

The Path To Follow

Toldot

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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

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

A Covenant of Peace That Did Not Last

It is written, "They said, 'We have seen that Hashem was with you, so we said: Let there now be an oath between us, between ourselves and you, and let us make a covenant with you. If you do [not] harm us, as we have not touched you, and as we have done with you only good, and we sent you away in peace, [so do] you now, blessed of Hashem.' So he made a feast for them, and they ate and drank" (*Bereshith* 26:28-30).

This raises a great question: Why did our holy Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac make a covenant with Avimelech, given that he was liable to make our holy Matriarchs, Sarah and Rebecca, impure if G-d had not prevented him? Even if Avimelech was not an evildoer, the Torah prohibits the making of covenants with non-Jews, as it is said: "You shall not seal a covenant with them, nor shall you show them favor" (*Devarim* 7:2). Were our holy Patriarchs afraid of him, afraid that he might harm them? How could this be, given that they trusted Hashem to save them from the hands of the wicked, as He had saved them in the past?

To Prevent them from Sinning

We may explain this passage in light of what the Sages have said in the Midrash, namely that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made converts and brought them under the wings of the *Shechinah* (*Bereshith Rabba* 84:4). This is why Abraham made a covenant with Avimelech, in the hope that this evildoer would learn from Abraham's good deeds and change his ways, and that by making a covenant with him, he would feel closer to him and avoid sin. Isaac also wanted to do the same, and so he tried to bring Avimelech closer to the *Shechinah* in order to save him from sin, hoping that he would repent and stop sinning.

However that may be, Avimelech did not learn from the good deeds of Abraham or Isaac, nor did he distance himself from sin, meaning that these covenants were useless. Not only that, but Avimelech canceled the first covenant with Abraham and wanted to profane Rebecca. Why? Because such is the way of the peoples of the world: Since they have no Torah, their conduct is constantly changing. Later generations do not resemble previous generations, for their lifestyle is in line with the views of thinkers and scientists in every generation. All the peoples listen to them, even though they say the opposite of what their predecessors said.

It is difficult to understand what our Sages in the Gemara meant when they said, "When a man takes leave of his fellow, he should not say to him, 'Go in peace,' but 'Go to peace.'" For Moshe – to whom Jethro said, 'Go to peace' [*Shemot* 4:18] – went up and prospered, whereas Absalom – to whom David said, 'Go in peace' [2 Samuel 15:9] – went away and was hanged" (*Berachot* 64a). We therefore need some way to explain why, once Avimelech and his men concluded a covenant with Isaac, the verse states: "They departed from him in peace" (*Bereshith* 26:31). It is also difficult to understand why the following verse states, "Vayehi [And it happened] on that day, that Isaac's servants came... and they said to him, 'We have found water.'" After all, the Sages teach, "Wherever in Scripture we find the term *vayehi*, it indicates misfortune" (*Megillah* 10b). However no misfortune occurred on that day, since they

found a well! Furthermore, they ate and drank on the previous day, and they celebrated and made a covenant, so what misfortune could have occurred?

The Children of Israel are not like the peoples of the world. Since the time that the Torah was given to them on Mount Sinai, Torah and *mitzvot* have been established for them for all time, and words of Torah will never be annulled, not even in the era of *Mashiach*. The Children of Israel are not influenced by the morals of the people among whom they live, just as our forefathers did not change their names, garments, or language in Egypt, despite having lived among the Egyptians for centuries (*Lekach Tov, Shemot* 6:6). Since they preserve the traditions of their fathers, they do not allow themselves to get swept into sin. Indeed, for thousands of years Jews have been taking an *etrog* and *lulav*, and for thousands of years Jews have eaten *matzah* on Passover. In fact not only do they not put *chametz* into their mouths, they do not even allow it into their homes on Passover. This will never change. The same cannot be said of the peoples of the world, for they have no Torah or *mitzvot*, and their way of life is not constant, for they are always changing according to time and place.

A Temporary Covenant

This is why Isaac was immersed in sadness on the day that this covenant was made, for he knew that it was not a true covenant, and that in the end it would be annulled, for non-Jews do not keep their word. Furthermore, the way of life among the nations of the world fluctuates with the generations, which is why the verse states: "Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace" (*Bereshith* 26:31), for he experienced no joy in this. In fact he regretted knowing that Avimelech would return to his evil deeds, which is why Isaac did not hesitate to bless him when he left. Thus the Torah states, "they departed from him in peace," which was written so as to inform us that the *tzaddik* did not make a covenant with Avimelech out of love. He only did so in order to bring him closer to the Torah. However he was unsuccessful, which is why Avimelech returned to his evil ways.

