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The Path to Follow

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THE GREATNESS OF MODESTY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “Vehaya eikev [And it will be, when] you hearken to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them, Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers” (Devarim 7:12).

The teachers of Mussar explain that the expression vehaya eikev (eikev means heel) signifies that man needs to yield and demonstrate humility before Hashem and the Torah. In this way, the Torah can reside in him and Hashem’s Name will cleave to his own, as it is written: “Words of Torah endure only with one who is humble” (Taanith 7a). The characteristics of humility and modesty belong to the Holy One, blessed be He, for the very fact that He is patient and does not rush to punish sinners demonstrates to everyone how modest He is. In this regard it is written: “You shall walk after Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 13:5), which our Sages explain as an order for man to cleave to Hashem’s attributes, in harmony with the principle: “Just as He [clothes the naked, visits the sick, etc.], so should you” (Sotah 14a). Hence just as Hashem is modest, it is incumbent upon us to acquire this extraordinary attribute and to cleave to it.

Praising His Name

The Midrash cites a well-known incident regarding King Solomon, who sought to bring the Holy Ark through the doors of the Temple. Because of an error in calculation, however, the doors were too narrow and the Ark was unable to pass. Faced with this difficulty, he immediately read the verse: “Lift up your heads, O gates! Lift them up, O everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall enter” (Tehillim 24:9). Despite saying this, the doors did not move. In fact not only did they refuse to open, they also wanted to crush him, believing that he was talking about himself while reciting this verse. It was only after King Solomon read the following verse (“Who is this King of glory? Hashem, the L-rd of hosts”), that the doors stopped threatening him.

Yet even once the anger of the doors was appeased when they realized who this King was, they still refused to open until King Solomon finally recited the verse: “Remember the righteousness of David Your servant” (II Chronicles 6:42). The doors then opened and the Holy Ark was able to enter and take its rightful place in the Temple. King Solomon merited the opening of the doors by mentioning his father David, since this represented an act of humility for him. It proved to the doors that King Solomon, when speaking of the “King of glory,” was sincerely thinking of Hashem and sought to praise Him (for if Solomon had demonstrated pride, he would not have humbled himself by mentioning his father David).

In light of this, we can understand why King Solomon – the wisest of all men – did not build the Temple doors to accommodate the eventual arrival of the Holy Ark into the Holy of Holies, but instead relied on a miracle to increase the size of the Temple’s entrance.

We must explain that this situation was actually brought about by Divine Providence. Hashem wanted King Solomon to build doors that were too small precisely so he would reach this point and mention his father David. The dialogue between King Solomon and the Temple doors teaches us a lesson in ethics: We must realize just how important it is for a person to cleave to modesty and humility. If King Solomon, the wisest of all men, humbled himself by mentioning his father, then how much more should we – insignificant as we are – adopt the same attitude!

I thought of asking another question on this Midrash: Why did King Solomon decide to mention only the kindness of his father David, which obviously caused the doors of the Temple to open? The answer is that throughout his life, King David constantly devoted himself to others by helping Jews in all situations and at all times. Our Sages say that David’s hands were always full of blood, for he was constantly issuing rulings on cases of blood (the blood of niddah) for women in order to declare them clean for their husbands. Likewise, he was always deeply worried about the material situation of the Jewish people. When he saw that Jews were experiencing material difficulties, he instructed them to help one another.

From here we learn that David distinguished himself by this attribute of kindness on account of his tremendous sense of modesty. Indeed, as the leader of the Jewish people, he invested his energies into worrying about all their needs without feeling superior to others because of his privileged position.

The Kindness of David

Our Sages teach, “The world stands on three things: Torah, Divine service, and deeds of kindness” (Pirkei Avoth 1:2). This means that the basis and foundation of the world depends on Torah, the offering of sacrifices (replaced today by prayer), and deeds of kindness. According to this saying, we can more easily understand why the doors of the Temple did not open until they heard King David’s name. King Solomon had built the Temple, where the Torah was located (since the Holy Ark contained a Sefer Torah and the broken pieces of the Ten Commandments), and it was also where sacrifices were offered, meaning that the only thing missing was the third pillar, deeds of kindness.

In his great humility, King Solomon understood his error and did not hesitate to acknowledge it in public. Hence he evoked the third pillar – deeds of kindness – represented by King David. When the doors saw that King Solomon recognized his error and mentioned his father David, a symbol of the pillar of kindness, they immediately opened. Hence in the final analysis, the Temple rests on the three pillars that constitute the very foundation of the world.



