

## DOING GOOD TO ALL MEN, SMALL AND GREAT ALIKE (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

is written, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water" (Devarim 29:9-10).

King David said, "Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully" (Tehillim 24:3-4). He also said, "Hashem, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart" (ibid. 15:1-2). Here we learn that a person cannot stand before Hashem and reside in His holy place unless he possesses the attribute of truth and distances himself from lies and falsehood.

We see proof of this in what the Sages have said: "The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth" (Shabbat 55a). We also read, "One who practices deceit shall not dwell in My house. One who tells lies shall not stand before My eyes" (Tehillim 101:7). Therefore only those who live by the truth may stand before G-d.

This is why Moshe told the Children of Israel, "You are standing today" – the word atem ("you") being formed by the same letters as the word emet ("truth"). Here Moshe is giving them the Torah for the third time, as the Midrash states: "The Torah was given in three places, and in each case the root yatziv is used: On Mount Sinai, as it is written: 'Vayityatzvu [And they stood] at the base of the mountain' (Shemot 19:17); in the Tent of Meeting, as it is written: 'Venitzvu [And they would stand] each by the door of his tent' (Shemot 33:8); and in the plains of Moab, as it is written: 'You nitzavim [are standing] today, all of you, before Hashem.' "

They received the truth because they had accepted the yoke of the Torah, for the Torah is called "truth," as the Sages explain: "Truth is Torah, for it is said, 'Buy the truth and sell it not' [Mishlei 23:23]" (Berachot 5b). Moshe told the Children of Israel, "Since you have taken the Torah and truth upon yourselves, you may stand before Hashem."

#### Studying with the Simple

Why did Moshe tell them, "The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water"? It was in order to prevent Jews from thinking that they did not need to study Torah with those who are less intelligent than themselves. Hence Moshe specifically mentions "your little ones, your wives, and your stranger," to teach us that every person must learn Torah with someone less intelligent than himself. In fact on the contrary, it is the duty of Torah scholars to study with those who are not very intelligent, in order for the Torah to be studied by all.

In principle, whoever possesses the attribute of truth, it is a sign that he possesses humility, for he is not afraid to teach the truth and recognize error. This is because when a person is infused with humility, he learns with everyone and does not say, "How can I study with so-and-so? He hasn't learned Scripture or Mishnah, and he never visits Torah scholars!" The Torah is only acquired through humility, as we read: "Why are the words of Torah compared to water, as it is written: 'Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water' [Isaiah 55:1]? This is to teach you that just as water flows from a higher level to a lower one, likewise words of Torah only endure with someone who is humble" (Taanith 7a).

It is for this reason that King David said, "Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully." He also said, "Hashem, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one" (Tehillim 15:1-3). Truth is juxtaposed to humility in order to teach us that one is impossible without the other. Whoever possesses one also possesses the other, and whoever lacks one will necessarily lack the other, meaning that he will be unable to stand before Hashem.

# He Bestows Good on the Wicked and the Good

The Aggadah also states that when the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to create the world, all 22 letters that comprise the Torah immediately descended and

stood before Him, each letter saying: "Create the world starting with me."

The first letter to present itself was the tav. It was followed by the shin, which stood before Hashem and said: "Master of the universe, may it be Your will to create the world through me, for Your Name begins with me, as it is written: 'This is Shemi [My Name] forever' [Shemot 3:15], and I am also the first letter in the Name Sh-ddai." When Hashem said no, the shin asked why, and Hashem replied: "Because both shav [lie] and sheker [falsehood] begin with you, and sheker has no legs, nor do you. How can I create the world starting with a letter that has no legs?" The shin immediately left covered in shame (see Midrash Otiyot D'Rabbi Akiva).

