

# הנהגות THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### **DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM A BAD NEIGHBOR AND DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH THE WICKED** (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**I**t is written, "The L-RD said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying, 'Aaron shall be gathered to his people... Take Aaron and Elazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor. Strip Aaron of his vestments...and Aaron shall be gathered in and die there.'...Aaron died there on the top of the mount" (Numbers 20:23-28).

Rashi relates the teaching of the Midrash, which describes Mount Hor as a small apple on top of a large apple (Tanhuma Chukat 17). Even though the cloud leveled the mountains and made them equal in size, three of them remained: Mount Sinai for the giving of the Torah, Mount Hor for Aaron's burial place, and Mount Nebo for Moses' burial place. Furthermore, commenting on the phrase, "by the border of the land of Edom" (Numbers 20:23), the Midrash explains: Since they had contact with the wicked Esau, their deeds were corrupted and this Tzaddik was take away from them.

We need to clarify a certain number of issues concerning this subject:

1. Why did our Sages describe Mount Hor, where Aaron was buried, as a small apple on top of a large one? In the final analysis, it is a large mountain. What exactly is the meaning of one mountain on top of another? Finally, why does the verse state "Mount Hor" at one point and "the top of the mount" at another?

2. Concerning contact with Esau, Rashi supports his view with an incident involving King Jehoshaphat: "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the L-RD has wrecked your undertakings" (II Chronicles 20:37). Yet here the Children of Israel, whose only goal was to make it to the Holy Land, did not ally themselves with Edom. On the contrary, the king of Edom did not give them his authorization to pass through his territory.

3. Moses sent emissaries to the king of Edom to obtain his authorization. What sin is there in that? Why was it specifically Aaron who died when the Israelites were by the border of Edom?

Actually, we may say that the Children of Israel were responsible for Aaron's death. When the king of Edom refused to allow them to pass through his land, they should have immediately proceeded to the Holy Land by another route. However they did not do this, and instead they insisted on passing through his territory, as it is written: "Let me pass through on foot" (Numbers 20:19). Moses in no way shared the same viewpoint, and it was the Children of Israel who believed that it was necessary to pass through his territory. Therefore they were the ones who sent emissaries. We may say that in the final analysis, it was the Children of Israel who wanted to associate with the wicked (G-d forbid).

It was this insistence on the part of the Children of Israel that caused Aaron's premature death. The death of a Tzaddik like Aaron is an enormous loss, for the Tzaddik rectifies the spiritual worlds and brings abundance to the world. (Concerning this subject, the Ohr HaChaim writes, "The sentence had already been pronounced, but he could have lived for a few extra days"). Commenting on this verse in his book Pituchei Chotam, Rabbi Yaakov Abihssira writes: " 'When you light the lamps' (Numbers 8:2), Aaron brought good upon all. He loved peace and continuously sought it, and he made peace reign between man and wife, and between man and his fellow (Perkei Avoth 1:12). His sudden and premature death was a tremendous loss. ... The Torah stresses the fact that he died by the border of the land of Edom in order to make us understand that the Children of Israel had not distanced themselves from that wicked one. They were not careful to avoid falling into his traps, and their contact with Edom brought about the premature death of the Tzaddik."

This verse mentions Mount Hor at one point and the top of the mount at another because, as we know, the evil inclination has seven names (Sukkah 52a). It often changes form and manages to entice a person in a different way each time. It may even appear as a Tzaddik at times. We must therefore be very careful not to fall into its traps. For example, King Jehoshaphat of Judah was a great Tzaddik, yet he associated with Ahaziah, the king of Israel, who was wicked. Jehoshaphat certainly wanted to make Ahaziah return to the right path, yet a prophet had forbid him to associate with Ahaziah. This is because he was susceptible to his harmful influence, for if Ahaziah had failed to heed his own father's voice, why would he listen to Jehoshaphat?

Our Sages compare the evil inclination to a mountain (in the eyes of the righteous), and to an unbreakable rock (Sukkah 52a). If we break it in one way, it gets stronger in another, and if we think that we have defeated it, it appears in exactly the same place but in a different form. Concerning this subject, Kabbalah explains that if a person distances himself from sin, this is an indication that he wants to rectify it. By distancing himself from the evil inclination, which constantly changes appearance, a person will manage to eliminate it.

