

# הַמִּתְחַלְּקִים וְהַמְדַבְּרִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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**HEVRAT PINTO**

*Under Aegis of*

**Rabbi David Hanania Pinto** שליט"א

11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: (331) 48 03 53 89 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85

8 Morris Road - Spring Valley NY 10977

Tel: 1-845 426 1276 • Fax: 1-845 426 1149

[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)

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## **"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE YOUR TENTS, O JACOB, YOUR DWELLING PLACES, O ISRAEL!"** (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**C**oncerning Bilaam's blessings, we have seen that the word "tents" corresponds to houses of prayer, and "dwelling places" corresponds to houses of study. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana teaches that, except for these houses of study and prayer, all the blessings reverted to curses, which was Bilaam's real intent (see Sanhedrin 105b). This demands a certain amount of clarification.

1. If the reason why Bilaam's curses were not fulfilled is because he did not pronounce them sincerely and wholeheartedly, why was the blessing "How beautiful are your tents..." fulfilled? Did he pronounce that blessing wholeheartedly?

2. The author of Ilana De'Chaye asks why Bilaam's blessings were mentioned in the Torah if they were not said wholeheartedly. What was their purpose in that case?

To focus even more on the problem, let us consider the importance of deeds performed by a person who does Teshuvah. Even the greatest Tzaddikim can draw a lesson and grow stronger from the exemplary devotion of those who put the most sincere efforts into returning to the right path. If King David, who had learned but two things from Ahitophel, called him his teacher, his guide, and his mentor (Perkei Avoth 6:3), how much respect should we pay to those who strengthen the foundation of our faith? Perhaps we should also call them our teacher and rav.

Some acquire the World to Come in an instant, exclaimed Rabbi in weeping (Avodah Zarah 10b, 17b, 18a). In other words, those who have returned to their Creator earn a great reward for all the effort and energy that they expended in a single moment to return to the right path. Rabbi also wept for those who could have acquired the World to Come by intensify-

ing their Torah study, yet refrained from doing so. If a Baal Teshuvah (who did not previously know G-d) is assured of the World to Come, a person who recognizes his Creator can strengthen himself each day and every hour by considering that he has just now, on this very day, received the Torah on Mount Sinai (Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:16).

Nevertheless, one who chooses the good and desires to take to the path of righteousness must exert a great deal of effort to arrive at the goal that he has set for himself, since the evil inclination lays traps for him everywhere. If the evil inclination becomes aware of a person's strong desire to engage in Torah study, it will fear that his efforts will lead him to recognize his Creator. Even if he enters a yeshiva without studying Torah there, the very fact that he is in a place of study will have a tremendous effect on him, and he will certainly end up studying Torah for the very love of study (Pesachim 50b). We must therefore be aware of the obstacles that the evil inclination uses in order to make us transgress, and we must do our best to radically distance ourselves from it and only seek to be close to the good inclination.

The Talmud tells us, "If that repulsive wretch [the evil inclination] meets you, drag him to the house of study. If he is of stone, he will wear away; if of iron, he will shatter into fragments" (Sukkah 52b). Engage in Torah study and you will come to realize that the evil inclination only seeks to deceive you.

Some people radically distance themselves from our religion and even refuse to hear of it. Instead of recognizing the truth, they prefer to stay in the darkness of falsehood and impurity. This is because they pay attention to the evil inclination, which tells them that if they recognize the truth, they will never again be able to enjoy the delights of this world. To counter

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the evil inclination, we must expend every effort in getting to a place where Torah is studied. In doing so, even the most wicked will come to clearly recognize the Creator of the universe, for the voice of the Torah will penetrate his heart and the evil found therein will fly out in pieces. With respect to this, we have already seen the example of Resh Lakish, an infamous armed robber, who repented as soon as he heard the voice of Rabbi Yochanan. As it is written, “Behold, My word is like fire – the word of the L-RD – and like a hammer that shatters a rock” (Jeremiah 23:29).

Despite his wickedness and the hatred he felt for Israel, Bilaam marveled at what he saw. His heart broke when he saw the Children of Israel united around the Sanctuary, which connected them to their Father in Heaven, and when he saw them neglecting the vanities of this world to concentrate solely on eternal life. At that point he could only exclaim, “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob.” In other words, how beautiful is the Torah, which is called *Tov*, the study of which we engage in like our Patriarch Jacob, who “dwelled in tents” (Genesis 25:27), these being the academies of Shem and Ever (Bereshith Rabba 63:15). Similarly, “Your dwelling places [Mishkanot], O Israel” means that Torah study enables a Jew to be *Nimshach* (drawn) to the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) and to connect with it.

