

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א

11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: (331) 48 03 53 89 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85

8 Morris Road - Spring Valley NY 10977

Tel: 1-845 426 1276 • Fax: 1-845 426 1149

www.hevratpinto.org

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THE GATES OF TORAH AND REPENTANCE ARE NEVER CLOSED

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well" (Numbers 4:22). The great commentators and Kabbalists have explained this verse in various ways, and I will also add my contribution.

We must be cognizant of the great power of Torah. In an awe-inspiring way, the work entitled Noam Elimelech speaks of this concerning the fact that the Children of Israel breached the forty-nine gates of impurity while in Egypt (Zohar Yitro 39a). That was the reason why G-d made them leave Egypt immediately, lest they attain the fiftieth gate. In such a case, since they had not yet received the Torah, they would have lost all rights to their existence. This is why it is said, "and they were not able to tarry, ve'gam [and also] they had not made provisions for themselves" (Exodus 12:39), the word ve'gam having a numerical value of 49. However, once they received the holy Torah, even if they had breached the fiftieth gate of impurity, the Torah would have had the power to purify them. This is because "the words of Torah are not susceptible to impurity" (Berachot 22a), and the Torah would have brought them back from the gates of impurity towards those of purity.

In examining these holy words, the idea came to me to point out that we find an allusion to this in the passage, "Take a census [nasso] of the sons of Gershon," for the word nasso can be decomposed into the letter nun (having a numerical value of 50) and the word aish ("fire"), an indication that even if a man breaches the fifty gates of impurity, he can rise upwards like fire by means of the holy Torah, which is called "fire" (Mechilta Yitro 19:18), as it is said, "at His right hand, a fiery law for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2).

We may even add to this that the word nasso (literally "count", but also "elevate") is made up of the same letters as shoneh (which evokes shinun, the study of Torah through repetition). This means that when a man studies the laws of the Torah and repeats them throughout the day (Niddah 73a), it makes him great and elevates him in all his actions (Perkei Avoth 6:1), which is the idea contained in the word nasso. He thereby no longer has any connection to the evil inclination, which tries without cease to chase after him (legaresh, which evokes Gershon) in order that he should have no part in the heritage of the Eternal.

In addition, the word nasso is made up of the same letters as soneh (the root of sina, "hate"), for a man should hate the honors afforded by an official position (Perkei Avoth 1:10), which buries those who assume it (Pesachim 87b), and he should love work,

meaning that he should act solely for the love of Heaven, not for honor. This will make him merit long life, during which time he will never forget that he is attached to "Gershon," a stranger (ger) in this world, all this by the power of the holy Torah.

This is what a man's work in life on earth should be like: He should realize that as soon as he takes his first steps in the service of G-d, the evil inclination will immediately try and instill an icy attitude and despair in him. The evil inclination does this in order to provoke a man to take a big fall, for when we feel that things are hopeless, it is very easy for our instincts to convince us that repentance and Torah study are useless. Our instincts tell us that our sin is too great to bear, and that any repentance on our part will be of no use whatsoever. This is what happened to Elisha (Acher), who heard a Heavenly voice say, "Return, rebellious children, except for Acher" (Hagigah 15a). He concluded that he had been chased away from the world to come, to the extent that he decided to at least enjoy this world, and so he abandoned everything. This was a grave mistake, for he quickly lost all hope by thinking that there was no way for him to rectify his sins. Yet he was completely mistaken. He should have told himself that if his repentance was really not wanted, he would not have been told this by means of a Heavenly voice, a voice whose very goal was obviously to awaken repentance within him and help him return to G-d!

We may compare this situation to that of a rebellious child whose father, in order to educate him, tells him that all his children except for him will receive gifts. Obviously, all that the father wants is to arouse remorse in the child, that he asks himself why he is being treated differently than his brothers, and that he arrives at the conclusion that his father wants him to improve. He surely doesn't intend to discourage his son, for that wouldn't be of any use because it would only lead the boy to continue in his errant ways.

