

The Path To Follow

Pinchas

450

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

Tamuz 24th, 5772

July 14th, 2012

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

THE HUMILITY OF RABBI ZECHARIAH

Concerning a well-known incident that took place in Jerusalem, the Sages have said: “The destruction of Jerusalem came about through Kamtza and Bar Kamtza” (Gittin 55b). What happened is that Bar Kamtza, having been chased out of a celebration held at Kamtza’s home, went to the Roman Emperor and said to him: “The Jews are rebelling against you.” Bar Kamtza told the emperor that as proof, if he were to send an offering to the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews would refuse to offer it. Which is precisely what happened.

We need to understand how it is possible for the talmidei chachamim attending that celebration to have kept quiet and not reacted when Bar Kamtza was publicly humiliated, despite wanting to pay for the entire celebration out of his own pocket. Did they hate him for no reason? Is that possible? When they saw a person enduring such terrible public humiliation, did they not react at all?

If we say that they pretended not to see what was going on, that is even worse. In such a case, they were liable of having done something far worse, namely not admonishing someone when they saw him doing something reprehensible – a demonstration of malice and baseless hypocrisy. Did they ignore what the Torah says: “You shall not stand aside while your fellow’s blood is being shed” (Vayikra 19:16)?

We shall attempt to explain this as best we can. There are two kinds of tzaddikim in the world. One kind are those whose entire goal and sole desire is to do the will of their Creator, without any personal interests whatsoever. We find this idea in the teaching of the Sages concerning Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, who was collecting money to redeem captives: Arriving at the River Ginnai, he ordered its waters to divide so he could make his way across. The river replied, “You are about to fulfill your Maker’s will, and I am also doing my Maker’s will. While you may or may not fulfill your goal, I am sure of fulfilling mine.” Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said, “If you do not divide, I will decree that no waters should ever flow through you,” at which point its waters divided (Chullin 7a).

From here we learn how true tzaddikim behave: They always do the will of their Father in Heaven, without taking their own opinions or personal interests into account. That is why they are also willing to risk their lives for the sanctification of G-d’s Name, without fearing any man.

On the other hand, there are some “tzaddikim” who devote themselves entirely to doing the will of others. They only appear to be righteous, for all they want to do is what seems good in their own eyes. They seek to please other people, even when those people are wrong.

We can now fully understand what happened at the celebration in question. At the time of the Temple, there were tzaddikim and Sages whose sole purpose was to do the will of others, having only their own interests at heart. True, they studied Torah, but when it came to admonishing others, they were altogether silent because they wanted to please people. It was Sages of this kind who were at the meal, and they failed to reprimand their host for having humiliated Bar Kamtza because they sought favors from their host. We need to understand why the silence of these Sages, who did

not issue any admonishments, was interpreted by Bar Kamtza as approval on their part for their host’s actions. The result was that he denounced the Jews to the emperor, which led to the destruction of the Temple. Perhaps such silence was only a way of pleasing their host?

When the Sages’ Influence is Absent

We fully understand that the role of Torah Sages is to spread their influence upon all the residents of the city, and also to affect the entire world in order for everyone to benefit from them. If the Sages at that celebration had in fact had a good influence on the residents of the city, the conduct of the latter would have been better, especially when everyone was seated together. Yet here, we see the exact opposite: It was precisely in the presence of all these Sages that someone humiliated another without arousing the least bit of protest from them. That’s not all, for the Sages themselves were present but did not react when they saw this terrible humiliation taking place. In other words, this means that the person in question was not influenced by the Sages in any way. Why not? It is because the Sages themselves did not act any better, since they remained seated without protesting against what they heard. This seems to imply that they were certainly in agreement with what happened. Hence Bar Kamtza went to denounce them to the emperor, which led to the destruction of the Temple.

If we were to ask how the Sages themselves could have reached such a point, the primary reason would be baseless hatred. This is alluded to in the expression *sinat chinam* (“baseless hatred”), whose first and last letters form the words *shach mat*. This means that when there are no sacred conversations (*sichot kodesh*), but only *Lashon Harah* and mundane conversations (*sichot chullin*; i.e., *shach*) – which do not correspond to the dictates of the Torah – we arrive at baseless hatred. This is true death (*mat*), much as Kamtza killed Bar Kamtza with humiliation. This goes without mentioning the fact that the Sages were present but did not protest, which means that they chose such offensive behavior in order to seek their own honor and the sins of others. Sin was imputed to them alone – those who accepted the situation – which is why Bar Kamtza went to denounce and accuse the Jews.

