

The Path To Follow

Re'eh

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The Mitzvah of the Pilgrimage Festivals:

Strengthening our Faith and Confidence in the Creator of the Universe

It is written, "Three times a year, all your males shall appear before Hashem your G-d in the place which He shall choose.... None shall appear before Hashem empty-handed" (Devarim 16:16).

This verse obligates all Jewish men to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem three times a year. What is the exact meaning of this mitzvah? Why does it apply precisely for the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot?

Simply speaking, anyone who takes a closer look at this mitzvah will conclude that it rests upon the principle of faith in G-d. It requires a person to control his emotions and to leave his home, his field, and his vineyard behind without any supervision. He must place his trust solely in G-d, and in His promise to us: "No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem your G-d" (Shemot 34:24).

Can there be any greater faith than this? For a person to abandon everything that he has worked on for the past year, to leave everything behind and to travel to Jerusalem with joy and enthusiasm, bringing with him all kinds of offerings to the Temple?

All throughout the year, man fights his evil inclination as it seeks to prevent him from serving G-d, and especially from placing his faith in Him. The evil inclination entices him with its ruses, availing itself of every possible trick, be it through desire ("eat and drink, for life is short"), or through waves of denial that weaken his faith in G-d. Each day, the evil inclination adopts new arguments and pretexts in this fight, primarily attacking a person's faith, the pillar of all mitzvot, as we read: "It is Habakkuk who came and based all of them [the 613 mitzvot] on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the righteous shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]" (Makkot 24a).

Hence during the three pilgrimage festivals, every Jew had to intensify his faith in G-d by traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem. There he would see the kohanim, G-d's servants, performing their functions and the Levites singing, which prompted a spiritual awakening in him.

The Gemara recounts that when the festival pilgrims arrived at the Temple, they were shown the Showbread: "They used to lift it [the Shulchan] and show the festival pilgrims the Showbread... and they would say to them: 'Behold the love in which you are held by the Omnipresent, it [the Showbread] being taken away as [fresh as] when it was set down.' As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, 'A great miracle was performed in regards to the Showbread: Just as it was set down [fresh], so was it taken away'" (Chagigah 26b). Indeed, they were truly loved. In fact this miracle – the Showbread being taken away as hot and fresh as on the day it was placed on the Shulchan – was not necessary for the fulfillment of the mitzvah, only for its beautification. Hence this miracle revealed G-d's special love for them.

When the festival pilgrims realized just how much G-d loved His children, they were immediately infused with more faith and an extraordinary level of confidence in the fact that G-d does not let forsake His people or abandon His heritage.

It is also explained in our holy books that the miracle of the Showbread alludes to the sustenance of the Jewish people. That is, just as G-d ensured that the Showbread remained hot, growing neither old nor moldy, likewise He does not

forget to generously provide everyone with all that they need. The more confidence that we have in Him, the greater our reward.

These were not the only inspirational signs lavished upon the festival pilgrims, for they were also shown the jar containing the manna, which had been preserved and remained in perfect condition as a perpetual reminder. Its goal was to teach people that just as Hashem fed the Children of Israel in the desert for 40 years, likewise He feeds all of us each day.

All of these signs, which infused faith into the hearts of the Children of Israel, had to take place during Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These are times whose very essence strengthens our faith in G-d.

Pesach is when G-d demonstrated that He had accepted a nation and a people, "for the Children of Israel are My servants" (Vayikra 25:55), a time when we received the commandment: "I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Sukkot is when G-d protected us with the Cloud of Glory, so that nothing could harm us. Then there is Shavuot, the time when we received the holy Torah, which has ensured our existence and that of the universe to this very day, as it is written: "If not for My covenant [the Torah], I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 33:25). In fact it is well-known that at each of these times, the same supernal influence affects us, just as it did at those particular times: On Pesach, as it did during the exodus from Egypt; on Sukkot, as it did during the journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert "with a perfect faith"; and on Shavuot, as it did when they received the Torah on Mount Sinai. When G-d's majesty was revealed on the mountain and He made them hear His holy words amid the flames, the heights and the depths crumbled, and all the people could perceive the oneness of G-d, as it is written: "You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is none beside Him!" (Devarim 4:35).

This is why the Torah declares that precisely for these three festivals, "all your males shall appear before Hashem your G-d." Thus everyone will attain faith on Passover, called the festival of faith. Everyone will attain joy and the Divine spirit on Sukkot, when water would be drawn, which is why the festival that took place at the Temple during this time was called the Simchat Beit HaShoeva. Finally, everyone will attain the Torah on Shavuot. Nevertheless, in order to be influenced by all these things, a person must take the first step, meaning that he must travel to Jerusalem. In fact it is only when he creates the proper vessel for receiving this abundance – when he establishes the pillars of faith that allow him to abandon all his possessions and travel to Jerusalem – that he will be able to receive everything lavished on him from above. As the Sages say in the Midrash, "Present to Me an opening of teshuvah no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass" (Shir HaShirim Rabba 5:3). This not only pertains to teshuvah per se, but includes everything that deals with spirituality and the strengthening of one's faith.