And in fact the disciple of Acher, Rabbi Meir, who also heard the Heavenly voice, concluded that its goal was to lead Acher to repent, otherwise there would have been no need for it. He therefore told him to repent and tried to convince him to return to G-d. Moreover, he knew that the doors of Teshuvah were always open (Eicha Rabba 3:35) and that everything depended on Acher. This is why Rabbi Meir continued to study Torah with him, all while still sorting the good from the bad by "eating the inside while rejecting the peel" (Hagigah 15b). This would have

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been impossible if the doors of Teshuvah had been closed. We learn from here the certainty that by means of the holy Torah, it is possible to elevate ourselves once again, as if a light was returning us along the right path (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:7). Yet if we now find ourselves in a very low state, G-d never chases after us, for His arm is outstretched to receive all who return to Him (Pesachim 119a) and He awaits a man's repentance, as it is written, "Do I desire at all the death of the wicked man ... not rather his return from his ways, that he might live?" (Ezekiel 18:23). G-d doesn't want to make anyone give up hope. He respects the honor and property of each and everyone and waits for a person to return to Him by elevating himself. The Torah also respects the honor and the individuality of the Children of Israel (Rabbeinu Ovadia Bartenura, Keritut 6:3), even if they have acted very badly. In fact it is written, "The son of an Israelite woman went out, and he was the son of an Egyptian man" (Leviticus 24:10). The holy Ohr HaHaim asks why the Torah does not mention his name, since it was because of him that a harsh decree was pronounced, and harm only occurs through someone who is already guilty (Sanhedrin 8a). He replies that the Holy One, blessed be He, has no desire to shame anyone, hence for all the more reason is the offender's name not written in the Torah, where his shame would remain forever.

From everything that has been said, we note that there is no place for despair in a person's heart. On the contrary, he should recognize and appreciate his situation if he is a Ben Torah, for he receives the Torah anew each day, as it is written, "That it should be new in your eyes each day" (Pesikta Zutah Va'etchanan 6:6). In fact, when a person sleeps, his soul leaves him and he is considered as dead (Berachot 57b). The soul rises toward the Heavens (Zohar 1:92a, 121b), and when he awakes in the morning he is considered as a new being, as in the verse that states: "They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23). He should therefore purify himself because he was considered as dead. This is why, after we have recited the blessings for the Torah as well as the morning blessings, we immediately begin to study it, for we owe our entire existence in this world to the Torah. Now if we want to be able to study immediately upon rising in the morning, we should also go to sleep after having studied Torah, not after having occupied ourselves with trivialities, as it is written, "And you shall speak of them ... when you lie down and when you arise" (Deuteronomy 6:7). At that moment we will be connected to Torah, whether it be in lying down or arising.

Since Parsha Nasso comes right after the holiday of Shavuot, a time when a man finds himself at the height of his greatness, we have the statement, "Take a census of [or "elevate"] the sons of Gershon as well" (Numbers 4:22). He becomes the leader of all the sons of Gershon by dominating the Kelipah and the forces of darkness, which are driven away (megurashim) by G-d after the giving of the Torah. A person must therefore prepare himself before and during the holiday, because for all Jews it is a day whose influence extends throughout the whole of the year, a day in which a Jew truly receives the Torah as it was given on Mount Sinai. In itself, it purifies matter to the extent that he is transformed into a spiritual being. The Jew becomes master of the Kelipah, which then falls into his hands and between his ten fingers, but only if he takes upon himself the yoke of Torah. Now the doors of Torah and repentance are never closed, and this is the moment to return to G-d and to elevate oneself in wisdom and the fear of Heaven.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

THE JUST DECREE

One day Rabbi Avraham Avish, the Rav of Frankfort am Main, went on a journey that made him pass through a Christian village. That day was a Christian holiday, a time when non-Jews drank, ate, and became animated, to the extent that a Jew who passed nearby was to be pitied. The coach driver therefore tried to circumvent the village and travel by another route, but it was strew with rocks, so much so that Rabbi Avraham Avish refused to take it because of the pain that it would cause the horses. He preferred to wait 15 minutes before entering the village, saying that a fire would begin in the church at that point. Then, when everyone was busy trying to put it out, they could quietly pass through. This in fact is what happened. They waited 15 minutes, and then the Rabbi gave the signal to the driver to depart. He himself was stunned. How was it possible that a fire could begin so that everyone would be busy trying to extinguish it, and how could the Rabbi know about this?

The coach driver took to the road, his heart seized with fright because there was still no fire. He knew very well that he had nothing to fear as long as he was by the Rabbi's side, and yet his imagination had him picturing non-Jews attacking the carriage. He was in this state all the way to the center of town, and there, all of a sudden, cries of fear and shouting arose. A dark smoke rose up, coming for the church. The inhabitants of the village rushed toward the burning structure to save whatever they could. During that time, the Rabbi's carriage passed though the village without anyone noticing. The coach driver was stunned into silence.