If we follow the rest of the story, we see that the Sages of Israel acted in this way when the emperor sent his offering. Bar Kamtza caused a blemish around its eye, and the Sages saw this blemish and wanted to offer it anyways for the sake of peace. However Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said, “People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar!” In the end, this offering was not made, the Temple was destroyed, and the Sages said: “By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our house has been destroyed” (Gittin 55b-56a).

In reflecting upon this, we note that for political peace, it would have been better to give in and accept the emperor’s offering. Yet here Rabbi Zechariah acted with negative humility and ordered the Sages not to accept the offering. Why? Because there was no peace among the Sages themselves. They did not consider the opinion of one another, for everyone wanted to find favor with others and not do the true will of the Creator, the result being that the Temple was destroyed.

For Moshe's Good

It is written, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Take for yourself Joshua bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit'" (Bamidbar 27:18).

Our Sages have taught that everywhere the expression "take for yourself" is used, it means "for your own benefit and your own good."

Rabbi Haim HaCohen of Aleppo raises an objection, saying that it seems that for Moshe's own benefit and good, it would have been better for him to continue leading the people, not to lay his hands on his servant Joshua.

He answers with a teaching from the Sages: "A man is jealous of everyone except his son and student" (Sanhedrin 105b). A man's student is like his own son, and Joshua served Moshe with all his might. The Sages have also said, "The son is the continuation of the father," which is why it was for Moshe's own benefit and good that Joshua – his student and servant – should continue in his path and lead the Children of Israel.

Reward and Punishment

It is written, "Therefore say: Behold, I give him My covenant of peace" (Bamidbar 25:12).

The Netziv of Volozhin explained G-d's command to Moshe with a parable:

A general entered a city in order to conquer it, but he was unsuccessful. In fact this general and his entire army were almost captured. A simple soldier came to him with some advice on how they could escape. The result was that both he and his army were able to make it out of the city.

When the king heard of this, he ordered his general to give a gift from the king to the simple soldier. This would also serve as a punishment to the general, who had been personally unable to save himself and his men.

Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated slack by not being seized with zeal for Hashem, and only Pinchas had strengthened himself and put his life in danger for the sanctification of G-d's Name. This is why Moshe was personally ordered to tell Pinchas of his reward.

Hence the verse states: "Therefore say" – you yourself must tell him; "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace."

Measure for Measure

It is written, "The sons of Korach did not die" (Bamidbar 26:11).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal raised the following question: The Sages have said, "The son confers merit to the father" by his good deeds. As a result, why were Korach's sons unable to save him by the merit of their good deeds? The Rav answered by saying that this principle of the Sages ("The son confers merit to the father") only applies when the father has not sinned or denied the principle of faith in G-d. If the father has sinned and denied faith, then all the merit of his sons will be useless.

Thus measure for measure, just as he denied the fact that there is a Father in Heaven – and just as he has rejected His providence, His Torah, and His mitzvot – likewise in the future the merit of his children and their good deeds will be unable to save him from the destruction of Gehinnom.

This is what happened with the sons of Korach: Just as Korach and his followers denied fundamental principles of faith, Korach was not saved from descending into the abyss, not even by the merit of his righteous children.

The Burnt-Offering

It is written, "The lamb, one shall you make in the morning" (Bamidbar 28:4).

We may explain this verse according to the teaching of the Sages that whoever studies the laws of the burnt-offering is considered to have made one. Now in the expression echad ta'aseh vaboker ("one shall you make in the morning"), the first and last letters of each word have the same numerical value as "Torah." This means that the Torah considers him to have made a burnt-offering.

– Bnei Shushan

The Month is for You

It is written, "This is the burnt-offering of each month in its own month" (Bamidbar 28:14).

The term chodesh ("month") has a numerical value of 312. There are 12 ways of combining the letters of the Tetragrammaton, and each month is illuminated by one of these combinations. Furthermore, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton (26) multiplied by 12 is equal to 312, meaning chodesh. The word itself designates a renewal, for with every month time renews itself in combination with the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Nevertheless, we have been given the power to change times and combinations in order to proceed from justice to mercy, as it is written: Hachodesh hazeh lachem (Shemot 12:2) – this month is for you; it is in your hands.

