeshivat Porat Yosef, was exceedingly careful with

tzedakah money and all the yeshiva's possessions. Even if he had to make a phone call from the yeshiva's office for a yeshiva-related matter, he insisted on paying for the call from his own money. He was afraid of using something sacred for mundane purposes. He would immediately pay the secretary, Rabbi Yosef Chalbi, a"h, explaining exactly what the money had been used for.

Once, while he was learning, an Italian Jew approached him with the offer of a paltry sum for the yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva good-naturedly closed his sefer, took the man's meager coins, counted



them, and pulled out his pad to note the transaction. He never once displayed impatience, even when the man returned with the request to see the record of the donation in the Rosh Yeshiva's notepad.

A few days later, this man re-appeared, and then a third time, each time disturbing the Rosh Yeshiva's learning with the claim that he wished to contribute to the yeshiva. Each time he gave a trifling amount, yet he always insisted on seeing if it was duly recorded in the notepad.

Finally, one day, the man appeared with a significant sum. He placed it before the Rosh

Yeshiva, stating, "I have no need for notes. I see how faithful and honest Chacham Yehudah is with sacred monies, even when it is just a few pennies."

Care in money matters is an art. Tremendous sums passed through Rabbi Yehudah's hands, donations on behalf of *tzedakah*. However, he never profited from these monies. In his pocket, he kept a notepad with two columns: Income and Expenses. Whatever he received from donors was recorded so that it could be put to maximum benefit. And whatever was given to the poor was recorded, as well.

Whenever he had to take out a loan, which was generally in regard to sacred matters, he would first stipulate with the lender, "This is on condition that you remind me when the debt is due. If you do not remind me, I will be released from this debt." But he never forgot.

For many years, he was a monthly member of the Satmar *mikveh* near his house. However, in contrast to the norm, he would pay his bills at the beginning of each month instead of the end. He would explain, "Who knows what will be tomorrow, may Hashem protect us. If I fail to cover my expenses, who will pay them after I'm gone?"

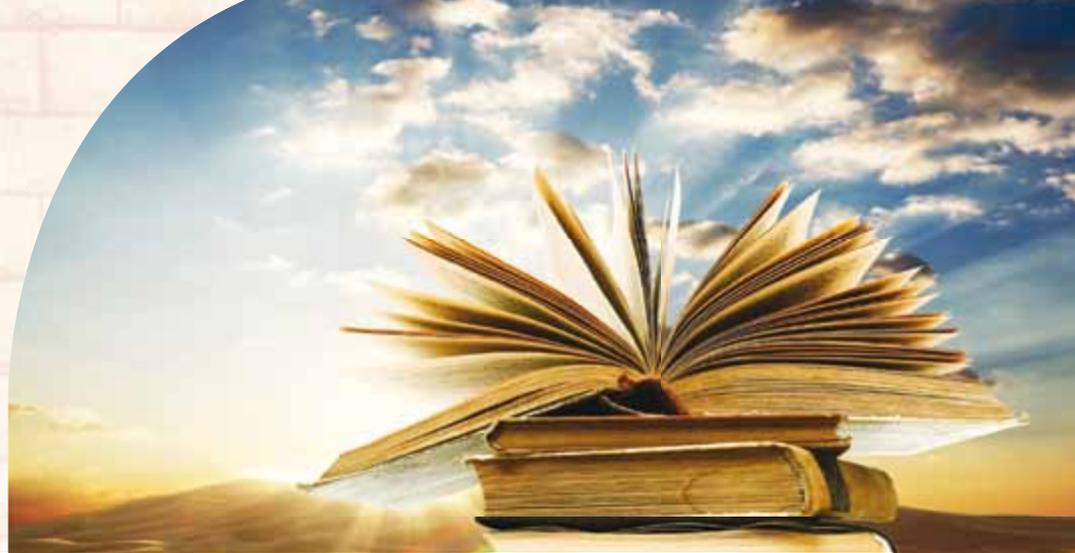
Yielding to Others Yields Reward

On Motza'ei Shabbat of Selichot 1977 (תשל"ח), Maran Rosh Hayeshiva, Hagaon Hagadol, Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman, shlita, said, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires that each person should enter Rosh Hashanah with the understanding that Hashem is his king, and he wants to be His servant. 'Crown Me upon yourselves' means that

one should view the entire world through the Torah's perspective, whether it is in interpersonal matters or matters between man and his Maker."

If people would think about what they quarrel over, they will see that it is not worthwhile and they gain nothing in the end. However, each time a person foregoes his honor, he profits immensely. This is in line with the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah*): "Whoever overlooks his natural tendencies has his offenses overlooked." Would anyone be so foolish as to think he has no need for forgiveness? There is no one who is a perfect tzaddik and never sins.

Unfortunately, instead of yielding to others, people stand on principle and refuse to budge. What do they gain? One should constantly measure the loss he will incur in doing a mitzvah against the great reward awaiting him, and the benefit he will gain by doing an aveirah against the great punishment he will receive. In both cases, the ultimate remuneration is manifold times greater than the immediate difficulty or gratification. One is obligated to accept upon himself the yoke of Heavenly Kingship in all aspects of life. If one does so, he will only benefit. By sparing himself one quarrel, one piece of idle talk or juicy piece of gossip, he has earned untold revenues. Likewise, doing even one mitzvah produces unlimited returns. In this manner, one crowns Hashem upon himself and merits a good new year.

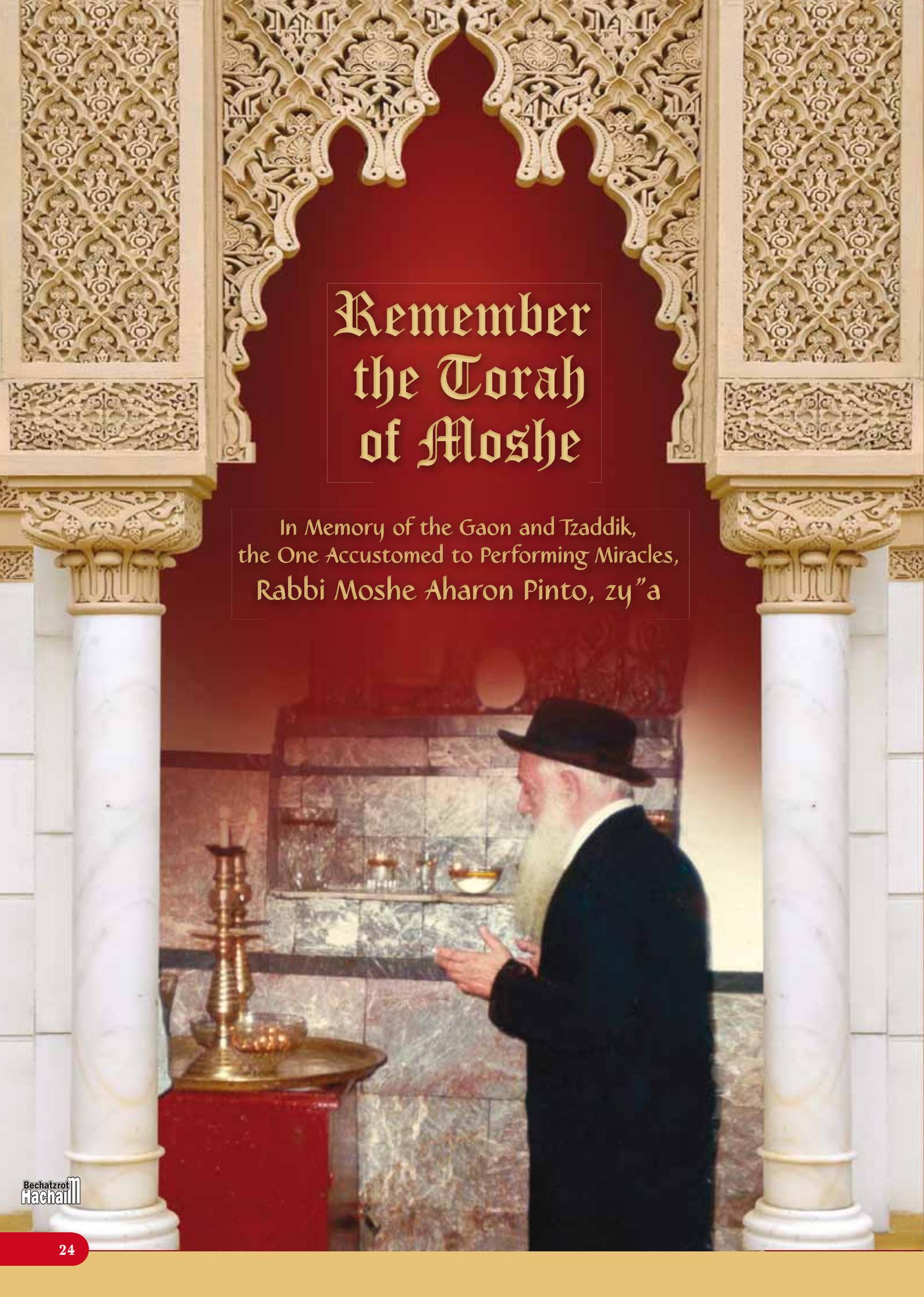


The Gates of Heaven Are Open

In the sefer *Otzrot Yerushalayim*, the Mahariaz Margolis, zt"l, in the section *Eis Ratzon* mentions specific times which are auspicious for tefillah:

1. Midnight (Shelah Hakadosh, in the name of the Idra, as quoted in Kumi Roni).
2. The break of dawn, which is auspicious for all types of prayer (Zohar III, p. 45).
3. Sunrise, for everything is dependent on the Ohr Haganuz (the "Hidden Light"), which is revealed each day, as the Zohar explains. Perhaps one will discover the exact time of day when this occurs, and his requests will immediately be fulfilled. It is an auspicious time to ask for all of one's requests before the actual sunrise (Imrei Pinchas, Parashat Shemot).
4. Morning (Zohar III, p. 204).
5. Together with a minyan in prayer. The Gemara (Berachot 8) says that when the public is praying, it is an auspicious time. The Rambam (Hilchot Tefillah 8:1) states, "The prayer of the public is always heard, even if sinners are among them. Hakadosh Baruch Hu never shuns the prayer of a group."
6. Silent Shemoneh Esrei (Tikkunei Zohar p. 38:8b). One may add his own request to the blessing that pertains to what he needs, at the end of the blessing of Shema Koleinu, or at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei (Shulchan Aruch 119:1; Mishneh Berurah, *ibid.*).
7. Nefillat Apayim (Zohar p. 200).
8. When the Sefer Torah is removed before the congregation, the gates of Heaven are open, as well (Zohar Chadash p. 206).
9. When Sages and tzaddikim are praying (Zohar Chadash I p. 137)
10. Minchah (Aggadat Bereishit 15).
11. From Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur (Sha'ar Ruach Hakodesh p. 50)
12. Asseret Yemei Teshuvah (Rosh Hashanah 18a; Zohar Chadash, Parashat Terumah).
13. During Birkat Kohanim. At this time, the Upper Worlds and lower worlds are blessed (Zohar p. 147).
14. The seven days after Pesach Sheini (Zohar Chadash III p. 152).
15. Every Monday and Thursday (Rema 134:1).

During a brit milah, when the newborn is crying, one should pray on behalf of a sick person or for the newborn himself. He should intend, with the words (Tehillim 6), "Favor me, Hashem, for I am feeble," that he himself is being circumcised at this time (Olelot Ephrayim 415). Every person should think of his problems when the baby is crying, for this pure voice pierces through all barriers of impurity and goes straight to Heaven. His private prayer, too, will adhere to the baby's cry and soar Heavenward. In Tehillim, it states, "For Hashem has heard the sound of my weeping," referring to the cry of the newborn. "Hashem has heard my supplication, Hashem will accept my prayer." This is a wonderful piece of advice (Hagahot of the gaon and kadosh MiGriditz, zt"l, printed at the end of Shabbat p. 130).



Remember the Torah of Moshe

In Memory of the Gaon and Tzaddik,
the One Accustomed to Performing Miracles,
Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, zy" a

The family would often see fire emerging from his room. Afraid of a conflagration, they would come rushing in... to find no trace of a fire. This was surely a spiritual flame, which emitted from the intense Torah study and holiness of our forefathers, zy”a, who cleaved to Hashem with their entire beings.



In honor of the upcoming *hilula* of the tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, zy”a, father of Moreinu, HaGaon HaTzaddik, Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita, we would like to present a few pearls from the treasury of customs and characteristics of this sage. These are culled from the trove of Moreinu’s lectures, in which he enlightens us with the Torah wisdom and elite qualities of his illustrious father.

The Torah (*Devarim* 17:18) describes how a Jewish king looks, his behavior, and his method of governing: “It shall be that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself two copies of this Torah in a book.” The word וְהָיָה (It shall be) contains the letters of the Ineffable Name, יהוה-וה. This teaches that only Hashem can manifest pride. No mortal king, who is here today and gone tomorrow, may don the mantle of pride. Just as the king must serve as an example to his subjects, so must every Rav, community leader, and *talmid chacham* act as a model of sterling qualities, guided by the holy Torah. He should serve as a symbol of good behavior for his flock to emulate.

