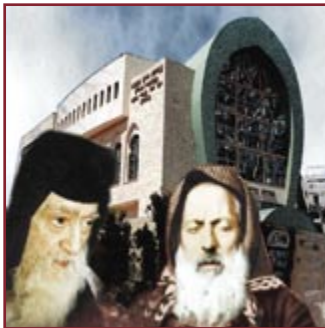


THE INFLUENCE OF TORAH STUDY AND PRAYER EVEN EXTENDS TO OTHERS (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



The Path To Follow

NOAH

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HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of
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

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

One Who Guards His Tongue Will Experience Great Material Blessings

"If you listen to me," said the Chafetz Chaim, "then I definitely advise to you guard yourself from this sin [Lashon Harah] with great vigilance, even more than in causing someone actual harm, such as by theft, violence, material damage, and the like. [Note: These are obviously major factors in losing one's possessions and becoming poor, as we read in the booklet Sefat Tamim and according to many teachings of the Sages.] Thus it is certain that your possessions will be more greatly blessed than by any other segula. As we know, every curse [arur] began with a blessing, as for example: 'Blessed be he who does not strike his fellow in secret.' And all the people shall say Amen' [see Rashi on Deuteronomy 27:12; ibid. 27:24]. Such a blessing will certainly be fulfilled, as it is written: 'It is the blessing of the L-RD that enriches' [Proverbs 10:22]. However the evil inclination blinds a person and prevents him from seeing the truth."

From the verse, "For it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me" (Genesis 7:1), we learn of the greatness of the tzaddikim and those who study Torah. When they study, others see them and do the same, and they are also elevated in the service of Hashem.

Similarly, when people see how someone continues to be upright because he studies Torah in yeshiva, they can also be favorably influenced and want to partake of the Torah. They will then merit seeing the light of Torah for themselves, a light that will extinguish the darkness within them. They will return to the right path, and Hashem's Name will be sanctified as a result. In fact Noah had considerable merit of his own, for the environment in which he lived and worked was filled with evil, and moreover everyone scorned him. There was but a step between remaining a believer and being influenced by his environment, for Noah was an innocent man (ibid. 6:9), and the innocent usually believe what people tell them. The Holy One, blessed be He, was therefore concerned that because of Noah's innocence, he would be influenced by crafty people and ensnared in their sins. Hashem therefore occupied Noah with building the ark. For seven days prior to the flood, people were mourning the death of Methuselah. Because of their grief, during these seven days people began to consider all the warnings that Noah had given them over the previous 120 years, which resulted in a small degree of teshuvah.

This is why Hashem warned Noah: Know that there will be a flood in seven days, and therefore you must wait and draw closer to them until these days of mourning end. If they truly improve their ways, the coming downpour will become a rain of blessing, and you can then come into contact with them. If they do not improve their ways, then the downpour will become a flood, and you will never be able to come into contact with them.

When Noah realized that he would only be saved from the flood if he distanced himself from the unhealthy environment of the people living at the time, he went to hide in the teva ("ark"), a word that has the same numerical value (142) as yeshiva. Noah sought to increase the satisfaction that he brought to his Creator, and in the ark he studied Torah and engaged in deeds of kindness, which helped him to survive while living there, since he was not tempted to stray. We see that Noah studied Torah while in the ark, for it was to Noah that the Sages applied the passage: "His desire is in the Torah of the L-RD" (Psalms 1:2) – a reference to the seven mitzvot that Noah received; "and in His Torah he mediates day and night" (ibid.) – deriving one thing from another; "he shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water" (v.3), for Hashem planted him in the ark. This also proves that on account of his Torah study, Noah was knowledgeable in the laws of shechita and everything that concerned offerings. Similarly, when Noah emerged from the ark he understood that to truly serve Hashem with devotion, holiness and purity, a person must sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake, as it is written: "And Noah built an altar" (Genesis 8:20). The word vayeven ("and he built") also designates havanah ("understanding"). Thus Noah understood that it was solely by studying Torah with tremendous effort that one can achieve complete devotion in the service of Hashem. This is why he was ready to give up his life in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, and it was only because he

had no other way of showing his devotion that he brought an offering. As we know, the offerings actually symbolize a person giving up his soul, for in bringing an offering, a person pictures himself as being the one who really should have been offered on the altar.