– Bnei Issachar

In the Light of the Parsha

Fighting the Evil Inclination – Not Listening to It!

Man was created in this world, a place where the evil inclination exists, and he cannot fight it unless he completely ignores what it tells him. If he listens to it, he will be enticed by what it says. Thus when the evil inclination wants to convince a person to commit a sin, he must not listen to it at all, as the Sages have said: "A man should always incite the good inclination to fight against the evil inclination" (Berachot 5a). Here Rashi explains that a person must go out and wage war against it. Just as one does not listen to what his enemy says in war, but thinks only of victory, likewise one must fight against the evil inclination without listening to it at all.

Pinchas took action as if he did not hear anything. At a time when all the Children of Israel were sitting and weeping, each at the entrance of his own tent, Pinchas arose from among the community and took action. As a result, G-d gave him a blessing of peace, as it is written: "I give him My covenant of peace" (Bamidbar 25:12). Why? It is because he put action before thought. It is a rule that everywhere a chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d's Name) takes place, we do not listen to what the evil inclination says, but instead we take action. When we do, the power of the evil inclination is diminished. However a person will fall into the hands of his evil inclination if he listens to it. Along the same lines, the Sages have said: "Do not say, 'I will study when I have free time,' for perhaps you will never have free time" (Pirkei Avoth 2:4).

To what can this be compared? It is like a man who enters a village and sees a large house on fire. He immediately raises his voice and summons the firemen. Does he lose time by asking the village residents whose house this is, saying that he believes it is on fire? If they first try and find its owner, the house will have burned down completely! When we see a house on fire, we take action immediately. Only later do we ask about its owner.

Relying on the Drawing of Lots

It is written, “Only by lot shall the land be divided, according to the names of their fathers’ tribes shall they inherit. According to the mouth of the lot shall one’s inheritance be divided, between the numerous and the few” (Bamidbar 26:55-56).

In the Gemara the Sages say, “[The land of Israel] was divided only by lot, for it is said: ‘Only by lot.’ And it was only divided by the Urim and Tumim, for it is said: ‘According to the mouth of the lot’” (Bava Batra 122a). The Sages also say, “[Joshua] went and cast lots, and the lot fell upon Achan, who said to him: ‘Joshua, are you convicting me based on a mere lot? You and Elazar the kohen are the two greatest men of the generation. Yet were I to cast lots on both of you, the lot might fall on one of you.’ He replied, ‘Please, cast no aspersions on the lot, for the land of Israel is yet to be divided by lot, as it is written, ‘Only by lot shall the land be divided’” (Sanhedrin 43b).

In numerous places throughout Scripture, the Sages have relied on a drawing of lots: Moshe chose the 70 elders from each tribe by lot. The 273 firstborn who exceeded the number of the Levites and were to be redeemed with five shekalim were chosen by lot. It was by lot that Saul discovered that Jonathan had violated his oath by tasting a little honey on the end of his staff. Saul wanted to kill Jonathan, but the people rescued him and he was not harmed (I Samuel 14). The watches of the kohanim were also chosen by lot, as it is written: “They cast lots, watch by watch, the small as well as the great, the teacher together with the student” (I Chronicles 25:8). Elsewhere we read, “We cast lots for the wood offering, the kohanim, the Levites, and the people, to bring it to the Temple of our G-d, the Temple of our forefathers, at the appointed times, year by year, to burn on the Altar of Hashem our G-d, as it is written in the Torah” (Nehemiah 10:35).

The gaon Rabbi Yair Bachrach Zatzal mentioned this subject in his writings: “We see that in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, people had faith in the drawing of lots, for it took place without human thought or action interfering – ‘Only by lot shall the land be divided.’ People also had faith in the drawing of lots to sentence Achan and Jonathan to death (had the people not rescued him), not because he had confessed. It is also said, ‘The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is entirely from Hashem’ [Mishlei 16:33]. Even among the nations of the world, this was something that was allowed, as we see in regards to Jonah and Haman, according to the plain meaning of the text, for it is very likely that if lots are drawn properly, Providence will oversee it” (Responsa Havot Yair 61).