Thus whoever undertook this pilgrimage opened this door and merited great abundance in the spiritual and material realms. In spirituality, as we have said, and also in materiality he lacked nothing, as the verse promises:

"No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem your G-d." In fact the Sages recount extraordinary stories in Yerushalmi Peah 3:7 and in the Midrash to this effect: "A man once forgot to lock his house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found a serpent entwined in the rings of his door. On another occasion, a man forgot to bring his chickens into the house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found some cats torn to pieces before them. On another occasion a man forgot to bring a stack of wheat into the house when he went up to the festival, and upon his return he found it guarded by lions" (Shir HaShirim Rabba 7:3).

At the Source

Not Dead

It is written, "You are children of Hashem your G-d: You shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for the dead" (Devarim 14:1).

The commentators raise a question: How can G-d render Himself impure to revive the Children of Israel at the resurrection of the dead, since He is a kohen?

They respond that this is not a problem, since we are G-d's children, and we know that a man can render himself impure for his son.

Furthermore, there is a Halachah which states that "one who is about to be hanged is already considered to be hanged." As a result, if we are to live again at the resurrection of the dead, we are already considered to be alive.

In his book *Va-yaas Avraham*, Rabbi Avraham Didi Zatzal states that this is why the nations of the world have the custom of cutting and shaving themselves for the dead. It is because they know that the dead will never live again. As for the Children of Israel, of whom it is said, "You are children of Hashem your G-d," they are prohibited from cutting and shaving themselves for the dead, since the dead will be revived during the resurrection of the dead, and they will then stand "between your eyes." The letters forming the term lamet ("for the dead") will then read lo met ("[he is] not dead").

Beware

It is written, "Beware, lest...you look with an evil eye upon your poor brother and refuse to give, and he cries out against you to Hashem" (Devarim 15:9).

There is an old excuse, as old as time, which is used by every person who is approached for money. He will evade the issue by resorting to this excuse. What exactly does he do?

He will sigh and say, "I have relatives who are poor. In fact I have a brother who is needy." Yet in reality, he will not help his brother either.

The book *Lachmei Todah* describes how the Torah warns us against adopting this hypocritical excuse:

"Beware, lest – when people come to you asking for money to give to the poor: you look with an evil eye – not wanting to give; your poor brother – is the excuse that you will resort to, saying that you have a needy brother who is suffering and that your relatives come first. Yet in reality, you will simply refuse to give, even to your brother. Nevertheless, remember that he will cry out against you to Hashem – your brother will appeal to G-d, saying that you are using and humiliating him without reason."

In the Morning

It is written, "You shall turn back in the morning and you shall go to your tents" (Devarim 16:7).

In the book *Nishmat Chaim*, Rabbi Asher Chadad interprets this verse allegorically:

We may figuratively relate this to the words expressed by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the *Shulchan Aruch*, namely that before the Morning Prayer, a man must ensure that he is clean. The Rema writes that a man should adopt the habit of seeing to his needs in the morning and evening, this corresponding to a hygienic and zealous lifestyle. The reason cited in the *Mishnah Berurah* is that the body should be clean when a person takes upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven for the reading of Shema and during prayer.

Hence the verse alludes to this by stating: "You shall turn back in the morning," meaning that one should see to his needs before prayer. Then "you shall go to your tents," meaning the synagogue, which is called a "tent" (according to the explanation given by our Sages on the verse, "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob!"). You will therefore go to "your tents" to pray and recite Shema.

The Midrash also relates the story of two brothers living near some wicked, non-Jewish neighbors who sought to harm them. When these brothers went to celebrate the festival, G-d sent angels in their likeness, dissuading their neighbors from stealing from them, for they thought that the brothers had remained home (Shir HaShirim Rabba *ibid.*). These are just some of the miracles that our Sages attest to.

We therefore see that the objective behind the mitzvah of the pilgrimage festival is to strengthen our faith and confidence in G-d. May we strengthen our loyalty to the Creator, and may He send us Mashiach, for then we will travel to the pilgrimage festivals and eat the peace-offerings and Passover-offerings.

In the Light of the Parsha

More Like Angels Than Animals

It is written, "You shall not eat any abomination" (Devarim 14:3).

Our Sages have taught, "In three ways are men like the ministering angels: They possess understanding like the ministering angels, they walk erect like the ministering angels, and they can speak in the holy tongue like the ministering angels. And in three ways are they like animals: They eat and drink like animals, they procreate like animals, and they relieve themselves like animals" (Chagigah 16a).

