

# THE PRECEPTS OF HASHEM ARE RIGHTEOUS, REJOICING THE HEART

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



## The Path To Follow

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RABBI DAVID HANANIA  
PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau  
75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)

Responsible of publication  
Hanania Soussan

### GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

#### The Evil of Dissension

A person must garner all his strength in order to distance himself from dissension. Apart from the gravity of this sin, it leads to a whole slew of grave prohibitions, including baseless hatred, Lashon Harah, slander, rage, shaming and hurting people with words, vengeance, bearing a grudge, financial damages, and even sometimes a Chillul Hashem.

A person who finds himself in a place where dissension exists must leave as quickly as possible. Sometimes those who participate in a conflict hesitate to control themselves and leave, for they do not want people to think that they have been defeated. However a person should remind himself of what the Sages have said, namely that it is better to be considered as a fool for one's entire life by man, than to be considered as wicked for an instant by G-d.

A person must not take sides in a conflict, even if his father or mother are involved. That is what happened with the sons of Korach, who did not take their father's side in his dispute with Moses. They were therefore spared the punishment that their father received.

**A**t the beginning of this week's parsha we read, "Vehaya [And it shall be] because you will hearken to these ordinances... the L-RD your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 7:12). We are familiar with the Sages' teaching on the word vehaya, namely that it denotes joy, whereas the word vayehi denotes trouble (Megillah 10b; Bereshith Rabba 42:3). When there is joy in the service of Hashem, when Torah study and mitzvot observance are done in joy – the joy of having merited to serve the King – this will lead to good things from Hashem. In this week's parsha as well, if we perform all Hashem's mitzvot with joy, He will rid the Jewish people of all their illnesses and they will prosper in every area.

On the other hand, we must realize that the opposite also takes place. That is, evil decrees come upon the world when joy is lacking in our service of Hashem, as it is written: "Because you did not serve the L-RD your G-d with gladness and goodness of heart when everything was abundant" (Deuteronomy 28:47). What can this be compared to? It is like the vanities of this world, for when someone discovers that he has won the lottery, he is ecstatic even before seeing a penny of his winnings, already prepared to spend it in a variety of ways. Similarly, and even more so, a person should constantly rejoice at being able to perform numerous mitzvot and merit eternal happiness in the World to Come. This is especially true since there are so many mitzvot whose reward is granted in this world, as the Sages have said (Peah 1:1).

Examining the parsha's opening verse, we see that the Torah states: "Vehaya eikev [And it shall be because] you will hearken." This means that joy should also be present in this mitzvah. It must not only be present for important or rare mitzvot, those that seldom present themselves to us, but for every mitzvah, even the ones that can be qualified as eikev ("heel"), meaning those we tend to trample upon. As Rashi explains in citing the Sages (Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 758), such mitzvot must also be accomplished in joy, as the Mishnah states: "Be as careful of a minor mitzvah as of a major one, for you do not know the reward given for the mitzvot" (Perkei Avoth 2:1). Therefore this mitzvah, seemingly unimportant to us, one that we trample upon, is in fact very important in the eyes of Hashem.

If we were to ask how one can rejoice when performing mitzvot that are done out of habit and tend to be overlooked, the answer is to reflect upon the ways of this world and to learn a lesson from it. For example, although people earn money each day, has anyone ever said that he doesn't enjoy his money because he earns it every day? On the verse, "It is a sorry task that G-d has given to the sons of man with which to be concerned" (Ecclesiastes 1:13), the Sages have said: "This is the nature of wealth. ... If [a person] has a hundred, he wants to turn them into two hundred" (Kohélet Rabba 1:32). That is, the more a person adds to his wealth, the happier he is, even if he adds to it every day.

If such is the case for frivolous pursuits, of which a person brings nothing with him in the next world, how much more is it the case for mitzvot that a person brings with him after his death? These mitzvot, which are eternal, can only be performed in this world. We should obviously rejoice to no end in performing them, even though we are constantly and habitually doing

so. This is what protects a person in this world and in the next. By reflecting on this, a person's heart will be filled with overflowing delight, and he will run to perform both easy and difficult mitzvot with joy and enthusiasm.