Listening only to Moses' voice, the Children of Israel insisted several times on passing through the territory of Edom. They should have understood that this was the work of the Satan, which tried to persuade them to do so. The evil inclination appears as a small apple on top of a large one, yet afterwards it ascends to the top of the mountain and there tries to make people sin. Up there, it erects

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structures abounding in sin to entice people to sin (see Shabbat 105b). Hashem therefore commanded Moses to bring Aaron up Mount Hor, for the goal of the evil inclination was to prevent him from influencing the Children of Israel. Aaron had to be at the top of the mount in order to defeat it.

Having heard of Aaron's death, the king of Arad came and attacked the Children of Israel. How could this king have dared to confront Moses, who could have easily defeated him? After having seen the Clouds of Glory disappear, the king of Arad heard that Moses, followed by the Children of Israel, had sent emissaries to the king of Edom to ask him for permission to pass through his territory. The king of Aram therefore concluded that they wanted to associate with the wicked, which caused Aaron's death, for Hashem loathed their conduct. Furthermore, seeing their weakness, the king of Arad immediately decided to wage war against them.

By their death, Tzaddikim expiate the sins of the generation (Shabbat 33b). The king of Arad, a Canaanite, therefore rushed out to fight the Children of Israel before they could repent and begin to mend their ways. Being a descendant of Esau, he knew that when the voice of Jacob would not be heard, the hands of Esau would dominate them. Nevertheless, the Children of Israel strengthened their faith and made a vow, and Hashem accepted their repentance. Therefore they managed to defeat the Canaanite.

The Children of Israel thus continued on their way to the Promised Land. However the people became discouraged while on route (Numbers 21:4), frustrated by the "light bread" (v.5), meaning the manna. Now as we know, bread alludes to Torah (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeitzei 123). Thus they denied the Torah and distanced themselves from Teshuvah. The evil inclination therefore controlled them, for the Torah is its antidote. This occurred because the wicked traits of Edom were still rooted in them, which was the cause of Aaron's death.

The Children of Israel were punished by fiery serpents, which killed multitudes of them. This was an unusual punishment that had never been seen before. Hashem thus said to Moses, "Make yourself a fiery [serpent] and place it on a pole, and it will be that anyone who was bitten will look at it and live" (Numbers 21:8). The Talmud asks, "Is it the serpent that kills? Is it the serpent that keeps alive?" (Rosh Hashanah 29a). Why is it that a serpent brings death and causes healing?

The reason why G-d sent the Children of Israel fiery serpents is because they began to distance themselves from Him and associate with the wicked Edomites. Furthermore, instead of entering the Holy Land, they were getting farther from it and thus detaching themselves from the Torah and Judaism. The serpent embodies the evil inclination, the Satan, the forces of evil, the other side (Zohar I:114a). G-d acted strictly with the Children of Israel, as He does with all Tzaddikim (Yebamot 121b). Nevertheless, He immediately healed them. As the Talmud states (Rosh Hashanah 29b), all they needed to do was to look at the overhanging serpent, the essential thing being to raise their eyes and see beyond it to Hashem.

Mount Hor alludes to the evil inclination, which is called a mountain. A person should therefore come closer to Hashem and never distance himself from Him, and he should constantly engage in heshbon nefesh (personal accounting, introspection). Commenting on the verse, "Regarding this the poets would say: Come to Heshbon" (Numbers 21:27), the Talmud explains that this is a reference to those who control their inclination, to those who take an accounting (heshbon) of their life (Bava Batra 78b). Let us therefore not be seduced by the vile one who takes on various forms. We will thus follow the path laid out by Aaron, who knew how to draw a line between himself and the evil inclination. Let us distance ourselves from the evil inclination and come closer to the Holy One, blessed be He. We will then experience good in this world and in the World to Come.

## THE STORY OF THE WEEK

### TZEDAKA RESCUES FROM DEATH

The holy Tzaddik, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, was teaching Torah to his students when he suddenly interrupted his lecture and, gripped by great fear, arose and left the Beit Midrash. He quickly headed toward the gates of the Mellah (Jewish district), fervently looking for an important member of the community. That particular individual, indifferent to the troubles of others, stubbornly refused to carry out the mitzvah of Tzedakah.

