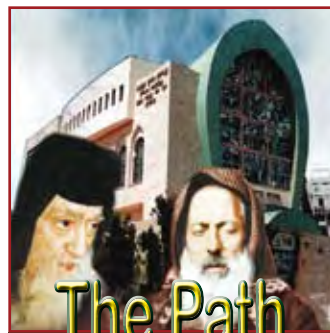


ALL JEWS MUST ENSURE THAT HASHEM'S HONOR AND MITZVOT ARE RESPECTED (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



The Path To Follow

PINCHAS

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

What Profit?

The Gemara cites Resh Lakish as saying, "What is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: 'If the snake bites before it is charmed, then the charmer does not profit' [Ecclesiastes 10:11]?" (Arachin 15b).

He explains that in the future, all the animals will gather together and ask the snake: "The lion attacks and devours, the wolf tears and consumes, but what profit do you have?" The snake will answer, "What profit is had by a person who uses his tongue [to disparage others]?"

According to this reply, there is a sinner who profits from his sin, and there is a sinner who does not, the latter being a person who speaks Lashon Harah. It is not enough that he sinned, and he himself is often struck by the virulence of an evil remark.

It is written, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, turned back My wrath.... Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood'" (Numbers 25:11-13).

The Torah tells us that when Pinchas saw Zimri's vile deed, he realized that the honor of Heaven was being desecrated, and that thousands of Jews would die. Motivated by feelings of jealousy for Hashem's honor, Pinchas therefore arose and took his spear to kill Zimri without hesitating or wavering, thereby saving Israel from death.

Pinchas' bravery was impressive in Hashem's eyes, which is why He told Moses to inform Pinchas that he would be rewarded on account of his great deed. What was his reward? It was a covenant of peace for himself and his descendants after him, a covenant of eternal priesthood, meaning that his descendants would always possess the holiness of the priesthood.

We need to understand this incident, for when Zimri sinned and disaster was about to strike, many of the Children of Israel saw and were fully aware of what he was doing. That being the case, why was it only Pinchas who decided to arise and carry out Hashem's wrath?

We also need to understand the meaning of the statement, "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood.'" Although Pinchas was rewarded in this way, elsewhere we have learned that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world (Kiddushin 39b)!

The explanation is the following: When Pinchas saw what Zimri was doing, he not only perceived the physical reality around him, but also looked into himself and perceived his own strength, sensing an incredible awakening inside. He felt that the hidden forces within him were suddenly telling him to get up and carry out Hashem's vengeance. At that point not using these forces would have been regrettable. Although Pinchas was not one of the most important figures among the tribes, he was a descendant of Aaron, one of the greatest figures in Israel, and he sensed that the merit of his fathers would help him carry out Hashem's vengeance. Hence the verse states, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest." Pinchas' name alone would have sufficed here, so why mention his lineage as well? It is in order to tell us by allusion that Pinchas relied on the merit of his fathers to help him fulfill Hashem's will, thereby preventing a plague.

Pinchas also understood that he was precisely the person who had to take action, for at that point the Halachah had been forgotten, and even Moses did not know it. Pinchas therefore saw Zimri's deed and recalled the Halachah, leading him to the realization that Heaven had chosen him to kill Zimri. Pinchas understood what was happening, and he sensed that things now depended on him. If he hesitated or wavered at that point, a plague would break out and kill thousands of people. This completely explains our first question, which is why it was Pinchas who took action. He did so because he felt that Heaven gave him the strength needed for this task, and he realized that he was precisely the person chosen to carry it out.

The great proof that what Pinchas did was for the sake of Heaven – that his intentions were pure, not tainted in any way by self-interest – lies in the fact that twelve miracles were performed for him, as the Targum explains at the end of Parsha Balak. This is the greatest proof that all he did was solely for the sake of Heaven, completely devoid of self-interest.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Pinchas His covenant of peace, for his only intention was to bring peace between the Children of Israel and their Father in Heaven. As the Sages have said, "Resh Lakish stated: Pinchas is Eliyahu. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'You have made peace between Me and the Children of Israel in this world, and in the future you will also make peace between Me and My children.'" Pinchas merited the priesthood for himself and all his descendants, and death had no power over him (Zohar III:214a). According to this, we can understand the question that we raised earlier, namely how Hashem could have rewarded Pinchas for his deed, since there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world. The question can be answered in several ways:

1. A person does not merit a reward in this world for a mitzvah that he performs, since his reward is reserved for him in the World to Come. However what he adds to a mitzvah, meaning the devotion and effort that he puts into completing it to perfection, is rewarded in this world. Here Pinchas risked his very life by acting as he did for Hashem's honor.