The Sages explain just to what extent the ark provided Noah with holiness and purity. They say that when Noah emerged from the ark and saw that the world had been destroyed, he cried out to Hashem: "You should have shown compassion for Your creation." Hashem replied, "Now you say this? Why didn't you say this when I told you that you would be safe in the ark? You didn't even bother to intercede for others! Yet now you open your mouth and pray?" (See Zohar Hashmatot, Bereshith 254b.)

The reason why Noah only prayed after emerging from the ark was because he did not understand the tremendous power of prayer. He did not realize that if he had prayed, it would have been possible to save his entire generation, just as Abraham prayed for Sodom. Although Abraham's prayer was not answered in that case, he still did what he could. It was, moreover, his prayer that saved Lot and his daughters, from whom the kingship of the house of David emerged. Even if Noah would not have been able to save his generation had he prayed, he still would have suffered less by knowing that he had done all he could to save them, even if trying was pointless. Thus even if Noah could not have saved his entire generation, he could have possibly saved a few individuals, and even if he had been unable to save a few, he would have at least known that he did all he could. Yet that never happened, for he only prayed after the flood, since it was then that he experienced tremendous sorrow.

Thus Noah understood why Hashem had told him to build an ark. The ark (i.e., Torah and prayer) is what saves a person from the tribulations of his time. As long as we are not within the ark (i.e., a yeshiva), it is impossible to understand the power that hides within the walls of the Beit Midrash. It is impossible to know what we can obtain and how much we can grow by taking advantage of each moment that we are there.

Similarly, the faith of a yeshiva student, who is constantly studying Torah, is not the same as that of a person who does not study in a yeshiva, for the latter's faith is far weaker. Although he may perform mitzvot, pray in synagogue, and listen to Torah lectures, when he leaves the Beit Midrash we see that he hasn't changed at all. We see that he conducts himself as before, seemingly without any spiritual elevation. That being the case, such a person cannot exert a good influence on others.

As for someone who "kills himself" in studying Torah – as it is written, "a man that dies in a tent" (Numbers 19:14) – and who fulfills the verse, "Because for Your sake we are killed all the time" (Psalms 44:23), since he never stops elevating himself in the service of Hashem, such a person can influence others through his Torah study and prayer. This is because people will see and emulate him, and as such he can save many from a disastrous spiritual fall. He can elevate them to the heights, to the King of the universe, for that is the main thing, the most important thing of all.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Kindness and Compassion

It is written, "G-d remembered Noah, and every living thing...with him on the ark" (Genesis 8:1).

One year during the sounding of the Shofar, a large crowd gathered in the Beit Midrash of the Chozeh of Lublin. Everyone awaited the arrival of the Rav, who at that time was in an adjoining room making last minute preparations to sound the Shofar with lofty spiritual intentions. Unexpectedly, the Chozeh turned to his friends and asked, "Look to see if Rabbi David of Lelov is in the Beit Midrash." They looked and told him that Rabbi David wasn't there.

The Chozeh said, "Go and find Rabbi David wherever he is, because I can't begin the tekiyot without him." These messengers scoured the streets of Lublin looking for Rabbi David, and after a few minutes they found him standing next to some horses, feeding them barley from his hand. He did this because the coachmen hadn't fed their horses, for they had abandoned them to go pray and hear the Shofar.

The messengers asked Rabbi David, "What are you doing here?" He answered, "I'm not ready to hear the Shofar. Is it only with people that we must show kindness? Is it not written, 'His mercy extends to all His works' [Psalms 145: 9]? In what way are these poor animals guilty, such that their owners left them without food?" When Rabbi David returned to the Beit Midrash, the Chozeh said: "I took great delight in Rabbi David's preparations for the sounding of the Shofar. The entire celestial assembly came down to see the great kindness and compassion that Rabbi David showed to those starving horses. His action silenced all accusers and annulled every evil decree against the Jewish people. Rabbi David's service of Hashem in feeding those horses was more pleasing to Heaven than all the kabbalistic intentions of many of the generation's great. You should realize that by the deeds of kindness and compassion that a person does in this world, he causes great abundance in the upper worlds to descend upon him and the entire Jewish people, an abundance of kindness and compassion."