These blessings were thus mentioned in the Torah because Bilaam pronounced them with great sincerity, from the depths of his heart, so moved was he by the greatness of the Children of Israel. From afar, he was dazzled by the sight of Jews engaged in Torah study and united around the Sanctuary. If he would have approached even closer, he certainly would have repented, and he too would have engaged in Torah study. He would have then become another man.

Such is the power of Torah, which can change a man as wicked as Bilaam. Hence a person who wants to know the path that the Torah lays out for him should, without hesitation, begin to study it. Otherwise the evil inclination, that old and foolish king (Zohar I:179b), is capable of catching him in its trap and radically distancing him from the Torah.

Nevertheless Bilaam did not react as Jethro did, whom he had known for a long time. Actually, they served together with Job as counselors to Pharaoh (Zohar II:69a). Concerning the passage, “And Jethro heard” (Exodus 18:1), our Sages asked what exactly he had heard (Zevachim 116a). The answer is that he had heard of Amalek’s war against the Children

of Israel and the miracle at the Sea of Reeds. With that, Jethro left all his money and possessions behind in order to get closer to G-d. He fled from all the vanities of this world as soon as he recognized the Creator of the universe. On the other hand, Bilaam did an about-face because it was difficult for him to part from his possessions. It was wealth “hoarded by its owner to his misfortune” (Ecclesiastes 5:12) that controlled him. He failed to realize that a person can be protected by wisdom and protected by money (ibid. 7:12). Hence Bilaam needed very little to draw closer to Israel and earn his portion in the World to Come.

It was therefore money that prevented Bilaam from approaching Israel, and thus he lost everything and became the greatest enemy of the Jewish people.

We can now answer the question we asked at the beginning: If Bilaam’s blessings were not sincere, why does the Torah mention them? The answer is, given that he was very close to the truth, the Torah did not close the doors of *Teshuvah* to him. Rather, it left him with a choice: By seeing the Children of Israel diligently engaged in Torah study, would he be influenced by them and repent? All his blessings would then have been fulfilled.

Consequently, the Torah mentions his blessings because they could have been fulfilled. In that case, Bilaam would have attained a sublime spiritual level.

The Zohar teaches that there is no single word of Torah that does not contain secrets of great profundity (Zohar I:21a). Each of them embodies advice, parables, hymns, praises, and supreme wisdom (ibid. I:135b; III:202a). If Bilaam’s blessings, which at first seem superfluous, are mentioned in the Torah, it is certainly because we can draw great lessons in *Musar* from them.

A person who goes to a place where Torah is studied can become noticeably influenced by it, even if he is very far from Judaism. He can then truly connect to that place and thus come closer to the Holy One, blessed be He. The light of the Torah will shine in his heart, and contrary to the case of Bilaam, the evil inclination will not be able to make him transgress. This is what King David prayed for, imploring G-d to lead him in the path of His commandments and to incline his heart to His testimonies (Psalms 119:35-36).

## RABBI YITZCHAK ISAAC KRASILSCHIKOV – COMMENTATOR OF THE YERUSHALMI

**R**abbi Israel Meir, the Chafetz Chaim, said: “When a man sets out to do something, he should not ask himself if he is capable of doing it. He must act and work with all his strength, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will help him to succeed in his undertaking so that his plan materializes.”

This idea came to mind when I saw the first volume of Tractate Berachot in the Jerusalem Talmud, along with the commentary of Yitzchak Isaac, the Gaon of Poltava. It is a living example of this idea.

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, the author of the commentaries Toldot Yitzchak and Tevunah on the Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), lived in a virtually sealed apartment near the Kremlin in Moscow. It was there, in solitude and obscurity, that he wrote his marvelous commentary on the Yerushalmi. Of course, on many occasions he asked himself a terrifying question, “I lift my eyes to the mountains. From where will my help come?” (Psalms 121:1). Would he succeed in what he had set out to do? Could he hope that one day his commentary would be published? However he did not despair concerning G-d’s help, and deep down he felt that he would be rewarded and that there was hope for the future. In the introduction to his book, he wrote: “When I prayed to our merciful Father, asking Him to take pity on me, I had steadfast confidence that He heard my voice and supplications, which came from the depths of my heart, and that He would come to my help, for ‘My help is from the L-RD, Maker of heaven and earth’ [Psalms 121:2].”