How can we say that anyone who possesses truth also possesses humility? We learn this from the attributes of Hashem, for Hashem's seal is truth, and one of Hashem's attributes is to bestow good on both the wicked and the good. He also sustains the entire world every day, from the horns of the reimim to the eggs of lice (Avodah Zarah 3b). Just as Hashem does good to small and great alike, whoever possesses the attribute of truth must also do good to both small and great. In the Aggadah we read, "Although I appointed leaders, elders, and officers for you, you are all equal before Me, as it is written: 'all the men of Israel' " (Tanchuma, Nitzavim 2). From here we learn that everyone is equal before G-d.



The Pinto Centers around the world and Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita send you their best wishes for the upcoming year. May you have a joyous Shana Tova 5768, and may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.

# A TRUE STORY IS LEARNING TORAH REALLY SO DIFFICULT?

# It is written, "For this mitzvah that I command you today – it is not hidden from you and it is not far off" (Devarim 30:11).

One day the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal, the founder of the Mussar movement, spoke before a congregation in synagogue about the duty to study Torah. He mentioned the fact that everyone – the poor just as well as the rich, and even those struck by illness – must study it, and that a person is judged only on the words of Torah that he uttered in life.

In his talk, Rabbi Israel Salanter cited the Yerushalmi at the beginning of tractate Peah, which states that all the mitzvot are not as important as a single word of Torah. He added that the Vilna Gaon Zatzal explained this to refer to learning a single word of Torah.

Rabbi Israel explained that, as a result, Torah study is even more important because it is so easy to study a single word of Torah followed by another, and the easier the mitzvah, the more we are expected to perform it. As the Gemara explains, "A king of flesh and blood gave orders to two servants. To one he said, 'Bring me a seal of clay,' but to the other he said, 'Bring me a seal of gold.' Yet they both failed in their duties and did not bring them. Who deserves a greater punishment? Surely it is the one to whom the king said, 'Bring me a seal of clay,' but did not do so' (Menachot 43b).

After the lecture, a man went up to Rabbi Israel and said to him: "Rabbi, it's not correct to say that everyone must study Torah, for I'm exempt from this duty. The obligation to study Torah does not apply to me."

Rabbi Israel asked the man what gave him that impression.

He replied, "First of all, it's because my parents taught me nothing. I'm a simple Jew, and I barely learned the siddur. I fulfill mitzvot as best I can, but I don't know how to study, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will not start a quarrel with me after 120 years!

"Second, it's because I'm busy earning a living from morning till night. I return home exhausted, without any strength, so how can I be expected to study Torah?"

The Rav answered him gently:

"Do you think that the study of Torah can only be done from a book? Not at all. We fulfill the duty of studying Torah by learning orally. Indeed, on the contrary, the essential part of learning the oral Torah consists of repeating it aloud, not in writing. You can do this repetition when going to work and when returning home, even when you are at work."

The man was surprised by this, not understanding what Rabbi Israel meant

"But Rabbi, if I don't know how to study from a book, how much less can I recite anything orally!"

Rabbi Israel began to ask him a few questions, beginning with how he started his day.

"I get up in the morning," the man said, "and I wash my hands."

"Why?" asked the Rav.

"What do you mean, 'Why?' Because a Jew has to wash his hands when he gets up – that's the law!"

"Very good. Then what?"

"Then I put on my tefillin and pray," the man said.

"Why?" asked Rabbi Israel.

The man looked at him with surprise. "Are you trying to make fun of me? That's what a Jew has to do!"

"But why does a Jew have to do that?" asked the Rav.

"Because that's the Halachah. That's what's written in the holy Torah."

"Alright. What do you do next?"

"Next I wash my hands and eat some bread for breakfast."

"Without a blessing," the Rav asked with surprise.

"Obviously with one," shuddered the man. "Of course I say a blessing at the beginning and at the end – Al Netilat Yadayim and Birkat Hamazon. You can see that I'm a good Jew. There's no reason to criticize me, since I fulfill the mitzvot – other than studying Torah study, since I don't know how to study."

Rabbi Israel said to him, "It is as I have said: You have just proved that you have the duty to study Torah, and that you can study it – if not the written text, then at least the oral Torah."