Thus a prior condition must be met: The performance of mitzvot must be done in joy, not out of habit. We can learn this lesson from the ways of the world, for people eat and drink several times a day, and each night they go to sleep. Yet nobody does this out of habit or obligation, for people eat with gusto and they are quite willing to go to sleep when they are tired!

So too must we perform mitzvot with vigor and a sense of renewal, a sense that the Torah is our life, as it is written: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by all that comes from the mouth of G-d" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

In the blessing of Ahavat Olam we say, "For they are our life and the length of our days," which is patterned after the verse, "For He is your life and the length of your days" (Deuteronomy 30:20). Just as it is clear that we cannot live without food, so too is it clear for all to see that we cannot live without Torah and mitzvot. Since we have arrived at this point, we shall be able to understand what the Torah is warning us about in this week's parsha by saying: "If you completely forget the L-RD your G-d and go after..." (ibid. 8:19). This means that if a person neglects to perform mitzvot or does them out of habit, without joy or a sense of renewal, he is liable to forget Hashem and go from bad to worse. As Rashi says on the verse, "And it will be, if you diligently hearken" (ibid. 11:13): "If you hearken to the old, you will hearken to the new. Similar is [the verse], 'And it will be, if you forget' – if you have started to forget, you will eventually forget it all, for it is written in the scroll: 'If you leave Me for one day, I will leave you for two days.'"

The Sages made a similar statement in the Mishnah: "One sin brings about another" (Perkei Avoth 4:2). This means that if we have started to neglect Torah study and mitzvot performance, we will no longer have any spiritual feelings left. We will instead be so attached to the frivolous pursuits of this world that all our thoughts will focus on them, which is a kind of idolatry.

Let us remember that habit becomes second nature. When Torah study and mitzvot performance are done out of simple habit, it will become natural to forget Hashem and become mired in seeing the world as being ruled by itself. It will then be natural for a person to think, "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17), to believe that he can live on bread alone, not Torah and mitzvot, which provide spiritual nourishment. What a shame it will be for a person to reach such a level. Was it for this reason that Hashem created him, so as to pursue fleeting pleasures? We must therefore be very careful in studying Torah and performing mitzvot, ensuring that we do them in joy. In that case we will not forget Hashem, but remember Him forever.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## Not By Bread Alone

It is written, “To make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by all that comes from the mouth of G-d” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

When the Children of Israel left Egypt and became a people, the Holy One, blessed be He, deemed it good to lead them through the desert, an arid land that was filled with obstacles and dangers. In this way He taught them that man cannot live without Hashem. Thus we are told, “Man does not live by bread alone,” for bread, which symbolizes man’s food and substance, is not what gives him life. Instead, everything “comes from the mouth of G-d” – everything depends on His will. For the 40 years that they were in the desert, the Children of Israel were guided by miracles. This clearly taught them that it is completely useless to think, “My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:17). The truth is that everything “comes from the mouth of G-d.” It was by Hashem’s word that the water was sweetened at Marah, and it was by His word that Miriam’s well provided them with water for their journeys. Although water came from a rock, and although in reality a rock cannot produce water, nevertheless by Hashem’s word it brought forth abundant water for the entire people. By His word they obtained bread from heaven, and by His word their garments did not wear out, not even after 40 years. The same applies to every miracle, for they are all meant to teach that there is none other than Hashem. We see this everywhere, for every corner of Creation proclaims that everything “comes from the mouth of G-d.”

As for us, if we succeed in overcoming our prejudices and desires, and if we examine all the intricacies of nature, we will discover our Creator. We will see, hidden away in everything, the intelligence behind life. What the generation of the desert perceived through miracles, namely that everything stems from Hashem, we can perceive through nature. We can see that everything comes from Him, and in this way we will be certain that nature, just as much as miracles, “comes from the mouth of G-d.”