2. When we say that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world, we are speaking of a material reward. A person nevertheless merits a spiritual reward in this world, such as the priesthood and long life, since Pinchas was rewarded with these.

3. There is no reward for a mitzvah in this world when it is performed with the sentiment that personal merit is the cause. Pinchas did not act as he did by relying upon his own merit, but upon the merit of his fathers. Although he had a number of personal merits in his favor, Pinchas still humbled himself, and therefore it is fitting that he was rewarded. It was not a personal reward that he received, but the reward of his fathers, accompanied by its fruits.

Pinchas' brave deed teaches us that when we see the honor of Heaven being desecrated or Judaism's sacred values being trampled upon, we are not allowed to ignore it and weigh our options in order to save face. Although we are not called upon to emulate Pinchas' deed, there are still many ways that we can ensure that Hashem's honor is being respected. As the Sages have said, "There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the L-RD' [Proverbs 21:30]. Whenever the Divine Name is being profaned, honor must not be paid to one's teacher [i.e., Pinchas did not wait for Moses' ruling upon seeing Hashem's Name being profaned]" (Sanhedrin 82a). Every Jew must therefore ensure that the honor of Hashem and His mitzvot are respected, in which case the glory of the Torah will be exalted and Hashem's Name will be sanctified in the world.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

A Questionable Job Offer?

It is written, “The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Harass the Midianites and smite them, for they harassed you’” (Numbers 25:16-18).

The Midrash states: “Harass the Midianites. Why? For they harassed you. From here the Sages derived the adage: If a man comes to kill you, kill him first. Rabbi Shimon says: How do we know that one who causes a man to sin is worse than one who kills him? Because one who kills him does so only as regards this world, but leaves him a share in the World to Come. One who causes him to sin, however, kills him in this world and in the next. Two nations advanced against Israel with the sword and two with sin. The Egyptians and the Edomites advanced against them with the sword, as proved by the texts: ‘The enemy said: I will pursue, I will overtake...I will draw my sword’ [Exodus 15:9] and ‘Edom said to him: You shall not pass through me, lest I come against you with the sword’ [Numbers 20:18]. Two advanced against them with sin, namely the Moabites and the Ammonites. Of those who advanced against them with the sword, it is written: ‘You shall not detest an Edomite...you shall not detest an Egyptian’ [Deuteronomy 23:8]. ... However of those who advanced against them with sin, endeavoring to make Israel transgress, it says: ‘An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the L-RD, even to their tenth generation... forever’ [v.4]” (Bamidbar Rabba 21:4).

One day a merchant carrying a package on his back arrived at the Beit Midrash of the gaon Rabbi Chaim Leib Mishkowsky. He was carrying all kinds of sanctified objects to sell: Mezuzot, tzitzit, tefillin, siddurim, and so on. Such merchants would usually put their merchandise on display by the door of the synagogue during prayer, and people passing by would purchase what they wanted.

The Rav approached the table and fixed his gaze upon a pile of profane books that were known to contain indecent material. Not hesitating for a moment to fulfill the mitzvah of, “You shall remove the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 22:24), the Rav himself took this pile of books and threw them into the furnace. The merchant started to blame him: “Rabbi, you’ve cost me a great deal of money – three rubles! And that goes without counting the fact that you harmed my livelihood, for how am I going to feed my family with the few cents that I made by selling some mezuzot and tzitzit? I make money from the books you burned!” The Rav murmured that he would repay him in cash for the books, but as far as his livelihood was concerned, no Jew is allowed to earn money from indecent material, and therefore he had to find another way to make money. If he couldn’t earn a living selling books, he should look for another job or some other line of work, and the Rav promised to help him in this regard.

When the man heard the Rav explicitly saying that he would help him earn an honorable living, he thanked him for his generosity. They agreed that the man would return on the following day after prayers to remind the Rav of his promise.

The next day, the merchant returned and mentioned what they had spoken about. The Rav replied that he had already started looking for a job for him. In fact he had asked the Shamash to summon the local Catholic priest, for he had something important to tell him, and with his help the Rav was certain that he could help the man earn an honest living.

“How could that be?” asked the merchant. “How can a priest help me?”