I heard the following tale regarding the holy Admor of Alexander, zt”l, may Hashem avenge his blood. When the Germans, may their names be blotted out, took him out with his disciples to the crematorium, the

Admor stood before his disciples and told them in an emotion-laden voice, “You must know that we are now going to perform a *kiddush Hashem*. We will sanctify His Name throughout the world. Therefore, concentrate with purity on His Name alone. Beware, lest any wrong thoughts enter your minds, *chas v’shalom*. In this manner, our bodies will rise like perfect offerings, bringing untold pleasure to Hashem.” With the Admor at the lead, they proudly marched to their deaths.

The Admor had always led his flock with holiness and sanctity as his signposts. This is the meaning of the injunction, “Place upon yourself a king.” The king must know how to lead his people, at all times. He must be able to guide them through times of joy as well as sorrow, *rachmana litzlan*, for the eyes of the congregation are turned to him, as they await his word.

Unfortunately, today we have neither king nor prophet. However, Hashem, in His great mercy, has not abandoned us. In every generation, He has planted tzaddikim, *chassidim*, and luminaries who guide us accordingly. *Talmidei chachamim* are called kings (*Yoma* 38b), for they, too, have the power to rule. They dominate their inclinations. Everyone would do well to take an example from them in how to serve Hashem correctly.

Humble Beginnings

Already as a young child, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon, the beloved son of the tzaddik, the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hakatan, zy”a, conducted himself with sanctity and abstinence, as he absorbed in his father’s house. He was a paradigm of humility and modesty. Additionally, he was blessed with an illustrious lineage. He shone like a brilliant diamond in the crown of the Pinto dynasty. One generation after another was filled with men of faith, devout, holy and pure, who were accustomed to performing miracles. They illuminated their generation with their light of Torah and *kedushah*.

Moreinu relates: “I perused the *ketubah* of my father, Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, zy”a. Between the lines, one can discern how well he was able to conceal his greatness. The word ‘Rav’ does not appear at all, only ‘the perfect Chacham.’ His father, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, is described there as ‘the Chacham who brings merit to the public.’ That is all. They humbled themselves to such an extent that even those closest to them did not notice their greatness. They always hid their virtues from

others and never behaved condescendingly. This is the perfect way to maintain peace among fellow men.”

Another important quality that Rabbi Moshe Aharon espoused was that of silence. As the *sifrei mussar* state, this attribute is fitting for Torah scholars. “This was the greatness of my father and teacher, the tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, zy”a. Everyone considered him a tzaddik and *chassid*. He was a great Kabbalist, yet remained humble. Although he did not write an essay or sefer on *pshat* or *sod* (the simple and hidden meanings of the Torah), everyone respected him and came from afar to seek his blessings and advice. He hardly spoke with us, his sons, surely not with others. Whenever we would ask, ‘Why doesn’t Father go out a little bit?’ he would respond, ‘If I go out, people will speak to me about all sorts of things. As we know, in an abundance of words, offense will not be lacking (*Mishlei* 10:19). Therefore, I prefer to remain at home.’

“The power of speech is such that with one word, a person can build or destroy. A well-known Rosh Yeshiva once approached me and asked me to put in a good word about his yeshiva with a wealthy philanthropist. All he asked was that I say his yeshiva was good. I complied. After some time, the Rosh Yeshiva phoned me and, with profuse thanks, said that after

I ‘put in a good word,’ the man donated a much larger sum than he usually did.”

A Fiery Spirit

Many people ask Moreinu, “How did your father acquire such lofty qualities?” The answer is that he knew that all worldly matters are inconsequential. Honor and praise, therefore, did not speak to him. He never allowed himself to be won over by any form of acclaim. His sole aim in life was to study Torah and observe mitzvot. All he desired was to sanctify Hashem’s Name in this world. Thus, he succeeded in vanquishing his *Yetzer Hara*. Respect for his fellow man’s honor was legendary.

Many who were acquainted with Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, related that they were afraid to look at his face, due to the intense light that shone from it. “My mother, may she live long, relates the following about my father, zy”a: The family would often see fire emerging from his room. Afraid of a conflagration, they would come rushing in... to find no trace of a fire. This was surely a spiritual flame, which emitted from the intense Torah study and holiness of our forefathers, zy”a, who cleaved to Hashem with their entire beings. They merited having the fire of Torah burn within them and the fire of the *Shechinah* shine on their faces. This was the level Am Yisrael attained



Rabbi Moshe Aharon replied, “Here are the glasses with oil which I am accustomed to light in memory of the tzaddikim. Point to one. If it is the cup designated to the memory of my holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, you will know that your salvation is near.”

as they encamped around the Mishkan. Their exalted level shielded them from fearing the *Shechinah's* fire which burned in the Mishkan.”

Living Their Dreams

I would like to relate an example of how Hashem fulfills the desire of the tzaddik who goes in His ways and fulfills His word wholeheartedly. A short time ago, I participated in the birthday celebration of a very elderly woman, a relative of Pinchas Avitan of Paris.

Her daughter, Leah, related the following: When she was sixteen years old, her parents suggested a match with someone much older. She adamantly refused to hear of the match, but her parents were determined to go ahead

with it. The girl was greatly distressed by this. In her anguish, she turned toward the home of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, zy”a, and related all that was on her heart.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon replied, “Here are the glasses with oil which I am accustomed to light in memory of the tzaddikim. Point to one at random. If it is the cup designated to the memory of my holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hagadol, zy”a, you will know that your salvation is near.”

The young girl, deeply ingrained with faith in the sages, pointed to one of the glasses. Sure enough, it was the one used for the memory of Rabbi Chaim Pinto. Father immediately told her to go home in peace for she had nothing to fear. “You will merit deliverance this very

day and in the near future, you will find your intended match.”

She had hardly stepped over the threshold of her house when both parents approached her, stating, “We realized that the man in question is much older than you. It is therefore appropriate to break off this match. Bring back all the jewelry he sent and we will return it.”

Father’s words had come true. After some time, she married a fine young man from Paris. After a smooth pregnancy, she found herself and her newborn in a life-threatening condition, *rachmana litzlan*. When the situation became desperate, her husband rushed to Father, explaining everything. Father covered his face and then told him, “I promise you that your wife will be healthy and,

Be'ezrat Hashem, no harm will come to her. However, regarding the baby, I cannot guarantee anything. I have a feeling that he will not make it." That was exactly what happened. The baby gave back his soul to his Maker, while his mother lived for many more years.

Why did these tzaddikim merit Hakadosh Baruch Hu fulfilling their decrees, as we cite, "The desire of those who fear Him, He fulfills"? It is because they were scrupulous in serving Hashem, devoting their lives for the sake of the Torah. They sacrificed all that was dear to them for His honor, never worrying about the money involved in doing mitzvot.

Alacrity in doing mitzvot demonstrates that a person is happy to do his Master's bidding, yearning for the opportunity to serve Him at all times, however he is expected to. Such a person earns Hashem's unlimited love and Hashem, in turn, fulfills his desires.

An Eventful Journey

My father and master, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, zy"ta, lived in dire poverty all his life, to the extent that my sister remembers making do with a slice of bread and a glass of tea for her morning meal, since Father could not afford even



milk or other staples. Once, when she was beset by hunger pangs, she begged Father to provide something to still her hunger. Father sent her to a neighbor to ask for some food. In spite of his difficult financial condition, Father was always happy with his lot, constantly thanking Hashem for what He had given him. As is known, he spent forty years cloistered in his house, abstaining from all forms of materialism.

Father's humility was his crowning glory. He never considered himself great. He always distanced himself from arrogance, conducting himself with humbleness and modesty toward everyone he met. This is why he merited a number of revelations from Eliyahu Hanavi, may his memory be blessed. He was also graced with Divine spirit. The quality of humility is tremendous and has the power to shoot a person upward, to the very pinnacle of perfection, attaining *ruach hakodesh*.

I would like to relate a story which I heard from Mr. Shlomo Weitzman, z"l, regarding my father. In the winter of 1968, Father visited Eretz Yisrael and was hosted by Mr. Weitzman. One evening, Father told his host, "I would like to travel now to Meron, to visit the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. I want to ask his permission to emigrate from Morocco to the Holy Land."

"Weren't you there just two weeks ago?" Mr. Weitzman asked.

"True, but I haven't yet received an answer from Rabbi Shimon. I am scheduled to return to Morocco soon, and it is urgent that I get an answer immediately!"

"It's very rainy tonight. Perhaps we should delay the trip until tomorrow," suggested Mr. Weitzman. But Father was adamant. "I will go regardless."

Shlomo Weitzman asked his neighbor, Mr. Peretz, if he would like to join them for the

trip. After he agreed, the three of them took a taxi to Meron. They were still not sure if they would find the place open. In those days, the gates to the monument of the grave were not always open, as they are today. Alas, they found the place locked up. However, they could pray outside the gates, where, according to tradition, is the actual burial site of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. But Father wanted to go inside. He spent some moments lost in thought and then told his escort, "I want to go to Moshav Safsufa."

Mr. Weitzman looked at him, dumbfounded. "Indeed, this settlement is not far from here, but what could you want there?" he asked.

"A number of years ago, I blessed someone by the name of Ben-Shushan with a baby boy. I think his wife gave birth not long ago and they are in the midst of preparing for the *brit milah*. It is fitting for us to go there and participate in the *brit*. After that,

we will decide what to do next."

"Fine. But how do you propose getting there?"

"Let's go and flag down a taxi or a passing car."

The group made haste. Suddenly, a car stopped in front of them. The driver asked where they were headed. "To Moshav Safsufa," was their reply.

"Please come in."

As soon as they arrived there, they heard joyous music and realized that Father had been right. The place was humming with the happy anticipation of a *simchah*. The threesome stepped out of the car. As soon as Shlomo let go of the door handle, the car disappeared into thin air. Stunned, he cried out, "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai!" Father signaled to him to remain silent and then whispered, "As long as I live, I forbid you to relate what you have witnessed. After my passing, you may relate what you saw. Please do not ask for any explanations."

Mr. Shlomo Weitzman related this story at the end of the *shivah* for Father, a"n. Upon analysis, I was left wondering: Why was Father so insistent on hiding this miracle? It must have been because, all his life, he kept away from arrogance. He fled from honor like one flees from fire. Father was afraid that if this miracle were to be publicized, a trace of pride might enter his heart. He therefore preferred concealing it until after his death.

This is the way of the righteous. They are considered kings, for they scrupulously fulfill all the mitzvot of the Torah. The phrase, "You shall place a king upon yourself" aptly suits them, for they know how to overcome their base instincts. They have sharpened the skill of ruling over their *Yetzer Hara*. They thereby subjugate it for the sake of Hashem and the glory of His Torah.

One who rules over his *Yetzer Hara* is promised, "He will prolong years over his kingdom, he and his sons amid Israel." If a person truly knows how to rule his *Yetzer Hara* and gain full control over it, he is guaranteed that his children, too, will rule over their inclinations and negative tendencies. Their father's holiness becomes an inherited trait.

May Hashem help us rule over our *Yetzer Hara* and control our desires. May we and our children always act for Hashem's sake, Amen.



BY RABBI YOSEF ELKOUBY

MAY HIS MERIT PROTECT US



“The merits of the tzaddikim” and “the merits of our fathers” and other similar lofty concepts seem to us to be relevant to the past, to our forefathers. The stories of fantastic miracles that took place in the merit of the righteous people of the generation and the wonders that they did, in our mind, belong to previous eras.

The readers of *Bechatzrot Hachaim* have read many accounts that testify to the wonders wrought by the exalted tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, who is buried in Mogador, which is now Essaouira, Morocco. These stories demonstrate how events which would, according to the dictates of nature, lead to a certain conclusion, were nevertheless led to a different conclusion through the intervention of the holy tzaddik. Rabbi Chaim, through arousing Heavenly mercy

and because of his own merits, was able to decree a change in reality. The righteous one decrees and Hashem fulfills his decree, in every detail and in the most wondrous way, each time anew.

We read these stories and wistfully sigh, “How wonderful were those days, when the merits of the tzaddikim brought such extraordinary salvations, totally against the ways of nature.”

Is this true? Was it only then that this merit existed and brought people deliverance? Nowadays, are we to be content merely with relating the miracles of the past?

This article will prove just the opposite. In it, we will describe

wondrous events and salvations that have taken place in our times. These are miracles that have occurred to people just like me and you, at times that they were in need, in the merit of the holy tzaddik, accustomed to performing miracles, Rabbi Chaim Pinto. Many of these stories have been related to us by the protagonists themselves. These people witnessed with their own eyes the tremendous power of “the merit of the tzaddik.” Miracles take place in our times. The merit of the tzaddikim is eternal.

Moreinu, shlita, takes every opportunity to say, “The wondrous deeds and famous stories concerning



miracles that are told about the tzaddikim, may their souls rest in peace, publicize Hashem's Name. They strengthen the hearts of those who hear them, inspiring them to increase their service of Hashem." It seems that to some extent, the accounts of miracles that take place in our times make an even greater impression than such stories of previous generations. "And they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant."

