

The Path To Follow

Shoftim

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Story of Agrippa

It is written, "You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d shall choose. From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself; you shall not place over yourself a foreigner, who is not your brother" (Devarim 17:15).

The Mishnah in Sotah 41a recounts what happened to Agrippa, a king of Israel who descended from Herod, a slave from the house of the Hasmoneans. Agrippa was called to the Torah and read a passage from this week's parsha. He received it and read it while standing, for which the Sages praised him. When he reached the words, "You shall not place over yourself a foreigner," tears ran from his eyes, but they said to him: "Do not fear, Agrippa. You are our brother, you are our brother!"

As he was reading from the Torah, Agrippa wept upon reaching the expression, "you shall not place over yourself a foreigner," for he knew that he descended from Herod. The Sages then told him that he was their brother. The Gemara explains: "At that moment, the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for Israel] made themselves liable to destruction, for they flattered Agrippa" (Sotah 41b).

Rashi comments: "Tears ran from his eyes – for the verse rendered him unfit as king. You are our brother – for his mother was Jewish." Commenting on Sotah 41b, Rashi says: "They flattered Agrippa – for although his mother was Jewish, he was not fitting to be king because he was a slave, and it was shameful."

Let's think about this: What is the first concept taught by the verse in question, and what is the final concept that it teaches? When King Agrippa wept, it was because he understood that the expression, "From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself," was referring to a Jewish king of Jewish descent. Now, "From among your brothers" is not the same as a king who is Jewish only on his mother's side. In that case, why did the Sages tell him: "You are our brother"? Did they not know that only his mother was Jewish? Furthermore, we need to understand why their flattery made them liable to destruction. What wrong was there in wanting to console him?

We need to explain why Agrippa wept only when he reached the second part of the verse ("you shall not place over yourself a foreigner"). He should have burst into tears as soon as he reached the first part: "From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself." The Sages interpret this expression to mean "the best of your brothers," and yet Agrippa descended from a slave, meaning that he was not among the best of his brothers.

It seems that Agrippa initially thought that "from among your brothers" excluded a foreigner. Yet when he reached the end of the verse – which explicitly mentions the foreigner – he realized that the beginning of the verse was excluding him.

If we are correct about this, then our initial question is now even more pertinent: What purpose did the Sages' response serve? Agrippa's ancestors were not among the best of their brothers, meaning that he was not fit to be king. Therefore what were the Sages telling him?

It seems that by saying, "You are our brother," the Sages meant to tell him that because the end of the verse says "who is not your brother," it was not referring to him, since "you are our brother." The fact that the verse says, "from among your brothers" teaches something else. That is why they twice said, "You are our brother," for the term "brother" is mentioned twice in the same verse.

As a result, when the Sages told Agrippa: "You are our brother," they annulled the mitzvah of "from among your brothers" and twisted an entire verse from the Torah. They did all this so they could flatter Agrippa, which is why they were held to account.

To modify a verse – to give explanations on the Torah that are contrary to the Halachah – renders a person liable to destruction.

We should also point out how the accusation made against the Sages was different, for the Gemara teaches that only individuals from among the tribe of Judah could reign as king. As we know, the Hasmoneans were accused of this, as the Ramban says in commenting on Sefer Bereshith. On the verse, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Bereshith 49:10), the Ramban writes: "[T]he scepter shall not depart from Judah to any of his brothers because the king of Israel, who will rule over them, must be from the tribe of Judah, and none of his brothers will rule over him. ... [E]very lawgiver in Israel who carries the king's signet must be from Judah. It is he who will rule and command in all Israel, and he will have the seal of royalty until the coming of his son...."

"In my opinion, the kings from other tribes, who ruled over Israel after David, went against the wish of their father Jacob by diverting the inheritance of Judah to another tribe. Now they relied on the word of Achiya the Shilonite, the prophet who anointed Jeroboam, who said: 'For this I will afflict the seed of David, but not forever' [I Kings 11:39]. Yet when [the northern kingdom of] Israel continued to crown kings one after another from the rest of the tribes, and they did not revert to the kingdom of Judah, they transgressed the testament of their ancestor, and they were accordingly punished...."