If we firmly adhere to the concept that man himself is completely powerless, and that everything is guided by Hashem, we will always be happy, for we will know with certainty that everything is guided from above. We will obtain what is meant for us in all cases, for nobody and nothing can affect what the Holy One, blessed be He, has decided to give us, be it by a hairsbreadth. (Conversely, we will never obtain what is not meant for us, regardless of our efforts.) If the Creator wants to give us something, He lacks neither the means nor the power to bring it about. Even if someone deprives us of something, it only seems that way, for he is nothing more than a messenger. The fact that we still have to put an effort into obtaining what we need is only meant to ensure that we are repaid for the choices we make. Although we may choose to believe in our own abilities, we understand and firmly believe that such a choice is erroneous, for everything “comes from the mouth of G-d.” By the merit of this understanding, everything we do will be blessed.

## A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “Now O Israel, what does the L-RD your G-d ask of you?” (Deuteronomy 10:12).

Our Sages explain this to mean, “Everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven” (Berachot 33b). From here we see that the fear of Heaven is something that we can easily obtain, and something that we must obtain.

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states that everyone knows that the fear of Heaven is a tremendous thing, one that a person must work hard to attain. Therefore how could it follow from the text that it can be easily obtained, to the point of asking what Hashem expects of

us? We must explain that if a person wants to arrive at the level of fearing G-d, if he wants to never again risk sinning, he must acquire the virtue of humility and grow in it, for only through humility will he be able to reach such a level. We find this concept alluded to in the verse, “Mah [What does] the L-RD your G-d ask of you?” Hashem is asking for mah – that you be as Moses and Aaron said: V’nachnu mah (“What are we” [Exodus 16:7]) – which exemplifies true humility. This is the mah that Hashem expects of us.

## Increasing Their Number

It is written, “All the evil diseases of Egypt that you knew, He will not put on you” (Deuteronomy 7:15).

In the Passover Haggadah, Rabbi Yossi the Galilean, Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Akiva strived to increase the number of plagues that struck the Egyptians. Rabbi Yossi said that 10 plagues struck them in Egypt and 50 at the sea, Rabbi Eliezer said that it was 40 in Egypt and 200 at the sea, and Rabbi Akiva said that it was 50 in Egypt and 250 at the sea. Yet what difference does it make how many plagues struck them?

Here the Vilna Gaon states that these Tannaim wanted to increase the number of the plagues as much as possible in order to prevent them from affecting the Jewish people in any way. Since the verse states, “All the evil diseases of Egypt that you knew, He will not put on you,” the more plagues that struck the Egyptians, the more plagues and illnesses that will not strike the Jewish people.

## Today We’re Fasting!

It is written, “He afflicted you and let you hunger, and He fed you the manna” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

We know that the Children of Israel were given manna to eat while in the desert. However when did Hashem afflict them and let them go hungry?

The Sages have said that the manna descended for each person according to his deeds. For a tzaddik, the manna arrived at the door of his tent. For an average individual, the manna arrived a little further away, and for the wicked it arrived outside the camp. Imagine, therefore, that a Jew got up in the morning and expected his manna to be waiting at the door of his tent. If he discovers that it’s not there, nor anywhere near his tent, he will realize that he must go outside the camp to get it. However he will also realize that shame will accompany him if he does, for the children in the area will see him heading outside the camp to get his manna, and they will laugh at him and chant, “[So and so] is wicked!” Not a very nice thing to hear. Therefore when such a person realizes that he has to go outside the camp in order to get his manna, he will go back inside and tell his wife, “Today were going to fast. I had a bad dream last night, and I think it would be best if we fasted.” He will then fast for the entire day and repent of all his deeds. Come the next morning, the manna will be at the door of his tent and he will rejoice. Is this not, “He afflicted you and let you hunger,” followed by, “and He fed you the manna”?

– Rabbi Galinski Shlita

## An Amazing Land

It is written, “A land where you will eat bread without scarceness” (Deuteronomy 8:9).