FROM MOUTH TO EAR

The *hilula* in honor of the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy" a, is held

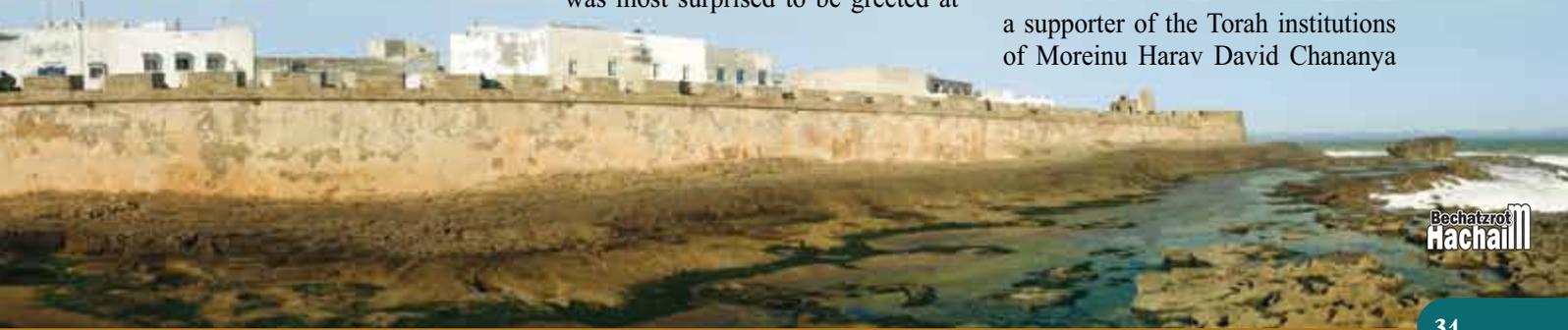
every year in Morocco and is attended by thousands of people, who come to Mogador from all over the world. During the *hilula*, fabulous stories of the miracles and wonders that were wrought in his merit are related by the participants. They become infused with the power of faith in Hashem Yitbarach, and in his servants, the tzaddikim. This enables them to make a stronger commitment to Torah and mitzvot.

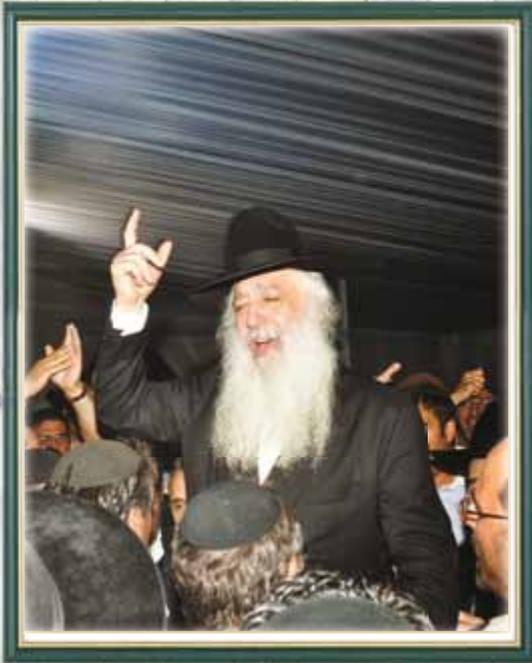
The following story was related at the *hilula*, a few years ago. Here is the account, as confirmed by its protagonist:

A businessman from Ra'anana was most surprised to be greeted at

the entrance of his office by a team of officials from the tax authorities. They had come to inspect his business. It seemed that they had been tipped off that they would find incriminating documents in his possession. They did not find any. However, they began to confiscate other files that they thought were suspicious. The purpose of their visit was unclear to the businessman, but he was filled with dread at the thought that they would find some pretext to incriminate him and indict him with conducting his business against the law.

What should he do? A believing Jew searches for merits. This man is a supporter of the Torah institutions of Moreinu Harav David Chananya





“Come, let us make a deal. We will all pray to the Creator that in the merit of these tzaddikim, the stone will give birth, and you shall merit children... Because I see how strong your faith in the Creator is, and how greatly you rely upon Him for salvation in the merit of the tzaddikim, with His help, you will soon merit salvation.”

Pinto, shlita. He immediately phoned the Rav and worriedly told him what had happened. The Rav sighed and said, “I know that you possess great faith in the merits of Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto. Continue to strengthen this faith, as you always have, and I am certain that you will yet witness salvation, with Hashem’s help. Remove all worry from your heart. I know that you are an honest and reliable person. No one would believe that you would be involved in embezzlement. If you did nothing wrong, with the help of Hashem, nothing bad will happen to you.”

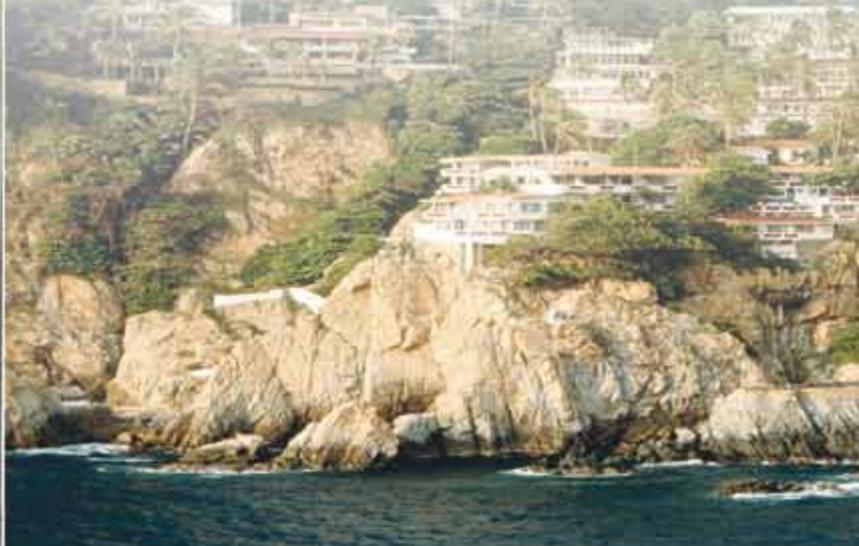
The man heeded the advice of the Rav and strengthened his faith in Hashem and the merits of the tzaddikim. He fully believed that Hashem would send him salvation in the merit of the tzaddik.

Three days later, the tax officials returned and informed him that they had not found any trace of wrongdoing in his accounts. The report that they wrote about him even praised him for running his business in such an upright manner!

This story was related at the *hilula* in Mogador. A man came up to the Rav and whispered in his ear, “Honorable Rav, the Rav promised this man that if he had done nothing wrong, nothing would happen to him. In the end, it was clarified that he had acted honestly. Where is the miracle here? *Baruch Hashem*, we are speaking about a trustworthy and law-abiding person who did not do anything wrong. This is why the tax officials did not find any incriminating evidence against him!”

It was obvious that this man knew nothing of the way the Israeli authorities work; every clerk presents difficulties and delays. He did not realize how close this businessman was to a prolonged and exhausting court case, which could take years to resolve and would cause him tremendous aggravation.

The Rav continued, “Until it was proven that this man was innocent of all blame, and the tax officials declared that he was conducting his business lawfully, he was beset with worry. He thought that the authorities might lose the important documents that they had taken, which could prove his innocence. They might also relegate his case to the back burner, unwilling to invest the effort into examining the facts. It was therefore of paramount importance that he pray, in order to precede the cure to the disease. Often a person undergoes what is deemed a ‘minor’ operation, yet never wakes up, *rachmana litzlan* ... One must pray in every situation and always hope for the miracles of Hashem Yitbarach.”



A SMALL SURPRISE

The people of Mexico eagerly anticipate the wonderful Shabbatot that Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita, spends with them. These Shabbatot are filled with spiritual elevation and joy. People from the entire area come to join the exalted prayers and the exciting Shabbat *seudot*. In Sivan 2011 (תשע"א), the citizens of Mexico City merited spending a Shabbat of spiritual inspiration and elevation with the Rav. The participants enjoyed the splendid radiance of the holy Shabbat. The Rav spoke words of Torah, including, as is his way, stories of the miracles and wonders that took place in the merit of his holy forefathers, zy"ta.

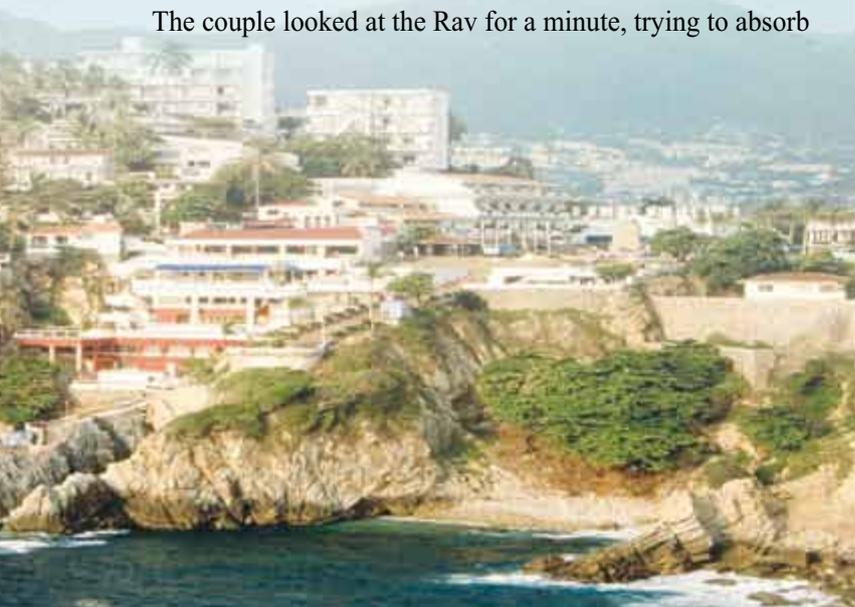
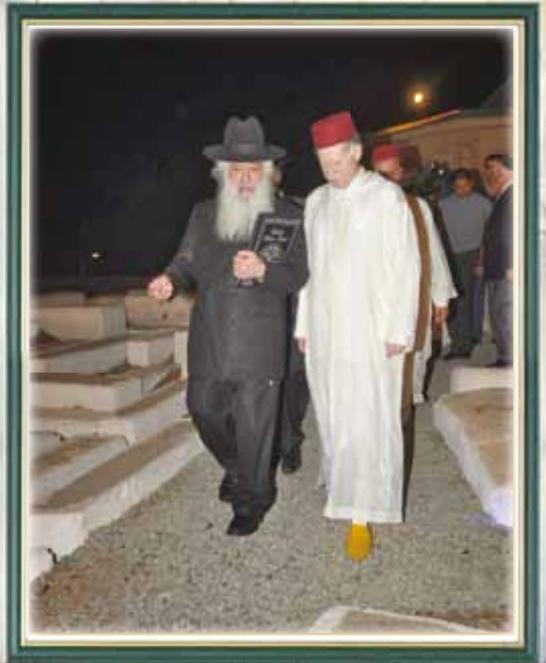
One of the Rabbanim of Mexico attended this Shabbat with his wife. The Rav, shlita, was well-acquainted with this Rabbi, since he always approached him to ask for a blessing for children. He and his wife had been married for many years, but had not yet been blessed with a family. Of course, every time he asked, the Rav gave him a heartfelt blessing.

After Minchah of this wonderful Shabbat, this Rabbi and his wife approached the Rav. He emotionally began, "Honored Rav, we have heard many stories about your holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy"ta, throughout this Shabbat. They clearly illustrate the great powers that the tzaddik possessed in requesting salvation from the One Above. We would like to request that the Rav, shlita, pray for us that the merit of the tzaddik should stand by us for salvation, and we will merit children."

With tears in his eyes, he continued, "According to the doctors there is no possibility for us to have children. One even said: Just like a stone can never give birth, neither can you... However, after this elevating Shabbat, when we have heard so many encouraging stories, we understand that the tzaddikim can effect salvation in Heaven. So, maybe even a stone can give birth..."

Later, the Rav, shlita, said that when he heard these words, he did not know what to do with himself. But he gathered his strength and replied, "If you want the stone to give birth, you must turn to the One Who made the stone and ask for His help."

The couple looked at the Rav for a minute, trying to absorb



what he had said. Then, they both burst out in heart-rending sobs, and were unable to stop. Tears streaming down his face, the husband said, “Rabbi David! We have heard such wondrous miracles that took place in the merit of the tzaddikim. You are a scion of this wonderful dynasty, the descendant of Rabbi Chaim, and the son of Rabbi Moshe Aharon, zy”a. Please, call upon the great merits of these tzaddikim in Heaven, so that they should pray for us before the Heavenly Throne, and not stop until we merit salvation, with the help of Hashem.”

The Rav could not bear to witness their terrible sorrow. He turned to them and said, “Come, let us make a deal. We will all pray to the Creator that in the merit of these tzaddikim, the stone will give birth, and you shall merit children... Because I see how strong your faith in the Creator is, and how greatly you rely upon Him for salvation in the merit of the tzaddikim, with His help, you will soon merit salvation.”

The couple went on their way. The Rav tearfully beseeched Hashem, “Please, Hashem, compassionate and merciful G-d, heal these unfortunate souls in the merit of my holy forefathers.”

