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SHOFTIM To Follow
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WE ARE ALL THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera of any tree near the altar of Hashem your G-d, which you shall make. Neither shall you erect for yourselves a pillar, which Hashem your G-d hates. You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish, anything evil, for that is an abomination to Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 16:21-17:1). There are a host of things that are difficult to understand in this week's parsha, which begins with the appointment of judges and officers to judge the people in accordance with the principles of Torah and justice.

First of all, what is the expression, "You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera" doing after, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates" (Devarim 16:18)? Furthermore, how could anyone think that a Jew would want to plant an Ashera next to the altar? This is impossible, for anyone who wants to plant one does so only for idolatrous purposes, meaning that he does not believe in the altar. Such a person will therefore plant his Ashera elsewhere, not near the altar. We also need to explain what the expression, "You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish" is doing next to the mitzvah to appoint judges and officers.

Israel Bends Like the Reed

We may explain this entire passage according to the teachings of Mussar. The above passage pertains only to a person who grows proud, for the Sages have said: "Better is the curse that Ahijah the Shilonite pronounced on Israel than the blessings with which the wicked Bilam blessed them. Ahijah the Shilonite cursed them by comparing them with the reed. He said to Israel, 'For Hashem will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in water' [I Kings 14:15]. The reed grows by the water, its stock grows new shoots, its roots are many, and although all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they cannot move it from its place because it sways with the winds, and the reed resumes its upright position as soon as they have stopped. However the wicked Bilam blessed them by comparing them with the cedar, as it is said: 'Like cedars by the water' [Bamidbar 24:6]. The cedar does not grow by the water, its stock does not grow new shoots, its roots are not many, and although all the winds in the world blow against it, they cannot move it from its place. Yet if the south wind blows at it, it uproots and overturns it" (Taanith 20a).

Why did Bilam bless them by comparing them to a cedar, while Ahijah the Shilonite compared them to a reed?

Both men spoke in keeping with their own nature. Our Sages have said, "Whoever possesses the following characteristics is among the disciples of Abraham our father, and [whoever possesses] the three opposite characteristics is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam. The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul" (Pirkei Avoth 5:19).

Ahijah the Shilonite spoke in keeping with his nature – a humble spirit and a meek soul like the reed – while the wicked Bilam spoke in keeping with his nature – an arrogant spirit and a greedy soul, a soul as insatiable as a cedar. Yet the pronouncement of the former was fulfilled, while that of the latter was not. It is in the nature of Jews to bend like a reed and not to grow proud.

Hence it is written, "You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera of any tree." This seems like a redundant expression, for the term Ashera implies a tree. Therefore why use the term "tree" and "Ashera" together?

This teaches us that whoever grows proud and becomes as hard as a tree, Scripture considers him to have planted an Ashera near the altar in order to reject G-d. As our Sages have said, "Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'" (Sotah 5a). It is also taught, "If one walks with a stiff bearing even for four cubits, it is as if he pushed against the heels of the Shechinah" (Berachot 43b). The Sages add: "Everyone who is proud of heart is an abomination to Hashem.... It is as though he had erected an idolatrous altar" (Sotah 4b).

Pride Points to a Blemish

The verse uses the expression "near the altar of Hashem your G-d," which indicates that even if a person studies a great deal of Torah and practices mitzvot, Hashem will want nothing to do with him if he grows proud. Hence we read, "You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish, anything evil, for that is an abomination to Hashem your G-d." Although a person may make himself into an ox with regards to carrying the yoke of the Torah – as the Sages have said: "What is the meaning of the

verse, '...sending the ox and the donkey to roam freely' [Isaiah 32:20]? ... In order to study words of Torah, one must cultivate in oneself the [habit of] the ox for bearing a yoke and of the donkey for carrying burdens" (Avodah Zarah 5b) – if he grows proud, he will still be an abomination to Hashem. The verse explicitly says "an abomination to Hashem" (Devarim 17:1), and we also read, "Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem" (Mishlei 16:5). In both cases the issue is pride, for Hashem abhors all who grow proud.

How do we know that the passage is speaking of the proud? The verse says, "with a blemish," and the Sages state: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'Why do you prance [teratzdun], O you mountains of majestic peaks' [Tehillim 68:17]? A Celestial voice went forth and said to them: 'Why do you want litigation [tirtzu din] with Sinai? You are all full of blemishes in comparison to Sinai.' Here it is written, 'gavnunim [of majestic peaks]' and elsewhere it is written, 'or gibei [a hunchback] or a dwarf' [Vayikra 21:20]. Rabbi Ashi observed, 'From here you learn that if a man is proud, it constitutes a blemish in him'" (Megillah 29a).