After all the blessings that were promised in the parsha when we observe the Torah, it would seem that this verse is not telling us anything new by stating that there will be no scarceness in the land.

The key to understanding it lies in the fact that the poor usually eat their bread plain, whereas the wealthy eat it with other things in order to give it a better taste. Hence the verse is telling us that the bread of Eretz Israel will be so good that even the wealthy will eat it plain.

– Yalkut Halevi

## The Pleasure of Torah Study

It is written, “You will eat and will be satisfied, and you will bless” (Deuteronomy 8:9).

With regards to a person’s obligation to recite a blessing before eating, the Gemara teaches: “If he says a blessing when he is full, how much more should he do so when he is hungry” (Berachot 35ab). With regards to the blessings of the Torah, the need to recite a blessing after studying Torah is derived from the fact that we must recite one before studying it.

The Vilna Gaon explains that insofar as the pleasures of this world are concerned, a person has a greater appetite and pleasure before eating than afterwards. Hence, “If he says a blessing when he is full, how much more should he do so when he is hungry?” However the opposite applies to the study of Torah, for a person experiences greater pleasure after he studies it.

## A Beautiful Treasure

It is written, “Now O Israel, what does the L-RD your G-d ask of you?” (Deuteronomy 10:12).

The prophet Isaiah stated, “The fear of the L-RD is his treasure” (Isaiah 33:6).

The Vilna Gaon is said to have remarked with a smile that every king counts as his treasure everything that is important and valuable in his kingdom. Things that can be found in abundance, however, are not considered as befitting a treasure. Thus in the eyes of Hashem, Who created everything, nothing is important enough to be considered a treasure, for everything belongs to Him – everything, that is, except the fear of Heaven. The fear of Heaven apparently does not belong to Him, for it is written: “Everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven” (Berachot 33b). Therefore, “The fear of the L-RD is His treasure.”

## Blessed in All Things

It is written, “A land of wheat, barley, grape...you will lack nothing there. A land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper” (Deuteronomy 8:8-9).

The Ohr HaChaim Hakodesh explains that the land of Israel is perfect in every way. A land is not perfect if it possesses good agricultural products yet lacks raw material for construction and consumer goods. In that case it must export what it has for what it needs. Many farmers make a good living off the land, yet they are in need because they must spend all they have in order to buy clothing and other common goods.

Therefore after stating that the land contains wheat, barley, and other agricultural products, the Torah tells us that it lacks nothing. There is no need to export its produce in order to acquire consumer goods, for it contains everything needed to make such goods. Hence “you will lack nothing there.”

## Setting a Personal Example

It is written, “You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way” (Deuteronomy 11:19).

The language of this verse seems to be imprecise, for it should have stated: “You shall teach them to your children so they shall speak of them when they sit in your house and when they walk on the way.” Actually, the verse is discussing the subject of one’s children, and the Chatam Sofer states that it teaches us a marvelous principle in education: Before a father can direct his children to study Torah at every possible moment, he must first set a personal example. This is why the verse expressly states, “You shall teach them to your children,” and then goes on to say, “speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way.” First the father himself must be devoted to Torah, and then his children will automatically learn to do the same.

# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## Serving Hashem is Quite Easy

It is written, “You shall fear the L-RD your G-d; Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave” (Deuteronomy 10:20).

As the verse tells us, we have been commanded to always set our minds on G-d. This means that our thoughts must constantly be focused on Him, as King David said: “I have set the L-RD before me always” (Psalms 16:8). Although he was the ruler of Israel and a brave warrior, King David still focused all his thoughts on Hashem and never turned away from Him.

The thoughts and deeds of a person when he is alone at home are unlike those when he is standing before a great king. How much more is this true when he reflects upon the fact that the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Whose glory fills the entire universe, is before him and knows everything he thinks and does! There is no doubt that such a person, who cleaves to the Creator, will fear Him and yield to Him. The more he cleaves to Him, the more his deeds will become refined and his words pleasant, for he will see others as being children of the great King. Because he knows before Whom he stands, his prayers will be said with concentration, and because they come from the bottom of his heart, they will be not be said in vain. A person who focuses on the fear of G-d is not afraid of scorners, for he knows that he is serving the King. Although he conceals his good deeds, the evil inclination cannot do anything to stop them, for the fear of G-d is his treasure.