When he came to make a covenant with Isaac, Avimelech knew that it would be temporary and end up being annulled, as he had annulled the first covenant with Abraham. How do we know this? We learn it from Avimelech himself, for upon concluding a covenant with Abraham he said, "Swear to me here by G-d that you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my grandson" (*Bereshith* 21:23). At that point, Avimelech did not think that he would be unfaithful to the covenant, which is why he concluded it for all the generations. Yet when he left Abraham, he said: "I don't want to learn from his good deeds, and it's impossible to distance myself from sin, so I'm canceling the covenant." Some time later, when he saw Isaac's success, he immediately wanted to renew the covenant out of jealousy. Nevertheless, Avimelech did not use the expression "nor with my son, nor with my grandson," as he had done with Abraham. He simply said, "Let there now be an oath between us, between ourselves and you," without mentioning future generations, for he knew that this covenant would not endure. He therefore entered it superficially, knowing that it would not last long.



Concerning the Parsha

A Segula for a Long Life

It is written, “He said, ‘Behold, now I am old, I know not the day of my death’ ” (*Bereshith* 27:2).

Here Rashi states, “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah said: ‘If a person reaches the age of [the death of] his parents, he should worry five years beforehand and five years afterwards.’”

Regarding this subject, the *gaon* Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Shulsinger *Shlita* of Bnei Brak recounted an extraordinary story:

“On Tammuz 25, 5739, a great *talmid chacham* died. He was known for his great diligence in learning and fear of Heaven. After the *Shiva*, I met his firstborn son, who taught Torah. He told me that while in mourning, he and his mother went through his father’s drawers and found, among other things, a note. The mother asked what it was, and the son replied: ‘Twelve years ago, father’s third brother died, and father was very worried because all three of his brothers had died at a relatively young age. He sent me to see the Steipler, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky *Zatzal*, to ask him for a *segula* for long life. The Steipler read my note and said, “Tell your father to be very careful to recite the prayers of *Yom Kippur Katan* every *erev* Rosh Chodesh.”

Now I Understand

“ ‘When I told this to my mother, she was stunned. She said to me, “Now I understand! Your father never told me, but I noticed that he was extremely careful to recite the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers every *erev* Rosh Chodesh. Even when his health was failing, he would always go to synagogue to recite *Yom Kippur Katan* with a minyan.

“ ‘ “But last *erev* Rosh Chodesh, Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, once he finished eating at home and said *Birkat Hamazon*, I noticed that he skipped *Ya’aleh Veyavo* of Rosh Chodesh and started saying *Uvneh Yerushalayim*. I mentioned it to him, and he appeared stunned and shaken.

“ ‘ “He thought for a moment and then said *Ya’aleh Veyavo*. After *Birkat Hamazon*, he said to me, very worried: ‘I’ve completely forgotten that today is Rosh Chodesh. I forgot to say the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers on *erev* Rosh Chodesh!’

“ ‘ “I said to him, ‘But you didn’t forget to say *Shema* or *Shemoneh Esrei!* He was silent and did not react, and I sensed that he was very upset and worried. But I didn’t know what it all meant. Now I understand. It was the first time in twelve years that he hadn’t recited the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers on *erev* Rosh Chodesh. That is why he was so sad.”

“ ‘That month, on the 25th day of Tammuz, my father was summoned to the Heavenly Yeshiva,’ the son concluded.

The Steipler’s Explanation

“As for myself,” said Rav Shulsinger, “I was very curious to understand the meaning of the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers. I wrote down this entire story and waited for a suitable moment to ask the Steipler about it.

“A few months later, during one afternoon, I found myself with our teacher *Zatzal*. It was a good time for him, and he spoke to me about various things, and from one subject to the other we

eventually spoke about the family in question. I then took the piece of paper out of my pocket and gave it to our teacher.

“Our teacher *Zatzal* read it carefully, and immediately he said: ‘Oh, I hadn’t heard that he died, and I don’t recall anything that you wrote. However there’s one thing that I do know: It’s always been known in *yeshivot* that the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers are effective for annulling evil decrees. Since he was afraid that a short life had been decreed for him, it’s possible that I told his son to be careful in regards to the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers, which are known to annul or lessen harsh decrees.’