Almost a year later, the Rav again visited Mexico to strengthen the community. Throughout that time, he had not heard a word from the couple. He remembered how

sincerely they had prayed to Hashem and, on various occasions, he said that he “firmly trusted that Hashem Yitbarach can do anything.”

The Rav was hosted by one of the distinguished members of the community. One day, the host said to him, “Honored Rav, we have a special surprise for you this evening.” The Rav did not know what he meant and waited to see what would happen. The surprise came. The Rabbi who had approached the Rav with his wife on that Shabbat a year earlier now came to greet him. As he stepped forward, the Rav saw that he was holding something and that he was very emotional. As he came closer, the Rav realized that he was holding a baby!

The first thought that entered the Rav’s mind was that this couple had adopted a baby... But then the man began to cry and burst out, “Honorable Rav, the stone gave birth to a boy.”

A great *kiddush Hashem* was made by this story at the *hilula*. Everyone present heard from this Rabbi the story of the fantastic miracle that he and his wife experienced in the merit of the holy tzaddikim. Everyone praised and thanked Hashem Yitbarach for His great kindness. They witnessed how the simple faith of this Jew in Hashem and His servants the tzaddikim merited him this great salvation, which was beyond the bounds of nature.

"G-D OF RABBI CHAIM PINTO, ANSWER ME!"

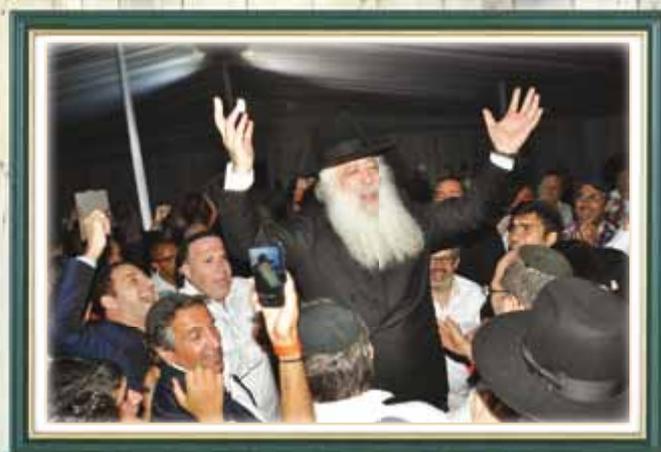
The niece of the Rav, his sister’s daughter, told me the following story. Once, she was in New York and was due to take a flight on a Thursday back to her home in Canada. Shabbat was approaching, and, to her chagrin, there was a transportation strike. The only way to travel was by taxi. Hundreds of people were on the streets waiting for a taxi to pass and take them to their destinations.

This young lady also stood outside with her suitcases, trying to flag down a taxi to take her to the airport. The time of her flight was getting closer, but every taxi she saw was already full. She did not know what to do. Suddenly, she started shouting, “Ribbono shel Olam, I must get home, it’s already Thursday... What am I going to do?”

In front of all the passersby, she started crying and then called out, “G-d of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, answer me!”

Suddenly, an awesome thing happened. To her surprise, a taxi pulled up at the curb next to her. Several people ran to the door, begging the driver to take them to where they needed to go. He refused. Pointing to the Rav’s niece, he declared, “I’m not taking any of you. I will only take this young woman.”

The driver helped her put her suitcases in the trunk and set off. When



they had been traveling for a while, she happened to look up and notice the identification tag with the information of the driver written on it. Her heart fell as she read his name and realized that he was an Arab. This was at the time of tremendous strain between the Arabs and the Jews. She was filled with dread.

Then, the Arab turned to her and asked, "Where are you from?"

She replied, "My family is from Morocco, from Essaouira. I am the granddaughter of Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, zy"a." When the driver heard this, he stopped the car in surprise. With great respect, he turned to her and said, "I am also from Morocco, from that town." He told her that once a year an important Rabbi comes to Morocco and conducts a *hilula* in Essaouira at the grave of Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto.

The Rav's niece was amazed. She smiled and replied, "That Rabbi is my mother's brother." When the driver realized who his passenger was, he stepped on the gas and made every effort to hasten the journey. They arrived at the airport in good time, and the Rav's niece was able to make her flight.

Hashem's kindness was revealed in another detail of this episode. At the end of the journey, the Rav's niece realized that she did not have enough money to pay the full fare of the ride. The driver merely said, "Driving the granddaughter of the tzaddik from whose town I come is worth all the money in the world." He gladly relinquished the money she owed him.

THE WALL OF SALVATION

This story was related to Moreinu by the stall owner, Mr. Dahan, who sells oil for lighting candles at the grave of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes, zy"a, in Tiveria. Mr. Dahan told this story about his father, who was a young man living in Casablanca at the time. Once, a man was walking through the city carrying a heavy crate on his back. When he saw Mr. Dahan's father, he asked him, "Please would you be good enough to help me carry this crate to my house. It's on the top floor." His father did not hesitate and happily helped this man carry his heavy burden. But after he put the crate on the floor, the man quickly shut the door and turned on him with a large knife, threatening to kill him.

Although he was very strong, Mr. Dahan's father was terrified and remained frozen in his place. In his heart welled up a silent cry, "G-d of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, answer me." He was certain that in the merit of the tzaddik, he would yet witness miracles and salvation. He was filled with simple faith, believing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu would not abandon him and that mentioning the name of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy"a, would stand by him and protect him from all evil.

Mr. Dahan was extremely emotional as he related the rest of the story, "Suddenly, without any warning, the wall separating the house from the stairway collapsed. My father, z"l, seized this opportunity and ran for

YOUR CHOICE

One day, a young child visited the Rav, shlita. The Rav knew that he was computer-savvy and asked his mother what sort of things he could do. The mother began to describe her son's proficiency on the computer, and the Rav commented on his talents.

As is his way, the Rav cited this occurrence in one of his speeches in order to impart an important message. He was describing the tremendous talents of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy"a. The Rav said, "This child's knowledge and expertise in computers at such a young age was truly astounding. However, Rabbi Chaim Pinto wrote a book of his interpretations of the Torah when he was merely thirteen! He mentioned in the introduction that he wrote this book as a gift to his father on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah.

"Each person must choose what he will do with the gifts that Hashem has given him. Will he use them to make innovations in secular fields or in the holy Torah?"



One never loses out by giving charity. If he desists from doing so, in the end, Heaven will ensure that he will spend the same sum on something less worthy



his life. He fled through the streets from the sword of death and was saved. This was all in the merit of the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto, who was accustomed to performing miracles.”

Mr. Dahan continued, “My father was astounded at this miracle that had saved him from certain death. As an expression of his limitless gratitude for Hashem’s wondrous deliverance, he vowed to build a Beit Hakeneset in the memory of the tzaddik Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, when he would be able.”

He fulfilled this vow by building a Beit Hakeneset in Tiveria named after the tzaddik. After his death, the family decided to also build a *mikveh* in memory of the tzaddik. This was another manifestation of their gratitude toward Hashem Yitbarach for saving their father in the merit of Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto, may the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing.

THE GREAT MERIT OF CHARITY

Moreinu was also told this story by its protagonist:

I was fortunate to participate in the great *hilula* of the holy *mekubal* Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto Hagadol, zy”a, in Elul 2010 (ט”ש). I joined in the auction for the privilege of opening the gates of the monument over the grave, which would be given to the highest bidder. The sum rose from minute to minute, until it became very large. I was just about to offer an even higher sum, when I suddenly caught the eye of my wife, standing farther away. She motioned to me to stop bidding, since she thought the amount was too much. I deferred to her opinion and was quiet.

About two weeks later, I was summoned to the income tax offices. I was being charged concerning my business and was told to pay... exactly the same amount of money that I had wanted to donate to charity for opening the monument of the tzaddik.

This amazing story does not end here. During the hearing, one of the officials of the tax authorities said these words to me, “You should know that about one year ago, your file had been closed. No one had any intention of claiming this money from you. But on such-and-such a date, we examined your case again and realized that you were obligated to pay this sum.”

The date upon which the tax authorities conducted their re-evaluation of my case was the date of the *hilula* of the tzaddik. It was the same day that I had intended to give charity in order to open the gates of the monument over the grave of the tzaddik, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto.

This episode taught me that one never loses out by giving charity. If he desists from doing so, in the end, Heaven will ensure that he will spend the same sum on something less worthy. Instead of gaining a mitzvah through giving charity, he will lose out. He will be forced to spend his money in a different way, as it says, “They leave their wealth for others.”

ADVANCING WITH LOVE

This is a story about a sincere Jewish woman, who succeeded in drawing close to her Father in Heaven in a wonderful manner by honestly contemplating, “What does Hashem want of me, and how can I fulfill His will?” Her success reflects her amazing willpower to persevere.

No, there are no extraordinary miracles to recount. There was no major upheaval or change in the order of nature. It was an ordinary event portraying a sincere Jewish daughter’s inner battle to meet her challenge. In a spiritual sense, it was truly an earthshaking event portraying how she overcame difficult obstacles in order to perform Hashem’s will with love.

This commendable woman wrote to us, asking that we publicize her story in order to bring merit to the public. Her words speak for themselves. The intensity of emotion that we sense between the lines reflects the wholehearted devotion

of a Jewish daughter, who maintains a strong love for Hashem in every situation. This is because the burning belief within propels her to cleave to Him and guard His mitzvot completely, despite all obstacles and challenges.

A TIME TO STEP BACK

My story began more than three years ago. My husband and I are very close to the tzaddik Rabbi David Pinto, shlita. We participate in the annual *hilula* that is held during the week before Rosh Hashanah, in memory of his holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a, in Essaouira, formerly Mogador.

That year, I decided to prepare myself spiritually for the uplifting event of the *hilula*. The thought crossed my mind that I should accept upon myself to begin keeping the mitzvah of covering my hair, as proper married Jewish women do, so that I would advance in my spiritual ascent.

I would like to preface by explaining that since I got married (over seventeen years ago), I have observed Shabbat. Likewise, for over eleven years, I have taken upon myself to dress modestly, in proper Jewish style.

I am no stranger to head coverings, since I was always careful to cover my head on Shabbat and festivals. Therefore, it seemed natural to take this step forward at this opportune moment and begin covering my hair at all times. The uplifting *hilula* sweeps all the participants off their feet, raising them above the materialism that weighs people down in their daily life.

I saw this as a personal challenge. I did not tell anyone about my decision, not even my husband. Of course, I was careful not to make a vow that I would cover my hair, but only resolved to try my best.

In the following days, I succeeded in sticking to my decision in a discreet manner, so that no one would notice the change. I wore a variety of hats and berets and wrapped matching scarves around my head.

After a month, my resolve broke. I did not feel like myself in a head covering. I confided in one of my close

friends, describing how I felt trapped by my decision. My friend knows me well and wisely advised me to ease off for now. “If you force yourself to do this against your will, you are liable to rebel against the mitzvah and then it will be harder for you to tackle it in the future, when you are better prepared.”

With a heavy heart, I took her advice (she understood my nature well), and regretfully I discontinued my improved conduct.

The following year, when I arrived in Morocco as usual, I was filled with a feeling of failure and despair. I felt that I had been unsuccessful in a very important area. My thoughts raced between cold logic: “Why did this happen to me?” and my emotions of: “How wonderful it would have been had I persevered.” I began to feel a lack of self-worth, and entertained the thought that perhaps I was not worthy of fully reflecting the image of a modest Jewish woman.

The disappointment was difficult, especially since until then I had always succeeded in sticking to other new things I had taken upon myself. I had managed to overcome extremely challenging situations, and, in the end, my commitment had always come through.

HASHEM’S BLESSINGS

A new year arrived. A most significant year for me.

My husband opened a new business. And, just as in all beginnings, this first year was proving particularly difficult and challenging.

One morning, my husband met his former boss. His boss seemed glad to see him. “Our company owes you money,” he told my husband. “We discovered a savings plan in your name, and there is a substantial sum of money waiting there for you,” he added, handing him a letter with details explaining how to receive the money.

WHAT A BLESSING!

Just on that day, the tzaddik Rabbi

David Pinto, shlita, was coming to our neighborhood.

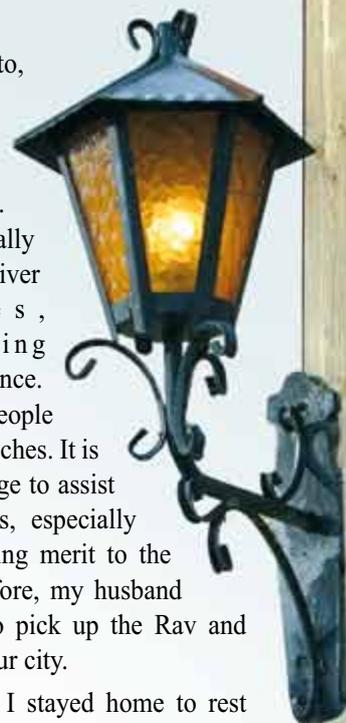
He occasionally came to deliver lectures, strengthening Torah observance. Many people attend his speeches. It is a great privilege to assist Torah scholars, especially when they bring merit to the public. Therefore, my husband had offered to pick up the Rav and drive him to our city.

