

The Path To Follow

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A Hevrat Pinto Publication



Under the Direction of Rabbi David H. Pinto Shlita

www.hevratpinto.org | hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief: Hanania Soussan

32 rue du Plateau 75019 Paris, France • Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 • Fax: +331 42 06 00 33

Shvat 3rd 5771 - January 8th 2011

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Blood of the Passover Offering

It is written, "Hashem will pass through to strike Egypt, and He will see the blood upon the lintel and the two doorposts; and Hashem will pass over the entrance and not allow the destroyer to come into your homes to strike you" (*Shemot* 12:23). Did the Creator of the universe – Who created all things, Who knows the thoughts and plans of everyone, and Who probes hearts and minds – need to see blood on the doorposts in order to pass over the homes of the Children of Israel and not kill their firstborn?

The Sages have said, "How is the Passover offering roasted? We bring a spit or pomegranate wood and thrust it into its mouth [right down] as far as its buttocks, and we place its knees and its entrails inside" (*Pesachim* 74a). This is surprising, for how does the Passover offering differ from the other offerings in regards to its entrails? For the other offerings, the entrails are not brought with the main offering, but are brought separately by the *kohanim* who remove them.

The Sages have also taught that the Children of Israel took the Paschal lamb and tied it to the foot of their beds. When the Egyptians heard the bleating of lambs, they gnashed their teeth because their gods were going to be slaughtered, but they could do nothing to stop it (*Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim* 430). This requires an explanation, for why did the Holy One, blessed be He, order the Children of Israel to tie the Paschal lamb to the foot of their beds? Could they not have tied them elsewhere? They could have tied them to their front doors, where people would have seen them, not inside their homes where nobody looks.

Like Your Fear of Men

This signifies that there are two ways of fulfilling *mitzvot*. Some say, "I refuse to add pointless restrictions to my life because people will ridicule me. It's enough that I believe in Hashem in my heart." Others fulfill all the *mitzvot*, but without conviction. Instead, they fulfill them out of habit.

In regards to the first category, those who are afraid of what others may think, Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim *Zatzal* cites Yehudah ben Tema as saying, "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven" (*Pirkei Avot* 5:20). He detailed these four ways of serving the Creator beginning with the boldness of a leopard, for it represents a great principle in serving Hashem. Indeed, a person may sometimes want to perform a *mitzvah*, but will avoid it because people may ridicule him. Hence we are taught to be bold in regards to scoffers, and not to avoid performing a *mitzvah*. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai told his students, "May your fear of Heaven be like your fear of men" (*Berachot* 28b).

In regards to the second category, those who perform *mitzvot* superficially, without paying attention to what they are doing, the Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written: 'But Hashem looks at the heart' [I Samuel 16:7]" (*Sanhedrin* 106b). This means that a person will sometimes fulfill *mitzvot*, but feel that he has not fully accomplished them, just like a monkey that is taught to jump, but does not know what it is doing.

One who feels shame before scoffers will end up sinning, for he fears men but not the King of kings. The Sages have said that the Children of Israel in Egypt neglected the *mitzvah* of circumcision in order to gain favor with the Egyptians. Hashem therefore changed their hearts so they would detest His people.

Separating Them From Idolatry

When the Children of Israel tied a lamb to the foot of their beds, the Egyptians looked into their homes and saw their god tied to a bed. They screamed and asked the Children of Israel why this lamb was tied up, and they replied: "Our G-d has commanded us to slaughter this lamb in His honor."

In the Midrash our Sages say, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe to slay the Paschal lamb, Moshe replied: 'Sovereign of the universe, how can I possibly do this thing? Do You not know that the lamb is the god of Egypt?' Thus it says: 'Behold, if we were to slaughter the god of Egypt before their eyes, will they not stone us?' [*Shemot* 8:22]. G-d replied, 'As surely as you live, Israel will not leave here before they slaughter the gods of Egypt before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing at all.' This is what He did, for on that night He slew the Egyptian firstborn, and on that night the Israelites slaughtered their Paschal lamb and ate it. When the Egyptians beheld their firstborn slain and their gods slaughtered, they could do nothing" (*Shemot Rabba* 16:3).

Since the Children of Israel rebelled against the gods of Egypt, an abundance of faith entered their hearts and extirpated the spirit of idolatry that had been there. Taking the lamb served to distance them from idolatry, and it accustomed them to the performance of *mitzvot*, as the Sages have said: "Remove yourselves from idolatry and attach yourselves to *mitzvot*."