Furthermore, we find an extraordinary account in the responsa of the ancient Geonim, where it is written: “Everywhere we can draw by lots, we have done so. No Jew has the right to transgress what has been decided in regards to this matter, for the lot is how Heaven expresses itself, as it is written: ‘Only by lot shall the land be divided.’ Whoever transgresses the decision of the lot, it is as if he has transgressed the Ten Commandments.”

The Sdei Chemed is surprised by this: What connection is there between the Ten Commandments and the drawing of lots?

Concerning the statement of Rabbi Yosef Karo, “We do not seek advice from soothsayers or astrologers, and we do not draw lots”

(Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 119:1), the Rema explains: “This is because it is written, ‘You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d.’” The book Taharat HaMayim points out that we must understand what Rabbi Yosef Karo meant when he said that we must not seek to predict the future by relying on these kinds of predictions, for elsewhere we see that the land of Israel was distributed by lot. In regards to things of this nature, there is no prohibition against drawing lots.

Not Trusting in Lots

Can we trust in the drawing of lots when it comes to decisions that involve human life? For example, when people are on a ship and a storm arises that threatens to sink it, are they allowed to draw lots, as people did with the prophet Jonah?

In his book Midrash Talpiot, Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen of Izmir cites two sources from Sefer Chassidim which seem to contradict one another. In one place, it states that under such circumstances it is forbidden to draw lots: “People who find themselves on a ship when a storm arises do not have the right to draw lots, for if the lot were to fall on one of them, he would have to be thrown into the sea. We must not do what was done to Jonah the son of Amittai, for wagering has little value when it comes to money, and how much less so when human lives are involved! In such cases we do not rely on the drawing of lots” (Sefer Chassidim 601). Concerning the incident between Saul and Jonathan, when lots were drawn to determine who was liable to death for having broken Saul’s oath, it states: “This is because the Ark was present, and thus every decision came from Hashem. They knew how to proceed, but at present we can no longer rely on the drawing of lots.”

Elsewhere he writes the opposite: “If people are crossing the sea and a storm arises that is liable to sink the ship, and yet other ships travel across in peace, this means that there is someone guilty aboard that ship, and we have the right to draw lots. The one upon whom the lot falls three successive times must be thrown into the sea, and we pray that the lot does not fall upon the innocent, but upon the guilty” (Sefer Chassidim 679).

Midrash Talpiot explains this by noting that in the first case, a storm arose by chance and all the ships on the water were subjected to the same conditions. Hence lots could not be drawn in that case, for no one was guilty. In the second case, however, all the other ships traveled across the water without incident, and only one ship experienced the storm. This clearly shows that the storm arose because of someone aboard that ship, as was the case with Jonah. Lots could therefore be drawn in such a case.

Guard Your Tongue!

When Obtaining a Loan

What else must we learn? That in general, if someone has obtained a loan and tells everyone that So-and-so has done him a favor, it often happens that unscrupulous people will inundate him with requests for help, and he will be unable to escape them. We must therefore be extremely careful about what we say.

When someone discovers a new Torah teaching, joy enters his heart, as it is written: “The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart” (Tehillim 19:9). The reason for this joyful heart, writes the author of Shevet HaMussar (ch. 11), is that “the light of the Torah which he studied has entered and brightened it.” In fact the Torah is like a lamp that brightens the soul and rejoices it.

In a talk given by Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman Shlita, he stressed the great joy of anyone who finds himself within the walls of the Beit HaMidrash. This is what he said:

“Young people do not know how fortunate they are – just from the fact of being able to study Torah without being disturbed by anything harmful on the outside. We must first recognize how many people among all mankind have the merit of learning Torah. It is said that there are some five billion people in the world, the vast majority of which are non-Jews, and of them there is nothing to say. As for Jews, regrettably the vast majority of them are detached from Judaism, with Orthodox Jews constituting only a small minority. Among these, many do not have the ability to study because they must earn a living or for other reasons. For the young men who find themselves in a yeshiva, it is the happiest moment of their lives, a time when they can use each instant for Torah. This is because one cannot know what will happen afterwards, be it because of the need to earn a living, or for any other reason.