Complete Control of the Gates

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read: "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates" (Devarim 16:18), and we know what is written in our holy books, namely that the gates mentioned here are those of the body: The eyes, mouth, and ears. A person must always protect them from sin and control them with his good inclination.

Just as a person can sin with his eyes, mouth, and ears, he must use them to fulfill mitzvot. The Midrash tells us, "King David said, 'Sovereign of the universe, every day I used to plan and decide that I would go to a particular place or to a particular dwelling, but my feet always brought me to synagogues and houses of study.' Hence it is written, 'I returned my feet to Your commandments' [Tehillim 119:59]" (Vayikra Rabba 35:1).

This is why a hunchback is mentioned in regards to the prohibition against "erect[ing] for yourselves a pillar, which Hashem your G-d hates." This teaches us that just as a pillar does not bend before the wind, a proud person does not yield before anyone, and since he is proud, he is abhorrent to Hashem.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI MOCHE AHARON PINTO

This week marks the Hilloula of the great gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto Zatzal, may his merit protect us all, the father of our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita. A descendant of holy and upright men who produced miracles, Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto embodied in his robust personality the image of a pure and holy Jew, serving Hashem with all his might. The initials of the expression Ahuv Lema'ala Venechmad Lemata ("Loved above and appreciated below") form the word Elul, the month of his passing.

Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto was part of a magnificent dynasty, the distinguished Pinto family. He was the son of a tzaddik and miracle worker of noble lineage, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, may his merit protect us all.

He became known above all for his lofty service of Hashem, which he practiced in righteousness, as the verse states: "You shall be upright with Hashem your G-d." This was due to the strict measures that he adopted, completely secluding himself in his home for almost 40 years upon the orders of his father, during which time he studied Torah with incredible diligence, completely beyond human comprehension. There, enclosed within the four walls of his small home, he elevated himself in holiness and purity.

Rav Eliyahu Sitbon once recounted to our teacher Shlita that a certain Jew, a great talmid chacham, told him that he had heard people speaking about the reputation of the tzaddik Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto, about his customs and the miracles that he did. Rav Eliyahu Sitbon said to him, "Do you know that this tzaddik remained in his home for 40 years without leaving it?"

The talmid chacham found this hard to believe. He thought that it was impossible not to leave one's home for 40 years, so it couldn't be true!

Some time later, Rav Eliyahu Sitbon met this talmid chacham again, and suddenly an old Jew approached them both and began to speak. In the course of their conversation, he said to them: "I knew a great tzaddik in Morocco who didn't leave his home for 40 years. I remember that when he moved from his home in Essaouira to live in Casablanca, dozens of people covered him with blankets so he wouldn't see the street or the light of day." When the talmid chacham heard this, he was stunned. He looked at Rav Eliyahu Sitbon and said with heartfelt emotion, "By two witnesses shall a matter be established."

The Lamp Burned Day and Night

Rabbi Moche Aharon was born to Rabbi Haim in the Moroccan city of Mogador (Essaouira), where he spent his childhood under the direction of his father. It was in Mogador that he learned his father's customs and way of life. He drew his Torah from this pure spring, which he was called upon to reveal to the public, to his sons and students, and to all who came to see him. From his youth, people could see in him – in his deeds, his conduct, and his Torah study – that he had been born for greatness. His father, who realized this, watched over him like a precious stone, for he knew that Torah and deliverance for the Jewish people would emanate from him.

Near the end of his life, Rabbi Haim Pinto left Mogador with his entire family for Casablanca, where he lived until his dying day.

The tzaddik Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto yearned for the home of his forefathers in Mogador, a house of tzaddikim that for years shined as a beacon to whoever needed help. He had a profound desire to live in this sanctified house, so that it would never be abandoned or deserted.

Furthermore, this house adjoined the synagogue of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, where a lamp burned day and night without interruption. Hence Rabbi Moche Aharon decided that despite the difficulties involved, he would not leave that place, and he continued to live in the house of his father, Rabbi Haim, until he left for Eretz Israel, where he settled in Ashdod.

Neither Sold Nor Purchased

In reality, Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto had another reason to remain living in the house of the tzaddik of Mogador. What was it?