The Tzaddik managed to find this man as he was making some purchases in a store located within the Mellah. Rabbi Haim Pinto said to him, "I beg you, give some Tzedakah to the poor!"

The man, however, refused: "I have no money to give!"

Rabbi Haim Pinto beseeched him again and again, resorting to all possible arguments in order to convince him, yet it was useless. When he realized that he would not be able to convince the man, Rabbi Haim asked his assistant to follow the man to his home.

Rabbi Haim then added the following instruction: "Once you arrive, recite Shema aloud. Since this pitiful man is going to die, at least he should die as a Jew."

When the man reached the door of his home, he collapsed on the spot, at which point Rabbi Haim's assistant recited Shema Israel. He returned to Rabbi Haim not long afterwards, completely taken aback, and recounted everything that had happened. It was exactly as Rabbi Haim had said.

Afterwards our teacher, Rabbi Haim Pinto, revealed that he had seen the Malach Hamavet (Angel of Death) in a vision dancing in the streets of the city and approaching the man in question. With that, Rabbi Haim

knew what was going to happen, hence his desperate attempts to save the Jew by offering him the shield of Tzedakah.

Rabbi Haim added, "Faced with the futility of my efforts, I nevertheless did not want that pitiful man to leave this world without having heard the Shema."

From that day on, all the Jews in town were very careful to have a Tzedakah box at home. Before leaving, they would put a few coins into it to fulfill the words of Scripture: "Your righteous deed will precede you" (Isaiah 58:8) and "Tzedakah rescues from death" (Proverbs 11:4).

Following this episode, someone asked Rabbi Haim why he had not been even more insistent with the man, so as to persuade him to give Tzedakah and thus remain alive. He replied by citing a verse from the Torah: "The hidden [things] are for the L-RD our G-d, but the revealed [things] are for us and our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:28). We have no right to obey a voice from Heaven to institute a Halachah, but only to the instructions of our Sages. This is why we have no right to overly insist with anyone that he gives Tzedakah.

Concerning this subject, Rabbi Haim Pinto was in the habit of saying, "In matters of Tzedakah, we must act according to the principle that 'One who sacrifices much and one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven' [Berachot 5b]."

As it is written, "He distributed and gave to the destitute. His acts of Tzedakah exist forever."

# RABBI YEKUTIEL YEHUDA HALBERSTAM – THE SANZER REBBE

BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

**R**enowned as much for his scholarship as for his holiness, the leader and spiritual head of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the United States, Israel, and around the world, the Sanzer Rebbe was a unique figure in his generation. People from around the world came to him for advice and blessings, which always proved effective.

It was by a miracle that G-d, concerned over the Torah's continuity in his world, enabled the Sanzer Rebbe to survive the Holocaust. The Nazis almost exterminated his entire family, with his wife and 11 children being the first to perish. Having been able, by G-d's grace, to escape from Poland, he devoted his entire life to helping American Jews and to bringing hundreds of thousands of them to Teshuvah.

About 35 years ago in Netanya, this Tzaddik created the settlement of Kiryat Sanz for his thousands of followers and their families, as well as a magnificent hospital. His chassidim recount that when he was in Auschwitz, he suffered so much at the sight of the sick being thrown by the side of the road, or condemned to die for lack of care, that he undertook a personal vow: If he were to survive that hell, he would build a hospital.

People also recount the discussion he had with a German officer while he was in Auschwitz. The German told him, "Every morning you Jews bless G-d for not making you gentiles. Now look who's more important – you or me?"

The Sanzer Rebbe explained to him that we Jews recite this blessing every morning because Hashem gave us more commandments to perform than non-Jews. In addition, the Jewish religion is harder than all others. We do not have the right, for example, to eat meat with milk products. We have to guard the sanctity of the Sabbath and refrain from working. Even thinking about our work is forbidden on Shabbat. Apart from that, we must distance ourselves from all forbidden relations, and we are not to excessively talk with women. If a woman is Niddah, her husband does not even have the right to touch her. In addition, we are obligated to study the Torah day and night, to love others as ourselves, and so on. We are bound by hundreds of commandments that regulate our behavior with respect to Hashem and others.