In principle, it is impossible for a person to have two different sentiments – the fear of G-d and the fear of man – at the same time, for in that case he will act in accordance with one, but not the other. A person who believes in Hashem will not feel shame before men. However a person who feels shame before men due to his fear of them demonstrates that he does not really believe in Hashem.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to place blood upon the two doorposts and the lintel of their homes, for blood alludes to man's innermost sentiments, blood being the soul. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to hint to the Children of Israel that the main thing in serving Him is sincerity, service from the depths of the heart. Serving Hashem superficially is not acceptable, and by the fact that a person studies Torah and fulfills *mitzvot* by paying attention to what he does, it follows that he will love Hashem with all his heart and all his soul.

Furthermore, even when a person serves Hashem with complete sincerity, yet feels shame before others, his service is not pleasing, for he is replacing the fear of G-d with the fear of man. Hence the Children of Israel received the commandment to place blood – which, as we have said, alludes to man's inner sentiments – upon the doorposts and the lintel, which are located outside. This alludes to the fact that serving Hashem inwardly and outwardly are both necessary, and it is impossible to choose one over the other. This also explains why the Passover offering differs from the other offerings in regards to the entrails. It is to teach us that in order to attain the level of being Hashem's servant, a person must serve his Creator both inwardly and outwardly.

It is written, “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (Shemot 12:2).

In discussing the reasons for this *mitzvah*, the Ramban writes: “Now the purport of the expression, ‘This month shall be for you the beginning of the months’ is that Israel is to count this as the first of the months, and from it they are to count all months – second, third, etc., until a year of twelve months is complete – so that through this enumeration there will be a remembrance of the great miracle. Whenever we mention the months, the miracle will be remembered. It is for this reason that the months have no individual names in the Torah. Instead, Scripture says: ‘In the third month’ [Shemot 19:1], ‘It was in the second year, in the second month...that the cloud was lifted from upon the Tabernacle of the Testimony’ [Bamidbar 10:11], ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month’ [Bamidbar 29:1]. ... Just as in counting the weekdays we always remember Shabbat ... [describing them as] ‘one day of Shabbat,’ ‘the second day of Shabbat’ ... likewise we remember the exodus from Egypt by counting ‘the first month,’ ‘the second month,’ ‘the third month,’ etc., of our deliverance. This way of counting the months is not in regards to the years, for the counting of our years is from Tishri.... If so, when we call the month of Nissan the first of the months, and Tishri the seventh, the meaning is ‘the first [month] of the deliverance’ and ‘the seventh month’ of it. Hence this is the intent of the expression, ‘It shall be for you the first of the months’ ... that it be called ‘the first’ for the purpose of remembering our redemption.”

The Sages mention this subject, noting that we returned from Babylon with the names of their months (*Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2). This is because we had no names for the months, for we initially counted them as a reminder of the exodus from Egypt. Yet upon returning from Babylon, we fulfilled the verse: “It shall no more be said, ‘As Hashem lives, Who brought the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As Hashem lives, Who brought the Children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands where He had driven them’ ” (Jeremiah 16:14-15). Thus we began to describe the months by the names we used in Babylon, in order to remember that we lived there and that Hashem brought us back from there.

In his book *Torat Moshe*, the Chatam Sofer cites the words of the Ramban and notes: “And this is reproof that we should write in letters and the like ‘the first day of Shabbat,’ and ‘the first month,’ to attest to the Creation of Heaven and earth in six days ‘and He rested on the seventh day’ [Shemot 20:11], and about the exodus from Egypt, not G-d forbid, like the numbering of the nations of the world.” In his discourses, the Chatam Sofer went even further, saying that we must not count the years “starting from the birth of the messiah of the Christians, which is shameful for the Jewish people.”

Not Counting the Years Like Christians

The Maharam Schick (*Responsa Yoreh Deah* 171) was asked about the use of secular dates on gravestones. He states that it is absolutely forbidden to use them: “Writing the years and months in the language of non-Jews is a double and triple sin, for they do not count their months in the same way as Jews, and in my opinion expressing the years according to the way of non-Jews is forbidden by the Torah, for the Torah in *Parsha Mishpatim* states, ‘Make no mention of the name of other gods’ [Shemot 23:13]. One who adopts their method of counting transgresses this prohibition.”