Thus in the present day, when we all need a great deal of divine mercy, we must strengthen ourselves in the mitzvah of kindness. We must realize that this does not require much effort, a concept that is illustrated by the following story from the book Sheal Avicha Veyagidcha: Rabbi Shalom Schwadron Zatzal said, "One day I took one of my children to see the doctor, and on the way I met the gaon Rabbi Eizik Scher. After we exchanged hellos, he asked me where I was going. I said that I was going to the doctor with my son. He then asked me, 'Why are you going to the doctor?' I said, 'Because my son is ill.' He then questioned me about this several times, stressing something different with each question he asked. When I realized that I wasn't giving him the right answer, I kept quiet. He then asked me another question, but this time with an explanation: 'What is the difference between an animal that takes care of its young and a man who takes care of his children? A father who goes to the doctor with his child must realize that he is demonstrating kindness to a Jewish soul that needs healing. Moreover, that soul happens to belong to his son. This is the proper way for a person to conduct himself with his children. Otherwise he is simply acting like an animal.'"

Let us take this to heart and transform all our day-to-day actions into an immense undertaking of chesed.

A Pearl From the Rav

In this week's parsha we read of the deeds of the generation of the dispersion and their punishment, namely that Hashem came down to confound their language, resulting in their dispersal over the face of the earth. In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to punish them by confounding their language and dispersing them over the earth.

The answer is that the generation of the dispersion demonstrated unity only in a superficial way, for they were not really sincere with one another. The attention they paid to mitzvot between man and his fellowman did not stem from a sincere love for the other. Instead it resulted from their realization that what condemned the generation of the flood – what brought about their terrible punishment – was the sin of theft, a sin between man and his fellowman. Hence the Creator punished the generation of the dispersion measure for measure: Because they spoke the same language only superficially, Hashem confounded their language. The Sages described this generation as follows: "One said to his fellow worker, 'Bring me water,' whereupon he would give him earth, at which point he struck him and split his skull" (Bereshith Rabba 38:10). From here we can see their true intentions with regards to living together in harmony.

Which is Better?

It is written, "Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations" (Genesis 6:9).

The disciples of the Chozeh of Lublin once asked him, "Which is better, being 'perfect' or being 'great'?"

The Chozeh of Lublin replied, "Suppose a person is about to recite Hamotzi. If he has two loaves of bread before him, yet one is large and sliced, while the other is small and whole, he should recite the blessing on the latter. From here we learn that being perfect is better than being great."

A Light for the Ark

It is written, "A light shall you make lateva [for the ark]" (Genesis 6:16).

The word teva ("ark") can also mean "a word." Thus: "A light shall you make latevah" – create light from every word of Torah, so that each word of Torah emerging from your mouth shines.

Heaven once revealed to the Arizal that there was a man living a certain town who had prayed better than he did during the holidays of Tishri.

The Arizal went to find him and asked, "Are you a ben Torah?" The man said that he was not. "Do you know how to pray?" the Arizal continued. "No I don't," said the man.

The Arizal then asked, "What did you do during the holidays?" The man replied, "Rabbi, I don't even know the whole alphabet! I only know aleph to yud. When I arrived in synagogue and saw that everyone was concentrated in prayer, my heart sank. I then said, 'Aleph, beit, gimel, dalet, hei, vav, zayin, chet, tet, yud. Master of the universe, assemble these letters as You wish, and may they be pleasing to You.' I then repeated this with all my strength, heartbroken as I was."

Thus the words of this Jew had done more in Heaven than all the prayers of the Arizal!

How We View Precious Stones

It is written, "A light shall you make for the ark" (Genesis 6:16).

When Noah entered the ark, he took some precious stones with him. When they were dark, he knew that it was daytime, and when they shined, he knew that it was night (Yerushalmi, Pesachim 1:1).