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A Great Principle in Serving Hashem

It is written, “Your heart will become haughty, and you will forget Hashem your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Devarim 8:14).

Rabbi Moshe de Coucy, the author of Smag, writes: “In Mussar courses, I speak publicly about the reprimand on humility. However I never had the intention of including it among the 613 mitzvot. The Rambam also does not mention it among his prohibitions. When I arrived at this subject in my book Sefer HaMitzvot, I found myself being summoned in my dreams, where I was told: ‘You forgot the main thing! ‘Beware lest you forget Hashem your G-d!’”

“The next day, upon awakening, I reflected upon this and realized that it is a great principle in fearing G-d. With the help of He Who gives wisdom to the wise, I therefore wrote it among the list of prohibitions: ‘Beware lest you forget Hashem your G-d!’ This is a warning to the Children of Israel against growing proud when the Holy One, blessed be He, sends them a blessing, and they believe that they have earned it all because of their efforts, thus failing to recognize Hashem on account of their pride. Afterwards, I consulted tractate Sotah and found an explicit Gemara: ‘Whence is there a prohibition against pride? ... Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak Isaac said: “From this passage: Your heart will become haughty, and you will forget Hashem your G-d, and it is written: Beware lest you forget Hashem your G-d.” ... Wherever it is stated “Beware,” “lest,” and “Do not,” the reference is to a prohibition’ [Sotah 5a]” (Smag, Lavin 64). In the introduction to Smag, the author adds: “Hashem Elo-kim knows that I do not lie when it comes to visions; Hashem knows that I only mentioned them in this book in order for Jews to strengthen themselves in Torah and Mussar.”

In his book Shem HaGedolim, the Chida speaks of a man who was great in wisdom and the fear of Heaven, a man who received the tradition from a great rav, who in turn had received it from the elders. According to him, there lived three rabbis in the generation of Rabbi Yosef Karo who were worthy of writing a book like Beit Yosef, men capable of assembling all the dinim by citing their sources up to the Halachah. These men were Rabbi Yosef Taitazak, Rabbi Yosef Bar Lev, and Rabbi Yosef Karo.

From Heaven, it was decided that Rabbi Yosef Karo would write it, for he surpassed the others by his exceptional humility. It was also because he avoided, in his works, writing denigrating things about men who reached halachic conclusions that differed from his own, and because his teachings were those of a pious and generous man.

The same things are said about the Ohr HaHaim Hakodesh, Rabeinu Haim ben Attar, may his merit protect us, a man so humble that he considered himself as dust. In the introduction to his book Hefetz Hashem, he writes: “Today, no one knows better than I just how few things I understand. I am a small mosquito in the wisdom of Torah.... I am like a vessel that echoes loudly when a coin is dropped into it, for it is empty. And I – a child deprived of all wisdom – what right do I have to approach the King’s courtyard and enter it like great men to explain words of Gemara?”

The Chida also speaks about the greatness of humility: “I heard from an old rav that in the time of Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshal, his Beit HaMidrash was located above a vegetable shop that was owned by a man named Reb Avraham. He was a modest and quiet man, one who never quarreled with others. His shop also served as his home, and one night the Maharshal awoke to hear Reb Avraham studying a very profound sugia, explaining it from every possible angle. At that point, the Maharshal realized that the modest Reb Avraham was a great man. What did he do? He sent someone to ask him a very difficult question on the Gemara. When the messenger arrived, Reb Avraham told him that he was an ignorant man, and that he didn’t understand why he was being asked such a question. The Maharshal did not accept this answer, and he sent the messenger to him once again. After numerous requests, and on the Rav’s orders, Reb Avraham opened his mouth and offered incredibly wise and scholarly explanations. He requested only one thing, namely that the Maharshal should keep this secret and never reveal it to anyone. Subsequently, the Maharshal and Reb Avraham had profound discussions on the secrets of Torah, without anyone ever suspecting a thing.”

In the year 5334, as the Maharshal was about to leave this world, he commanded that Reb Avraham, the vegetable merchant, be appointed as the Rav of Lublin, for no one was greater. The Maharshal’s will was not carried out until after Reb Avraham heard innumerable requests for him to accept. The Chida ends by writing, “From here, a person with a heart will learn how humility and modesty are the means by which to arrive at Torah and wisdom for sincere reasons, for his Torah will testify that he is a lofty man, and Hashem pours out goodness upon one who walks in righteousness.”