The book *Kol Bo LeDinei Avelut* states that in our time, when many people use their method for counting the years, we cannot say that they are transgressing a prohibition, for in reality this is not the number of years that has passed since the birth of their messiah. According to many sources, the Jewish people used this method even before he was born, and before he was known. In fact it was the method used by the Romans after the death of Herod. The Rema also gives a *halachic* response that begins with, “In December of the year 1546, by their count” (*Responsa Rema* 51). He employs the method used by non-Jews, and although several hundreds of years have passed since then, no one has ever protested that he evoked the names of other gods. *Responsa Chavat Yair* (par. 184) says, among other things: “The year 1424, according to their count,” and *Responsa Shevut Yaakov* expresses itself in the same way. In their letters, both the Chatam Sofer and the *gaon* Rabbi Akiva Eiger *Zatzal* used the expression “September 5, 1831.” Some have noted that the Chatam Sofer used a non-Jewish method for writing the date in his letter because it was addressed to non-Jewish authorities. In all published books, the printing date is written in the standard format, and yet nobody finds fault with it.

“In April I Received...”

Against this backdrop, we shall describe a famous incident involving Baron Wilhelm de Rothschild, Reb Shimon Wolf. A member of the wealthy Rothschild family, Reb Shimon was famous for his devotion to everything that pertained to the observance of *mitzvot*.

It is said that when he wished to fulfill the *mitzvah* of writing a Sefer Torah, he did not have faith in the *Soferim* of Germany because they were not experts in all fields of the Torah. What did he do? He brought in a *Sofer* from Russia, a man who was known to be G-d-fearing and a great scholar. This *Sofer* stayed with the Baron for an extended period of time as he wrote the Sefer Torah in holiness and purity.

Finally, his work was done. The Sefer Torah was ready, and the *Sofer* went to see the Baron for his wages.

“Did you already receive some money in advance?” Baron Rothschild asked him.

“Yes,” he replied. He then took out a notebook from his pocket and began to read from it: “In April I received this amount, in May I received this amount....”

At that point the Baron interrupted him.

“What did you say?” exclaimed the Baron in a loud voice. “Does a G-d-fearing *Sofer* count using non-Jewish months, not the months of the Jewish calendar or the *parshiot* of the Torah? Is a *Sofer* who spends his life writing Sifre Torah transgressing what is written in it: ‘You shall not mention the name of other gods, nor shall your mouth cause it to be heard?’”

As he was saying this, Baron Rothschild took out his wallet and paid the *Sofer* for what he was owed. He then told him, “When you leave, take the Sefer Torah that you wrote with you!”

Guarde Your Tongue

When it is a Mitzvah to Listen

It is sometimes a *mitzvah* to listen to the disparaging remarks that someone says about another. For example, if the listener determines that by listening to the entire story, he can show the speaker or other listeners that the information is inaccurate, or if he can exonerate the subject, then he may listen to it.

– Chafetz Chaim

Peace-Offerings

It is written, "Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind" (*Shemot* 10:24).

It is surprising that Pharaoh needed the livestock of the Children of Israel, such that he had to tell Moshe and Aaron that all their livestock had to stay behind! Rabbi David of Yaldula *Zatzal* addresses this issue by citing the Gemara: "Rav Huna said, 'The peace-offerings of non-Jews are to be treated as burnt-offerings.' ... Rava replied, 'It means this: If [he gave them to a Jew] so the Jew can thereby receive atonement, the Jew may eat them'" (*Menachot* 73ab).

Consequently, we may explain that Pharaoh said this because the Children of Israel were his servants, and since the law states that everything acquired by a servant belongs to his master, all the livestock of the Children of Israel belonged to him. Since he was a non-Jew, it would be impossible to offer them as peace-offerings, and so it was better for their livestock to remain in Egypt.

To this Moshe replied, "You as well shall give us peace-offerings and burnt-offerings," meaning that Pharaoh himself would send animals through the Children of Israel so they could bring them as peace-offerings. If Pharaoh were to object, "How can you bring peace-offerings with the livestock of a non-Jew?" Moshe would say: "We shall offer them – you will give us animals in order for us to do what we must, for in this way a Jew may offer peace-offerings and also eat them."

Worthy of Protection

It is written, "I shall see the blood and I shall pass over you" (*Shemot* 12:13).

Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that the blood did not prevent the plague, and not placing the blood did not bring the plague. Rather, what the verse teaches us is that whoever fully believed in Hashem and placed all his trust in Him without worrying about Pharaoh or his decrees – whoever publicly slaughtered the god of the Egyptians and placed the blood of the offering upon the two doorposts and lintel of his home – such a person was a *tzaddik* who trusted in Hashem, worthy of protection from the angel of destruction and the plague.

A Different Kind of Night

It is written, "It is a night of watching for Hashem" (*Shemot* 12:42).

A Halachah in *Choshen Mishpat* states that "rulings are not made at night," for night is when the attribute of strict justice is strengthened in the upper worlds. Now the night of the exodus from Egypt was different from all other nights. It was comparable to the day, when justice does not prevail, but rather mercy. Thus court decisions are permitted on the night of Passover, just as if it were the day.