"This is also the reason for the punishment of the Hasmoneans, who reigned during the Second Temple. They were saints of the Most High, without whom the learning of Torah and the observance of mitzvot would have been forgotten in Israel. Nevertheless, they suffered great punishment: The four sons of the old Hasmonean Matityahu, saintly men who ruled one after another, fell by the sword of their enemies despite all their prowess and success. The punishment ultimately reached the point at which our Sages of blessed memory said: 'He who says, "I come from the house of the Hasmoneans," is a slave' [Bava Batra 3b], and they were all destroyed on account of this sin."

Hence this may be why the Sages of the generation were admonished: They should have reprimanded Agrippa directly for having dared to reign as king, since he was not from the tribe of Judah. Despite the fact that on any other day, the Sages would not have been obligated to reprimand Agrippa due to the fear of authority, once he read what was written in the Torah and tears began running from his eyes – since he realized that he was not worthy to reign as king – they should have taken advantage of this opportunity and reprimanded him. Instead, not only did they not reprimand him in any way, they went so far as to flatter him, allowing this opportunity to pass! Hence they made themselves liable to destruction, for a person who has an opportunity to spiritually progress and strengthen himself, yet fails to use it, has much to be admonished for. The Sages, who could have returned the kingship of Israel to the tribe of Judah, yet failed to use this marvelous opportunity which presented itself to them, were held liable and deserving of destruction.

If You Find a Dead Body

The gaon Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi, the author of Responsa Chacham Tzvi, was particularly stringent when it came to the issue of agunot (women whose husbands have disappeared). The reason for his excessive stringency can be found in a terrifying incident that occurred to his father, Rabbi Yaakov.

The son-in-law of the Av Beit Din of Vilna (the author of Sha'arei Ephraim), Rabbi Yaakov was a talmid chacham without equal, a man of incredible diligence. From morning till night, he would learn Torah with his chavruta and best friend, Rabbi Moshe, the son-in-law of the president of the city's Jewish community.

During this period of time, Vilna was attacked by a wild horde of Tatars. Great fear seized the inhabitants of the city, especially its Jews. Any region "visited" by the Tatars produced large trails of Jewish blood, destruction, and desolation.

The fear of Vilna's residents was justified. After the Tatars left, people discovered that besides the many possessions which had been pillaged, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Moshe, the two young avrechim, could not be found. It quickly turned out that they had both been carried away by the Tatars.

Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Moshe were taken by their abductors to a distant mountainous region where another savage tribe lived, a group of people who raised large numbers of sheep. They would usually buy captives from the Tatars, and they would impose all kinds of work upon these captives, including the herding of flocks.

All the members of this tribe wore similar clothing so as to recognize each other more easily. They also made their prisoners wear the same clothes, though different from their own, in order to recognize them from afar and watch them.

Having been sold to two slave owners, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Moshe were each assigned a flock to herd. The tribe's rules were very strict, and at the end of the day the sheep were counted. If even a newborn was missing, the slave overseeing it had to pay with his life. Several years passed in this way.

One day, when the two of them went out to graze their masters' flocks, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Moshe suddenly met one another. It was a reunion that was filled with great emotion, and they cried on each other's shoulder. They knew that the odds of regaining their freedom and returning home were extremely slim. In their agony, the two friends tried to reconstruct the Jewish calendar by memory in order to determine when Shabbat, the holidays, and the fast days were.

They became so wrapped up in their conversation and calculations that Rabbi Yaakov didn't realize that a few sheep had become separated from his flock. Tremendous fear seized him when he learned of this, for he was certain that his fate was sealed. Hence he made his friend Rabbi Moshe swear to find his body and give him a Jewish burial.

They agreed that if a miracle happened and Rabbi Yaakov would not be killed, they would meet again in the same place.

Rabbi Yaakov returned to his master. As soon as the tally was made and they decided to execute him, certain members of the tribe suddenly intervened and tried to stop it. They had pity on Rabbi Yaakov,

who was handsome. A ferocious fight broke out among members of the tribe, and Rabbi Yaakov's master was killed.

The young Jew understood that this was his chance to escape. He quickly exchanged his clothes with those of his dead master, and then fled to the mountains knowing that nobody would chase him.