"This is why," the Sanzer Rebbe told the German officer, "we thank G-d for not having made us non-Jews, for as opposed to us, they do not have many commandments to follow. We Jews, however, are happy to unselfishly assume this responsibility, even to die for it."

Without the least bit of fear, the Sanzer Rebbe then told the German, "Blessed be G-d, Who did not make me a gentile. Otherwise, what interest would I have in being a Nazi gentile such as yourself, whose hands are full of Jewish and non-Jewish blood, and whose heart is devoid of any feeling, of any pity for the thousands of Jews that you murder day after day!"

Completely stunned by the words of the Rebbe, the officer told him, "Since you've convinced me, I will save your life and take you out of this camp. You can then live and bless G-d for not having left me as a Nazi. From now on, I will strive never to kill again."

We see something quite remarkable in this. If the Sanzer Rebbe could bring a Nazi, an inhumane monster, to his senses, how much more could he convince Jews, who are believers at heart, to assume their rightful place in Judaism.

I am not a Sanzer chassid. I simply believe in each Tzaddik who has worked for Judaism. Even if a regular individual helps people to do Teshuvah by showing them the true and right path to follow, he has my respect and admiration.

Yet if truth be known, I am attached to the Sanzer Tzaddik, and this has to do with what happened to me about two decades ago in New York City.

It was a Tuesday during the winter of 1984. On that day I was supposed to meet the Sanzer Rebbe at his office at 9 pm, after the evening prayer. However during the afternoon, I was told that a famous Jewish singer, Bob Dylan, wanted to see me at around 8 pm, just before his scheduled departure for Germany, where thousands of fans awaited him at a concert. He had heard of me from an important figure who often came to see me. I had been planning on leaving to see the Sanzer Rebbe at around 7:30 pm (taking into account the distance from where I was staying and also the traffic), hence my dilemma and uncertainty over this turn of events. If I missed my meeting with the Sanzer Rebbe, who knew when another such occasion would arise? On the other hand, if I refused to meet Bob Dylan, a Jewish singer capable of attracting hundreds of thousands of people by his music, he would feel offended. Instead of doing Teshuvah, he would be angry with a rabbi who had brushed him aside. After thinking it over carefully, I decided to cancel my meeting with the Sanzer Rebbe.

Thus on that night I met Bob Dylan, followed by a crowd of curious onlookers. They were in disbelief at the thought that a rabbi and a singer such as Bob Dylan could have a private talk. We spoke about Judaism for about two hours, and since that time, thank G-d, we have remained good friends and in close contact. In fact during his last trip to Paris, he paid a visit to our yeshiva.

Bob Dylan left at around 10 pm. At that point I wondered if I was going to completely forgo my meeting with the Sanzer Rebbe or if, seeing that I had not yet arrived, the Tzaddik was still waiting for me. I said to my four friends who were with me at the time, "Let's go to Union City where the Sanzer Rebbe lives. If we manage to see him, so much the better. If not, Hashem will remember the journey we undertook in honor of the Tzaddik. As for the Tzaddik himself, he won't be upset at us or offended when his secretary tells him that we were late because of special circumstances."

We got into a car and left. The shortest way to Union City was to get off the highway at Exit 5. We saw Exit 1, then Exit 2, Exit 3, and finally Exit 4. But then we saw Exit 6! At first we thought that this was just a simple mistake, so we hastily turned back. I told the driver to drive slowly this time and to pay special attention to the exits. Yet as if Hashem had decided to try us by enclosing us on this highway, the same thing happened once again: We could not find Exit 5. We asked for directions from someone working in a tollbooth, and he said, "Are you blind or what? Exit 5 is written in huge letters!"

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## **RABBI YEKUTIEL YEHUDA HALBERSTAM – THE SANZER REBBE**

After the third unsuccessful try, I said to the driver: “We’ll try a last attempt to make it to Union City. If, out of respect for the Sanzer Rebbe, Hashem opens our eyes and we manage to find Exit 5, good. If not, this will mean that the Tzaddik is upset at us and Hashem does not want such a meeting to take place. In that case, we won’t have the merit of seeing the face of the Tzaddik or taking hold of his saintly hands and kissing them,” as we Sephardim do when in the presence of a Rebbe or Tzaddik.