"I don't understand," mumbled the man.

"I will explain it to you," said Rabbi Israel.

"When you finish eating, you recite Birkat Hamazon and leave for work, correct?"

"Yes."

"On the way to work, do you constantly repeat, without interruption, that when a Jew gets up in the morning he must wash his hands and recite Al Netilat Yadayim and Asher Yatzar, immediately followed by Elokai Neshama? He must then recite Birkat HaShachar and Birkat HaTorah, envelop himself in his tallit and don tefillin, and then pray Shacharit. He must recite the passages on the Akeidah and Korbanot, Eizehu Mekomam, and Baruch She'amar, the Pessukei D'Zimra and Birkat HaYotzer. He must say Shema and stand praying Shemoneh Esrei."

The man was surprised by this. "It's true, Rabbi. That's how my day unfolds. But what does that have to do with Torah study?"

"Please understand," gently replied the Rav. "What is Torah? The word means teaching and guidance, as it is written in the prophet: 'I am Hashem...Who guides you in the path you should follow' [Isaiah 48:17]. The holy Torah has described the ways in which we must conduct ourselves, the Mishnah has explained them, the Gemara has detailed them further, the Rishonim and Acharonim had developed these teachings, the Shulchan Aruch has assembled them, and the Chayei Adam has summarized them. Therefore, do you agree with me that whoever studies a paragraph of the Shulchan Aruch thereby fulfills the mitzvah to study Torah and should recite the blessing for Torah study?"

"Naturally," the man said.

"And a person who studies a paragraph of Chayei Adam?"

"Him too."

"And in your opinion, what is written in Chayei Adam? It says that one who arises in the morning must wash his hands, recite Birkat HaShachar and pray. And one who is about to eat a meal must recite Al Netilat Yadayim and say HaMotzi Lechem Min Ha'aretz over bread, and after eating to satisfaction he must wash his hands for Mayim Acharonim and recite Birkat Hamazon, and so on."

The Rav continued: "Therefore tell me, why do you think that the approach of Chayei Adam is a Torah approach, whereas repeating these things aloud is not?

"It's not the method that is the main thing, but the contents. All the words and judgments of Hashem are Torah!

"If you reflect upon the dinim and halachot that you know, you will realize that they are numerous. The dinim of everyday life and the halachot of Shabbat and the festivals, kashrut, and the laws concerning the home – all these you can repeat to yourself when you are at home and on the road, when you go to bed and when you arise. And for every word that you repeat, you are performing the most amazing mitzvah of the Torah. Compared to it, the other mitzvot appear to be of little importance."

### AT THE SOURCE

#### In Agreement

It is written, "The hidden things are for Hashem our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah" (Devarim 29:28).

In his book Pituchei Chotam, Rabbi Yaakov Abuhatzera Zatzal states that a man must, when performing a mitzvah or learning Torah, have the same thing in his mouth as in his heart. If his deeds are superficial, however, all his efforts will have been in vain. It is in regards to this that we say in the morning blessings, "A man should always fear Heaven in secret and in public."

Thus the verse states: "The hidden things are for Hashem our G-d" – a reference to man's thoughts, which G-d alone knows; "and the revealed things" – deeds that are clearly seen – "are for us and our children forever." A person must unite both in order "to carry out all the words of this Torah," for we cannot study Torah and fulfill mitzvot if the mouth and the heart are not in agreement.

#### Prelude to a Curse

It is written, "When all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse..." (Devarim 30:1).

The commentators note that the end of this passage describes how the Children of Israel will be forced, due to the severe punishments they endure, to repent. That being the case, why is a blessing mentioned here?

The author of Akeidah writes that in general, the pain of a person who has been poor for his entire life is not as great as that a person who suddenly becomes poor after having been wealthy and trouble-free for many years.

The verse is therefore saying: "When all these things come upon you" – first the blessing and then the curse, it will have such an effect on the Children of Israel that they will fulfill: "take it to your heart that Hashem is G-d."