All his deeds, even those pertaining to the material realm, even physical pleasure such as eating, are sanctified, for everything he does is aimed at fulfilling Hashem’s will. He eats and drinks in order to gain strength to serve the Creator, and when he recites a blessing, it is to thank and exalt Him for all the good things He provides. When he sleeps, he knows that those who hope in Hashem will renew their strength, and his goal in resting is to do just that, for he wants to continually serve Him. His daily actions are completely sanctified, for his thoughts are correct and pure. He constantly places the fear of G-d before his eyes.

The Chafetz Chaim once told a pharmacist that he was quite jealous of him. Astonished at his remark, the pharmacist asked him what he meant. The Chafetz Chaim said, “Every day you perform a great deal of chesed, for you give everyone what they need in order to heal their illnesses.” The pharmacist was even more surprised by this statement, since he was only working to earn a living. The Chafetz Chaim replied, “If you have the intention of helping your clients by providing them with what they need, then even if you make money by your work, it still does not detract from the mitzvot you perform.” It was said that this pharmacist later became the greatest practitioner of chesed in his city.

We therefore see how great this mitzvah truly is, one that sanctifies and elevates us. Knowing the Creator in all our ways and deeds awakens tremendous joy in us!

# EISHET CHAYIL

## Teaching a Child How to Recite a Blessing

It is said that the Rebbetzin of Belz (the wife of the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Sar Shalom) once saw a child quickly uttering a blessing over bread.

She said to him, “When this wheat was being planted in the field, there was one grain that prayed to Hashem for the earth to receive it. You see, it wanted someone to recite a blessing over it! Hashem answered its prayer, and it wasn’t thrown away, but was able to take root in the ground. Hashem made it grow until it became a great blade of wheat.

“Before the harvest, it prayed for the harvester not to crush it. It also asked Hashem to be included in the harvest, for it really wanted someone to recite a blessing over it. This grain of wheat did not stop praying, and it was eventually loaded into a bag and made it to the mill.

“At the mill, the grain prayed to be turned into flour, not to get thrown away. And at the bakery, it begged Hashem not to end its life as a leftover piece of dough.

“Once it was part of some dough and began to rise, it was cooked and became a delicious piece of bread. After everything it went through and all the prayers it said, it was placed in a bag and finally made its way to you. You’re the answer to all its prayers! Now what do you think, that the blessing you uttered is fitting for a grain of wheat that prayed so much?”

## A TRUE STORY

### True Service of Hashem

It is written, “You shall fear the L-RD your G-d; Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave” (Deuteronomy 10:20).

After an exhausting journey, Rabbi David ben Baruch Zatzal arrived in Meknes and was welcomed by Rabbi Mordechai Berdugo Zatzal. On the night of his arrival, his host invited the greatest rabbis in the city to pray with him, for Rabbi David ben Baruch was very skilled in all areas of Torah. Rabbi David prayed with them during the entire night, even encouraging regular individuals to ask him questions. Everyone was quite happy.

When the sun arose, they proceeded to pray Shacharit. Despite the fact that he still had not rested from his long journey, Rabbi David was called upon to lead the service. Rabbi Mordechai was so amazed that he couldn't help but ask, “How can you possibly lead the service? You've just arrived from an exhausting trip, you stayed up all night and encouraged people to ask you questions, and now you're leading the prayers?”

Rabbi David replied, “You should know that this is part of the service of Hashem, to rouse oneself with emotion and vigor. As for one who studies with apathy, he will fall asleep even if he is well rested.”