Earlier on, the tzaddik Rabbi Hadan, may his merit protect us all, the son of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, had given a part of the house as a gift to the synagogue's shamash. However this was only on condition that the shamash, Soliman ben Zikri, never sell that part of the house to anyone for the rest of his life.

This is precisely what happened, for Soliman ben Zikri preciously kept his part, rejecting any offers to sell it, not even for all the gold in the world. This occurred during his lifetime, but after his death there were serious concerns that his heirs wanted to sell their inheritance to someone else.

This is why Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto bought that part of the house for himself, in order for it to remain in the Pinto family. He also purchased the synagogue, stipulating that it should not be sold or purchased until the coming of Mashiach.

Later on, it turned out that the tzaddik had great foresight, and his intuition had been correct. Due to the fact that he insisted on not leaving that house, it remained as a beacon even after the death of Rabbi Haim Pinto. Whoever had a question would go there to pray and entrust himself to the Creator of the universe.

Thus even today, Jews from around the world travel to this sanctified house in order to pray and study there.

Immersed in Pain

As we said at the outset, Rabbi Moche Aharon studied Torah and prayed alone in his room for 40 years. Although this is a well-known fact, only a few people understand the reasons behind this seclusion.

His father, Rabbi Haim Pinto, had been told through Ruach HaKodesh that a terrible decree was threatening the Jewish people, namely the Holocaust. Since he was aware of his son's greatness, he summoned him and revealed that the Holocaust was about to destroy millions of Jewish lives – men and women, the elderly and the young. Although he was aware of his son's importance, he ordered him to enclose himself at home and take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. He asked his son to distance himself from all the vanities of this world, so that he might succeed in diminishing the severity of the decree.

Rabbi Moche Aharon immediately obeyed his father without question. He enclosed himself in his home, purified his thoughts by the study of the revealed and hidden Torah, and from the depths of his heart he beseeched the Creator of the universe to have pity on His distraught people and to show them compassion.

What Rabbi Haim had seen through Ruach HaKodesh came to pass, and in the year 5699 the Second World War erupted. With the Holocaust, the lives of more than six million Jews were wiped out – entire communities and their leaders, Chassidic courts and their rebbes, entire countries, cities and villages, holy and pure individuals – may Hashem avenge their blood.

During the five years of the Second World War, Rabbi Moche Aharon lived in pain and misery, suffering along with the Jewish people. Despite the great difficulty involved, he fulfilled the will of his father and never left his home for 40 years. The only single exception was when he traveled to Casablanca to attend his father's funeral. Immediately afterwards, he returned to Mogador and continued living in isolation. He remained there alone, studying Torah, serving G-d, and performing mitzvot.

News of the terrible events taking place in conquered Europe, along with the communities that had been destroyed, fueled his pain. Hence he also took it upon himself not to change his clothes during the war years, in order to share in the suffering of his people and the Shechinah.

He would climb to the roof of his house every Friday, and there he would wash the clothes he was wearing in honor of Shabbat. During this time, he would eat only a little bread with some olive oil, and he washed his body with water once every six months.

With the end of the war, Rabbi Haim appeared in a dream to his son Rabbi Moche Aharon and asked him to stop living a life of denial with regards to food and bathing. He also asked him to wear different clothes than the ones he had been wearing up to that point, since the war was now over.

Happy Are Those Who Dwell in Your House

During the time that Rabbi Moche Aharon was isolating himself within his four cubits, an outbreak of tuberculosis ravaged Mogador and claimed many victims. There was no cure for the illness at that time, which was considered incurable, and so the fate of anyone who caught it was regarded as hopeless. The leaders of the community feared that because Rabbi

Moche Aharon had remained isolated for so long in his house, his health was likely to be in danger. Hence they asked him to leave his house for a few hours every day in order to get some fresh air and to stretch his legs. When they saw that he adamantly refused, and that he had firmly chosen not to leave his home until the period that he had imposed upon himself ended, they decided to use another approach.

The idea they had was to ask the rabbinic court of Mogador to obligate the Rav to leave his home every day, since his life was in danger. In this way, the Rav would be forced to go outside on account of a din Torah.

At the time, the Av Beit Din of Mogador was the gaon Rabbi Aharon Hassin Zatzal. He took it upon himself to represent the Beit Din in going to the Rav's home to tell him that according to the decision of the sages, he would have to leave his house from time to time.