#### **Grab Hold**

It is written, "If your dispersed will be at the ends of heaven, Hashem your G-d will gather you in and from there He will take you" (Devarim 30:4).

This verse has been nicely explained by Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal, who said the following:

"If your dispersed will be" – meaning that if a person completely sinks into the desires of this world, becoming as if dispersed from Torah, but then he grabs "the ends of heaven" – be it by any point, even a small spiritual spark at the extremes of spirituality; then the Torah absolutely promises that "Hashem your G-d will gather you in and from there He will take you" – He will draw that person closer to His service.

#### You Yourself

It is written, "And you, you shall return and listen to the voice of Hashem, and perform all His mitzvot" (Devarim 30:8).

In the book Yismach Israel, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer Zatzal writes: "We may ask why the verse says: 'And you, you shall return and listen.' Given the fact that it is addressed to the entire Jewish people, it should have said: 'You shall return and listen to the voice of Hashem, and perform all His mitzvot.'"

He answers by saying that there are two kinds of repentance: Repentance through love, and repentance through fear.

Repentance through fear comes by means of others, for they will inform the sinner of the punishment that he incurs for his sins. There are sins that we pay for in this world, and others that we pay for in the World to Come, some through Gehinnom and others through reincarnation. This realization will penetrate the heart of the sinner and he will commit himself to sinning no more.

As for repentance through love, it comes by means of the person himself. When he looks as the marvels of Hashem, thinks about how He directs the world, and contemplates the vast number of galgalim, angels, chayot, and seraphim, he will want to cleave to the service of Hashem and His mitzvot.

Hence the verse states, "And you, you shall return and listen," meaning that you will repent on your own, by yourself, so that your repentance is through love. At that point you will perform and carry out all of Hashem's mitzvot.

#### The Power of Love

It is written, "It is not in Heaven" (Devarim 30:12).

The book Toldot Adam recounts the following story:

One day, a great desire to study a certain book arose in the heart of the tzaddik Rabbi Zalman of Volozhin Zatzal. However a large chest stood between him and the book, a chest so heavy that not even three men could lift it.

The tzaddik went home and began to study the passage: "'It is not in Heaven' – for were it 'in Heaven,' you would have to go up after it; and were it 'beyond the sea,' you would have to cross the sea after it" (Eruvin 55a). He recited this passage with tremendous affection and in a very beautiful voice, capable of awakening great love between himself and his Father in Heaven.

He did this until he felt extraordinary courage, at which point he ran with great speed, like an eagle, towards the chest. He then moved it by himself, without any help whatsoever, and grabbed hold of the book. Everyone who witnessed this considered it to be a miracle.

### IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

# The Essence of Teshuvah: Regarding Sins Committed in Secret

It is written, "The hidden things are for Hashem our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah" (Devarim 29:28). The Sages have said that the first letters of the Hebrew expression translated as "our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and our children" form the word Elul. This means that the essence of teshuvah pertains to sins that are committed in secret. In fact we usually repent for sins that are committed openly, since we know that other people are aware of them. However we do not feel the need to repent for sins that are committed in secret, which is why the Torah warns us by saying: "The hidden things are for Hashem our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and our children forever." In other words: Just as everyone repents for the sins that he commits in public and before his children, he must also wholeheartedly repent for the sins that he commits alone.

Hence this week's parsha begins by stating, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel" (Devarim 29:9). The Sages have explained that "today" signifies Rosh Hashanah (see Zohar III:231a). In regards to the expression, "The leaders of your tribes," the Sages have also said: "Although I have appointed leaders, elders, and officers for you, you are all equal before Me, as it is written: 'all the men of Israel'" (Tanchuma, Nitzavim 2). What is the reason for this? It is to teach us that when Jews repent, they are all equal before Hashem – the hewers of wood just as the tribal leaders – for they all become free of sin. It is therefore said, "You are standing today, all of you" – i.e., when are you standing before Hashem without any shame? It is on Rosh Hashanah, when you have repented.