G-d indeed heard his prayer and sent him a man to preserve the fruit of his work, that man being the faithful Rav Tzvi Bronstein, President of the Al Tidom (“Do Not Remain Silent”) Association. It was Rav Tzvi who loyally recovered his manuscript and published it so that the lips of its author could move in the grave, and so that future generations could know how to study Torah in utter destitution. This too is Torah, and it must be studied.

The history of the manuscript’s rescue is quite moving. Rav Bronstein describes it in his own words:

“On the morning of Iyar 10, 5725 (1965), I found myself in the office of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Levine, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow. The Rav whispered in my ear, ‘Hurry to the hospital. There you will find the Gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac on his deathbed, for his time is short. You must leave immediately, lest you arrive too late.’ Naturally, I immediately took a taxi to the hospital. The Rav was already very weak by that time. I approached his bed and told him who I was. A slight smile appeared on his pale lips, and with great difficulty he murmured, ‘Good. It’s good that you came. I need you now.’ He opened his eyes and looked all around to see if anyone was watching, then turned to me again and whispered, ‘Listen. These last years I have been working day and night on writing a complete commentary on the Yerushalmi. It contains thousands of pages on the Jerusalem Talmud, and it will make its study easier because it is clear and simple.’ He told me where the manuscript was, and he insisted that I promise to do everything in my power to have it published, which I did. The next day, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac rendered his soul to his Creator, and his burial took place one day later.”

The manuscript that he entrusted him with was the second part of his book Tevunah. The first part had appeared in 5856 (1926), and it was the last Torah book ever published under the Communist regime in Russia. Rav Bronstein kept his promise, giving himself

no rest until he had found the manuscript of Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac’s commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud, which was eventually published by the Mutzal Me’esh (“Saved from Fire”) Institute under the auspices of the Al Tidom Association.

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, the son of Rabbi Dov Ber Krasilschikov, was among the last vestiges of Jewish orthodoxy in Russia. Born in 5648 (1888) in the small White Russian town of Kritchev, he studied in the Mir Yeshiva with the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch Kamai, and it was from him that he learned the main part of his Torah.

Before the Communist Revolution in Russia, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac was the Rav of Heditz, then the Rav of Poltava, the town from which he earned recognition as the “Gaon of Poltava.” It was there that he printed the first part of Tevunah, which he had written when he was but 23 years old.

When those who studied Torah began to be persecuted by the communists, who vented their anger primarily against the great rabbis of Russia, he left the rabbinate and settled in Moscow, where he took a job as an accountant.

He lived with his wife in a modest little apartment, and after each day working for the government he returned home to immerse himself in Torah study during the night. It was there that the last rabbis of Russia came to hear the Torah emanating from his mouth. He ate only dry foods, for there was also a non-Jewish woman who cooked non-Kosher food in his kitchen (it was a communal kitchen, shared by those in the apartment complex). He did not cease wearing his rabbinic-style clothes, and throughout his life he acted like a Rav from a generation of long ago.

In his final years, he worked on his marvelous commentary on the Yerushalmi. Under such difficult conditions, while the fear of the regime gripped everyone in the apartment, for him the study of the Yerushalmi was a consolation. The verse, “Remember the L-RD from the distance and let Jerusalem come up in your hearts” (Jeremiah 51:50) was fulfilled in him. During the last years of his life, the Rav of Poltava lived in the Jerusalem of Heaven.

When an orphan prays by the grave of his parents, he recites Kad-dish. He does not pray for himself or mention the terrible tragedy that has befallen him, but instead implores the Creator to rebuild Jerusalem. The Rav of Poltava stood by the grave of Russian Jewry and prayed: “Our Father, merciful Father Who takes pity, have pity on us and give our hearts the ability to understand, to discern, to listen, to learn and teach, to observe, to perform and accomplish all the words of Your Torah, the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud.” Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac’s main concern was the Torah of Eretz Israel, the Yerushalmi, and the great Rav of Poltava will forever remain connected to the light of those who study it.