“Furthermore, when they find themselves within the walls of a yeshiva, they are protected from all outside harm. A yeshiva student must realize how happy he should be, inside the world of Torah, for outside the world of Torah – outside the four cubits of Halachah – it is dark and filled with misery. One who must, against his will, go out and earn a living has a life that is strewn with pitfalls. The only certain place is within the four cubits of Halachah. Nevertheless, we see that some boys do not share this point of view. They are confused and in despair, be it because they believe that they are not learning enough, which bothers them, or for other reasons. However the important thing to realize is that every boy should be happy simply because he has an opportunity to remain in the Beit HaMidrash and learn Torah!”

Rabbi Akiva Eiger's Appearance

One night, the wife of Rabbi Yaakov Orenstein (a student of Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin) realized that her husband had gotten up, washed his hands, and started to dance and sing with tremendous joy. When Rabbi Yaakov noticed how surprised his wife was to see him dancing in the middle of the night, he explained that for a long time he had great difficulty understanding a certain subject in Halachah. On that night, however, the gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger appeared to him in a dream and gave him a thorough explanation of the subject. In his tremendous joy, he did not know how to control himself, and so he expressed his jubilation by dancing! However Rabbi Yaakov was not content with this, and since his wife was pregnant at the time, he decided to name his son Akiva – after the name of Rabbi Akiva Eiger – which is precisely what happened!

How Can We Not Dance?

Rabbi Shimshon David Pinkus Zatzal once told Rabbi Tzvi Jacob-

son the story of what happened when he visited Rabbi Noah Weinberg Shlita (the Rosh Yeshiva of Aish HaTorah). Rabbi Shimshon David explained that while he was at the Netivot yeshiva in Netivot, through a window he could see all the students dancing around the bimah. Since it was the middle of the study session, he went inside and tried to understand what was going on, meaning why they were dancing.

He saw Rabbi Noah Weinberg standing at the center of the circle encouraging the boys to dance along with him. Rabbi Shimshon David, who was close to his uncle Rabbi Noah, approached him and said: “Rabbi Noah, what’s the reason for this joy?” Rabbi Noah happily explained: “I’ve found a new explanation for a Rambam, so how can we not dance?”

When the Telz Yeshiva Danced for Joy

Still on the same subject, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter Zatzal told the following story to his students at the Telz-Lakewood yeshiva:

One day, the students of the Kelm yeshiva realized that Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (the “Alter of Kelm”) left his regular spot in the study hall for a secluded place on an upper floor. Since this was quite unusual, one of the students followed him and discovered that the Alter had gone there to dance! When asked why he was dancing, he replied: “I’ve understood a new pshat in the Rashba!” He then added, “Dancing in the study hall, while others have not understood the Rashba with me, is not right. That’s why I’ve come here alone.”

A few days after Rav Gifter told this story to his students, a new way of understanding a commentary of the Rashba was discovered at the end of class. Rav Gifter was happy, and he exclaimed in a loud voice: “Ha! We’ve understood a pshat of the Rashba!” One of his students had the courage to say, “If we combine this with the story you told us in the previous class, we can now dance in the hall itself, since together we’ve all understood a pshat of the Rashba!” Agreeing with him, Rav Gifter stretched out his hand to the student standing next to him, and so one hand reached out for another, until the Telz yeshiva began dancing for joy!

He Knows How to Appreciate a Vort!

The Brisker Rav once said, “Each time I have a new idea, do you know why I first describe it to Rabbi Elazar [Shach]? It’s because he alone knows how to listen to and derive the greatest satisfaction from it. He knows how to appreciate a vort and truly enjoy it!”

The Brisker Rav added, “Do not ask, ‘What does it matter?’ Don’t let this seem trivial to you, for on the verse, ‘Honey and milk are under your tongue’ [Shir HaShirim 4:11], the Midrash says: ‘If one speaks words of Torah, but his listeners do not find his words as tasteful as honey and milk, better for him not to have spoken’ [Shir HaShirim Rabba 4:23]. Sages certainly speak words of Torah that are upright and true, otherwise there would be no reason to say them. Yet even when someone who explains a Torah concept is certain to be correct, one condition must still be met: That those who hear his words find them like milk and honey. This is a prerequisite for the honor of Torah. His words must be pleasant and rejoice the heart of his listeners, who should appreciate their importance and realize that there is a reason to dance. Only with Rabbi Elazar have I found these characteristics, which is why he is the first to hear any new Torah ideas that come to me!”