The Epidemic Stopped

“Our teacher *Zatzal* then said, ‘Here’s another example: A few years after the death of our teacher the Chazon Ish, tragedy struck the students of the Mir yeshiva in the United States, for many of them suddenly died in their youth. The situation was terrible, and no one knew what to do.

“ ‘One of them spoke to his friend Rav Avraham Wolf *Zatzal*, explaining the situation to him and asking for his advice. If the Chazon Israel had been alive, he would have immediately gone to see him. The advice that he gave was that of a man of G-d. However the “Urim and Tumim” were no longer present, and so Rav Wolf had no one to address. Now I used to pray at the Lederman synagogue, and I was seated not far from Rav Wolff. He often spoke to me about various things and showed me letters that he received on diverse subjects. He showed me the letter in question after the prayer service, and I mentioned that we know that the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers are effective at annulling harsh decrees. He immediately contacted his friend in the United States, for it was close to Rosh Chodesh, and they had time to organize a service to recite the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers in the United states. From then on, no more students from the Mir yeshiva died. It was absolutely incredible!’ ”

Something Extra

It is written, “Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew” (*Bereshith* 25:34).

This verse is generally understood to mean that Jacob purchased the birthright from Esau with a few trivial items, as we read: “lentil stew.”

However Rabbi Ovadia Sforno *Zatzal* explains it otherwise. He writes the following in his commentary on the Torah:

“He sold his birthright to Jacob” – for the price that they had agreed upon, which the text did not feel the need to mention. It was only at that point that “Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew” – it was only something extra, like a meal that people have upon concluding an important business agreement.

A Complete Curse

It is written, “I will bring upon myself a curse, and not a blessing” (*Bereshith* 27:12).

Rabbi Yehudah Elbaz *Zatzal* asks, “Since Jacob said, ‘I will bring upon myself a curse,’ it necessarily follows that it was not a blessing. That said, why did he add the words, ‘and not a blessing’?”

In his book *Shevut Yehudah*, Rabbi Yehudah Elbaz answers this question by citing a teaching from the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 9ab): Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sent his son to receive a blessing from

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Rabbi Yochanan ben Asmai and Rabbi Yehuda ben Gerim. They gave him the following blessing: “May it be [G-d’s] will that you sow but do not reap; that what you bring in does not go out; that what goes out you do not bring in; that your house be desolate,” and other such “blessings.” When the son returned home, he told his father: “Not only did they not bless me, they upset me!” His father asked him what they had said, and he recounted their words.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai replied, “These are all blessings: ‘That you sow but do not reap’ – that you father children and they do not die. ‘That what you bring in does not go out’ – that you bring home daughters-in-law and that your sons do not die.” Thus he gave explanations for all the blessings that his son had received.

We therefore see that some “curses” are filled with love, which is what Jacob was thinking of when he said: “I will bring upon myself a curse.” He was not referring to a curse which embodied a blessing, as in the case of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s son. Rather, Jacob was referring to a complete curse that contained no blessing whatsoever.

Crying Out

It is written, “*Hakol* [The voice] is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (*Bereshith* 27:22).

The term *hakol* (“the voice”) is written without a *vav*.

The book *Tzelota D’Avraham* gives the following explanation:

The term *hakol* is written without a *vav* because Jacob does not always have the ability to cry out. Oftentimes, when the hands of Esau create misfortune and we see the fulfillment of the expression “the hands are the hands of Esau,” the voice of Jacob is also forced to remain silent, to be missing a letter. Esau does not even allow us to cry out.

Being Human

It is written, “Rebecca took the garments of Esau...which were with her in the house” (*Bereshith* 27:15).

Rashi states, “He had many wives, and yet he entrusted them with his mother? He was well aware of their deeds, and he was suspicious of them.”

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman said that even the wicked eventually recognize that one who fears Heaven and fulfills *mitzvot* is a great person. Hence Esau, having several wives who could have kept the precious garments in question, did not entrust his garments to any of them, for “he was well aware of their deeds, and he was suspicious of them.” Rather, he entrusted them to his righteous mother with complete peace of mind.