Two or three days passed, and Rabbi Yaakov had not appeared at the location that he and Rabbi Moshe had discussed earlier. Having concluded that Rabbi Yaakov had been executed, Rabbi Moshe began looking for a decomposed body bearing his clothes, which he found buried under a mound of earth. He went to the trouble of exhuming the body and laying it to rest elsewhere, thereby giving it a Jewish burial.

As he was returning to his master's tent, Rabbi Moshe suddenly noticed a carriage in which he saw a prominent figure. In fact he recognized this man, who had often visited his father's home and was one of the leaders of the Vilna community. He called out his name and presented himself to him. The man quickly summoned him into his carriage and rushed him away, far away. Rabbi Moshe was certain that he had been saved by the merit of having fulfilled his final duties towards his friend.

Everyone rejoiced upon Rabbi Moshe's return to Vilna, but at the same time they were shocked to learn the tragic news of his friend's death. Rabbi Moshe explicitly testified before the Beit Din about Rabbi Yaakov's death and burial.

In the meantime, Rabbi Yaakov had succeeded in escaping from his abductors. Since he was dressed as a member of their tribe, he aroused no particular suspicions. He therefore spent several months wandering about, until he finally reached the area of Vilna. There he learned that his wife was on the verge of getting remarried, which made him quake. He knew that he had to make it home as quickly as possible.

In Vilna, the wedding day had arrived. Gaunt and exhausted, Rabbi Yaakov was dressed in tatters, and he easily melted into the seudat aniyim (meal for the poor) organized by the father of the bride. Nobody could recognize him. In fact his father-in-law walked among the poor and gave each of them some money. When he came to Rabbi Yaakov, he refused to accept it.

"Could it be that you're a talmid chacham and that accepting such money is beneath you?" asked his father-in-law. Rabbi Yaakov nodded his head in agreement. "Perhaps you can recount one of your commentaries?" he continued. Rabbi Yaakov agreed and delivered part of a sermon that he himself had given a few years earlier, during the reception that had taken place before his wedding.

A shiver ran up his father-in-law's spine. "Tell me something else," he insisted. He then recounted things that he had said during his engagement party. His father-in-law looked deeply into his eyes, and after a few seconds of shock and bewilderment, they fell into each other's arms.

The festive meal that had been planned for the following day was naturally transformed into a meal of thanks and great rejoicing over the son-in-law whom he had lost.

Some time later, Rabbi Yaakov and his wife had a boy whom they named Tzvi. This boy was none other than the Chacham Tzvi.

This incredible story involving his father Rabbi Yaakov was the reason why the Chacham Tzvi was so strict when it came to the issue of agunot.

– BeTzel HaChochma

Torah and the World

It is written, “For the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise” (Devarim 16:19).

In his book *Kol Eliyahu*, the Vilna Gaon draws attention to a change of expression: Here in Parsha Shoftim we read that a bribe “blinds the eyes of the wise,” while in Parsha Mishpatim we read that it “blinds the intelligent” (Shemot 23:8).

The explanation is that there are two requirements for a judge and a talmid chacham. One is that he must be wise in Torah in order to fully understand the law. The other is that he must be astute in business and the schemes of this world in order to know how to skillfully deal with them.

The difference between a chacham (wise man) and a pikeah (intelligent man) is that we become wise through Torah, while we become intelligent through learning the ways of this world.

That is why the Torah discusses this subject twice. Bribes end up blinding the eyes of sages in regards to Torah laws, as well as the eyes of the intelligent, those who fully understand the nature of this world and are adept in business.

Let Him Repent

It is written, “By the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the condemned person be put to death. He shall not be put to death by the testimony of a single witness” (Devarim 17:6).

The Sages say, “They asked wisdom, ‘What is the punishment of the sinner?’ Wisdom replied, ‘Evil pursues sinners’ [Mishlei 13:21]. They asked prophecy, ‘What is the punishment of the sinner?’ Prophecy replied, ‘The soul that sins, it shall die’ [Ezekiel 18:4]. Then they asked the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘What is the punishment of the sinner?’ He replied, ‘Let him repent and he will find atonement’” (Yerushalmi, Makkot 2:6).

Rabbi Avraham of Mikaliev explains: “By the testimony of two witnesses” – these are the opinions of wisdom and prophesy – or even “three witnesses,” by adding the opinion of the Torah (“the condemned person [shall] be put to death”) – the sinner is to die. Even when he can bring an offering, what will he do when the Temple no longer stands, or when he does not have the means to bring an offering?