Rabbi Aharon Hassin actually went to see Rabbi Moche Aharon several times. Yet each time, they would end up having an enjoyable discussion on numerous subjects, including Torah study, halachic decisions, and the leadership of the community. Surprisingly enough, on each occasion Rabbi Aharon Hassin would forget why he had gone to see him!

When Rabbi Aharon Hassin was asked what he discussed with the Rav, he replied: "It's extraordinary. Each time that I went to see the Rav, we had a long discussion on various issues, but the main subject – which had brought me there – escaped me as I was speaking with him. Each time before I would go to see him, I told myself that I had to inform him of the Beit Din's decision, and yet each time I forgot! It's as if someone had taken away my memory!"

When Rabbi Aharon Hassin realized that this scenario repeated itself, he understood that he was not dealing with an ordinary individual, but with a righteous and holy man, which meant that he should not interfere in something that he did not understand.

The Miracle of the Money

After Rabbi Moche Aharon married, poverty reigned in his home for a long time, almost two full years. It was especially difficult for his wife, the tzaddeket Mazal, since she had been raised in a wealthy home and was used to a life of comfort.

Her husband consoled and calmed her, striving to encourage her to have faith in Hashem. He would often say to her, "Let us wait for the goodness of Hashem, Who in His great kindness feeds all His creatures with mercy."

In fact a great turn of events occurred some time later. One day the Rebbetzin Mazal entered a side room, where she unexpectedly found some money. At first she thought that it had to belong to her husband, but upon further thought she dismissed the idea: This money couldn't belong to her husband, for even when she was giving birth, there was nothing to eat in the house!

Although these thoughts were racing through her mind, she had to put them aside because of their poverty. The needs of the household did not allow her to ponder the matter any further, and with this money she quickly went to buy a little food so her family could eat.

The same thing happened on the following day, and so on with the days that ensued. Whenever she entered that room, she would find money inside, and with that money she would buy food and fix up the house a little. In this way abundance began to fill their home.

One day her husband asked her out of curiosity where all this money was coming from: "Where did you find the money for this? How is the house being filled with such abundant things?"

The question surprised the Rebbetzin, for up until that time she innocently thought that her husband was leaving money in the room so she could buy food and see to the other needs of their home. She innocently replied that every day she would enter that room and take the money that he had left for her.

When Rabbi Moche Aharon first heard this, he didn't believe his wife, and so he asked her again where the money was coming from. She then wisely answered, "I can't tell you where the money is coming from, since I myself don't know. But there's money in that room every day."

They decided to lock the room by key and see what would happen. The following morning, when they opened the door, they found money in the room once again! At that point they realized that it was a miracle.

From the day that this secret was discovered, however, the blessing stopped. On the following day, no more money was found in the room.

Although the miracle had stopped, sustenance began to knock at the door of their home from then on, and Rabbi Moche Aharon's fame began to spread. In fact numerous Jews came to see him for his blessing and advice, which were greatly appreciated.

The Blessing of the Salt

The Rebbetzin recounted something else that was amazing. During the time that she was finding money in that room, she never ran out of salt in her home. Not once in six months did she ever need more salt, even though it was kept in a small jar and they used it every day! In fact it still wasn't empty as Passover approached.

When Passover arrived, Rabbi Moche Aharon said to his wife: "The salt is the result of a miracle, but during Passover we can't use it, or even keep it, because it may contain chametz." At that point the miracle stopped.

The Miraculous Journey

Rabbi Haim Pinto, the father of Rabbi Moche Aharon, died on Cheshvan 15, 5698. At the time, Rabbi Moche Aharon was still living in isolation in his home in Mogador, a self-imposed period in which he never left the home of his ancestors, as his father had commanded him.

His father died in Casablanca, and news of his passing needed to reach Rabbi Moche Aharon in time for him to attend the funeral. Communication was not very good at the time, and telephones were only found among a few merchants. Among these was Yaakov Mamane, the man who would inform Rabbi Moche Aharon of his father's passing.

As soon as he heard the sad news, Yaakov Mamane went to the house of Rabbi Moche Aharon in order to tell him. The Rav was in the middle of prayer, however, and Yaakov waited until he finished before telling him what he had to say.

In terms of transportation at the time, it took about eight hours to travel from Mogador to Casablanca, and nobody really knew if Rabbi Moche Aharon would make it in time for his father's funeral.

As soon as news of his father's passing became known, a group of people organized a trip to Casablanca, and they asked Rabbi Moche Aharon to join them. However the Rav did not accept their offer, saying that they should leave without him because he still had some urgent matters to take care of.