This is what happens with money, writes the author of Chavot Yair. If precious stones are dark for someone, it means that it is day, that he sees clearly, for he has the proper perspective on the value of money. However if precious stones shine to him, this means that it is night, that he is groping in the dark.

He Never Thought the Flood Would Come

It is written, "Noah...went into the ark because of the waters of the flood" (Genesis 7:7).

Rashi states, "Noah was also among those of little faith, believing and not believing that the flood would come, and he did not enter the ark until the waters forced him to."

How can we possibly say that Noah, whom the Torah describes as righteous and perfect, did not really believe in the coming flood?

This means that Noah believed in and hoped to see the flood beginning with a heavy rain, which would confirm what he had been proclaiming (i.e., that Hashem would sweep everyone away with a flood), compelling them to look to their Father in Heaven and repent. This is what Rashi means by saying that Noah lacked faith. That is, he never thought the flood would come, for he hoped that people would repent.

As Bitter as the Olive

It is written, "The dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, an olive leaf was in its mouth" (Genesis 8:11).

The Gemara states, "The dove said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'May my food be as bitter as the olive yet entrusted to Your hand, rather than sweet as honey and dependent on a mortal'" (Eruvin 18b).

We need to explain the meaning of this statement. Obtaining oil from olives is difficult, for olives must be crushed in a press. However obtaining honey does not require great effort, for it can simply be removed from a beehive. The dove is saying: Even if acquiring my food is as difficult and painstaking as obtaining olive oil, whereas acquiring it from men would be as sweet and effortless as obtaining honey, better that it should be as bitter as the olive, given that it comes from the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He!

– Torat HaParasha

In Accordance With Your Fear of G-d

It is written, "The fear and dread of you shall be upon all the animals of the earth" (Genesis 9:2).

In accordance with your fear of G-d, the animals will be in fear of you. Thus the verse is saying: "The fear and dread of you" – your fear of Hashem – "shall be upon all the animals of the earth" – that very same fear will fill all the animals with dread, so they will not harm you.

– Tiferet Shlomo

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Noah deals with the decline of mankind, recounting humanity's new beginning and the appearance of a select few, an account from Noah to Abraham. The parsha begins with man's conduct deteriorating to such an extent that Hashem decides to destroy everything on earth. Yet He orders Noah to build an ark, and the flood kills everyone on earth while leaving the last vestiges of life on the ark. When Noah emerges from it, the earth is renewed by the building of an altar and the offering of sacrifices. These are the sacrifices of the man of G-d, who reconnects the earth to G-d and His word. Hashem decides to never again destroy the earth, stating that the seasons will continue for all time and that man will rule over the animals. In declaring that He will never unleash another flood, Hashem sets the rainbow as the sign of this covenant. Returning to a life on earth, Noah plants a vineyard, drinks its wine, and unclothes himself. Following the actions of his sons at that time, Noah blesses Shem and Japheth. However he curses Canaan, the son of Ham, condemning him to be a slave to his brothers. After the death of Noah, the parsha lists the 70 nations that descended from him. Wanting to gain glory for themselves by constructing the Tower of Babel, they journey to the east and settle in the land of Shinar so as not to be scattered over the earth. Nevertheless Hashem does just that. After relating this incident, the parsha describes Shem's descendents down to the children of Terah, Shem being the ancestor of Israel, the bearers of G-d's Name. Terah leaves Ur of the Chaldees for the land of Canaan, and his death in Haran serves as an introduction to the story of Abraham.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

What Falsehood Gets, Malediction Takes Away

The Midrash Shocher Tov (87) recounts that when Noah gathered all the animals into the ark, falsehood also presented itself. However Noah rejected it because it had no partner. Falsehood then went to look for a partner, and on the way it met malediction. Falsehood asked, "Where are you coming from?" Malediction replied, "From Noah's ark, but he didn't want to take me aboard because I had no partner." Falsehood then said, "Are you interested in partnering up with me?" Malediction replied, "What will I get in return?" Falsehood answered, "Everything that I get, you can take away." They agreed and entered the ark. When they left, malediction took away everything that falsehood got.