Nevertheless, “He shall not be put to death by the testimony of a single witness,” for the opinion of the Holy One, blessed be He, is that the sinner must not die, for there is a simple option available to him: “Let him repent and he will find atonement.”

The King

It is written, “You shall surely set over yourself a king” (Devarim 17:15).

The commentators raise an objection in this regard, for when the Children of Israel went to see the prophet Samuel and said, “Give us a king,” he became angry and reprimanded them! However it is a Torah mitzvah: “You shall surely set over yourself a king”!

The Kli Yakar explains that the reason for having a king is that he casts fear upon the people. The Sages have said, “Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow one another alive” (Pirkei Avot 3:2). Hence the Torah commands, “You shall surely set over yourself a king” – so that his fear will be upon you, so that he rules over you, and so that people fear him. Appointing such a king is desirable, and even a positive Torah precept.

Yet in the time of the prophet Samuel, the Children of Israel said: “Give us a king.” That is, they wanted a king whom they could appoint and whom they could depose, meaning that he would need the people and have to acquiesce to them. This request was evil in the eyes of Samuel, which is why he became angry and reprimanded them.

The Earthly Kingdom: A Reflection of the Heavenly Kingdom

It is written, “You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d shall choose” (Devarim 17:15).

Why did G-d tell the Children of Israel to set a king over themselves? If we say that it was in order for the king to judge them, the power of judging was allocated to judges and elders, not to kings! There is another difficulty with this: Has anyone ever seen the slave of one king setting another king over himself? Any slave doing this would be rebelling against his king, and he would have to answer for it with his life! That said, how is it possible for a Jew to set a human king over himself, since G-d has said: “I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Shemot 20:2)? G-d has also said, “For the Children of Israel are servants to Me. They are My servants, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d” (Vayikra 25:55).

We must say that here, the Torah simply wants to state that the Children of Israel must set Hashem over themselves as King. That is why it uses the singular in the expression, “You shall surely set over yourself a king,” for each man had to set a king over himself, namely the Holy One, blessed be He. It was not that all Israel had to set another king over themselves other than G-d. He only commanded them to have a king in order for this king to serve as an example in the world, that we should fear Him as much as we fear the king, just as Rabbi Yochanan told his disciples: “May it be [G-d’s] will for the fear of Heaven to be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood” (Berachot 28b).

In reality, writes the Ralbag, Hashem was only angry with the Children of Israel in the time of Samuel the prophet because they sought to rebel against Him by appointing a king who would enact new laws according to their wishes. The Ralbag says the following:

“All the Sages of Israel gathered together and went to find Samuel at Rama, asking him to give them a king in order to judge them, just like all the other nations. However they erred in this regard, for the Children of Israel are not naturally inclined to have a king judging them according to his will, as is the case for the kings of other nations, who issue orders as they please. The Torah simply said that if the Children of Israel ask to be given a king like all the nations around them, then they can only appoint one from among their own brothers, a man who observes the Torah and acts according to the Torah, not according to other laws. Hence the Torah commands the king to write another Sefer Torah, other than the one he possessed before becoming king. He is to constantly have it with him and read from it all the days of his life, in order to lead the people according to the Torah. That is why Samuel thought it was bad for the Children of Israel to have requested this of him, and it is why he eventually told them that Israel has no king but Hashem. Indeed, Hashem told Samuel that what they wanted was to distance themselves from the ways of Torah. That is why He said that they did not want Him to rule over them.”

Guard Your Tongue

It Makes No Difference

Regarding the prohibition against speaking Rechilut, it makes no difference whether the speaker says it willingly, or the listener personally suspects something and pressures the speaker into telling him what another person said against him.

Even if a person’s own father or rav begs him to reveal what the other person has said against them, and even if the information is only avak (the dust of) Rechilut, it is still forbidden. – Chafetz Chaim

The Memory of the Tzaddik is a Blessing

A Few Glimpses into the Extraordinary Life of the Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, in Honor of his Hilula on Elul 5

The holy tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us, attained many lofty levels in the service of Hashem. The beloved son of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, may his merit protect us, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto was the father of our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita.