The author of *Kaf HaCohen* notes that the verse uses the expression *leil shimurim* ("a night of watching"). This can be read as "a night *shemorim* [that they teach]" the Halachah, for the night of Passover differs from all other nights of the year, belonging to the realm of mercy. This applied not only to Passover night of the actual exodus from Egypt, but to Passover night of every year!

In fact the verse ends by saying, "for all the Children of Israel throughout their generations."

Feeding Others

It is written, "*Matzot* shall be eaten for seven days" (*Shemot* 13:7).

The book *Ohr HaChama* cites the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Yinon Huri *Shlita* in stating that the expression "shall be eaten" seems to indicate that someone else is feeding us; we are not eating on our own. To convey the latter meaning, the verse should have stated: "You shall eat *matzot*."

He explains this according to Rashi's remarks on the expression "it shall not be eaten" (*Vayikra* 11:41), namely that anyone who feeds a person the things mentioned in the verse is just as guilty as the person who eats it himself.

We may therefore say that here as well, the Torah is telling adults to feed the young ("*matzot* shall be eaten for seven days"). Hence the expression used in the verse really means "to feed" – in this case, the young – implying that someone must give them to eat in addition to eating the *matzot* himself, a commandment that applies to all Jews.

As such, we may also explain why the very next verse states: "You shall tell your son on that day, saying..." (*Shemot* 13:8). In other words, besides the commandment to eat *matzah* (which adults must have the young do), a man must tell his son about the exodus from Egypt and the wonders of Hashem.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Evil Before Them

It is written, "[Pharaoh] said to them: 'May Hashem be with you, if I will let you and your little ones go. Look: *Ra'ah* [evil] is before you'" (*Shemot* 10:10).

Rashi explains, "An Aggadic explanation that I heard [states]: There is a star named *Ra'ah*. Pharaoh said to them, 'With my astrology, I see this star ascending towards you in the desert, and it is a sign of blood and slaughter.'"

I would like to explain this in another way. We know that 80% of the Children of Israel living in Egypt did not leave, as Rashi states (see *Shemot* 10:22; 13:18). Only 20% of them wanted to leave in order to receive the Torah and serve Hashem as much as possible without disruption. The Sages state that among the Children of Israel, there were transgressors who had Egyptian patrons and lived in affluence and honor, and they were unwilling to leave (*Shemot Rabba* 14:13). Hence they refused to leave because they enjoyed wealth and honor, and the trial of wealth blinded them to such a point that they no longer recognized the truth. In fact even after seeing all the wonders that Hashem performed in Egypt, they still did not want to leave.

If we are honest about this, we must say that Pharaoh thought that all the Children of Israel, transgressors included, were going to leave his country. He did not know that these transgressors were going to die before the Children of Israel left Egypt. He thought that the majority, composed of these evildoers, did not want to serve Hashem, and therefore he told Moshe and Aaron: "Look: Evil is before you." This was a reference to the transgressors among the Children of Israel, those who did not want to serve Hashem or leave Egypt, for they were the ones before Moshe and Aaron.

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Chaim Kapusi

“The pious Rav, our teacher Rabbi Haim Kapusi *Zatzal*, surnamed ‘Ba’al HaNess,’ served as a *dayan*. When he lost his sight, people said that it was because he had accepted bribes. Upon hearing such accusations, he arose in public and said that he heard what people were saying about him, and that if it were true, he should never regain his sight. However if he were absolutely innocent, his eyes should begin to see as before. His prayer was heard, and his sight returned.

“And I, as a youth, saw his signature when he was blind. He signed his name unclearly; the letters were barely recognizable, appearing as they would to the blind. However I saw his signature afterwards: *Hashem Nissi Haim Kapusi* [Hashem performed a miracle for me, Haim Kapusi] in a clear script. Even until today, whoever utters a false oath by his grave is punished. May his merit protect us all.”

Thus wrote the Chida in his book *Shem HaGedolim* as he praised the *gaon* Rabbi Haim Kapusi, who was born in Algiers to a family exiled from Portugal in 5151. These refugees were forced to wear garments with a pointed hood (“capuchin”).

Rabbi Haim Kapusi left for Alexandria, which at the time was the economic center of Egypt. He then moved from Alexandria to Damiat in Egypt. In his writings, he speaks of his numerous travels and his lack of peace: “Even now, while exiled from my home, without my tools or my books, my hands are weak and my eyes are dim, and on top of everything my heart is worried, like waters that cover the seabed. This is how someone in exile prays, surrounded by terror on all sides, with a trembling and saddened heart, feeling threatened.”