– Ma'aseihem Shel Chachmei HaSefaradim

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Yaakov Kuli of Constantinople – The Author of Yalkut Me'am Loez

Rabbi Yaakov Kuli Zatzal was among the greatest Sephardic scholars of his generation. The grandson of Rabbi Moshe ibn Chabib (the author of Get Pashut), Rabbi Yaakov was the favorite disciple of the gaon Rabbi Yehuda Rosanes Zatzal, the author of Mishneh LaMelech and Parashat Derachim. Rabbi Yaakov spent a year preparing Parashat Derachim for printing after his teacher passed away, and he was known as a Torah genius who possessed an extremely sharp mind, a scholar for whom no area of the holy Torah held secrets. He was a great poet, and many of his works have been printed, though many have not.

Many years later Rabbi Yaakov Kuli became famous for his work Yalkut Me'am Loez, a collection of aggadot and midrashim covering the entire Torah, the prophets, and the Jewish festivals. This work demonstrated his abilities in all areas of Torah, for in it he cites hidden midrashim that people never knew existed. The Chida was an adamant admirer of Rabbi Yaakov and his book, one in which every Jew can find something to draw him to Torah.

Rabbi Yaakov was an expert in the laws relating to names, as well as the most complicated areas of divorce. Complex questions of gittin were addressed to him from many places, especially questions dealing with the correct way to record names in a get. His answers explain the Halachah clearly, as when it was given at Sinai. Rabbi Yaakov also wrote the book Simanim D'Oraita, which distinguishes between Torah and Rabbinic prohibitions. He passed away on Av 19, 5492.

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

### Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was journeying on the road when it began to rain. He exclaimed, “Master of the universe, the whole world is at ease, but Chanina is in distress.” The rain stopped. When he arrived home he exclaimed: “Master of the universe, the whole world is in distress and Chanina is at ease,” and the rain began to fall. Rabbi Yosef remarked, “Of what use was the prayer of the High Priest [on Yom Kippur] against that of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa?” ... [The High Priest prayed:] “May it be Your will, L-RD our G-d, that this year may be one of rain and heat.” [Yet here, Hashem granted Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's prayer by stopping the rain!] ... Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “Each day a celestial voice is heard declaring, ‘The whole world draws its sustenance because of Chanina My son, and Chanina My son contents himself with a kav of carobs from one Sabbath eve to another [i.e., he was so poor that all he ate was carobs].’ ”

Once on a Friday eve [Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa] noticed that his daughter was sad. He said to her, “My daughter, why are you sad?” She replied, “I exchanged my vinegar can for my oil can, and I kindled the Sabbath light with vinegar.” He said to her, “My daughter, why should this trouble you? He Who commanded the oil to burn will also command the vinegar to burn.” A Tanna taught: The light continued to burn the whole day, until they used it for Havdalah.

– Taanith 24b-25a

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### Not Now, But Afterwards

It is written, “Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you, for he was only one when I called him. I blessed him and increased him, for the L-RD shall comfort Zion” (Isaiah 51:2-3).

The Midrash states that every occurrence of the expression “she has no” means that now she lacks, but in the future she will not lack (Bereshith Rabba 38:14). For example, the Torah states, “Sarah was barren; she had no child” (Genesis 11:30), but later on we read: “The L-RD visited Sarah” (ibid. 21:1). So too with regards to the verse, “She is Zion; no one cares for her” (Jeremiah 30:17), for it is written: “A redeemer shall come to Zion” (Isaiah 59:20). Likewise it is stated, “She has no comforter” (Lamentations 1:2), yet afterwards: “I am He Who comforts you” (Isaiah 51:12).

Thus the verse, “Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you” means that when we lose hope because we have not been comforted in the long night of our exile, and when we start to believe that “she has no comforter” and that “no one cares for her” is a permanent condition, then we must look to our father Abraham and to our mother Sarah. Although Abraham “was only one when I called him” – although Hashem called him in this world and announced that he would be childless – nevertheless, “I blessed him and increased him.” The meaning of “she had no child” is thus clear: Now she has no child, but in the future she will have one. From here we learn that “the L-RD shall comfort Zion,” for although now “She has no comforter,” afterwards she will definitely have one!