“What is humility?” asks Rabbi Tzvi Kaidanover in his book Kav HaYashar. He replies, “I will give you an example: Rabbi Menachem, the son of Rabbi Avraham Galanti, once told me that he was carrying on his shoulder a sack of flour that he had purchased at the market. Rabbi Shlomo Shagig arrived behind him, took his sack, and firmly ordered him not to carry it. All of Rabbi Menachem’s protests, including the fact that it was beneath Rabbi Shlomo’s honor to carry it – since Rabbi Shlomo was very learned in Torah, as well as very wealthy – proved useless. Rabbi Shlomo refused to listen, and thus he carried this sack all the way to Rabbi Avraham’s home.”

He continued with the story: “One day, Rabbi Avraham Galanti went to the village of Ein Zeitim, where he purchased a jar and filled it with fresh water from a well in the village. On the way, he met Rabbi Messod the chassid, who said to him: ‘Rabbi, please give me a little water because I’m thirsty.’ Rabbi Avraham immediately extended his jar so that he could drink. After tasting the water, Rabbi Messod grabbed the jar and brought it to Rabbi Avraham’s house. When Rabbi Avraham’s students saw him coming from about 15 yards away, they all stood up before him. When he met them, they would kiss his hand and say, ‘We wish to be at your feet in the World to Come.’ This happened because Rabbi Avraham was very pious and humble, and he always cautioned us on maintaining peace, friendship, and affection. May his merit sustain us and all Israel!”

For the World to Come

It is written, “Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant” (Devarim 7:12).

What does “safeguard” mean? Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said, “All [the good] that Israel enjoys in this world is a result of the blessings with which the wicked Bilam blessed them. However the blessings with which the Patriarchs blessed them are reserved for the World to Come, as it is said: ‘Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you.’” – Devarim Rabba 3:4

A Complete Blessing

It is written, “He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land” (Devarim 7:13).

How will He bless them?

Some people have five or ten children, but do not have enough to feed them. The Holy One, blessed be He, says: “I am not like this, for I bless through children and I bless through fruit, so that you may have something to feed them.

A Small Creature

It is written, “Hashem your G-d will also send the hornet among them” (Devarim 7:20).

Why exactly did He send the hornet?

The Sages teach, “When the Holy One, blessed be He, sent the hornet before Israel to slay the Amorites, see what is written about these people: ‘Yet I destroyed the Amorite from before them – whose height was like the height of the cedars, and who were as mighty as oaks – and I destroyed his fruit from above’ [Amos 2:9].

“It would enter a man’s right eye and release its poison, and the man would burst open and drop dead. This is indeed the way of the Holy One, blessed be He: To achieve His purpose by means of small things. Against all who displayed pride towards Him, He sent a tiny creature to inflict punishment upon them, so that you may know that their strength is not real. In time to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will punish the nations by means of small things, as it is written: ‘And it will be on that day that Hashem will whistle to the fly that is at the far end of Egypt’s rivers, and to the bee that is in the land of Assyria’ [Isaiah 7:18].”

– Bamidbar Rabba 18:22

A Complete Prayer

It is written, “I threw myself down before Hashem” (Devarim 9:18).

What is the meaning of “I threw myself down”? Rabbi Berekiah and Rabbi Helbo said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani, “Moshe did not leave any corner of Heaven without having prayed there, as it is written: ‘I threw myself down before Hashem.’ Many prophets and tzaddikim have prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and yet Scripture uses the term “threw myself down” only for Moshe. Why? Because he acted differently than all other men. How so? Someone can pray continuously for an hour or two, or an entire day if he is a great tzaddik. However Moshe prayed for 40 days and nights!”

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the ministering angels: “I compare him to you, as it is said: ‘Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word’ [Tehillim 103:20] – this is Moshe, who illuminates the darkness for the Children of Israel and transmits the words of the Holy One, blessed be He, to them.”

– Midrash Tehillim

Water Preceded Them

It is written, “A land of brooks of water” (Devarim 10:7).