The reason is that the wicked see and realize that the fear of Heaven is extremely valuable. However they regard it as a moral value, nothing more. King Solomon, however, tells us that this is not the case. He states, “Fear G-d and keep His *mitzvot*, for this is the whole man” (*Kohelet* 12:13). Simply put, the fear of G-d is the standard by which being human is measured, for one who has no fear of Heaven is not called a man; he is among the animals.

Days of Mourning

It is written, “The days of mourning for my father will be at hand, and I will kill Jacob my brother” (*Bereshith* 27:41).

Numerous explanations have been given for the fact that mourning would precede Esau’s murder of Jacob.

The Kli Yakar explains this according to the law that a mourner must not study Torah. In Isaac’s blessing of Esau, he said to him: “When you are aggrieved, you shall cast off his yoke from upon your neck” (*Bereshith* 27:40). In other words, when Jacob no longer studies Torah, Esau will cast off his yoke.

According to this explanation, Esau awaited the days of mourning for his father, for then Jacob would not be learning Torah and he would have no merit to protect him. Thus automatically Esau would be able to kill him. This is why the Sages say that a mourner needs protection, for he does not have the merit of the Torah to protect him.

In his commentary on the Torah, the Shach states that Esau meant the following: If I kill Jacob now, I will have to mourn for him. Then when my father dies, I will have to mourn once again. Better to wait for the days of mourning for my father, for then I will kill Jacob and mourn for both of them at the same time.

In the Light of the Parsha

Never Minimize the Importance of a Blessing

From the Teachings of the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita

It is written, “Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall be like a mocker in his eyes. Then I will bring upon myself a curse, and not a blessing” (*Bereshith* 27:12).

The Ramban is surprised by this, stating: “I wonder why Jacob was not afraid of vocal recognition, for all people are recognizable by their voice.” Why did Jacob not raise this issue with his mother? He told his mother, “I am a smooth [*chalak*] man,” and the term *chalak* is formed by the same letters as *lekach*, as in the verse: “For I have given you a good teaching [*lekach*, which here designates Torah]” (*Mishlei* 4:2). In other words, he studied Torah continually, meaning that he had no need for additional blessings, as the Sages have said: “How do you know that even if a man sits and studies Torah, the *Shechinah* is with him? Because it is said, ‘Wherever I permit My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you’ [*Shemot* 20:21]” (*Berachot* 6a). Since the Holy One, blessed be He, was blessing Jacob, he had no need for additional blessings. Now his brother Esau was a hairy (*sa’ir*) man, and the word *sa’ir* is formed by the same letters as *rasha* (evildoer).

What did Jacob’s mother tell him? “Although you study Torah and cleave to the *Shechinah*, the blessing of the *tzaddik* should not seem unimportant to you, for every blessing that we receive gives us extra strength to serve Hashem and study Torah.” This is why Jacob did not mention the issue of his voice, but only that “I shall be like a mocker in his eyes.” He did not need the blessings of his father, since he studied Torah, but it seemed as if he were deceiving his father. He was not afraid that his father would recognize him. He was only afraid of deceiving him and drawing upon himself a curse, not a blessing.

From the words of the *gaon* Rabbi Haim Falagi *Zatzal*, the Rav of Izmir, we can learn just how much importance he attributed to viewing time as critical for a life of Torah. He wrote, "Most of the time, when a man or woman present themselves before me and they go on and on about their troubles, Hashem knows how much suffering this brings me, for they are depriving me of time to learn Torah. If I hurry them off, I'm afraid that they will be embarrassed and think that I don't care about their troubles. Now we know that *Derek Eretz* comes before Torah."

This is why the *tzaddik* Rabbi Chaim Mendel went to the trouble of finding places in other homes for his numerous guests to stay. If he had invited them all to his table, he would have been forced to drop everything in order to speak with his guests and continue to chat as they wanted. It would not have been polite to leave them alone in a corner. Yet if he had discussed Torah with them, it could have embarrassed them because they might not have been able to understand him.

Nevertheless, people said of Rabbi Chaim Mendel: "He always had food ready for guests, and he prepared great meals for emissaries from Eretz Israel. Countless people ate at his table, and he rejoiced many whenever a poor person came while he was at the table."

Shoes Without Laces

The *chacham* Salman Moutsafi *Zatzal* would often say to those around him, "Leave me alone long enough to swallow my own spittle" (Job 7:19). His mouth never stopped speaking words of Torah, and even as he was traveling, he studied *mishnayot* or a passage from the Gemara by heart. If, for some reason, he did not have the necessary concentration to speak words of Torah, he made sure to simply recite the letters of the alphabet. His use of time was calculated to the very minute, and each instant of his life was an activity in itself.