We end with the words of the Gaon Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv of Jerusalem. In his approbation to Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac’s commentary he wrote: “May this man of action be blessed, the Rav Tzvi Bronstein, who devoted himself to him [Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac] and succeeded in rescuing his manuscript from the furnace and publishing it. In this way he proved and demonstrated his kindness to the deceased during his lifetime, enabling the name of the Gaon to become known, whose writings he left as his heritage. This too was an act of kindness to the living, for it gives those who study Torah an important work on the Yerushalmi.”

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “Amalek is the first among nations, but his end will be eternal destruction” (Numbers 24:20).

The Yalkut states: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘Wicked one! I created you after the appearance of the 70 languages, and now you will be the first among those who descend into Gehinnom, as it is written: “Amalek is the first among nations, but its end will be eternal destruction.” ’”

Let us illustrate this with a parable:

A man prepared a banquet and gave his servant a list of all the guests, drawn up in order of importance, that he was to deliver to each of them. The guest were listed in such a way that the most honorable one was to arrive first, since he was the first that the man thought to invite, and so on for the rest of the guests. Now on this list was someone of crude extraction, a vile man, who of course was listed last and thus was expected to arrive last. When the servant went to deliver the invitations, this vile man took the initiative and came even before receiving an invitation, lest he not be invited. Not only that, but he arrived at the banquet before the first and most important guest was scheduled to arrive! Upon seeing the vile man, his host said to him, “I sent my servant with a list, and on it you are written last. What are you doing here before everyone else?”

A wise man overheard him and said, “Don’t be surprised at this, for he will also be the last!”

“How can that be, given that he’s already here?” the host asked.

“As far as his presence here is concerned, he will be the last to leave because you must force him to stay until all the others have left, and so his stay will be to his great shame. He may have been the first to arrive, but he will also be the last to leave!”

Amalek was created after the appearance of the 70 languages, so it was appropriate that he be the last among them. Yet he became the first of those to descend into Gehinnom. Hashem did not retract from what He said. Amalek must be the last, which is why G-d decided that both things will happen: “Amalek is the first among nations,” for he is the first of those to descend into Gehinnom. Nevertheless he will also be the last, for all those who descend into Gehinnom will return when their sins are expiated, whereas Amalek will remain there, and “his end will be eternal destruction.”

## THE PATH OF THE JUST IMPUDENCE - PART I

Impudence is, in most cases, a bad trait. As opposed to the prudent man – who is generous, good, and who pardons and does not hold a grudge – the impudent man will feel not shame before anyone and will boldly impose himself upon everyone. He will commit wicked acts without shame, and he will pursue evil and bury himself into sin, as it is written, “They made their countenances harder than rock” (Jeremiah 5:3). All the positive virtues mentioned with respect to shame are reversed with impudence. When a man persists in habitually acting in this wicked way, he is greatly scorned by men, even if he possesses wisdom. Many evils stem from an impudent attitude: The impudent man will not be spared from disputes, hate, or jealousy. The impudent man denies the unity of Hashem, does not respect important people, and does not honor the aged. All the sins of the Torah are negligible in his eyes, according to his degree of impudence. Concerning such a man, the Sages have said, “The impudent are destined for Gehinnom” (Perkei Avoth 5:20).

The impudent person is called wicked, as it is written: “A wicked person shows his audacity on his face” (Proverbs 21:29). Now wicked men are detestable in the eyes of Hashem and even their name is vile, as it is written, “The name of the wicked will rot” (ibid 10:7). Concerning the humble who possess the character trait of shame, the verse says, “[G-d] teaches His way to the humble” (Psalms 25:9), whereas concerning the impudent wicked person it is said: “The way of the wicked He contorts” (ibid 146:9). The man who possesses the trait of impudence will commit sins without stop, and in spite of everything he will still consider himself perfect.

## THE STORY OF THE WEEK

### RABBI CHAIM PINTO AND THE FLASK OF TEARS

Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol and his friend Rabbi David ben Hazan traveled to Marrakech. There Rabbi David ben Hazan died, but he could not be buried because no one could clean his body, for everyone who touched his sacred body immediately collapsed. At that point Rabbi Haim Pinto said, “We can only clean the body of the holy man with his own tears, tears that he kept in a flask in Mogador.”

At the time, about 160 years ago, there were no trains or cars, and the residents of Marrakech were troubled because they did not know how they were going to bury the deceased. Rabbi Haim Pinto proceeded into a small room, then came out a few minutes later and said, “Go to the Al Azama synagogue and there you will find the flask of tears.” And so it was done.