Because of the great distance involved, those traveling to Casablanca calculated that they would be unable to make it for the funeral. At the most, they would make it there to fulfill the mitzvah of consoling the mourners. Therefore Rabbi Moche Aharon, who had still not left, would certainly not make it in time for the funeral.

After their long journey, they arrived at the Rav's home in Casablanca, and to their utter astonishment they saw that Rabbi Moche Aharon was already there and sitting with his brothers in mourning! When they spoke with him, they were even more astounded to learn that he had been there for the burial itself. Utterly astonishing!

When he was asked through his son how this miracle occurred, he replied: "There are things that are best kept secret. How would it help you to know how I arrived, how I made it from Mogador to Casablanca?"

Did you Hope for Salvation?

When a person comes before the Celestial Court, he will be asked: "Did you fix times to study Torah? Did you hope for salvation?" The Rishonim explain that the last question refers to waiting for Mashiach. As we know, this is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith listed by the Rambam: "I believe with complete faith in the coming of Mashiach, and although he may tarry, I still wait every day for him to come." Numerous Jews have given their lives with this phrase on their lips, for although he lingers, despite all the hardships that come upon the Jewish people in exile, despite everything, we still wait for him!

Nevertheless, there are few people who wait for the coming of Mashiach at each moment of their lives. Rabbi Moche Aharon concretely lived this faith; there was not an instant of rest for him, and he encouraged people to awaken as well. He gave numerous lectures that dealt with this question, and among other things he spoke of the terrible decrees that the Jewish people have endured over the generations, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the expulsion from Spain and Portugal, the decrees of Tach v'Tat, and the Holocaust. On one hand he tried to encourage people, while on the other hand he tried to alert them, for Mashiach was standing at the door and waiting for the Children of Israel to repent in order to come and lead them to Jerusalem.

Rabbi Moche Aharon Pinto personally fulfilled this principle among the Thirteen Principles of Faith. He awaited Mashiach with every fiber of his being and yearned for his arrival. May we merit it quickly and in our days, for then all the dead will rise amid joy. Amen.

AT THE SOURCE

Appointing Judges

It is written, “You shall not pervert judgment, you shall not respect persons, and you shall not take a bribe” (Devarim 16:19).

This verse, writes Rabbi Yitzchak Abrabanel Zatzal, is not addressed to judges in order to warn them not to accept bribes in judgment, as the commentators say. Rather, it is addressed to those who appoint judges, warning them not to veer from justice by appointing someone in order to flatter them, which is termed “respecting persons.” Bribes given to those who have the power to appoint judges – in order for them to appoint someone in particular – will result in them appointing someone who is not worthy of being a judge. This is because a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, the result being that they can no longer see the faults of a person, and they will appoint him as a judge.

“For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise” (v.19) – this means that because of a bribe, they will not judge properly in accordance with what they see. Rather, their eyes will be blinded and they will not see or reprimand as they should, according to what their ears hear. Even if someone were to tell them, “So-and-so is an evildoer,” and mention his shortcomings, they will twist things on purpose in order to at least appoint the person who offered them a bribe.

Offering Bribes

It is written, “You shall not take a bribe” (Devarim 16:19).

Why, we may ask, has the Torah only prohibited the taking of bribes, not the offering of bribes, as British law does?

The book Imrei Chen nicely answers this question:

If there was also a Torah prohibition against offering bribes, the transgression of this prohibition would be widespread. This is because every litigant would be sure that the bribe he offers to a judge would influence him, since he would think that the other litigant is certainly not going to do the same, out of fear of breaking the law.

On the other hand, without a prohibition against offering a bribe, people avoid offering them even more. This is because each litigant is afraid that any bribe he tries to offer will serve absolutely no purpose, for perhaps his court opponent has already gone before the judge and offered him an even greater bribe.

Hear it Again

It is written, “It will be told to you, and you will hear. Then you shall investigate well, and behold, it is true” (Devarim 17:4).

The saintly Rabbi Moshe Alsheich asks the following question: It seems obvious that if a person is told something, he will hear it with his ears. Therefore why does the verse say, “It will be told to you, and you will hear”? If someone tells you something, obviously you will hear it!

The answer, writes the Alsheich, is that the Torah wants to tell us by allusion that if someone hears forbidden words with his ears – Lashon Hara that someone has sinned, slander, or other such things – he should not be quick to accept these things as true. He should properly investigate the matter until he hears it again, at which point he can take a decision according to the truth of the Torah.