From his parents, Rabbi Moshe Aharon acquired numerous sanctified habits that he preserved and constantly improved upon. His piety was expressed in the fact that he paid great care to fulfilling the words of the Sages in Pirkei Avoth. As the Gemara states, "He who wishes to be pious must fulfill...the matters [dealt with in tractate] Avoth" (Bava Batra 30a). Every teaching emerging from the sanctified mouths of the Sages was carried out by him as written, word for word, without any change.

Here, for example, is how Rabbi Moshe Aharon fulfilled the teaching of the Tanna Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh, "Be of an exceedingly humble spirit" (Pirkei Avoth 4:4): Every Shabbat, when he entered the synagogue, he would hunch his back as if he was trying to diminish his importance in entering the palace of the king. When the faithful came to see him after prayers to kiss his hand, he immediately rejected the very notion of anyone kissing his hand. In fact he was opposed to it with all his strength, seeking as he did to diminish his own importance.

Furthermore, the humility that was the lot of Rabbi Moshe Aharon radiated upon all who approached him. Everyone felt that they were in the presence of an exceptional man, a man of tremendous spirituality. However his head was lowered in order to share the pain and worries of all those created in the image of G-d. Whoever entered his home was greeted with a blessing and a friendly face, regardless of the time.

He had a particular habit that was specific to him alone: Whenever a person came to his home, be it someone very young or very old, he would rise in their presence as a clear sign of respect. More than once, Rabbi Moshe Aharon was asked why he was so adamant on standing before one who came to see him, including the very young. To this he replied, "Know that there is a divine spark in everyone. I am not standing before that person, but before the divine spark within that person. That is what I am respecting, in accordance with the words of our Sages: 'Look not at the vessel, but rather at what it contains' [Pirkei Avoth 4:20]."

Talmidei chachamim and rabbanim were amazed when they came before the tzaddik and saw with their own eyes how he completely annulled himself before those who studied Torah. When they came to his home for a blessing, Rabbi Moshe Aharon would be the first to extend his hand and say, "Shalom Aleichem." He would shake hands quickly, so as to prevent people from kissing his own hand, as is the norm in Sephardic communities.

When they shared their worries with him, asking him to intercede on their behalf through his prayers, people could see on his face that he did not feel worthy of this task. He would tell talmidei chachamim and bnei Torah, "Who am I, and what am I, that I can bless you? On the contrary, you are talmidei chachamim, bnei Torah who dwell in the tents of Torah – you are a source of blessing!" Our Sages have said, "He who occupies himself with the Torah will have his desires granted by the Holy One, blessed be He" (Avodah Zarah 19a). Elsewhere they say, "If one studies Torah, painful sufferings are kept from him" (Berachot 5a).

An Amazing Sight

One of the times that Rabbi Moshe Aharon found himself exiled from home was when he was invited to the home of the Azoulay family in Los Angeles. In his honor, the members of the Azoulay family kashered all their kitchen utensils, and they even prepared special food in his honor.

One day, Mrs. Azoulay told her son David: "Go to the tzaddik's room and ask him to come for lunch."

Following his mother's request, David opened the door to the room of the tzaddik, their guest from Ashdod. However the boy stepped back and began to scream because of what he saw, quickly running back.

The family was frightened. "What happened?" they anxiously asked. Trembling, he said: "When I entered his room, I was very afraid. I saw the Rav completely surrounded by a powerful light, and even his face shined and radiated at a distance."

This incident is similar to what Rabbi Machluf Biton from Moshav Lozit experienced. The tzaddik was a guest in his home for a few days, and during that time Rabbi Machluf noticed an extraordinary burst of light suddenly coming from his room, despite the darkness that reigned there at all hours of the day. The Rav's face was like a flaming torch that sent out rays of light in all directions.

When Rabbi Machluf saw this, he stepped back, fearing for his health and leaving without entering the Rav's room. The members of his family also witnessed this incredible sight, which occurred throughout the time that the Rav stayed with them.

Members of the Rav's own family testified to the same kinds of thing. His room was dark for many nights, yet amid this darkness his face shined with celestial brilliance. Oftentimes, this truly frightened the members of his family, until they eventually grew accustomed to it a little.