“It’s very simple,” answered the Rav. “I happened to meet the priest on the street about a week ago, and he told me that the person who rang the church bells every morning had died. Since he didn’t know who could replace him, I’m going to ask him to be kind enough to offer you the job!”

Feeling apprehensive, the man asked the Rav: “Do you really think that now, as I approach old age, I’m going to sell myself to a priest engaged in idolatry?” The Rav answered: “Judge for yourself: To ring bells that call Gentiles to prayer, you hesitate to do. But to sell indecent material to Jews that make them sin, that you don’t hesitate to do!”

Allusions to the Mitzvah of Tzedakah

It is written, “The sons of Gad according to their families: For Zephon, the Zephonite family; for Haggi, the Haggite family; for Shuni, the Shunite family” (Numbers 26:15).

This verse contains several important allusions. The name “Gad” is formed by the initials of gomel dalim (“giving to the poor”), a reference to the mitzvah of tzedakah. How should this mitzvah be performed? The verse alludes to three things that we must keep in mind when giving tzedakah. The first: “For Zephon, the Zephonite family,” a reference to concealing our good deeds, for tzedakah should be given discreetly in order not to embarrass the poor. In fact the Gemara recounts that when Rabbi Yanai saw a man giving tzedakah to a poor person in public, he told the man that it would have been better not to have given at all (Hagigah 5a). The second is that when giving tzedakah, we must give with joy. This is found in the name “Haggi,” which alludes to the joy of the festival. The third thing to keep in mind is that we must not say “I already gave,” for we must give tzedakah time and again, as the Sages have said: “Give generously – even one hundred times.” This is alluded to in the name “Shuni,” which comes from a root meaning “to repeat.” Hence we must give tzedakah, and then repeat this mitzvah.

– Maor VaShemesh

Looking Without Shame

It is written, “For the L-RD is righteous. He loves righteousness; his face beholds the upright” (Psalms 11:7).

Rabbi Yechezkel of Kuzmir explained this verse in the following way: Hashem loves deeds of tzedakah, and the greatest one of all, the most precious in His eyes, is when “his face beholds the upright” – when the receiver can look straight into the eyes of the giver without shame. This can consist of an anonymous gift (such as by putting money in a person’s bank account, or by giving it to him through a third party), or a loan that is offered with kind words and an assurance that the recipient is actually doing the lender a favor.

Whispering into the Rav’s Ear

On the night of Passover, after the evening prayer, the faithful gathered around Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski to wish him a happy Passover. One man lingered by the Rav’s side for a few minutes and whispered something into his ear, at which point the Rav exclaimed: “Treif! Treif!” Hearing this, the faithful gathered around the man and began inviting him to their home for the Seder meal: “Come to my home!” “You’re welcome to stay with me.” What had the man said to the Rav, and what did the Rav mean by saying “Treif”? Actually, he told the Rav that he was staying in town alone, and so he didn’t have anywhere to eat the Seder meal. In his wisdom, the Rav said “treif” as if the man had asked him a question regarding some meat he had prepared for the Seder. The Rav’s reply gave people the impression that everything the man had cooked for Passover was treif, meaning that he would have to eat the Seder meal elsewhere. His assistants understood what was happening, and so they extended every honor in inviting the man to spend the Seder with them.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

RABBI HAIM BEN ATTAR – OHR HAHAIM HAKODESH

The city of Sale, located on the Atlantic Ocean coast at the far end of Morocco, is not large in terms of cities. The Jewish community there, although small in number, has nevertheless left its imprint on Israel's history because of our revered teacher, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar. Born and raised in Sale, he grew up in the city until he felt the need to leave for the Holy Land and Jerusalem, where he now lies buried.

He was born in 5456 (1696) into the Ben Attar family (originally from Muslim Spain, "Attar" means "perfume" or "perfume merchant") and studied Torah with his grandfather, after whom he was named. As he relates in the introduction to his book Hefetz Hashem, "I studied Torah with my teacher and grandfather, Rav Haim Ben Attar of holy and blessed memory. He was a great Rav, well known, pious and humble, who in his time I drank living waters from. From my birth, I grew up on his knees and took in all his wondrous sayings. He was so pious that I would say that he almost never slept even half a night. He even spent the nights of Tammuz reciting lamentations over the destruction of the House of G-d, crying profusely, like a widow. He finished the night by studying with myself and others who, like myself, were his descendants." In Sale, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar gained a living through his work, which tradition says was in making clothes, especially clothes made of luxury materials woven with gold or silver thread.