Meanwhile, I stayed home to rest and gather strength after an exhausting day, in which I had invested many heartfelt prayers for clarity. On his way, my husband called and asked me to read the letter that he had brought home a short while before. I opened the envelope while my husband was still on the line and read the contents of the letter, which he had received from his former boss.

On the spot, I informed him that I would like to take upon myself an additional aspect of modesty and cover my hair. “I want to start this coming Monday,” I declared enthusiastically. I felt that I had received a clear sign from Heaven. Deep in my heart, I felt that since Hashem had given us such a generous gift, we should now repay Him for His kindness with real conviction.

This time, I chose an easier way to cover my hair, in order to make the transition smoother. I decided to begin by wearing a wig, as is customary in many Chareidi communities throughout the world. I obtained the phone number of an expert wig stylist and arranged an appointment for Monday. The truth is that I did not intend to buy a wig right away, but only gather information and meanwhile wear hats.

At this point, I started entertaining some doubts, which I now realize was only the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*. Suddenly, I started feeling panicky.





Disturbing thoughts threatened my piece of mind, “What did I fall into? What if I can’t do it? How will I survive in the summer in the sweltering heat? What about my beautiful hair? Will it look ‘wiggy’? What will my family and friends say?”

Basically, the *Yetzer Hara* was starting to work – and hard!

JUST LIKE A BRIDE

The big day arrived, and I took my fifteen-year-old daughter with me. Besides for her company and opinion, I also wanted to share this special experience with her. I walked into the store, my heart racing. I fixed my hair really nicely that morning so the saleslady could see what my real hair looked like. Upon entering, I immediately informed her that I had not come to buy anything. I wanted to first see what it was all about and try on some wigs.

She sized me up at a glance and told me, “I have the PERFECT one for you.” She brought out this THING that was supposed to look just like my hair. I was horrified. “Are you serious? Did you SEE my hair?” She assured me, “You can’t really tell how a wig will look until you wash, cut, and style it. Now it’s just a rough shape. No commitments – nothing – you can try it. I can cut and style it according to your taste when it’s on your head, and then you can tell me what you think. You have absolutely no obligation to buy!”

I was taken aback. Things were moving too fast. I hadn’t expected to make a purchase so quickly. My daughter kept saying, “Do it Mommy! You have nothing to lose.” She was right. I had nothing to lose, so I did it... and the results were WOW! Gorgeous! It was me, only I looked like I was going to a wedding or special occasion. I felt Hashem with me. Hashem had handpicked the perfect one for me on the first try. Kind of like trying on a wedding dress and you fall in love with the first one you try on. I tell my daughter she gets the credit for this because without her support,

I’m not sure I would have had the guts to do it.

When I came home that day, I went to see my friend (who had no idea I was even going to the wig store). I wanted to see if she would notice anything. NOTHING! She just complimented me on how pretty my “hair” looked. “Are you going to a *simchah* or something?” she asked. “Your hair looks great!”

“No! It’s a wig!” She couldn’t believe it. I told her I still wasn’t sure... maybe I’ll wear it only on Shabbat... only for *smachot*, etc... She said, “Each day you cover your hair is a ‘coin’ in your ‘mitzvah box’. No one can take that away from you.”

MY PERSONAL SPLITTING OF THE SEA

Many months have passed since the day I began to cover my hair. I can honestly say that the challenge that I so feared turned into a smooth transition, accompanied by a feeling of fulfillment. I have worn the wig every day since I bought it. I didn’t undergo a radical change, and that is what helped me fulfill the mitzvah. I had success, because I did it in an easier manner, which was right for me at the time.

I believe that Hashem saw how much I really wanted to fulfill this mitzvah, so He helped me along at my pace. Despite all my initial misgivings, most people I meet do not even notice anything until I tell them. Their reaction is very positive, complimenting me on how good I look. Perhaps on the outside, the change is not so noticeable, and I feel like myself. But inside the transformation is tremendous. I am able to pray with more concentration, and I became more committed to serving Hashem. I feel empowered.

This remarkable process demonstrated an important principle for me. We all come to this world to grow and advance in our spiritual pursuits. We are prodded on by the various challenges that we meet,

just as Rabbi Pinto, shlita, mentions in many of his lectures.

It aroused me to think a bit, and I would like to share these thoughts with you: What do we do after hearing a lecture? Do we just comment, “It was a lovely speech,” and continue on our way? Or do we draw practical conclusions for ourselves at the end of the lecture, and apply them to our lives? If we reflect, we can always find some aspect of our lives that needs improvement. We have to grow and advance – even if it means making a sacrifice or generating a profound change in our lifestyle. From my personal experience, I know how difficult it can be to be the first, or the only one in the crowd, to make a change.

I always recall the spectacular incident when, upon leaving Egypt, Am Yisrael came to the Yam Suf and were trapped between the ocean and the advancing Egyptian army. The threat was terrifying. They screamed and prayed to Hashem, but nothing happened. Only when they jumped into the water, when they performed an act, did Hashem split the Sea for them!

After Hashem split the Sea, the prolonged persecution of hundreds of years finally ended, and the redemption was complete.

We need to make that first step (be it for whatever good deed), and Hashem will split the Sea and help us succeed.

Thank G-d, I took the first step toward fulfilling the mitzvah of covering my hair. I hope to advance in this mitzvah in the future, with Hashem’s help. I aspire to wear more modest head coverings. I sense Hashem’s direct involvement with me, as His beloved daughter, who took the first step to come close to Him, and then got swept straight into His loving embrace.

A MIRACLE BABY

This is the story of Aharon Chaim Nissim, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Layani from Lyon:

Approximately four years ago, in 2010, on Shabbat, my son Aharon was born. The birth went well and everything seemed normal. But twenty-four hours later, my wife phoned me urgently to drop everything and rush to the hospital because the baby was having difficulty breathing. When I arrived, I saw his head enveloped in a balloon-like contraption in order to help him breathe. The doctor took us aside and informed us that as far as they could see, the baby was suffering from pneumonia and would have to be moved immediately to the intensive care unit in the hospital in Villefranche, about fifty kilometers from Lyon.

When we got to Villefranche, a great commotion ensued. The medical staff began to check the baby, and after a few hours of waiting, which seemed endless to us, the head of the ward informed us of the very worst: The baby had contacted a dangerous virus in his mother’s womb which had affected his brain, lungs, and all his vital organs. We were devastated and began to cry.

We soon realized that our only recourse was to turn to Hashem, the Ultimate Healer, and make changes in our lives to draw closer to Him. I took upon myself to behave more modestly and to stop greeting women and speaking to them casually. My wife began to cover her hair and dress according to Jewish law. She also begged me to call Rabbi David Pinto to pray for our son and tell him about the changes we had introduced in our home. He reassured us and told us not to worry.

During the next few weeks, my wife remained at the baby’s side around the clock, in the intensive care unit. There were alternate phases of progression and deterioration in his condition. The doctors monitored him daily.

After a month and a half, Aharon was finally discharged from the hospital, but he remained very weak

as a result of the virus. He suffered from nutritional deficiency, motor ailments, and it was likely that he would be mentally retarded.

After praying intensely and strengthening our connection with the tzaddik, the baby’s condition began to improve each month. His steady progress totally baffled the doctors and medical staff.

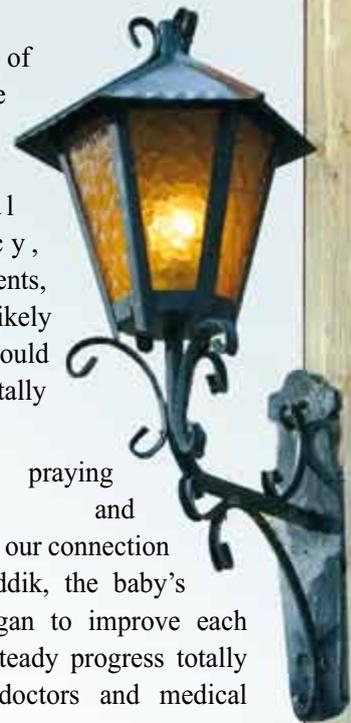
As he grew and began to talk, we would see him raise his eyes heavenward and speak to Rabbi Chaim Pinto saying, “See Rabbi Chaim, I am talking to you. Look, I can do this and this already.”

We were always surprised by these words. Many times he would ask for the help of Rabbi Chaim in playing a game or accomplishing some other task.

One Shabbat, when I returned from the morning prayers, I opened the door and saw my son standing glued to the window of the living room. The entire morning, my wife had been trying to teach him to walk. She said to him, “Well Aharon, show Daddy how you can walk!”

Then I saw my son let go and begin walking for three or four meters by himself. He was very proud of his accomplishment and gathered courage to try again, but this time he held on to the couch. He put out his hand, as if talking on the phone and said, “Look, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, that’s it, I’m walking!”

My whole family witnessed the scene and could not believe what they heard. They began to cry from sheer joy. This is our personal story regarding Rabbi Chaim Pinto, z”l.



By Rabbi Yosef Sofer

IN THE INNER SANCTUM

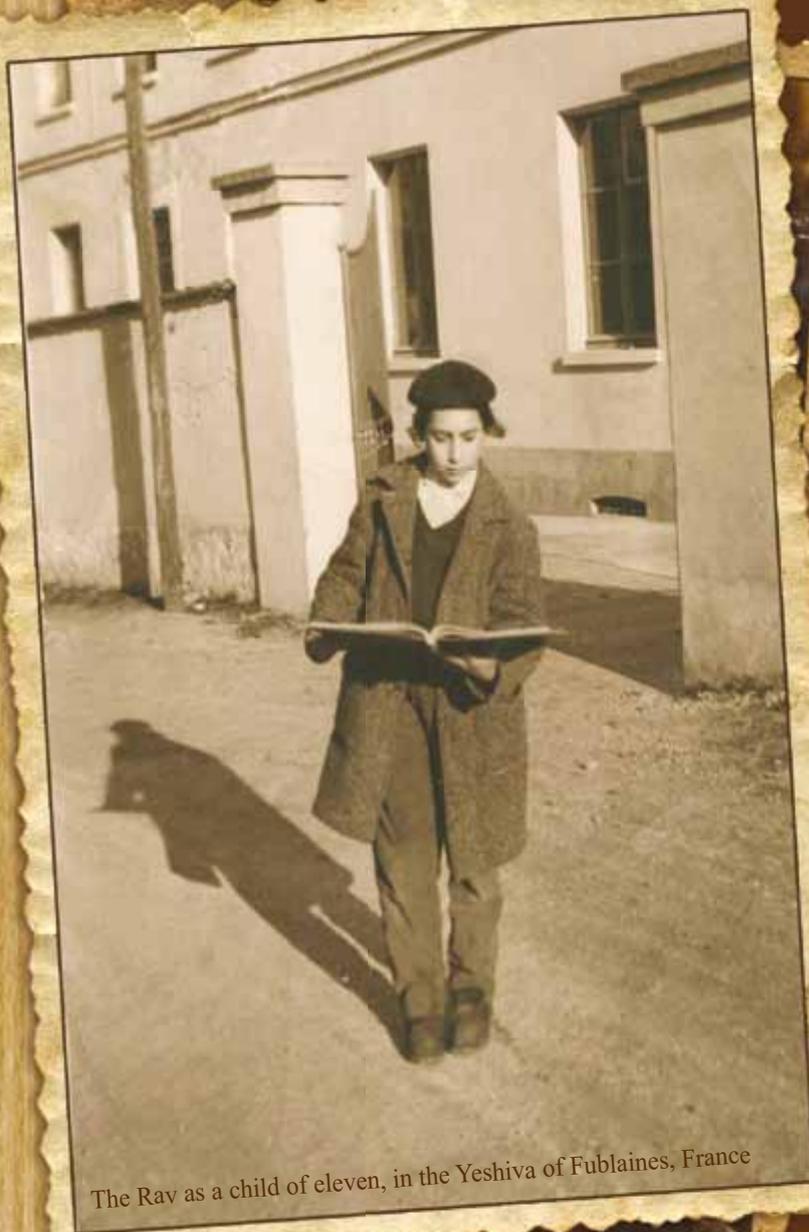
An interview with Moreinu v'Rabbeinu,
Harav **David Chananya Pinto**, shlita

**A rare interview with
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu,
the gaon and tzaddik,
Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita, who shared
with us memories
concerning**

His childhood and
education in Torah
centers abroad • His
father, who did not
attend his Bar Mitzvah •
His tremendous love of
Torah • The event that
caused him to devote
himself to the community
• How to bring others
close to Judaism • How
to infuse others with love
of Torah • The education
of his children • Love of
Torah in every situation •
The communities he has
established world-wide,
especially in France.

**Exciting stories and
valuable insights published
here for the first time in this
heart-to-heart talk with the**

Rav, shlita.



The Rav as a child of eleven, in the Yeshiva of Fublaines, France

A New Pair of Glasses

? *The tzaddikim of the Pinto family are known throughout the world for their greatness in Torah, their widespread tzedakah and chessed, the tremendous power of their tefillot, and their willingness to give counsel and support to all members of the Klal. The Rav, shlita, seems to have taken a different direction by entering the world of kiruv rechokim and bringing people back to the mesorah. For decades, the Rav has been considered one of the foremost leaders in France, and the whole of Europe. For many years, the Rav has traveled from country to country – including the United States, Canada, Eretz Yisrael, and Argentina. Each person who is distanced from Judaism and has embarked upon the journey of return, finds in the Rav the address for his questions and a wonderful source of advice. However, according to what we read about the illustrious Pinto family, it seems that the Rav's forebears were less involved with members of the public. Why has the Rav taken a new direction?*

In order to explain the reason for this, the Rav told a story about a Jew who lived in France.