Once again we turned back and began counting each exit, with the hope of spotting Exit 5. After having passed Exit 4, I said to my friends: “Now let’s all say aloud: ‘May Rabbi Chaim of Sanz and his grandson, the present Sanzer Rebbe, forgive us and open our eyes – all five of us – so we can see Exit 5!’”

There and then, at that exact moment, a miracle happened and from afar we saw the sign indicating Exit 5! As soon as we saw it, we gave free reign to our joy – as if blind men had regained their sight – and we began to sing with all our hearts.

From then on, it did not take long to reach the great Sanz Synagogue in Union City. We were welcomed at the entrance by the Rebbe’s special secretary, who informed us that the Rebbe was waiting for us in his office, at which point our joy multiplied immensely! Thank G-d, the Rebbe was not upset with us in the least for being three and a half hours late. We quickly ascended to the second floor, where hundreds of chassidim were awaiting our arrival, intrigued and curious to know why their Rebbe was waiting in his office for so long.

It is not difficult to imagine the emotion that I felt when I finally found myself before the Tzaddik. With his face like that of an angel, illuminated as it was by the Shechinah, and the majesty that emanated from his persona, he completely radiated a sacred splendor.

When I kissed his sacred hands, the memory of my holy ancestors – with Rabbi Haim Pinto at their head – came to mind, and I had the feeling that I was with my illustrious grandfather.

Since the Sanzer Rebbe was asking me many questions about Rabbi Haim Pinto (which I answered by relating various stories concerning my holy ancestors), I quickly realized that the Sanzer Rebbe was perfectly familiar with the life and great deeds of the illustrious Rabbi Haim Pinto. In fact one of the Sanzer Rebbe’s disciples was originally from Morocco, specifically Mogador, and each Shabbat he told his Rebbe of the miracles that Rabbi Haim Pinto had performed.

When it came time to leave, I once again kissed the sacred hands of the Rebbe, and then we left, as happy as if we had been at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah and gaze at the face of the Shechinah.

Today I still don’t know why Hashem blocked our way on that night, yet there is one thing I do know: Hashem has the power to close anyone’s eyes, even if he has perfect sight.

To conclude, I can only highly recommend that all those traveling to Netanya should go and pray – dressed very modestly, not wearing any mini-skirts, nor pants (for women), nor shorts – by the grave of the Tzaddik of Sanz, may his merit protect us all. Amen.

## **THE PATH OF THE JUST**

### **SHAME - PART VIII**

A man should always be among those who do not insult when they are insulted, among those who do not respond when they hear they are being humiliated. Their reward corresponds to their deeds: Since insults made them blanch, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make them shine brighter than the sun, as it is written, “The glory of the L-RD shines upon you” (Isaiah 60:1).

The virtue of shame will lead a man to humility, for his shame will make him yield to men. He will be discreet, for a man who knows shame will attempt to conceal his actions. Our Sages say, “Shame is seen on the face of pure children, for the man who experiences shame demonstrates through this that he is among the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Yebamot 79a). Our Sages also note: “Shame is recognized in moments of anger,” as well as, “The hate of a modest man is greater than the love of a fool.”

A man should feel shame towards everyone and don the mask of shame, as we see in the case of Saul, who chose to hide when people wanted to crown him. Hashem therefore chose him as king. Concerning shame, the Sages say, “This virtue is the expression of a refined soul.” A man who knows shame will be at a lofty spiritual level and will attain a great degree of discernment and understanding.

## **THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGID OF DOUBNO**

It is written, “You shall not pass through me – lest I come against you with the sword!” (Numbers 20:18).

The Midrash states: “This bears on the text, ‘I am peace, but when I speak, they are for war’ [Psalms 120:7].”

To understand this Midrash, let us illustrate with an example:

When a woman is childless, she guards her Ketubah very carefully, for she is constantly worried that her husband will want to divorce her. Even when they live in peace, she does not feel confident and is always nervous, for she is in constant fear of being divorced. These worries, however, never enter the mind of a woman who has children.

Edom harbored such intense hatred for Israel that even in times of peace and tranquility, the Children of Israel had reason to fear that they would hear, “Lest I come against you with the sword!” This is why, “I am peace, but when I speak, they are for war,” as the previous verse explains: “Long has my soul dwelt with those who hate peace” (Psalms 120:6).