Given that men have the same number of things in common with animals and angels, I wonder which of the two they resemble the most.

When we avoid forbidden food and sanctify ourselves in what is permitted, then our food is no longer like that of the animals. On the contrary, animals eat whatever is before them and have no concerns as to the effects of such food on their nature. We may therefore say that we resemble angels in four areas and animals in two, meaning that we are more like angels than animals. It is by the verse, "You shall not eat any abomination" that G-d has differentiated Israel from the animals.

The Midrash says, "You save both man and animal, O Hashem" [Tehillim 36:7] – by the merit of the animal, You save man" (Bereshith Rabba 33:1). What does this mean? If men are more important to G-d than animals, then why are men saved by the merit of animals? The answer is that when a man does wrong, he becomes inferior to an animal and can only be saved by its merit. In fact animals cannot get worse, nor can they improve their conduct. As for ourselves, since we received Torah and mitzvot, we can spiritually elevate ourselves and resemble the ministering angels. We find this idea in the Gemara, which asks: "Who are the 'Ministering Angels'?" Its answer: "The rabbis" (Nedarim 20b). However if a man does wrong, he descends from his level and resembles an animal, at which point he can only be saved by its merit, for animals do no moral wrong.

In *Kad HaKemach*, *Rabbeinu Bechaye* writes that the Torah draws a distinction between permitted and forbidden food in order to refine the soul. This is because mitzvot constitute the life of the body and the soul, as King Solomon said: "For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh" (Mishlei 4:22). The expression "life to those who find them" refers to the life of the body. The animals which the Torah has prohibited us from eating are not only harmful to the body, but to the soul as well. In fact they infuse men with a certain degree of cruelty as well as bad character traits, for such animals are themselves brutish and crude. Doctors are well-aware of this. It therefore befits those who received the Torah to refine their characters by eating pure food and by guarding themselves from cruelty. Our Sages ask, "What does the Holy One, blessed be He, care whether a man kills an animal by the neck or the nape?" (Bereshith Rabba 44:1). In fact the sole objective of the mitzvot is to allow man to refine himself through their fulfillment.

What the Mice Understood

It is written, "You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting" (Devarim 14:22).

The following story was recounted by the preacher Rabbi Shlomo Lewinstein, who personally heard it from Rabbi Nissim Tshuva, may G-d keep him.

Many years ago, Rabbi Nissim rented out an apartment on the ground floor of a building that he owned in Tel Aviv. The previous tenant was not observant at all, and had lived in this apartment for two years. However problems had already started within the first month of her lease, when she had complained about seeing mice in her apartment. Rabbi Nissim was perplexed, since he had been renting out this apartment for a very long time, and nobody ever had such a complaint. True, it was located on the ground floor, but mice? There had never been any mice there before!

Whatever the case, he certainly wasn't going to argue the point. If the tenant was claiming that there were mice in her apartment, then mice there were, and the solution was simple: He would call the city and ask them to carry out a pest control sweep of the area.

He therefore called the municipal services department and asked them to rid the area of rodents. City hall agreed and swept the area. Yet to Rabbi Nissim's great surprise, the procedure wasn't successful! Within a few days, the tenant was calling him once again with the same problem: "There are still mice in the apartment!"

After another pest control sweep also proved ineffective, Rabbi Nissim offered to tear up the tenant's lease without penalty. However she refused, preferring instead to stay in the apartment, brave the mice, and complain.

One day, Rabbi Nissim came up with a novel idea.

When the tenant called the next time to complain, he told her that Jewish sources (Yerushalmi, Demai 1:3) recount the story of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, whom all the inhabitants of a certain city went to see. They sought his help because of an epidemic of mice, which was threatening their entire harvest and could lead to a famine. After investigating the matter, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair discovered that these people did not give a tenth of their harvest for tzeddakah (ma'aser), which is why their harvest was being attacked by mice.

"I don't know if this will help, but perhaps if you start giving tzeddakah, the mice will leave," Rabbi Nissim said to the tenant. In fact from that day on, she never called him about the issue again.

Of course, Rabbi Nissim himself never called to find out what happened in her apartment. As long as she wasn't complaining, he preferred to steer clear of any potential problems and not contact her. A few months later, however, she called him because she had decided to move. At that point, she described all the changes that had taken place in her life since their famous conversation, the one in which he had encouraged her to give tzeddakah.

She recounted that her grandfather was a man of great moral standing, a religious Jew who had always taught her not to refuse the request of any Jew. "You can't imagine how much suffering a Jew has endured before he dares come to you asking for help. That's why you must never refuse him! Give him whatever you have," her grandfather used to tell her.

At the time, the woman used to follow this advice. Yet when she moved to the big city, Tel Aviv, she met new friends in university who infused her with their own values. These friends used to view the poor as "parasites" and "opportunists," explaining to her that there certainly wasn't any reason to help them!