From here we learn that a person has a sacred duty to conduct himself with integrity in all his dealings, distancing himself from falsehood and treachery. If he cleaves to truth, all his possessions will be protected and malediction will never affect him.

In his youth, before the gaon Rabbi Yehoshua Zimbalist Zatzal was named as the Posek and Rav of Minsk, he went into business with someone who made and sold wine.

At one point they produced a large amount of wine, which they kept for Passover. They naturally wanted to sell this ample supply, and they impatiently waited for clients to arrive. One day a Jew from a suburb of Minsk walked into the store and proceeded to order a tremendous amount of wine from Rabbi Yehoshua. After placing his order, the client asked Rabbi Yehoshua if this store was owned by Mr. Kashdan, the famous wine merchant of Minsk. Rabbi Yehoshua answered that the store did not belong to Mr. Kashdan. Upon hearing this, the client canceled his order and immediately proceeded to Mr. Kashdan's store.

When Rabbi Yehoshua's partner learned of what had happened, he was very upset with him. He said to Rabbi Yehoshua, "If we lose more opportunities like this, then we'll never sell the wine we made!" Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "You have nothing to worry about. When a person is honest, he loses nothing on account of his honesty. In fact I'm positive that we'll sell all the wine we made for Passover, and even that won't be enough!" This is precisely what happened, for they were so successful that they sold all the wine they made, and they couldn't even keep up with demand!

When someone places his trust in the Creator, firmly realizing that his sustenance comes to him from Heaven and that his actions are simply part of his duty to make an effort, then it will be easy for him to act honestly. In fact it is the Creator's will to bless the actions of such a person, which is why he is relaxed and places all his faith in Hashem, Who will certainly provide for him.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Torah of Her Sons

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal said, "During the First World War, we suffered greatly from hunger. Our neighbors made their sons return from yeshiva so they could work to put food on the table. Yet in our home, we had nine boys who all studied in yeshiva. Their mother the Rebbetzin had absolutely no desire for them to leave yeshiva, not even for a single hour. Our neighbors, who saw just how hungry we were, said to her: 'Why are you tormenting yourself? Why are you allowing yourself to go hungry? Call back one, two, or even three of your sons from yeshiva so they can ease the hunger in your home!' The Rebbetzin forcefully replied, 'I don't want my sons to help me now, for the time will come when I'll be forced to accept their help, and that will be in the World of Truth! That's why I want them to stay in yeshiva now, so later on they can help me when I really need it!'"

Rabbi Eliyahu concluded by saying, "In fact when my wife died in England, I was, as her husband, the tenth member of the minyan when her sons went to her grave to study mishnayot and recite Kaddish. It is certain that she is now receiving a great deal of help from her sons!" – Introduction to Lev Eliyahu

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Ashamed No Longer

It is written, “Fear not, for you will not be shamed. Do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced, for you will forget the shame of your youth and you will no longer recall the disgrace of your widowhood” (Isaiah 54:4).

Our Sages have said that according to this verse, the Children of Israel would no longer see the holy Ark, neither in the desert nor in the Second Temple, when it was concealed. In the desert they had the status of a fiancée still living in her father’s house, a woman who is too embarrassed to look upon her betrothed. At the time of the Second Temple, the Children of Israel had the status of a divorced woman, who is forbidden to look at the face of her former husband.

Hence the prophet Isaiah announced to the Children of Israel that in the future, they would be close to the Shechinah. They would not be embarrassed like a fiancée, nor would they be distant like a divorced woman.

“Fear not” – do not be embarrassed like a fiancée, “for you will not be shamed.” “Do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced” – you will no longer bear the shame of divorce. As for “the shame of your youth,” the embarrassment you felt during your youth in the desert, “you will forget.” As for “the disgrace of your widowhood,” the shame you experienced during the Second Temple, when you were abandoned by your Husband, “you will no longer recall.” You will then rejoice in the revelation of the Shechinah without impediment.

– Ma’ayana Shel Torah

A TRUE STORY

Honestly Earned Money

It is written, “The earth had become...filled with robbery” (Genesis 6:11).

The gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin Zatzal taught that if a person acquires money in an honest way, beyond any suspicion of theft, then it is completely safe. Thieves will not be able to take it, and its owner will lose none of it. This concept is illustrated by something that Rabbi Chaim witnessed when a group of community leaders came to see him for advice. A Jewish man from the community had strayed far from the path and become a moser (an informer). He recently started accusing these leaders of many things, causing them to incur heavy losses as a result. While they were recounting this to Rabbi Chaim, one of them accidentally moved a tablecloth, causing everything on it to go crashing to the floor. Rabbi Chaim’s guests were very upset with themselves, for who knew what kind of losses they had accidentally caused Rabbi Chaim? Rabbi Chaim, however, quickly reassured them: “There’s nothing to worry about, my friends. I’m certain that not even a single glass has broken. You see, everything on the table is completely protected, for they were purchased with money that was acquired in a faultless way.”

A closer look by Rabbi Chaim’s guests proved that he was right. Rabbi Chaim then said that this was intended as a sign for them, perhaps the very answer they had been looking for. He added, “This teaches that if your money is kosher, beyond any suspicion of theft, then you have no reason to worry about this informer. Just as you saw tonight, he has absolutely no way of making you lose kosher money by denouncing you.”

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Animals of the Tzaddikim

Just as the tzaddikim of old were completely devoted to Hashem, so too were their animals. It is said that the camels of Abraham never entered a house of idolatry, as it is written: “I have prepared the house” [Genesis 24:31]. This teaches us that they did not enter Laban’s home until he rid it of idols. The donkey of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was stolen by robbers, who tied it up in a yard and fed it barley, straw, and water. When it refused to eat or drink, the robbers said, “Why should we leave it here to die and stink up the yard?” Thus they untied the donkey and let it go, and it walked along braying until it reached the home of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. His son heard the sound of the donkey and said to him, “Father, that sounds like our animal.” Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa replied, “Open the door, my son, for it has nearly died of hunger.” The lad quickly opened the door and gave it straw, barley, and water, which it ate and drank. Thus it is said that just as the tzaddikim of old were completely devoted to Hashem, so too were their animals.

– Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan 8:8

Rabbi Pinchas happened to come to a certain inn. They placed barley before his donkey, but it would not eat it. It was sifted, but the donkey would not eat it. It was carefully picked, yet still the donkey would not eat it. “Perhaps,” Rabbi Pinchas suggested, “it has not been tithed?” It was at once tithed, and the donkey ate it. He then exclaimed, “This poor creature is about to do the will of the Creator, and you would feed it untithed grain?”

– Chullin 7a-b

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shimon Shkop – The Author of Shaarei Yosher

The gaon Rabbi Shimon Yehuda Hachohen Shkop Zatzal was born in the town of Turz in 5620. In his youth he possessed a sharp mind and showed great understanding in every field of Torah. At the age of 12 he was accepted as a regular student in the Mir yeshiva, and two years later he went to study at the Volozhin yeshiva, where he learned his Torah from Rabbi Chaim of Brisk and the Netziv.

In 5645 Rabbi Shimon Shkop was named as the Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, and for the next 18 years he gave amazing classes in Torah to thousands of students. In 5665 he was appointed as the Rav of Bransk, and was therefore known as Rabbi Shimon Bransker. However in 5689 he resigned from this position and went to live in Grodno. There he established Shaarei Torah yeshiva as a renowned center of learning in the Lithuanian world. His method of study was unique, for it combined the logical analysis of Rabbi Chaim with the simplicity and clarity of the Netziv. His yeshiva students were closely attached to him, for he was like a father to them.

Rabbi Shimon Shkop always stood out for his great diligence and powerful ability to focus. In fact towels soaked with blood were often found in his room, for his nose would bleed if he concentrated too much. Throughout his life, Rabbi Shimon Shkop unsuccessfully tried to make it to Eretz Israel. When the Germans entered Grodno, he was unable to leave due to his advanced age. However he ordered his students to flee to Vilna. He died in Grodno two days later, on Heshvan 9, 5700. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.