The Sages have also said, "If a person commits a transgression in secret, the Holy One, blessed be He, proclaims it against him in public" (Sotah 3a). In fact people will go out and rent films that they watch in private, films that portray things that have never happened, such as thugs murdering people or terrorists hijacking a plane and killing everyone aboard. They will then sit in a closed room and watch all this on a screen, and they will actually enjoy it!

What eventually happened? A terrorist who spent his entire life learning how to murder sent more than a dozen other terrorists to hijack four planes, flying two of them into the Twin Towers in New York and killing thousands of people. Thus the verse was fulfilled, "I will send a fire against Magog and against those who dwell confidently in the islands, and they will know that I am Hashem" (Ezekiel 39:6). Because they took pleasure in idolatrous films in private, the Holy One, blessed be He, proclaimed a great day against them, and that which they saw actually took place.

This happened in order to tell the inhabitants of the world that they should not take pleasure in watching such things; whoever contemplates this will be filled with fear and terror. May we merit to repent completely. Amen.

### RABBI HAIM PINTO HAGADOL

Our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita writes that the power of a tzaddik is infinitely greater on the day of his Hilloula. We see the tremendous righteousness of those who visit the grave of the tzaddik on that day. Here we have educated individuals, respected people whose lives are mainly filled with materiality, and yet when they come before the grave of the tzaddik, everything is transformed into spirituality. They completely nullify themselves at the grave and become different people, an indication that their core is good and honest.

Upon standing before the grave of the tzaddik, and upon seeing all the surrounding graves, we realize that this is the fate of all men. At that point we cast aside all our material desires and become completely spiritual. In the end, when the Hilloula is finished and everyone returns home, we leave with a feeling of spirituality, with a sense of having grown in sanctity.

The evil inclination begins its work at that point, trying to make us forget about all the sanctity that we acquired at the Hilloula. Things then depend on us, and we are obligated to defeat the evil inclination, as it is written: "When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand and you take captives." This means that we must put an effort into capturing the evil inclination before it does the same to us. It is only through Torah that we can easily defeat the evil inclination, something which it is fully aware of. Hence it tries over and over to make us stumble, which is why a person must constantly elevate himself and protect what he gained in spirituality at the Hilloula of the tzaddik.

This spirituality – which everyone received by the grave of the tzaddik on the day of his Hilloula, especially following several days of spiritual elevation in Torah and mitzvot, as well as hearing stories about the tzaddikim – must always remain ours, with warmth and enthusiasm. We must add to it every day by maintaining this fire, lest it go out.

Yet this is difficult, for it requires a great deal of help from Heaven. Otherwise it would be impossible to conquer the evil inclination, which tries to make us stumble. Hence the Torah states, "Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand," for on account of Heaven's help, all the sanctity that a person acquires will remain with him, and he will continue to spiritually elevate himself for the rest of his life.

#### The Small that Contains the Large

The mausoleum next to the grave of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, may his merit protect us all, is like "something small that contains something large." The structure is small, and normally only 30 people can fit inside. Yet every year, hundreds of people fit inside this small room, a supernatural event. This may recall what used to occur in Jerusalem when the Temple still stood, for the Temple was "something small that contains something large."

During one of the nights of the program for the Hilloula, at four o'clock in the morning, everyone recited Selichot by the grave of the tzaddik. Our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita was among them, acting as the Shaliach Tzibur. The Rav closed his eyes, when suddenly he noticed some kind of light passing in front of him. He thought that it might be a flash from a camera or an electric light, a chance occurrence. But no, it was a brilliant, strange light that was impossible to describe.

The Rav thought that he was the only one to have seen it, but when he asked others, many of them had also seen a brilliant light. This meant that it emanated from the tzaddik. What was this light?