Once, the governor of Sale was about to marry his daughter, and when he heard that the work of our teacher was done to perfection and with great precision, he decided to entrust the creation of his daughter's wedding dress to him. The governor had one condition, however, which was that the work had to be completed before the end of the week. As we have said, our teacher earned a living through his work. However he maintained one principle: From the moment that he had earned enough money to live on for the week, he returned to his studies. The servants who had brought him the bride-to-be's clothes were shocked to hear him refuse the job. They returned a second time on orders from the governor, and threatened him with death should he refuse. However our teacher remained firm in his conviction. The governor could not tolerate the fact that a Jew refused to obey him, and he ordered him thrown into the lions' den (after having starved the beasts) found in his court. The governor's servants, who had chained our teacher to bring him to the lions, could hear the hungry roars of the big cats from afar. Yet our teacher, without being perturbed, moved firmly towards the den. The governor's servants were even more surprised when the lions met him by lining up in front of him, wagging their tails and seemingly showing him respect. During this time, our teacher had taken out the book of Psalms and had begun to recite it. The governor, who hastened to come to the den to witness this marvel with his own eyes, greatly regretted having mistreated our teacher and ordered that he be freed. He also gave him expensive gifts and asked for forgiveness.

This is only one of the widespread stories circulating in the Jewish community concerning the greatness of our teacher, whom even wild beasts had a reverential fear of. Staying with his father-in-law from his youth, our teacher did not cease elevating himself in Torah. He finished by founding a yeshiva in his home, where he taught Torah publicly without receiving any salary for it, for from his youth he had undertaken to study and teach. In 5492 (1732), while still living in Sale, his book Hefetz Hashem (a commentary on the Gemara) was printed in Amsterdam. However persecutions forced him to leave the city of his birth, and he left for Meknes, then to Fez, where he studied for several years with certain students and friends. His home was wide open to everyone, and how much more to Bnei Torah. Every week he would purchase a calf for Shabbat, slaughter it, and distribute the meat to Talmidei Chachamim so that they could have something to eat in honor of Shabbat.

The story goes that one week, an epidemic erupted among the livestock of Sale, and all the animals that were slaughtered in honor of Shabbat turned out to be treif, with exception to the calf slaughtered by our teacher. One of the inhabitants of the city, a very wealthy and honored man who greatly regretted not being able to eat meat for Shabbat, went to see our teacher to ask him to give him some, regardless of the price. Our teacher refused, explaining that all the meat was devoted to the needs of the Talmidei Chachamim who came to receive their portion in honor of Shabbat. While they were yet speaking, one of the poor Torah scholars that had regularly helped him came by, and our teacher gave him his portion. The wealthy man was greatly

hurt by the fact that he had no meat for himself, whereas this poor man dressed in tatters received a generous portion. In his rage he heaped words of scorn on the poor man, who was a great Talmid Chacham. Our teacher did not wish to talk with the rich man, and so he left without having obtained what he wanted.

That night, our teacher dreamed that he was condemned into exile for an entire year because he did not defend the honor of the Talmid Chacham in lieu of the rich man's insults. He accepted the decree. The following week, he left his place and undertook a year of veritable exile. He didn't sleep more than one night in the same place, leaving the next morning to pursue his exile. He was often assailed by hunger, yet accepted this trial because of the insult suffered by a Talmid Chacham.

Noticing that he was overwhelmed with troubles, our teacher decided that the moment had come to ascend towards the holy city. As our teacher wrote, "Hashem cleared my mind, and I understood that this trial was only meant to encourage me to leave for the place that I had dreamed of, the place of the Shechinah, the exalted city that is precious to the Master of the world, Sovereign in the world above and in the world below. I armed myself with all my courage and faced great dangers by traveling in deserted regions, all this to arrive at the country that I had yearned for, that pure spot on earth, Eretz Israel. As for all the countries of the peoples of the world, their land – even the air that they breathe there – is impure."

On Rosh Chodesh Av in the year 5501 (1741), he left from Livorno, Italy with a group of students, 30 in all, for Alexandria in Egypt. From there he was to travel to Jaffa, and then on to Jerusalem. One of his students, Rav Avraham Ishmael Hai Sanguinetti, described in a letter to his father (who lived in Modena, Italy) the entire trip from Livorno until the city of Akko. The boat that they had taken stopped in Alexandria, from where the group was to travel to Jaffa and then on the Jerusalem, but the captain instead took them to Akko, where they arrived at the end of Elul 5501 (1741).