This man never kept Shabbat, and had never tasted its holiness and beauty. One night, he dreamed that he saw the visage of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a. In his dream, Rabbi Chaim said to him, “You are causing me and your parents great distress. Your parents are with me, and they are terribly pained by your deeds. Stop! It is enough! Repent!”

The man tried to defend himself by saying, “Dreams don’t mean anything.” But the dreams kept coming back, and each time Rabbi Chaim rebuked him for desecrating Shabbat. After a while, the man gave in and started going to a *shiur* to increase his knowledge of Judaism. He then became completely observant, and kept the laws of Shabbat in all their intricacies. For approximately the past ten years,

he has taken upon himself to travel by plane to Mogador to the grave of Rabbi Chaim every year. There he prostrates himself upon his grave and offers prayers of gratitude that the tzaddik saved him from the depths of sin and brought him back to Judaism.

A few months ago, he had another dream about Rabbi Chaim Pinto. This time, Rabbi Chaim smiled at him and said, “You have a new pair of glasses.” Obviously, he was referring to “spiritual glasses.” Rabbi Chaim then added, “You see! It has taken ten years for you to be able to see properly...”

I believe that it is incumbent upon me to fulfill the responsibility involved in being the descendant of Rabbi Chaim, zy”a. Since I have *zechut avot*, I believe it is my duty to encourage people to keep mitzvot, such as putting on tefillin and going to the *mikveh*, etc. Everyone has problems. I am in the position to be able to say, “Do you have a problem? Maybe give something to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and He will help you.”

? *It seems that the Rav says that people’s problems will be solved on condition that they keep mitzvot?*

The expression “on condition” is not appropriate in this context. I never force a person to do anything. I just suggest that it is a shame for a person to request help from Hashem without doing something in return.

? *I have heard that the Rav suggests the practical segulah of “If you want to be helped, learn such and such.”*

I always tell people that if it doesn’t work, they should not blame me. I say, “I want you to do your part, and I will do mine. I want that you should have faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu.”

A precious Jew from Syrian descent, who lives in Brooklyn, came to me a short time ago and in a loud voice proclaimed, “I have come to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu!” This man did not have children

and had come to me for a *berachah*. Baruch Hashem, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. A few weeks ago, his daughter drowned in his swimming pool. She was found after a long time, when she was already floating on the water, and was declared dead even before the ambulance arrived. The father remembered the words of faith that I had spoken to him at every opportunity and shouted out, “Master of the world! Did you give me a gift in order to take it away from me? Please, Hashem, use Your tremendous powers to revive my child!”

The child woke up!

I was deeply touched by his story, and said to him, “How fortunate you are! In one minute you elevated yourself to the level of the great *Tannai’im*, who were able to revive the dead through their pure faith in Hashem.” I also encouraged him to further strengthen his observance of Torah and mitzvot.

I have instructed my sons to bring every Jew, whoever he is, close to Torah in this way, with a smile and much love. Even if this Jew is exceedingly distanced from Judaism, even if he has tattoos and the like on his body! Every Jew should be brought close with love!

When the Rav mentions that one should love every Jew, I am reminded of the time that I had the opportunity to speak with his son, Harav Hagaon Rabbi Refael Pinto, shlita. I asked him, “What is the secret of Moreinu, your father, the Rav’s success?” Rabbi Refael smiled, and replied with the same words that I just now heard from the mouth of the Rav himself: “They are our brothers. We love them!”

Moreover, when I asked Mr. Gabi Elbaz, the president of the Jewish community in Lyon, France, what he thinks is the secret of the Rav’s success in bringing the members of the community back to the fold, he thought for a moment and then answered: “Love!” It is obvious that words that come from the heart enter the heart and that the great love that the Rav has for every Jew paves the path toward their hearts.

In the center, the Rav at age twelve; at left, the gaon, Harav Avraham Yaffen, zt"l, disciple of the Sabba of Novardok, on a visit to the yeshiva in Armentieres



Only Torah

I merited speaking with the Rav during the Shabbat of the *hilula* in Mogador, Morocco. Throughout Shabbat and the days of the *hilula*, I accompanied the Rav, watching his actions and following his conversations. I sat at his private table during the Shabbat meals, observing what he did and reading between the lines of both his public speeches and the words of instruction that he gave to people who came to him privately.

Throughout this time, I heard, saw, and felt how all the Rav's words were directed toward one subject – the Torah. "Learn Torah. Go to classes on Torah. Spend your time and energies in learning Torah." The Rav constantly and consistently repeated these words.

? *When the Rav speaks about Torah, the Rav looks like a person who is... drunk with the words of the Torah, with love of Torah. (The Rav smiles on hearing this description of himself and nods his head in agreement.) Nothing but Torah! Where did the Rav take this idea from?*

The Rav sighs and travels to distant times.

From where did I get my love of Torah? How can it be otherwise? When I remember the tremendous self-sacrifice that my father, zt"l, had so that we should learn Torah,

it is impossible to act differently. The pasuk says, "I have set Hashem before me at all times." Additionally, the image of my father is constantly before me. He had tremendous self-sacrifice in sending me to a different country in order to learn Torah. My father and my mother both suppressed their natural feelings of compassion and longing so that I could learn Torah. I think it must have been much harder for him than it was for us. At least we had the three-day train journey to take our mind off the separation. We were distracted by the beautiful scenery and everything that was happening on the train. He was left at home, thinking about us.

This is the reason that his descendants alone have followed the ways of our holy forefathers. There are many descendants of the Pinto family, but only my father's sons have followed in the Pinto traditions, each one on his particular path to *kedushah* (sons of one father are we!), continuing the true heritage of our family.

My very bones are infused with my father's immense love and self-sacrifice for Torah.

? *Why did your father not allow you to learn in Morocco? What fault did he find with the system of learning there?*

My father, zt"l, had tremendous respect for the Sephardic way of learning. I also endorse learning

the simple meaning of the words; I am not one for sophisticated debate, even though I was educated in the Lithuanian way of learning. My teacher, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l, always learned the simple meaning of the words. He was a giant in learning, a tremendous *talmid chacham*, but he advocated learning the simple meaning of the words. He reviewed the words of Rashi many times. Perhaps, since at that time there were very few Sephardic yeshivot in Morocco, my father deemed it necessary to send us far away to learn.

There was another extremely important reason why my father sent us away. This was to ensure that we would be far away from the pernicious influence of the Alliance.

? *When you were in yeshiva, how did you cope with being so far away from home?*

When I was nine years old, I left home to learn in France and stayed there until I was thirteen. When I turned thirteen, my mother came to France to make my Bar Mitzvah. I didn't receive a new suit or a hat for my Bar Mitzvah. Afterwards, my mother further strengthened herself and sent me to England to acquire greater levels in Torah. I did not see my father for eight years!

Today it is easy to travel from one town to another by bus. Nowadays, there are so many yeshivot that every *bachur* can find a place to learn either close to home or a short bus-ride away. In those times we had to travel 3,000 kilometers to get to yeshiva!

? *How can a child withstand the difficulties of being so far away from home? How can he suppress the feelings of homesickness and the longing to be with his own family, supported by the love of his parents?*

There was no choice! My father educated us that learning Torah is our life's purpose. Even if we did not understand this 100% at the beginning, it was "by doing

something for ulterior motives, one comes to act for the sake of Heaven.”

Hashem Directs the Footsteps of Man

The Rav is silent for a while, engrossed in his memories. The silence could be cut with a knife. It is obvious that the Rav is reliving those feelings of yearning for his family and being cut off from his dear ones at such a young age in order to go to learn Torah.

Suddenly, the Rav awakens from his reverie and confides in us a most personal memory:

When I was twenty-eight, I came to a crossroads in my life. I didn't know whether to become a simple businessman or whether to follow the path paved by my holy forefathers. My father wanted me to continue in his ways, but I preferred to become a businessman and work for my living while keeping my service of Hashem private.

The Rav tells this over simply, as if he is talking about somebody else who isn't present. In his great humility, the

Rav tries to explain:

I didn't want that people would start to kiss my hand; I didn't feel that I was worthy of such a thing. I didn't understand what a blessing is – why a person should go to a Rav to get a blessing or guidance. There was no such thing in the yeshiva. I was somewhat “Litvish” in this matter. (The Rav smiles for a moment.) The only blessing that we got in the yeshiva was when the rabbanim there wished us a “Good Shabbos.” That was it. I didn't see the point of all of this.

I battled over this point for two years. I didn't know what to do. Then something happened that shook me up greatly and pointed which path in life I should take. A woman, whose daughter was on her deathbed, decided that I was the one whose blessing would heal her daughter.

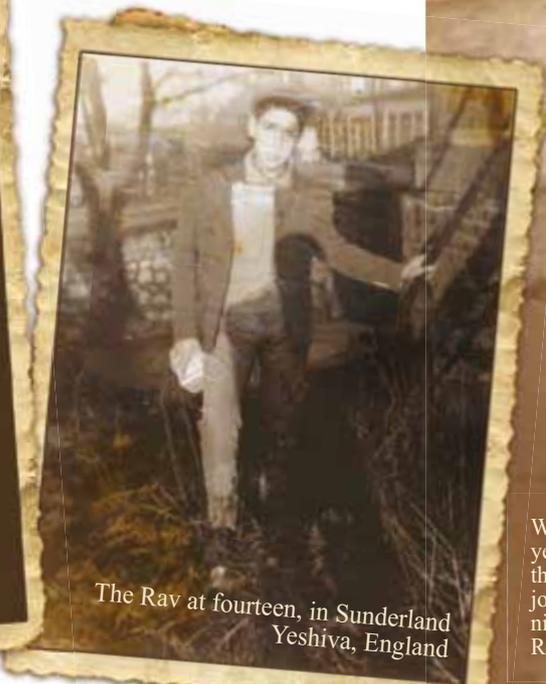
She came to me requesting that I bless her daughter. When I was unwilling to do so, she demanded it of me, breaking down in tears and pleading that I bless her daughter. She even said that if I didn't do so, she would die, “And it will be your fault!”

When she saw that I was still hesitant, she declared, “If your blessing comes true, I promise that I will make a large *seudah* of thanksgiving and dedicate it to the memory of Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy”a.” At

My father and my mother both suppressed their natural feelings of compassion and longing so that I could learn Torah. I think it must have been much harder for him than it was for us



The Bar Mitzvah of the Rav, with family in France



The Rav at fourteen, in Sunderland Yeshiva, England

When the Rav was nine years old, he traveled to the yeshiva in France, a journey of three days and nights, accompanied by Rabbi Moshe Ivgi, shlita

that moment, I found myself saying, "Prepare the *seudah*." In reality, I thought it was a joke.

When the woman returned home, she was informed that at the very time she had made this promise, her daughter had regained consciousness and woken up. A short while later, the daughter was able to get up, and subsequently returned to full health. The mother hurried to fulfill her promise of making the *seudah* in honor of Rabbi Chaim Pinto. I was invited to attend, and when I arrived, I was amazed to see the hall filled to capacity with many people who wanted to receive a blessing from me in the merit of my forefathers.

From that time on, I deferred to the wishes of my father, and began to involve myself in bringing my precious brothers back to the path of Torah and mitzvot.

Something that started as a joke, Baruch Hashem, has shown that "Hashem directs the footsteps of man."

A Strong Magnet

? *The Rav continues to involve himself in kiruv, and thousands of Jews throughout the world have merited hearing the Rav's words. A brief glance at the groups of young people coming from France proves that they are newcomers and that not so long ago they lived a completely different type of life. What makes them come? Why should they want to change their whole way of life?*

The Rav explains that many of these young people have received a basic Jewish education in their hometowns. Most of them are from Paris. "They have all acquired a basic of love of Torah and a tangible love of Hashem."

Some of these youths joined the Rav on at least one of the trips that he makes in Elul to the graves of tzaddikim. Last year, he went to

Gems of wisdom and practical guidance gleaned from the Rav during the interview

The Building of My Spiritual Character When I Was a Child

I acquired from my teachers a direction for life, as well as incredible love of Torah and fear of Heaven. I learned a tremendous amount from my teacher, Rabbi Shammai Zohn, zt"l, just by observing his actions. I am now in my sixties, and I still wish that I could turn back the clock and return to the yeshiva just to hear Rav Shammai pray Shacharit in a loud voice, and to hear him say the word "*Hamelech*," on Rosh Hashanah. His whole body would tremble when he said it. All of his prayers were infused with fear of Heaven.

If only I could go back to experience the prostration during the tefillah of Yom Kippur. It was difficult for Rav Shammai to prostrate himself, yet he always did so, completely. One is unable to forget such things; they become a part of you. They helped mitigate my longing for my parents.