From here we learn that water preceded the Children of Israel wherever they went. When they arrived at Elim, water had already preceded them there, as it is written: “They arrived at Elim, where there were 12 springs of water” (Shemot 15:27). Here too, water had preceded them from Yotvata.

– Lekach Tov

Those Who Do His Will

It is written, “The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it” (Devarim 11:12).

One verse says, “The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it,” but another verse says, “He looks toward the earth and it trembles; He touches the mountains and they smoke” (Tehillim 104:32).

How can these two verses be reconciled?

When Jews do G-d’s will, “The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it,” and they suffer no harm. Yet when they fail to do His will, “He looks toward the earth and it trembles.”

– Sifrei

In the Light of the Parsha

The Sages say (Berachot 21a) that the Torah obligation to recite Birkat Hamazon has its source in the verse, “You will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He gave you” (Devarim 8:10). We need to understand why the Torah gives the law of Birkat Hamazon just before a verse which speaks of “my strength and the might of my hand” (v.17), as well as the relationship between the two. We may explain this according to a teaching of the Rambam: “The Sages have instituted numerous blessings as praise and thanks, and also as requests in order for us to always remember the Creator, even if we have not rejoiced in anything or performed a mitzvah” (Hilchot Berachot 1:3). This teaches us that the Sages instituted blessings mainly in order for man to remember his Creator. Hence the mitzvah of reciting Birkat Hamazon is found next to this subject, for when the Children of Israel would enter Eretz Israel and find great abundance there, the Holy One, blessed be, He, was concerned that they would reject Him. As the Sages say, “A lion does not roar over a basket of straw, but over a basket of meat” (Berachot 32a).

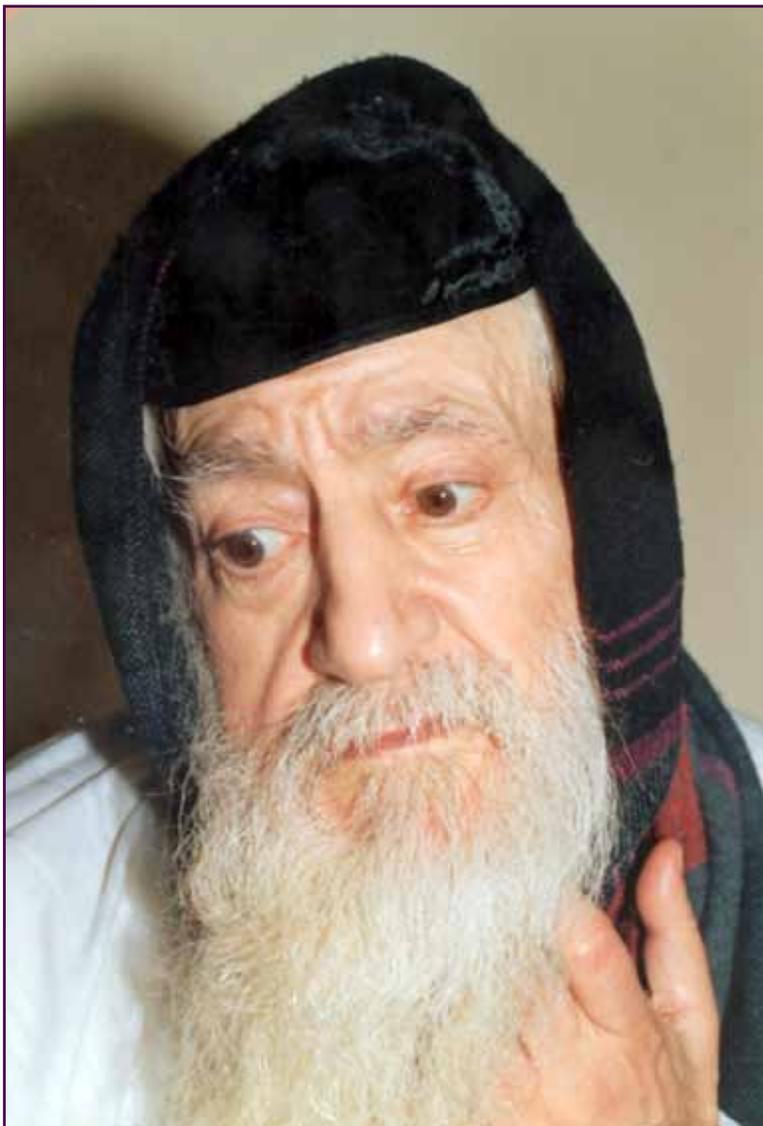
By reciting a blessing each time that we eat, as well as after eating, we will not forget the Creator, nor will we make the mistake of thinking, “My strength and the might of my hand have made me all this wealth.” Furthermore, by reciting each blessing with concentration, we fulfill the verse: “I have set Hashem before me always” (Tehillim 16:8). From here we achieve a fear of Heaven, for the Sages have said: “A man is bound to say 100 blessings each day, as it is written: ‘Now, O Israel, mah [what] does Hashem your G-d ask of you?’” (Menachot 43b). Rashi explains: “Do not read mah [what], but meia [100].” By reciting blessings, we achieve a fear of Heaven.