The Torah alludes to this by saying, “It will be told to you.” That is, once you have been told the first time, you must investigate the second time, in order to fulfill “and you will hear.”

Until the Festival

It is written, “All the people shall hear and fear” (Devarim 17:13).

Rashi explains: “From here we learn that they postpone his execution [i.e., of the rebellious sage] until the festival.”

The Re'em (Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi) objects to this, noting that the verse does not tell us to wait until the festival. If so, what is the difference between the rebellious son and the rebellious sage?

In his book Chiddushei HaRim, the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger Zatzal answers this objection by stating that there is, in fact, a great difference between the two.

In regards to the rebellious son, we cannot say that we must wait until the next festival, for the Gemara states that the maximum time of liability for being a rebellious son varies from the time that he is a “minor” until the time that he is an “adult,” which is no greater than three months (Sanhedrin 69a). Hence if the misdeeds of the rebellious son occur in the

middle of the month of Sivan, it follows that they would have to wait until the next festival, which would be in Tishri, a delay greater than three months.

This is why, writes the Chiddushei HaRim, that in regards to the rebellious son, we do not wait “until the festival.”

To the Kohanim and to the Kohen

It is written, “This shall be the due of the kohanim from the people, from those who perform a slaughter, whether it is an ox or sheep, he shall give the kohen the shoulder, the jaw, and the maw” (Devarim 18:3).

The verse begins with “the due of the kohanim” (in the plural), but ends with the expression, “He shall give the kohen” (in the singular).

Rabbi Vidal HaTzarfati of Fez explains that according to the law regarding offerings from an ox, the shoulder and the maw are divided among several kohanim. However if the offering is from a sheep or kid, the shoulder or jaw is given to the kohen.

Hence the verse states, “This shall be the due of the kohanim from the people, from those who perform a slaughter, whether it is an ox” – meaning that if the offering is from an ox, then the parts are to be given to the kohanim (plural). At the end of the verse we read, “or sheep, he shall give the kohen the shoulder, the jaw, and the maw” – they are to be given to the kohen (singular).

Do Not Move the Landmark

It is written, “You shall not move the landmark of your neighbor, which the earlier ones have set as borders in your inheritance” (Devarim 19:14).

During Chol HaMoed in the synagogue of the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Berdugo Zatzal, people usually recited piyutim composed by the poet Rabbi David ben Hassin Zatzal. One year, Rabbi Yaakov also wrote a piyut for the festival, and on the first day of Passover he sang it instead of the ancient piyut by Rabbi David ben Hassin.

On the second night of Passover, Rabbi Yaakov saw in a dream that Rabbi David ben Hassin was upset with him. He said to him, “My son, is it not said: ‘You shall not move the landmark of your neighbor, which the earlier ones have set as borders in your inheritance?’” When Rabbi Yaakov awoke, he was quite unhappy. Early the next morning, he recounted his dream to the community, which then committed itself to singing the piyutim of Rabbi David ben Hassin exclusively, as it had always done. On the night following the festival, Rabbi David ben Hassin again appeared in a dream to Rabbi Yaakov, and this time he gave him a triple blessing.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Producing Fruits

Rashi explains that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Let the calf that is in its first year, and has therefore produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place that has not produced fruits in order to atone for the murder of this man, whom they did not allow to produce fruits” (Rashi on Devarim 21:4). We need to understand this: If the victim was a young man who could have produced offspring, very well. However if the victim was an old man, how can we say that he was not allowed to produce fruits? He already produced the fruits that he had to produce, and according to nature he could not produce any more.

We may explain this according to Rashi's comments on the verse, “These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man” (Bereshith 6:9). Here he states, “Another explanation: To teach you that the main offspring of the righteous are good deeds.”

Therefore even if the victim was an old man, we may say that he was not allowed to produce fruits, for every person has something to rectify in the upper and lower worlds through the performance of mitzvot and good deeds. The person who was killed before his time did not have the opportunity to complete his task, to perform the mitzvot and good deeds that he had to perform, meaning that he did not produce the fruits that he should have produced.

We learn a great lesson from this, namely that the towns closest to the corpse required atonement because the murder victim did not finish producing the fruits that he had to produce. Thus whoever wastes his time and fails to do what he must, such a person will not produce the fruits that he should have produced, something for which he must deeply repent.