In fact, this was really a favor that G-d had done for them, for there was an epidemic that had broken out in Jaffa and Jerusalem. This is why the Rav established a yeshiva in Akko and stayed there for nearly a year, until the middle of 5502 (1742). In Eretz Israel, he was accustomed to pray at the graves of the Tzaddikim. He would go with his students, whether it be in Jerusalem, or in Sefat and Tiberias in the Galilee.

He was warmly greeted when he arrived in Sefat, and even the Beit Midrash of our revered teacher Rabbi Yossef Caro (the author of the Shulchan Aruch) was put at his disposal. There, according to tradition, the holy Arizal had prayed. From time to time, our teacher and his students left for ziarot (pilgrimages) to the graves of the Tzaddikim, Tannaim, and Amoraim buried in the villages of the Galilee. They approached the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron with particular emotion, and even though they traveled there by riding donkeys, when they saw from afar the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai on the mountain summit of Meron, our teacher descended from his donkey and began to climb on all fours, uttering with a bitter voice, "How can I – who am nothing – how can I enter into that place of fire, wherein dwells the flame of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah, while all the heavenly guides and all the souls of the Tzaddikim are here!"

When he visited the holy places of Tiberias, Rav Haim Aboulafia would insistently beg him to settle in Tiberias and to take charge of the new Jewish community of that city. In the end, our teacher decided to establish his yeshiva in Jerusalem, and near the end of the year 5502 (1742) he settled in the holy city with his students. His emotions in arriving in the holy city were expressed in a letter in which he enthusiastically described his first Yom Kippur in Jerusalem: "I saw a great light at the time of Kol Nidre ... and when I opened the heichal, it was truly for me like opening the doors to the Garden of Eden. There was such radiance in the synagogue that everyone was overflowing in supplications and cried abundantly in their desire to see the construction of the Temple. Even the Falachim did the same. [Editor's Note: Apparently these were the Jewish peasants that lived in the villages neighboring Jerusalem (such as Nevi Shmuel) and who came to the city on the night of Yom Kippur to pray with the community]. Believe me, in my entire life I have never seen such a thing."

Among his students was the Chida, who was 18 years old when he joined himself to our teacher's group as the latter ascended to Jerusalem. Even though our teacher

lived only 11 months in Jerusalem, the Chida had the time to serve and learn Torah from him. In his book *Shem HaGedolim*, he speaks with great praise of his grandeur: "And myself the youngster, I had the merit to be part of his yeshiva. My eyes saw the greatness of his Torah, his extreme gentleness, and his extraordinary holiness. For our generation, the Rav had impressive strength in study; he was like a source of living waters. One perceives his wisdom in his books, yet this represents but only a fraction of his insight, the greatness of his heart, and his exceptionally sharp mind. All day long there hovered over him a spirit of holiness and detachment from the world, as well as exceptional spiritual strength."

Our teacher did not live long in the holy city, and before a year had passed from the time of his arrival, he departed from this world and joined the Celestial Assembly: "Because of the sins of the generation, he fell ill and died at the age of 87, in the year 5503 [1743]."

During the last year of his life on earth, our teacher was awake on the night of Hoshana Rabba and recited the tikkun, his expression as radiant as the sun. His face emitted rays of glory, and he was like an angel dressed in white. When midnight arrived, he went alone into his room, removed his white clothes, then dressed in black and prostrated his entire body length to the floor and began to cry bitterly. He remained stretched out this way until the time for prayers arrived, after which he returned to his room and again stretched himself out on the floor until the time for Shemini Atzeret. He then came out dressed in white. After the holiday, his student the Chida asked the saintly Ohr HaHaim the meaning of his behavior. He responded that he had prayed for the arrival of Mashiach and that his prayer was heard. "When the Angel of Death saw that evil was on the verge of disappearing, he put all his efforts into sweeping the world up in sin, and he succeeded to such a point that the situation had reversed itself and destruction had been decreed." When our teacher had seen this, he had prostrated himself and began to pray with all his strength, to the point of having accepted to take upon himself the burden of the decree, thus saving the entire generation. Because of our numerous sins, this is what happened. He departed from the world within the course of that same year. The Chida finishes his account of what happened by saying that he had understood from his remarks that he was Mashiach, and that he was prepared to come out and reveal himself, but because of our many sins it was not possible to do so.