Our teacher explained it by citing a teaching of the tzaddik Rabbi Avraham ben Attar Zatzal: Why do we light candles by the grave? It is written, "For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light." The candle represents the soul; it is a mitzvah. This means that a person can enlighten his soul by fulfilling mitzvot. Therefore when we light candles by the grave of a tzaddik, we are recalling the mitzvot that this tzaddik performed in life. And when we recall his mitzvot, we thereby awaken the merit of the tzaddik so he may intercede for us. That was the brilliant light that people saw, the light produced by the mitzvot of the tzaddik.

#### Nothing Can Hinder His Will

In 5759, on the day before the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto in Morocco, a group of people came to see our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita in Mogador. They asked him to bless a Parisian Jew who was in prison, for his incarceration was causing a great deal of suffering to him and his family.

Among this group, one person addressed the Rav and said: "Does the Rav remember that about 15 days ago, the mother of this Jew came to see him in Paris, and the Rav told her that with G-d's help, her son would be released and travel to Morocco for the Hilloula?"

Our teacher said that he did not remember, "But if I said that, then by the merit of the tzaddik he will be released and indeed come here for the Hilloula."

That was Friday morning. At noon, it was suddenly announced that he would be released. What happened? A judge came into the man's cell and said to him, "I have some good news for you. Today you're going to be released." He added, "I've already ordered that your passport be returned to you, so you can leave and travel wherever you want."

The man immediately phoned the Rav to tell him of his release. Our teacher reminded him of his promise to come to the Hilloula, but since it was already Friday, he should at least try to make it for Sunday.

As it turned out, he arrived at the Hilloula on Sunday at 3 pm. He had an amazing story to tell about how he had managed to arrive in Morocco so quickly:

"Since the Rav had told me to come, I realized that I had to fulfill my promise and make it to the Hilloula. I knew that if I left Paris on Friday, I would arrive in Morocco on Shabbat. So I booked a ticked for Sunday at 6 am, in order to arrive in Morocco in the morning. I also booked a seat on a special flight to quickly bring me from Casablanca to Mogador.

"When I arrived at the airport in Paris this morning, I was suddenly told that there weren't any flights leaving for Morocco at 6 am. I was completely surprised, for I was holding a ticket for a 6 am flight! The airline employees double-checked all the flights on their computer, but told me that there were no flights leaving for Morocco. When I told them that I had an important meeting to attend, they said to me: 'Sorry, but there are no flights at this time.'

"One of the airline employees then came up to me and said, 'I don't understand how you managed to get a 6 am flight from Paris to Morocco! How did anyone know that there was a plane leaving for Morocco at this time? In reality, there is an airplane from a Moroccan company that arrived on Saturday filled with passengers. It now has to return to Morocco empty, without any passengers. There's a good reason that the flight isn't displayed on the computer, so how did you manage to get this ticket for it?' As it turned out, I had booked a flight on a plane that was empty!

"The employees were stunned. They telephoned Morocco and contacted security there, and in the end they allowed me to take the flight. I was alone in the plane with the pilots. When I climbed aboard, one of the pilots took a picture of me as I was standing alone inside a completely empty plane. The pilot approached me and said, 'Look, the whole airplane is yours. It's completely empty for you. I don't know how they let you take this flight, since I should have returned with no passengers aboard, as usual. It's the first time that I'm taking a lone passenger on a plane. How did they allow you to do it, and how did they even think of this letting you on this flight, especially since it's a personal, government plane?'

"I really can't explain," concluded this Jew, "how I received a ticked for that flight. Everything comes from Hashem, and He caused them to let me on this flight, precisely for me alone, since I needed to be at the Hilloula. I had received a ticket that allowed me to take a flight all by myself, me and nobody else."

In Scripture we read, "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man, but only the counsel of Hashem will prevail" (Mishlei 19:21). This Jew demonstrated his gratitude to the tzaddik, dedicating a Beit HaMidrash in the name of his father at the Nefesh Chaim yeshiva in Jerusalem.