Guard Your Tongue

Even if He Did Nothing at All

Sefer Chassidim states that if a person finds himself among a group of people and something deplorable happens – but no one knows who did it – he must say: “I was the one who did it,” even if he did nothing at all.

The Great Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto - Part I



With the approaching Hilloula of the holy and pure tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto (may his merit protect us), a man accustomed to miracles and the father of our teacher and Rav, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, we are publishing a number of customs and miracles connected to him, accounts that we have heard directly from Rabbi David Pinto. Great family nobility shines from this precious stone in the crown of the Pinto dynasty. Within this chain of son after son, generation after generation of righteous, pious, and holy men, the tzaddik Moshe Aharon shined like the offshoot of a dynasty of talmidei chachamim, men who obtained miracles and deliverance, and who bestowed their holiness and purity upon the Jewish people. Within his powerful personality, Rabbi Moshe Aharon embodied the image of a pure and holy Jew, one who places himself completely in Hashem's service.

Indeed, he was ahuv lema'ala ve'nechmad lemata ("loved above and cherished below") – the initials of which forms Elul, the month in which he passed away.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon made himself especially well-known by the perfection of his service of Hashem, as well as by the incredible fact that he took it upon himself to remain enclosed in his home for 40 years, this upon the orders of his father, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us. For four decades, he studied the holy Torah with a degree of diligence that is impossible to imagine. There within the four walls of his tiny home, he elevated himself to a level of holiness and purity without equal in the world. So greatly were all his deeds and desires focused solely on serving G-d, he did not submit to the needs of the body or to physical demands.

Draw Me to You

About 35 years ago, when our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto began to organize hillulot in honor of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto at Essaouira (better known as Mogador), the family of Rabbi Shlomo Assaraf Zatzal was the first to help in every possible way. Members of his family came to Essaouira to rejoice and dance, whereas the Hilloula was held exclusively in Casablanca for several years.

It is said that when Elkana, the father of the prophet Samuel, would travel to Jerusalem for the holidays, he would proclaim Hashem's Name in public, thereby meriting Samuel as his son. The same occurred to the Assaraf family, thanks to which people came to Rabbi Haim Pinto's Hilloula in Essaouira. By this merit, members of the Assaraf family were the recipients of miracles. Our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita was a witness to one such miracle.

What happened was the following: The wife of Rabbi Shlomo Assaraf only had two sons, and for several years she wanted a daughter. The tzaddik Moshe Aharon Pinto gave her his blessing and promised that she would have a daughter, which is precisely what happened: A year later, Rabbi Shlomo's wife gave birth to a girl. A young woman working for the Assaraf family was present when the tzaddik blessed her. Now this young woman was looking to get married. After she witnessed the tzaddik giving Rabbi Shlomo's wife a blessing for a daughter, she also went to see the tzaddik to ask him to pray for her. The tzaddik gave this young woman a blessing to find a husband. Although the young woman was not Jewish, she had faith in the power of the tzaddik. Because "the tzaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes," powerful emotions pushed her to ask the tzaddik for a blessing to find a husband. From here, our teacher Rabbi David Pinto notes, we can reason as follows:

If this young woman, someone from among the nations of the world, is capable of having faith in blessings and prayers, then how much more can a Jew – who has the merit of his fathers on his side – spiritually awaken if he so desires! Thus it is written, “Draw me to you; we will run” (Shir HaShirim 1:4). If a non-Jewish servant-girl understands this, how much more should a Jew understand and strengthen his faith! When Rabbi Moshe Aharon heard her request, he said to her: “I will pray for you, and with G-d’s help you will find a suitable husband this month.” That very same month, the young woman became engaged and was married a few months later, just as the tzaddik had promised, for it is written: “He will do the will of those who fear Him” (Tehillim 145:19).