Our teacher died on a Saturday evening, at the beginning of the night. At that moment, the Baal Shem Tov had just finished washing his hands for the third Shabbat meal (there, the sun had not yet set), and he said, "The light of the Orient has extinguished," meaning that our teacher, the saintly Ohr HaHaim, had died. At the moment he died, his friend Rav Haim Aboulafia fainted in Tiberius in the middle of prayer and remained unconscious for almost half an hour. In regaining consciousness, he said that he had accompanied our teacher up to the doors of the Garden of Eden. The Sages of Jerusalem speak of his death in their letter of recommendation for the book *Rishon Letzion*, which appeared in 5503 (1743). They stated, "That day, the entire country began to weep, the leaders of Zion sat in the dust, lamentations responding to tears, and everywhere we gathered together to eulogize him."

Rabbi Haim Ben Attar's tomb on the slope of the Mount of Olives is among the holy places where many people come to pray during the entire year. In particular, there are many who journey there on the day of his Hilloula, Tammuz 15.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Unmatched Devotion

It is written, "I recall for you the kindness of your youth" (Jeremiah 2:2).

Hashem speaks words of praise and affection to the Jewish people for their devotion in having followed Moses and Aaron into the desert of Sinai.

We know what tremendous hardships awaited the Children of Israel when they emerged from the yoke of enslavement. The people knew that they were headed for the desert, though with only enough provisions for a short time.

It is natural and logical for people to refuse to follow any leader, regardless of who he is, into a barren wasteland. Yet the Children of Israel, despite knowing that there was no natural way for them to survive in the desert, still had faith in Hashem and in His servant Moses. Hence at the end of the Haftorah, Hashem addresses them with words of affection for the devotion they displayed.

You Shall Not Take Interest

One day a wealthy and generous Jew came before the Chatam Sofer and asked to speak with him in private, a request that was granted. Looking all around, the man said, almost in a whisper: "Rabbi, I've already lost almost everything I own, and I'm almost bankrupt!" As the Chatam Sofer looked at him with compassion, the man recounted everything that had recently happened to him, and what had brought him to this point. "A large trade fair is going to take place," the man continued, "and all the important merchants will be there. If my spot is taken, everyone will immediately know about my situation and I'll be ruined."

The Chatam Sofer gave him an encouraging smile and asked, "How much does it cost to go to the fair?" The man replied with a sigh, "One hundred rubles, but I don't even have that much." The Chatam Sofer said, "My son, I'll lend you 100 rubles, and although you have no money to do business there, the money that you have generously given to observant Jews will protect you. In the meantime, I'll lend you whatever you need to cover your initial costs."

Since he was in a very difficult situation, and although it wasn't easy for him to accept this money, the man agreed to the offer and proceeded to the fair. The Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrated His kindness to him, and he was instantly allowed to purchase an item on credit. He completed the transaction and then resold the item at a much higher price, making a nice profit. Hashem was kind to him in this way all day long. He purchased and resold items like a skilled merchant, and he returned from the fair having made a considerable amount of money. He then went to the Chatam Sofer to repay his loan, and out of gratitude he also purchased a diamond ring for him as a gift.

When the Chatam Sofer put the ring on his finger, he didn't stop saying: "What a beautiful ring. What taste! What craftsmanship!" After a few minutes, he gave the ring back to the man and thanked him profusely, but said: "This is interest, and the Torah forbids taking interest."

Naturally, the man accepted this law, but he was curious about something. "Could you please tell me," the man said, "if the Torah forbids you from taking the ring, why you did not return it to me right away? Why did you wear it for ten minutes?"

The Rav replied, "What was the point of your gift? It was to make me happy and to demonstrate your gratitude. I therefore wore it for a while to show you how happy it made me. But to actually accept it as a gift? I would be staining my hands by transgressing the prohibition against taking interest, something that I could never do!"

A TRUE STORY

Rabbi Haim Pinto and the Flask of Tears

Rabbi Haim Pinto HaGadol and his friend Rabbi David ben Hazan traveled to Marrakech, where Rabbi David ben Hazan died. He could not be buried, however, because anyone who touched his sacred body to prepare it for burial immediately collapsed. At that point Rabbi Haim Pinto said, "We can only clean the body of the holy man with his own tears, tears that he kept in a flask in Mogador." At that time, about 180 years ago, there were no trains or cars, and the residents of Marrakech were upset because they did not know how they were going to bury the deceased. Rabbi Haim Pinto went into a small room, and he came out a few minutes later and said: "Go to the Al Azama synagogue. There you will find the flask of tears." Thus it was done.