To Strengthen Oneself in Mussar

I had wonderful teachers: Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l, Rabbi Shammai Zohn, zt"l, Rabbi Gershon Leibman, zt"l, and Harav Binyomin Kaufman, shlita. They taught me how to learn *mussar*, and they lovingly directed me on the correct path in life. I have merited learning many different paths of *mussar*. I learned the way of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter from Harav Shach, zt"l. But I also very much enjoy the path of Harav Ovadiah Yosef, zt"l, with his characteristic sweetness of presentation. I have been built up by all of these teachers.

An Inheritance

During the years of my youth, I learned from Gedolei HaTorah who were Litvish, and I accepted their way of learning and Avodat Hashem. I learned a tremendous amount from these rabbanim, who were the leading Torah scholars of that generation. The rabbanim of our times are small in comparison.

It was only when I matured that I returned to being a "Sephardi." When I traveled to Sephardic communities after my marriage, I then returned to the heritage of my forebears in both custom and the *nusach* of the prayers.

The Great Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l

I merited learning for three years, until I left yeshiva, from Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, the son of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian. I saw from up close the way he conducted himself in Avodat Hashem. I was always amazed that when he would open up a *sefer*, it would always open on the page that he needed!

A great rabbi once told me that when people asked him about this, he brushed aside their surprise. "Is this a miracle?" he would say. "What's so amazing? It's nothing! The main thing is to learn Torah."

In the Beit Hamidrash, he would walk between the *bachurim* slowly, in order not to disturb their learning. If anyone tried to get up in his honor, he would sharply rebuke them and tell them to sit down and resume their learning.

His personal Avodat Hashem in subduing his physical desires was incredible. He never finished the coffee and cake that he was given to eat. I always finished his cake for him.

What Is Mine and What Is Yours, Is All Hers

At a certain point, I considered stopping my work for the community in order to invest my energies into the education of my children. I addressed my question about whether I should do so to Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, zt”a, from Zurich, to whom I was very close.

He told me, “Rabbi David, if you do not do this, then no one else will.”

“What about the education of my children?” I asked him.

“You spend your time looking after the children of Hashem. He will look after your children! This is what the Chasam Sofer said.”

And so, I continued to devote myself to Hashem’s children, in the merit of the self-sacrifice of my wife, the Rabbanit, shetichiyeh. One can say about her the words that Rabbi Akiva said about his wife: “What is mine, and what is yours, all belongs to her.” I travel for long periods at a time, sometimes for a month or two, in order to bring merit to the community, and it is my wife who is responsible for educating our children. It is her merit that enables me to fulfill the words of the Chasam Sofer: Whoever devotes himself to the community, Hashem will look after his children.

Without “Protektziot”

When my sons became old enough to go to yeshiva, I asked the Gedolei Hador, Rav Steinman, shlita, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, and Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz, zt”l, where to send them. I wanted to come to live in Eretz Yisrael for three years so that they could learn in yeshiva here without any external distractions. Here, nobody knows who they are, the rabbanim in the yeshivot do not know them, and they would not be granted any special “protektziot.”

Baruch Hashem, I am happy that I did this, although not all of the rabbanim I asked advised me to do so. Those who advised it said that I could continue to spread Torah in Eretz Yisrael. When I asked what would become of the Jews in France, they replied that when they would see that I had moved to Eretz Yisrael, they would follow me here. Nevertheless, some were concerned about the people left in France.

And there were some who told me not to come to Eretz Yisrael, but to stay in France, since they felt that my sons would not suffer any bad effects by staying there.

When I returned to France, I redoubled my efforts to restore what I had built up so many years beforehand. Baruch Hashem, I received great *siyata di’Shemaya* in doing so.

His Sons

I brought up my children in an open manner. I would tell them that so-and-so is sick, or so-and-so has this problem (without names, of course). From when they were small children, I taught them about the different problems that people of this generation face. They grew up with this outlook, since I wanted them to be able to withstand the knowledge of such things. Baruch Hashem, I see that I was correct in taking this approach, since many young people come specifically to them to ask their advice (except in matters of *tzeniut*, which they ask me).

the graves of the Rav of Lublin, the *Maharshal*, the *Rema*, the *Chafetz Chaim*, the Vilna Gaon, the *Megaleh Amukot*, the *Ba’al Shem Tov*, and the *Ba’al HaTanya*, as well as others.

The Rav adds that everyone is strengthened by these trips, and that he speaks about Torah topics while they are traveling. “These can really be called ‘Torah travels,’” he says.

? *Even so, what influences a young person who is learning in college or university in France to come to a Torah class given by the Rav?*

This may sound somewhat amusing, but about 80% of the young people learning in college come to me for a blessing that they should succeed in their studies. I receive them happily, and agree to bless them if they will give me an hour of their time every week. They come, they taste the sweetness of Torah... and they stay for more and more.

? *What do they like to hear? In order for such a class to make them want to come for more, it must be very inspiring.*

All of our classes are based on the central themes of love of Torah and love of Hashem. I give classes on many topics, but they are all centered upon these ideas.

I frequently include examples from the lives of our holy forefathers, describing how they served Hashem. These stories appeal to the young people very much, since through them they realize that they are descended from very great people.

There is an incident that happened just last week. The students in France put a tremendous amount of effort into their studies. However, many of the teachers and principals are anti-Semitic and purposely fix the dates for the exams to be on Shabbat or the Jewish festivals. They see that the Jewish students are nevertheless successful in their exams, but still seek to prevent this.

One of the Jewish students, who

had become completely observant, managed to become a cardiologist. However, his problems were now doubled. He was unable to find a job that did not involve working on Shabbat. Recently, on the fourth attempt, he found a job which seemed suitable. The first two weeks went well, but then he was suddenly informed that he had to work on Shabbat. He was astounded. He refused to do so saying, "Although I have spent many years studying to gain such a position, I would prefer to be poor all of my life rather than desecrate Shabbat."

This was a sign to us that Hashem has helped us to instill within this man such great love of Hashem that he is prepared to undergo such self-sacrifice for His sake. Otherwise, he would desecrate Shabbat.

There is another student of ours, called Michael Ben Shushan, a resident of Marseille, who did *teshuvah* through attending our classes. His return to the Torah path began on Shabbat. One Shabbat, he returned home after hearing me speak very strongly about the importance of keeping Shabbat. "What is the point of making such a great celebration for a boy's Bar Mitzvah when he will not be keeping any mitzvot afterwards?" I asked. He was very shaken up by this question. He went for a walk with his brother in the city square and shared what I had said with him.

"I think the Rav is exaggerating," he said, "he expects too much from us. How are we supposed to keep Shabbat in such a stringent fashion?"

His brother surprised him by answering, "Did our Bar Mitzvahs really have no meaning?"

Suddenly, a strong breeze blew off the *kippah* that he had put on to attend the *shiur*. It landed under the wheels of a car that was parked next to the curb. As he bent down to pick it up, he noticed another *kippah* underneath the car.

"We're still worth something!" he joked with his brother, "at least we make the effort to pick up our *kippot*

and put them back on, even though we could be excused for not doing so in the middle of the city square of Marseille."

His brother smiled, and said, "But I wasn't wearing a *kippah* right now. Give me the other one and I'll put it on."

Michael picked up the second *kippah*, and both brothers were fixed to the spot in astonishment. The *kippah* in Michael's hand was embossed with the words "a souvenir from the Bar Mitzvah" and looked somewhat familiar to them. This was one of the *kippot* from the Bar Mitzvah of Michael's brother! He had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah seven years earlier. Just a few moments before, this very ceremony had seemed to lack any meaning whatsoever!

In those life-changing moments, the *kippah* regained its significance, which had been lost until that time. The words written on it now had a tangible meaning, which made a strong impression on the brothers.

That experience changed the brothers completely, and influenced them to return to the Torah's ways.

Rabbi Akiva's Question Is Worth Millions

In Eretz Yisrael, the kiruv organizations expend great effort in organizing lectures and seminars explaining the basics of emunah and bringing proofs of the authenticity of the Torah. Why does the Rav not do this, but instead focuses on learning Torah?

At the beginning of the road to *teshuvah* we do explain about *emunah*, but we very quickly move on to other more practical topics.

The Torah says, "And the people believed in Hashem and in His servant, Moshe." What does it mean that they believed in Moshe? It means that the people believed in the Torah [which Moshe transmitted to them].

When one believes in Hashem, he must go from the level of believing that Moshe Rabbeinu transmitted the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, to actually learning it.

Most people in France have a basic level of *emunah*; it's a shame to waste time. The main focus should be Torah study.

When I was in France, I was told about someone called 'Gabi,' one of the Rav's students, who came from very different circles. He still works, but devotes six hours every day, including Shabbat, to Torah study. How does the Rav influence such a person to be able to do this?

He himself has witnessed the power of Torah; that is why he loves it. He has a position as the manager of a large business. One day, a very large business deal came up unexpectedly. Going ahead with the deal meant that he would have to close his Gemara and cancel his learning session for a prolonged period of time. He came to me and asked me what he should do, saying that he would lose a large amount of money by not accepting the deal. On the other hand, he was committed to his learning session. I told him that he should answer the question himself. I did not want to take responsibility for him cancelling the deal, fearing lest he would later regret doing so and blame me for the loss incurred. I told him this, adding, "You are big enough, you know what 'Torah' means – you have a fixed learning session every morning – you can make the decision yourself!"

He looked at me and understood what I was saying "between the lines." With all his strength he exclaimed, "I'm staying!"

The people who had come to make the deal were very angry and went on their way. But he did not exhibit a sign of regret for even a moment.

That very afternoon, the prospective business partners returned. They were prepared to agree to his conditions. And what is

more, they were prepared to allow him to keep to his daily schedule of learning. He benefited in every way. The business deal was much more profitable than had been expected, and he had withstood the difficult test of cancelling his learning session.

The most amazing part of this story is that on the same day, when he continued learning after he had made this tremendous sacrifice, he was able to give an explanation for one of the hardest questions asked by Rabbi Akiva Eiger. His self-sacrifice for learning Torah enabled him to do this.

? *How does the Rav infuse such tremendous love of Torah learning into such a person, to the extent that he is able to answer a life-altering question for himself?*

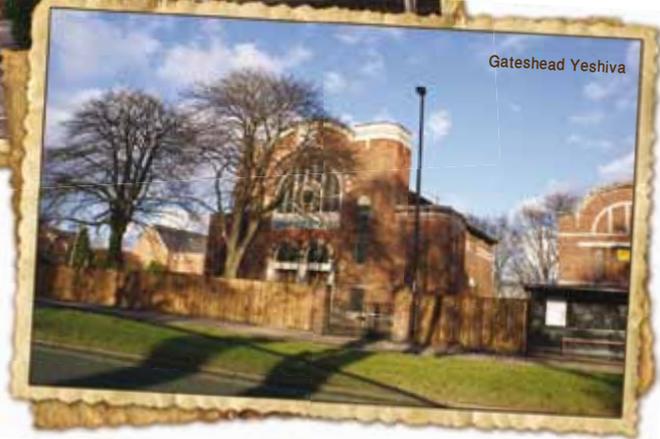
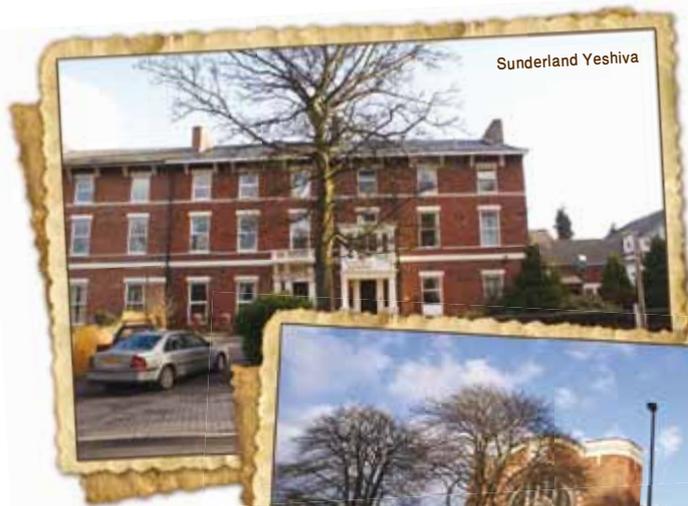
This takes an enormous amount of effort. One needs to invest a lot of love into these people and show them how much we truly love them.

We speak about Hakadosh Baruch Hu continuously, until they come to the realization that He is their Father. One doesn't need to ask a son if he loves his father.

We feel especially close to our Father on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But the point is to retain this feeling for the rest of the year.

We were taught this by our teachers in yeshiva. There was no air-conditioner in the yeshiva, nor was there plentiful food. Sometimes there wasn't even bread or potatoes.

I remember very well my teacher, Rabbi Shammai Zohn, z"l, who was not a well man, traveling from place to place to raise money to provide us with food. Times were hard, and there was never enough. In the winter, when the cold would penetrate our bones, we didn't have enough blankets to cover us, so we would put the mattress on top of our bodies to get warm. Even so, we felt that our days in yeshiva were the happiest of times. Although the conditions were very difficult, and we certainly fulfilled the dictum



“You shall eat bread with salt, and drink a measure of water, and on the ground shall you sleep,” we acquired true love of Torah, which became a part of us. All the hardships vanished in the face of our love of Torah.