Heavenly Protection

The teaching, "Man is led along the path that he chooses to take" (Bamidbar Rabba 20:12), was clearly demonstrated with the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, as recounted by his beloved son, Rabbi David Hanania Shlita:

"Rabbi Moshe Aharon would usually have lunch precisely at noon, and during this time he would not receive the public. He would then rest a little, receive people, and devote himself to his regular schedule of Torah study. In the evening, he made sure to go to bed on time, and at midnight he would get up and pour out his heart in reciting tikkun chatzot. He would then pray for the Jewish people. This was his custom until his last years.

"One day the Rebbetzin had to travel to Tel Aviv. Before leaving, she told my grandmother to take some chicken out of the fridge, and to prepare it for the Rav's lunch. She did what she was asked, and at noon – through no fault of her own – a few people arrived to see Rabbi Moshe Aharon. The Rav invited them in, but other people arrived once they left. Rabbi Moshe Aharon told my grandmother to let them into his room. Thus for the entire afternoon, he welcomed people without eating or resting.

"When the Rebbetzin returned from Tel Aviv, she asked my grandmother: 'Did the Rav eat lunch?' She then explained what had happened, that people did not stop arriving since noon, and that the Rav himself asked that they not be turned away, but rather invited inside to see him.

"The Rebbetzin asked, 'Did you kasher the chicken?'

"'No,' my grandmother said. 'I thought you already kashered it!'

"Everything was now clear. The Rebbetzin entered the Rav's room, quickly removed the plate, took out another chicken, and then kashered and cooked it. Suddenly, the Rav asked to eat! At that point the Rebbetzin told him everything that had happened to the chicken that hadn't been kashered. The Rav smiled and added with emotion: 'This is the meaning of the Sages' teaching: "Man is led along the path that he chooses to take." Treif meat has never entered my mouth, and even though you weren't here, Hashem continued to protect me and came to my aid.'"

Along the same lines, Rabbi Moshe Aharon would never finish everything that was on his plate during a meal. Instead, he would start eating but not finish everything. When his wife first noticed this, she thought that her husband did not like the food she was making for him. When the tzaddik understood what she was thinking, he said to her: "I love your food, but I always eat only a little at each meal. If I were to eat everything all at once, I would immediately ask you for another plate. But I choose to reserve my desire for Hashem and His Torah, not for the things of this world."

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The Power of their Sanctity

The merit of our fathers was of great spiritual importance to the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto. This merit exerted a tremendous influence on the power of the blessings which he bestowed upon all who came to see him. Whoever found himself in the tzaddik's presence would receive a blessing "by the power of the sanctity of my fathers the tzaddikim."

In this spirit, Rabbi Moshe Aharon described a special segula in one of his books:

Whoever has in his home the book Shnot Chaim [which deals with his holy ancestors, with their customs and the wonders which they performed, as related from generation to generation and which serves as a faithful source of confidence in the Sages throughout the Maghreb] will be protected and succeed in all that he does. The tzaddik will live by his faith.

In the book Shnot Chaim, we learn many things about the power of the tzaddikim, both in their lives and after their death. As the Sages say, "The tzaddikim are greater in death than in life."

We have therefore collected a series of extraordinary stories that can teach us the power of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us, during his life and after his death.

The following story took place about 40 years ago. A Jew by the name of Reb Amram ben Hamou, who lived in Toulouse, France, suffered a serious heart attack, and his life hung in the balance. His family immediately contacted Rabbi Moshe Aharon and asked for their father to be healed. The tzaddik promised them that he would, in fact, recover.

A few months later, Reb Amram experienced another serious heart attack. At that point, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon promised the family that there was nothing to worry about, for their father would live a long time, another 20 years with a damaged heart, which is precisely what happened.

Two decades later, Reb Amram had another serious heart attack. The family then contacted our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita in Lyon, France, to ask him to visit Reb Amram. They believed that his end was very near, since the "20 years" which his father had promised them would elapse in a few days.

As our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita testified, "On the very day that the 20 years elapsed, when the blessing of the tzaddik and his promise to Reb Amara ben Hamou came to an end, he passed away. Happy are you, O tzaddikim, in that you fulfill the teaching: 'The tzaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills.'"