Speech only came back to the driver upon leaving the village. He stopped the carriage and turned towards the Rabbi, an intense look of astonishment painted on his face. How did he know in advance what was going to happen in the village? Had he seen it by Ruach Hakodesh? Rabbi Avraham Avish said to him, "All my life, I have always paid careful attention to not desecrate my mouth by lying or saying inappropriate things, even in the most difficult of circumstances. This is why," he continued in an innocent sort of way, "when something comes out of my mouth, it is made it occur. You too," the Rabbi continued, "can attain a level such that your words are carried out by Heaven – if you carefully guard your tongue. There is an allusion to this in the Torah, where it is stated, 'He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do' [Numbers 30:2], which can mean that when a man does not desecrate his word, everything that he says will come to pass."

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RABBI MOSHE SOLOVEITCHIK

Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik was born on the second day of Rosh Hashanah in the year 5676 (1915) in the city of Brisk. His father, the Gaon Rabbi Israel Gershon, was the son of the Maran Rabbi Chaim Halevi of Brisk, who was his Sandek. It was within this illustrious family that Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik grew up. From his youth he was known for his exceptional gifts: His perseverance, his diligence, and his fear of Heaven (which had no equal other than his wisdom and lofty virtues).

He studied at the yeshiva of Rabbi Moshe Sokolovsky, the author of *Imreh Moshe*, and also at the yeshiva of Kamenitz with the Maran Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibowitz.

In 5695 (1935) he fled from Russia with a group of Brisk Talmidim, among whom was Rabbi Aaron Leib Steinman, who would remain one of Rabbi Moshe's most faithful friends. Rabbi Moshe settled in Switzerland at the Montreux yeshiva. Despite the anguish and distress that he experienced over the fate of his Jewish brothers caught in the tempest of World War II, he devoted his days and nights to the study of Torah and even gave, though he was still very young, shiurim to the bachurim. Rabbi Israel Zimmel Rottstein recounts that one day, a group of Jewish refugees coming from Buchenwald, broken both physically and emotionally, arrived in Switzerland. Rabbi Moshe assembled the entire group, and under the pretext of providing them support and encouragement he gave a *Davar Torah*. He cited the following Psalm: "A psalm by David, as he fled from Absalom his son" [Psalms 3:1].

He then told them, "The Gemara asks the following question: How are we to understand that David sang while escaping from his son Absalom, who was chasing behind in order to kill him? It would have been more appropriate for David to have moaned and cried. In fact, David sang because when he realized that it was his son Absalom who was personally chasing him (and not simply Absalom's servants), he foresaw and understood that it could only be the will of G-d behind this event, that this could not possibly be the result of a human response. In the same way," Rav Moshe told them, "you who have suffered martyrdom in your bodies and souls, this too cannot be conceived as belonging to the realm of man, but emanates from Hashem. Therefore be strong and courageous and follow the way of Hashem."

All of them felt that this was not a simple person who had spoken to them, but a great man. A few years later, Rav Moshe went up to Eretz Israel and studied at the Lomza Yeshiva in Petah Tikva, out of which emerged Torah giants. During those same years, he had the privilege of being in contact with the Maran Chazon Ish, whom he always called *Mori VeRabi*.

Rav Moshe returned to Switzerland in 5709 (1948/49), where he married the daughter of Rav Shemuel Zanvil Neuman of Lugano and settled in that city. There he founded a yeshiva and worked to strengthen Swiss Judaism. Several years later he founded a yeshiva in Lucerne.

His only goal was to arouse in his young students the desire to become yeshiva bachurim. All that was required for this to happen was for his students to see him sitting down and studying with his usual enthusiasm, which would inspire a love of Torah in them. In this way, he inculcated in them an attachment to Torah and a fear of Heaven that was never to leave them. His classes focused on giving

deep thought to the literal sense of the text, and he always pushed the Talmidim to go deeply into the texts in search of the truth.

He settled next in Zurich, where he lived the rest of his days. Upon his arrival there in 5724 (1963), he revolutionized Swiss Judaism and became a guide for all. Despite his prestige, he remained completely humble, and during his entire life he behaved as an ordinary Jew. He had such great concentration in study that nothing could bother him. Conversely, the complaint of a Jew always found in him an attentive ear. Such is the way of Hashem – to always be attentive to the complaint of a broken heart – and it was this same approach that was found with Rav Moshe. He didn't hesitate to provide comfort and support for the sick as quickly as possible, even if it was in the middle of the night. Many were his prayers and fasts for the healing of the sick.

Over the course of the years, he acquired a reputation as the leader of European Orthodox Jewry. Thousands of people came to consult with him, and Rav Moshe exercised this role of counselor for the great rabbinic personalities of his era as well. No important Halachic decision was taken without the advice of the Gaon, and his inputs always proved important. Rav Chaim Yaakov Rottenberg once said of him, "There is no other person more clear in his thoughts or sharper in his decisions."