And More Torah

The Rav speaks with great passion. I find that we have again returned to the topic of love of Torah. The Rav speaks with utter conviction from the depths of his pure heart.

Suddenly the Rav stops speaking and changes the subject slightly.

He continues: I spoke about the love of Torah that we absorbed from our teachers, when we were youths in yeshiva. I would like to make a point, which you might not agree with, but I feel is true – people speak about *yeridat hadorot*, but I say, “Fortunate are the members of this generation!”

Everyone sees how spoiled this generation is. There are so many material pleasures out there. It's all so easily available to us. For one who wants it, there are so many ways to enjoy oneself and have a good time. The young people who come to us have abandoned all of this. They have thrown away all the enticements of this world in order to

learn Torah. Instead, they come to the yeshiva!!

I am constantly astounded by the strength of such people. How are they able to withstand the allurements in front of them? When I was their age, there were hardly any negative influences that could affect us. We were not faced with the tests that they face today. What was there in Morocco? Nothing! There were no movies, no beach, and no problems with modesty. The *Yetzer Hara* had much less opportunity to trip us up. A person who wanted to find the *Yetzer Hara* had to actively seek him out.

The whole atmosphere surrounding us was conducive to keeping mitzvot. Who did not keep Pesach? The house was ready for Pesach a month before the festival. Our family was very stringent; we ate only potatoes. Dates and sugar were not allowed in the house. We didn't even eat chicken, in case there was any *chametz*. Today, every type of food is available on Pesach.

It's a different world today. Everything is available. There are so many different types of communication – cellular phones, fax, Internet. What don't we have? Those who return to the path of Torah and mitzvot leave all of this behind. They cut themselves

off from the world that they were previously accustomed to.

As Long as the Candle Burns

? *During the Shabbat hilula that was celebrated in Mogador, I was amazed to see the Rav at the Friday night meal standing for a long time to receive the enormous line of people waiting to receive his blessing of “l’chaim” or “Shabbat Shalom.”*

I witnessed this again, during the meal on Shabbat morning. This time the Rav received people for an even longer period of time. I saw that the Rav was exhausted after this. The Rav understood that I was wondering about this, and said to me, “What don’t we do in order to bring others back in teshuvah?”

When I was sitting with the Rav, I could not hold back from asking about this, and reminded the Rav about this particular Shabbat (the Rav smiled broadly), and I asked: The Rav dedicates himself to these people with tremendous devotion. Are there no bounds to this?

There is no answer to this!

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zt”l, was once walking through the town at 2:00 a.m. and saw that there was a light burning in one of the windows. When he peered inside, he saw a shoemaker fixing shoes. Rabbi Yisrael asked him, “How long can you work? It is already very late!” The shoemaker answered, “As long as the candle burns, I can continue to fix shoes.”

Rabbi Yisrael began to cry, and said, “As long as the soul of a person still burns within him, as long as he is still alive, he can still fix and mend his ways!”

The Rav smiles and tried to explain how far this goes: Sometimes I ask Hashem, “Give me all the money in the world, and see what I will do with it! Appoint me as trustee over it all.” If one is willing to invest the effort, there is so much that he can achieve. There is so much to do for Klal Yisrael.

? *The Rav gives many Torah shiurim. When does the Rav have time to prepare them?*

I am not a genius; this is pure *siyata di’Shemaya*. In general, I prepare, and Hashem assists me.

It is written that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and so forth, until it was transmitted to the Men of the Great Assembly. What happened after that? “They said three things...” Where did the Torah go to then? I once explained that the Men of the Great Assembly means all of Klal Yisrael, all of the people. Now the Torah is in the hands of each and every Jew – in our hands.

We could say that whenever I give over a Torah *shiur* to another Jew, since he has a portion in the same Torah, I am simply reminding him of something he has forgotten. I am returning a lost object to him.

? *What about the fact that “a good thing is brought about by someone who is meritorious?”*

Baruch Hashem. Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good.

Your Children Shall Come from Afar

? *A few years ago, the Rav came to live in Eretz Yisrael (“The Gedolei Hador told me to do so for various reasons, including the education of my children – that they should attend yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael”), but after three years, the Rav returned to France.*

There are many youths both in France and in Eretz Yisrael who have changed their whole way of life due to the influence of the Rav. How do the young people in France differ from Israelis in respect to returning to the path of Torah and mitzvot?

Here, in Eretz Yisrael, there are many *ba’alei teshuvah*. They have special qualities, and I sometimes would like to stay here.

In Eretz Yisrael, a person who

becomes a *ba’al teshuvah* has a much easier time doing so. He has many more opportunities than a French person. That is because in Eretz Yisrael there are so many rabbanim; here you have the *kivrei tzaddikim* and many holy places to visit. What is there in France? The Champs Elysees? Paris? What do they have there?

Even a Jew who lives in Tel Aviv, on Rechov Dizengof, can take a bus to get to Miron and attain incredible spiritual heights.

The very air of Yerushalayim makes one wise. One finds holiness here. Yerushalayim is the seat of the *Shechinah*. There is no other place like it. One who returns to the proper path in Eretz Yisrael is truly fortunate!

However, it is important to mention that everything in Eretz Yisrael is very extreme. If a person falls, he will fall to the very depths. Although there is tremendous holiness here, there is always the converse force opposing it.

? *I have seen on many occasions that all different types of people come to the Rav: Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Litvish, Chassidic, people far from Judaism, as well as those who are already religious. From France, England, the United States, and even from Mexico and Panama. How does the Rav have connection with all of these people?*

I have been traveling around the world for many years, to many different places, in order to bring merit to the people there. More recently, communities have been established in many different countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, and others.

At the beginning, I was astounded that most of the people who would come to me in New York were Reform Jews! Now they are all Orthodox.

The Rav then related an amusing anecdote that occurred on his first trip to the United States:

At that time, I did not know what

Reform was. I had married only a short while beforehand, and before that I had been learning in yeshiva. I had no idea that there was such a concept as Reform Judasim. When I came to New York, I was invited to attend a certain event, and afterwards people came to me to receive a *berachah*. A person came up to me and set a plate of food in front of me, saying, "Honorable Rav, please eat." He was proud of himself that he was giving me such an honor, but I was amazed at what he set in front of me. Later I found out that the food on the plate was crab.

At first I thought that these must be plastic toys. I washed my hands and picked up my fork, sticking it into one of the crabs. But then I realized that it was real. I didn't know what to do with myself! "What is this?" I asked. "It's fresh," the man said, "It's from today." It took me a long time to explain to him that we are forbidden to eat crab... He didn't even know that there are certain things that a Jew may not eat. Poor man, he was a Reform Jew. (Baruch Hashem that I did not come to sin...)

The members of that generation were children of people who had survived the Holocaust. They were brought up as Reform Jews, totally ignorant of the traditions that their parents had kept in Europe. Unfortunately, their parents had been unable to withstand the terrible horrors of the Holocaust and the alluring temptation to become Americanized. They abandoned religion completely. The children would come to me to get a *berachah*, and I would write a blessing on a piece of paper for them. Later, they started coming to *shiurim*, bringing friends with them. Baruch Hashem, these people are now all Orthodox.

I Believe

? *In conclusion, I muster my strength and ask the Rav a question concerning the statement, "It is the Torah, and we must learn it."*



The Rav with the first group of avrechim of the kollel in Lyon

When I was at the hilula I circulated among the people and heard from (very) many of them stories concerning wonders and miracles that the Rav effected for them. From where does the Rav have the ability to promise salvations for people and tell them that everything will be good? The Rav is descended from the illustrious Pinto family; from where did all the members of this family gain the ability to direct people in such a way?

Every person says "I believe." But there are different meanings behind these words. A person may sing "I believe" with a beautiful tune, which comes straight from his heart. This type of "I believe" builds the person in his personal Avodat Hashem.

Rav Massoud Zohar was my teacher, and influenced me greatly. He had incredible fear of Heaven, and I absorbed this myself. He used to say: David Hamelech said: And for me – closeness to Hashem is good. David did not ask Hashem to grant him victory over his enemies, nor to make him wealthy. He asked only to be close to Hashem. And whoever asks, receives!

What does it mean to be "close to Hashem"? Surely Hashem is very far from us, in Heaven. There is far and there is close. There is someone who is close, who in reality is very far away. The great quality of tzaddikim is that they see Hashem, Who is really very far away from us in Heaven, as being right here, very close by.

How do they do this? They make no distinction between "Heaven" and "earth." To them, Hashem is always close. He is below as well as Above; He is everywhere.

My forefathers taught us to realize this point at all times; to feel that Hashem is truly everywhere. It is difficult to explain this in simple terms. Perhaps I have seen too many miracles. I have so clearly seen Hashem's control over the world. How is it possible to say otherwise?

This clear perception of Hashem's mastery over everything enables me to devote myself to fulfilling His will. I can't recall how many hours I have slept this week, or in the last three weeks. If my father, zy" a, were still alive, he would probably rebuke me, saying, "David, don't neglect your health!" Nevertheless, I always wonder: Did David Hamelech spend time worrying about his health? Or the *Maharsha*, who would put his feet in cold water to stay awake in order to learn? What about Rabbi David Chazan, the learning partner of Rabbi Chaim Hagadol, who used to tie his hair to the ceiling in order not to fall asleep?! Did he think of his physical needs? Of course not! When a person does everything in order to fulfill Hashem's will, then "those who trust in Hashem, He will give them strength."

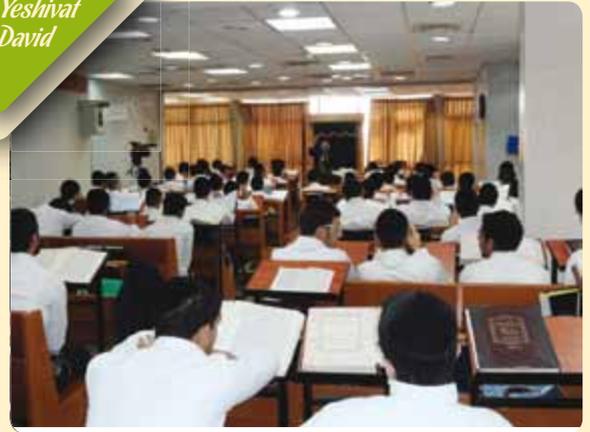
Even if a person seems to be drowning in tribulations, if he persists in fulfilling the will of Hashem, no wave of misfortune can overcome him.

May it be Hashem's will that the merit of my forefathers stand by you.

In the Gents of the Tzaddikim



*Shiur
to start
the Summer
Zman in Yeshivat
Gorat David*



*Shabbaton
in the Orot Chaim
U'Moshe
community,
Mexico*





Preparation for the Festival of Matan Torah in the kollelim of France



Visit of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, shlita, to the Argentinean communities



In the Gents of the Tzaddikim



*Hilula
of Rabbi Chaim
Pinto, zy"u,
and a hachmasat
Sefer Gorah
in Paris*





*Hilula of Rabbi
Chaim Pinto, zy"o,
and a hachnasat
Sefer Torah in
New York*



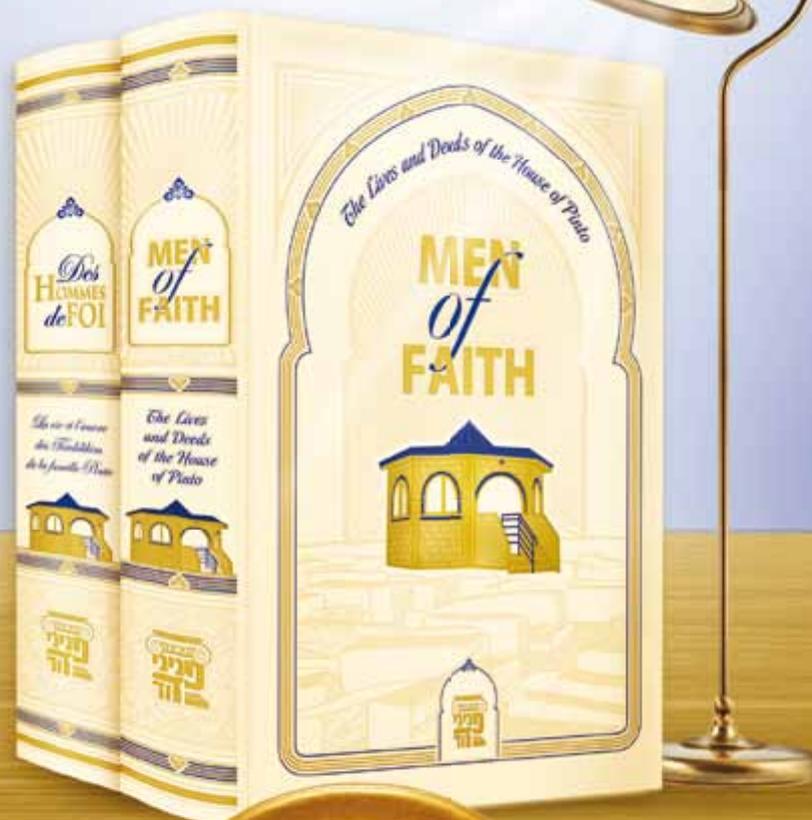
Shehecheyanu v'kiyimanu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh

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