What Would You Like?

A certain Moroccan Jew had a donkey that was almost about to give birth. He knew in advance that the donkey would give birth to a male, and he was therefore obligated to perform the extremely rare mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn of a donkey.

This man introduced himself with great respect to Rav Moshe Aharon, offering to sell his donkey to the Rav. The Rav smiled and said, “What would I want with a donkey?” When he said that the Rav could perform this rare mitzvah by purchasing the donkey, he agreed. Soon afterwards the donkey gave birth to a male. Rav Moshe Aharon accomplished the mitzvah with immense joy and prepared a great feast to celebrate the mitzvah. In the middle of the meal, he turned to the Jew who had sold him the donkey and said, “What would you like?” Taking advantage of the opportunity, he replied: “Rabbi, I want a child!” The tzaddik thought for a moment, and then gave him a blessing to have ten sons. The blessing of the tzaddik was fulfilled in its entirety: This Jew had 10 sons, all in good health, and today he lives in the city of Dimona in Israel.

Living Water

What follows is another extraordinary story that can teach us about faith in the Sages: Mrs. Akoun of Paris was childless for a number of years. In her misery, she went to Rabbi Moshe Aharon at the end of one Shabbat to ask him for a blessing to have children. He listened and then told her to come see him at the end of the following Shabbat. At the end of the following Shabbat, this woman returned to receive his blessing. Rabbi Moshe Aharon gave her a bottle of water, upon which he recited his blessing that she would have children.

The tzaddik’s blessing very quickly came to pass. Several years later, the son who was born as a result of this blessing also needed a blessing for children. One day, Mrs. Akoun met Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita and said to him, “I heard that you are the son of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto. The son that was born thanks to the blessing of your father Zatzal also needs to have children.”

Rabbi David blessed her son to have sanctified children by the merit of his father, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon. Some time later, Rabbi David was told that her son had fathered children in good health.

By the Merit of My Holy Forefathers

Rabbi Moshe Aharon was a good friend of Rabbi Nachmani of Nazareth. Rabbi Nachmani had been paralyzed for a number of years, and he never had any children. When Rabbi Moshe Aharon arrived in Eretz Israel, he went to visit him. Upon arriving at his home, Rabbi Moshe Aharon saw him in a wheelchair, his head tilted towards the ground. He started to cry out of grief and pity for what had happened to his friend, and he intended to intercede on his behalf through prayer, giving him a blessing for a complete recovery.

When Rabbi Nachmani’s wife saw just how special this moment was, she wanted to take advantage of this time of mercy and grace. She therefore approached the tzaddik and said to him, “Rabbi Moshe, please pray for me to have children!” He replied, “How can I pray for you to have children when your husband is paralyzed and bound to a wheelchair? I will first pray that your husband is cured of his paralysis, and then I will pray for you to have a child.”

The woman answered, “Rabbi, why give two blessings? Give me just one blessing, and save the other.” When Rabbi Moshe Aharon asked her how, she said: “If you pray for us to have offspring, the Holy One, blessed be He, will automatically send a cure for my husband, and he’ll no longer be paralyzed.”

Rabbi Moshe looked at Rabbi Nachmani and said, “By the merit of my holy forefathers, the Holy One, blessed be He, will give you offspring, and in one year you will have a son.” A few months passed, and the blessing of the tzaddik was completely fulfilled: Rabbi Nachmani arose from bed and started walking like everyone else. His wife gave birth to a son one year later, and Rabbi Moshe Aharon went to Nazareth to serve as the Sandak and sit in Eliyahu Hanavi’s chair.

Who Rules Me?

Tremendous miracles take place on the day of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto’s Hilloula, and every Jew who gathers by his grave and prays to Hashem by his merit experiences deliverance. Such is the great power of the tzaddikim before G-d, to the point that it is said: “The tzaddik decrees, and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes.” As Hashem Himself testifies, “Who rules Me? The tzaddik, for I make a decree, and he annuls it” (Moed Katan 16b).

We have numerous accounts from people who have been granted children after praying for them by the merit of the tzaddik. This is especially the case on the day of the tzaddik’s Hilloula (Elul 5), for we know that the tzaddikim are greater in death than they are in life.