He was once asked why he wore shoes without laces, and his astonishing reply was, "To save time!"

He did not participate in any celebrations, lest he lose time. Even at the wedding of his sons and daughters, he would only go to the *chuppah*. He would immediately leave to accompany the *rabbanim*, and then discreetly return home to learn Torah. He did this every time.

At the wedding of one of his daughters, the family of the groom did not agree with his decision to not attend the meal, and so they went to find him. After an exhaustive search, they found him in a locked room within the synagogue, where he was immersed in the *Sha'ar HaKavanot* of Rabbeinu Haim Vital. People begged him to come and participate in the meal, but he refused. It was only when he saw that it was upsetting the family that he agreed to come.

A Gold Watch

The *gaon* Rabbi Binyamin Kamenetsky *Shlita*, the son of the *gaon* Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky *Zatzal*, recounted the following story: "On the day following my Bar Mitzvah, my father summoned me into his office. When I came in, I raised my inquiring eyes towards him, but he said nothing. He simply stepped on a bench and took down a small, carefully wrapped package from the bookcase.

"My father took the package in his hand and said to me, 'Today, now that you're an adult, I want to give you the most precious piece of merchandise in the world. But first, I want you to promise me that you will protect it like your own life!'

"My father untied the strings that bound the package, removed the wrapping, and handed me a watch as a gift!

"In seeing the look on my face, he said: 'My son, know that Rabbi Israel Salanter used to say that time is life. If we lose time, we lose life!'"

Rabbi Kamenetsky *Shlita* added, "These words of my father engraved themselves deeply in me, and the lesson that I learned on that day lasted much longer than my watch!"

A certain *avrech*, as his wedding day was approaching, asked the Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter *Zatzal* (the Imrei Emet), which book of Mussar he should study. The Rebbe showed him his watch and said, "This is the greatest of all Mussar books. Each lost moment will never return!"

He also used to say, "Why is there the custom of giving a gold watch to the groom? To teach him that each minute is more valuable than gold!"

The Final Moments of the Sha'agat Aryeh

The *gaon* Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld *Zatzal* recounted the following story about his Rav, the *gaon* Rabbi Aryeh Leib *Zatzal*, who was known as the Sha'agat Aryeh.

When word spread in Metz that the *gaon* of the generation, the Sha'agat Aryeh, had no more than a few hours to live, the members of the Beit Din, as well as the leaders and directors of the community, gathered in his room. The *gaon* was lying down, with no remaining strength. From time to time, he would simply ask for a Gemara so he could look something up. When he had finished, he would ask for another Gemara.

Those who gathered around him were watching his rapid breathing and slightest movement, which in his final moments were devoted to the study of Torah. One of the leaders of the community asked the *Shamash*, who was handing the Rav the books he asked for, to give him the book *Ma'avar Yabok* instead of a Gemara. In this way he would be able to say *Vidui* and other prayers before his soul passed away.

When the Sha'agat Aryeh saw that he was given the book *Ma'avar Yabok*, he returned it to the *Shamash* and said: "It's pointless, for I never had time to commit a real sin. I didn't even have time to think of any sin, for my entire life was occupied with learning. When could I have committed sins?"

More Valuable than Millions

The *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita* said, "One of my students once had an opportunity to attend a business meeting in which he could have closed a very lucrative deal, but it was scheduled right in the middle of a session devoted to learning Torah. He came to ask me what he should do, and I said to him: 'I am not telling you anything. You must decide what to do.' He thought for a moment, and then he returned to his learning. At that point he resolved a great question posed by one of the Rishonim, something that made him extremely happy. He said to me, 'This explanation is worth more to me than all the millions I could have earned!' In fact, although he did not attend that business meeting, he still managed to close the deal. Why? Because he had conquered his desire to earn money during a time established for learning Torah!"

Guard Your Tongue!

It Constitutes Accepting Lashon Harah

Even if we clearly realize that what someone has told us is true – that a certain individual has disparaged us or done something against our will – but there is a way of judging him favorably (for example, that he had no intention of causing us harm, but had some other objective), then it is an obligatory *mitzvah* to judge him favorably. If we do not want to do this, it will be counted as a sin against us, namely that we resented him in our heart. That is why it constitutes accepting *Lashon Harah*.