He Ventured into the Dark

Rabbi Haim Kapusi received his primary Torah education from Rabbi Yaakov Bei Rav *Zatzal*, the greatest Torah scholar in Eretz Israel following the expulsion from Spain. Rabbi Yaakov had learned Kabbalah directly from the Arizal.

Rabbi Haim corresponded with all the great men of his generation concerning *halachic* issues. The most famous among these were Rabbi David ben Zimra (the Radbaz), who was the leader of Jews in Egypt, Rabbi Yaakov Castro, and Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi (the author of *Shita Mekubetzet*). He also corresponded a great deal with Rabbi Meir Gabisohn.

Some of Rabbi Haim Kapusi’s responsa were published in the book *Tashbetz*, as well as in the responsa of Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi, the Maharam Galanti, and others. The designation “Ba’al HaNess” accompanied Rabbi Haim Kapusi everywhere he went, a name that he earned on account of the following incident: A Jew who worked in customs received a loan for his boss, a customs official. Since this Jew was not used to swearing oaths, he vowed not to eat meat or drink wine until the loan was repaid. A few years passed, but the Jewish worker had still not managed to reimburse the debt. The creditors wanted him to fulfill his vow, but Rabbi Haim ruled that he could go back on his word. This was unavoidable on account of the worker’s poverty, something that he certainly had not thought of when he made a vow. Ruling in favor of the worker harmed Rabbi Haim Kapusi’s reputation, after which a great dispute erupted.

One Torah scholar who treated Rabbi Haim scornfully even alluded to his blindness by evoking the verse, “He walked in darkness” (Isaiah 50:10).

Rabbi Haim sent this scholar a detailed reply to all the arguments that he had raised against his ruling. He also took note of the allusion that he made to his blindness: “Concerning the fact that you wrote, ‘He walked in darkness,’ I ask you to read the end of the verse: ‘Let him trust in the Name of Hashem.’ In Him does my heart trust, and even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of darkness, no evil will come upon me, and if I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light.”

May It Be His Will...

As usually happens in a dispute, the fire of the evil inclination spread as far as the Torah scholars of the generation. This tragic incident reached its peak when rumors spread that Rabbi Haim Kapusi had lost his sight because he accepted bribes. People even brought proof from the Torah to support their view: “A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise” (*Devarim* 16:19). When Rabbi Haim became aware of this grave accusation, he asked the entire community to gather in synagogue on Shabbat. There he addressed them with words of Torah pertaining to current issues, but then proceeded to the main topic: “I know that some people are saying that I have accepted bribes, but Hashem knows that I am completely innocent of this sin – it is not in me. And now, if there is someone from whom I took something, or if there is someone against whom I twisted justice, let him accuse me before Hashem and before this entire holy congregation!”

At that point Rabbi Haim Kapusi raised his voice and said, “Let this testify in my behalf: If I am truly guilty, I ask Hashem, the G-d of justice, to dry up my bones and not let me descend from the podium. And if I am innocent, may it be His will that my eyes open, that my sight returns, and that the entire congregation knows that there is a G-d of justice and truth.” Shivers went through the faithful upon hearing these words. In fact to their utter astonishment, Rabbi Haim Kapusi’s prayer was heard and his sight immediately returned. He looked around and called out everyone by name. He then descended from the podium and greeted the people that he spoke to by name. From then on, he signed his name as *Hashem Nissi Haim Kapusi*.

After this great miracle, Rabbi Haim Kapusi devoted most of his time to writing a Torah commentary entitled *Be’or HaHaim*, alluding to the fact that he had regained his sight.

The Inhabitants of the Land

After Rabbi Haim Kapusi died on Shevat 12, 5391, his gravesite became a sacred place for the Jews of Egypt. Whoever needed help would come to his grave and merit miracles and wonders.

In the book *Even Sapir*, Rabbi Yaakov Sapir’s account of his travels, he describes what he witnessed in Egypt by the grave of Rabbi Haim Kapusi:

“I went to the cemetery during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, but the graves were not very nice, just the usual. There I saw a grave over which stood a large stone that was drenched with oil, the libations that everyone had poured upon it, those who had a request to present.

“Before visiting this sacred grave,” Rabbi Yaakov Sapir observed, “people would remove their shoes some distance away and crawl on their hands and knees up to the grave, for it is very holy.”

Those visiting the grave told Rabbi Yaakov Sapir of another custom: When they wanted to take an oath, they would swear by the name of Rabbi Haim Kapusi. In fact even the non-Jewish inhabitants of the country respected his name, making Jews swear their oaths by it.