Sanctifying G-d's Name in this World

In the year 5738, three years before Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto fell ill, his son Rabbi David Hanania Shlita traveled with him from Israel to several countries: France, Morocco, England, and the United States. Our teacher Shlita was responsible for preparing this entire trip, and as such the tremendous responsibility for the health of the tzaddik, who was diabetic, lay on his shoulders.

While they were in Morocco, recounts our teacher Shlita, "I heard and saw all the problems that people came to share with my father. I observed and learned a great deal from the way in which my father, may his merit protect us, heard and carefully listened to the problems of the poor, just as he did for the rich. I observed how he advised and supported them, infusing them with faith in our Father in Heaven, and telling them that they had nothing to worry about because everything would be fine."

Even non-Jews arrived in droves to receive Rabbi Moshe Aharon's blessing and advice. Concerning them, he would often say: "By the merit of my holy fathers, the Name of Heaven was also sanctified in the eyes of these non-Jews." In fact the tzaddik would bless them, promise them that their prayers would be answered, and tell them that their problems were nothing to worry about.

A year later, when Rabbi Moshe Aharon and his son returned to Morocco, all the non-Jews who had come the year before to receive his blessing for a certain problem, to request a blessing for their children, to be healed, or to be delivered

in some way, returned to thank him for the miracle that had occurred as a result of his blessing.

They recounted with amazement how, within the very month which they had received his blessing, deliverance arrived, healing came, someone's wife conceived, and so on. It was truly a great Kiddush Hashem. Throughout Morocco at that point, even among non-Jews, people had faith in the tzaddikim. Even important government ministers and prominent figures from all levels of government came to see Rabbi Moshe Aharon for his blessing, be it for children, to be appointed to an even higher position, or for his blessing that their daughter should get married and the like. Hashem's Name was thus magnified and sanctified in the world.

The Raging Sea Calmed Down

As we know, the city of Mogador is located by the sea, and the mellah [Jewish quarter] is opposite the water. One day the sea began to unleash its fury on Mogador, to the point that massive waves began crashing against the city. Water made its way into homes and began flooding the city and its inhabitants. As a result, immense panic could be felt in the city, which was in danger.

In their distress, the Jews of Mogador went to see Rabbi Moshe Aharon to ask him for guidance. The Rav's home was located in the mellah, and Jews gathered there to ask for deliverance and mercy on themselves, their children, and their possessions.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon then summoned his shamash, Rabbi Nissim Ohayon, and together they went to the cemetery. There the Rav gave him a piece of paper and instructed him to place it on the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, may his merit protect us, and then to throw it into the sea.

Indeed, the sea calmed down at that very instant, as if nothing had ever happened.

How Deep are Your Thoughts!

About thirty years ago, in the year 5740, Rabbi Moshe Aharon travelled to Los Angeles with his son Rabbi David Hanania Shlita. During one of their commutes in the city, their taxi driver addressed Rabbi Moshe Aharon and asked him for a blessing to find a wife.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon said to him, "Stop the car, get out, and look under the wheels for a coin with something written on it. If you find your name there, it's a sign that you will have success in everything you do. If you find no coin, we will pray to Hashem for you."

The driver said to the tzaddik, "Rabbi, I can't stop now. We're on the highway! When we arrive at your destination, I'll stop the car and look under the wheels, just as you've said." Rabbi Moshe Aharon acquiesced.

When they reached their destination, the driver stopped the car, got out, and looked under the wheels. As it turned out, he suddenly found a coin on which his name was written! Our teacher has refused to tell us the name of the driver, because he is well-known. As he pointed out, however, this was something truly incredible! How did that coin get there? And why did his name appear on it? All these things are true mysteries that originate from Hashem, things that we cannot comprehend in any way.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon never saw things as mere coincidence. He perceived individual providence even in the trivial things of daily life. Given that the Sages say that the everyday conversations of talmidei chachamim should be examined – meaning that they hold special interest because they are filled with wisdom and intelligence – how much more is it forbidden not to examine things that happen each day, for they may contain Divine allusions.

If we search our souls, we can truly penetrate the mysteries of Hashem, which are only revealed to the most pious of individuals in a supernatural way. In order for them to be the only ones to understand, Hashem reveals them by allusions that the intellect cannot comprehend.

Furthermore, in order to prevent the Satan from perceiving Hashem's deeds, which are very deep, He reveals these mysteries in mundane things, in order that only the most pious can comprehend them.