Day and night, Rav Moshe's house was a place for answers to questions concerning the affairs of the community. Concerning this subject, the statement that was written concerning Moshe Rabbeinu applies to Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik as well: "And Moshe descended from the mountain to the people" (Exodus 19:14). Rashi explains that Moshe Rabbeinu descended directly from the mountain to the people – he did not attend to his personal affairs first. Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik was always concerned with the needs of the community before even his own studies. He was known for his exceptional ability to reach hearts and guide them regardless of their various tendencies. He was appreciated and loved by thousands of Jews around the world because of his extraordinary midot (characteristics) of *tzniut* (modesty), *anavah* (humility), *metinut* (prudence), *savlanut* (patience), and tolerance.

In Russia, during the time of Communism's collapse, he was at the head of the spiritual resurgence of Jews who had been disconnected from their origins for two generations. As soon as the first events occurred in the East, he understood that this upheaval was part of the Divine plan to strengthen Torah in that part of the world. He then founded a yeshiva in Moscow that allowed many young Jews to return to Torah, enabling them to become true Ben Torahs, Jews who are at present enrolled in the largest yeshivas in Israel.

Rav Moshe became sick during the last months of his life, and the Torah world mobilized itself in prayer and supplication for his healing. However on Iyar 18, 5755 (May 18, 1995), he rendered his pure soul to his Creator.

The legacy that Rav Moshe left behind is great, and his descendants are known the world over as great Chachamim: Rabbi Israel (Rosh Kollel in Jerusalem), Rabbi Shemuel Chaim; Rabbi Baruch (Rosh Yeshiva in Hebron); Rabbi Avraham Ishaya; his daughter and son-in-law Rabbi Shlomo Zev Karlibach.

With the passing of Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, Orthodox Judaism lost one of its most beloved spiritual shepherds, great in Torah and the fear of Heaven.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “Command the Children of Israel that they shall expel from the camp every leper and everyone that has an issue” (Numbers 5:2).

The Midrash states: “This is why Rabbi Yehudah Halevi said in the name of Rabbi Shalom: ‘Leprosy arises because of 11 things ... because of one who profanes G-d’s Name – this is Gehazi, who ran after Naaman to get money from him. Elisha had sanctified the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, by refusing to take anything from Naaman, and Gehazi ran after him and uttered a false oath. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gehazi, ‘Wicked one! You said, ‘As the L-RD lives, [I swear] that I shall run after him and take something from him’ [II Kings 5:20]. You swore by My Name to profane it! By your life, you said, ‘something,’ and so you will take his affliction, for ‘Naaman’s leprosy shall therefore cleave to you and to your children forever’ [v. 27].” ’ ”

This seems incomprehensible. What logical connection is there between “something” and “his affliction”?

Let us try to understand this with the help of the following parable.

A certain man saw some objects at his father’s home that pleased him, however they belonged to someone else. He therefore begged his father to at least give him “something.” Seeing that his father had no intention of doing so, he began to swear on his head that his father would give him “something,” for he knew very well that his father would not transgress an oath. The father then gave him a tremendous slap in the face and said, “Here is the ‘something’ of your oath!”

The interpretation is clear. This was exactly what happened to Gehazi, who had sworn: “As the L-RD lives, [I swear] that I shall run after him and take something from him.” Hashem retorted, “You said, ‘something,’ and so you will take his affliction, for ‘Naaman’s leprosy shall therefore cleave to you and to your children forever.’ ”

THE PATH OF THE JUST SHAME - PART IV

We may discern four levels of shame:

1. A man feels shame to commit sins openly, yet in spite of this he sins secretly. In feeling shame before men but not before Hashem, he tries to “fool” Hashem. His sin is extremely grave.

2. A man restrains himself before men and avoids sinning in private because of the fear of being discovered, and also because he feels shame before Hashem. Concerning such cases our Sages say, “Acting in a selfish way will lead a man to act for more noble reasons” (Pesachim 50b).

3. A man thinks, “How dare I perform this wicked act in secret? Is it correct to feel more shame before the servant than before the master? Is it correct to betray the Alm-ghty?” Motivated by these thoughts, a man will avoid sin. This is a positive trait.

4. In public as in private, a man feels shame exclusively before Hashem. This is a highest level of shame possible.

Our Sages teach, “When a person commits a sin and is ashamed of it, all his sins are forgiven” (Berachot 12b). They also say, “The shamefaced [are destined] for Gan Eden” (Perkei Avoth 5:20[25]), as well as, “Modesty and honesty lie side by side. In fact, a man who feels shame conducts himself honestly towards men, whereas a dishonest man doesn’t feel shame.” Finally, a wise man once said, “If you don’t know shame, nothing will curb your impulses.