At first, she did not allow herself to be influenced by them. Yet little by little, their words wormed their way into her heart, and she began by refusing to help people, followed by no longer giving money to charity. That was the day when the mice started to appear!

By bringing up the subject of tzeddakah, Rabbi Nissim had suddenly triggered something within her. She realized that the mice actually appeared when she stopped giving tzeddakah, and at that point she decided to change. A miracle then happened, for the mice vanished as if they had never existed!

The story doesn't end there. The tenant in question left the apartment and someone else moved in. After a short time, this new tenant called Rabbi Nissim with the same complaint: Yes, there were mice in the apartment. This time, Rabbi Nissim knew just how effective municipal services were, and so he did not try contacting them to solve the problem. Instead, he directly advised the tenant to give some money to tzeddakah, all while explaining what had happened to the previous tenant. As expected, once the new tenant gave money to tzeddakah, the mice vanished as if they had never existed.

A third story will complete the picture, according to the principle that "a three-ply cord is not easily broken" (Kohelet 4:12). This is what happened:

During one of his classes in Bnei Brak, attended by both religious and secular individuals, Rav Lewinstein recounted the story of these two tenants who had rented the Tel Aviv apartment. In the weeks that followed his account, someone came to see him after class and said that he himself was renting out an apartment in Bat Yam to a completely secular woman, one who attached absolutely no importance to her Jewish roots. On the day after the class in which he had heard the story of the mice, the tenant had called him and – as incredible as it sounds – started to complain about an epidemic of mice in her apartment! She demanded that he call the city right away to ask them to carry out a pest-control sweep of the area.

The owner immediately made the connection between the story he had heard the previous day and this call from his tenant, and so he was in no hurry to contact municipal services. He first inquired as to whether his tenant regularly gave money to tzeddakah. When she said that she did not, he made it clear that he wouldn't call the city as long as she hadn't assured him that she had given something to tzeddakah.

At first she protested, "Who exactly do you want me to give charity to? Everyone around here is super-rich!" However he didn't budge, and he was eventually able to persuade her. She therefore agreed to give tzeddakah, and he told her that he would call the city as soon as she gave him her word that she had kept her promise.

On the next day, the tenant called to thank him. Yes, she had given tzeddakah, but she also wanted to thank him for having contacted the city. In fact the mice vanished as if they had never existed!

Such is the power of tzeddakah, and especially of ma'aser. It can even get rid of animals that resist everything else!

Guard Your Tongue

Even if Completely True

The prohibition against speaking Rechilut applies even if all the information is completely true, being without a trace of falsehood. Needless to say, it does not matter if two people were friends and someone told one of them what the other said about him. The speaker is still called a rasha [evildoer], and his actions make him detestable before G-d. Even if animosity had already existed between them, if someone hears one of them speaking against the other and goes and tells him about it, it is still called Rechilut.

– Chafetz Chaim

Charity Funds

Charity organizations, be they public or private, have always existed among the Jewish people. Since the time that we have been a people, generosity in all its forms is considered to be one of our characteristics. In fact we are known as charitable people who do good deeds.

The number of different charitable concepts among the Jewish people grows day by day. In Israel, telephone books in each city are filled with all kinds of organizations devoted to chesed. Charitable deeds, a characteristic of the Jewish people, cover all of a person's needs from the time of birth until his burial after 120 years on earth.

The Rambam begins his chapter devoted to tzedakah with the laws governing donations to the poor, starting with this particular law: "In every city where Jews live, they are obligated to appoint faithful, reputable men as trustees of a charity fund" (Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 9:1). Likewise, great sages should not live in a city that lacks a charity fund.

The mitzvah of tzedakah can be found among various expressions in this week's parsha. The Rambam points this out and concludes the following: "We are obligated to be careful with regards to the mitzvah of charity to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments" (ibid. 10:1). In fact Rav Eliyahu Haltamari, the author of Shevet Mussar, wrote a book entitled Me'il Tzedakah that deals exclusively with this subject. In it, he counts 70 different kinds of charity that are included in the concept of tzedakah, and which allow the Jewish people – generous and children of the generous – to distinguish themselves. Among these we find fixed and regularly-occurring charities, as well as those which do not occur on a regular basis, such as organization that provide money to purchase wheat for the arrival of Pesach, gifts to the poor on Purim, and so on for each holiday.

The List is Long

Leafing through the pages of Jewish history allows us to see many thriving works of tzedakah. Every time that the need has arisen among the Jewish people, individuals have volunteered to form a group that provides aid and support. What follows is a partial list of charitable organizations that have adorned the pages of our history:

- Orach Chaim ("way of life")
- Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick)
- Gemiluth Chassidim (doing good deeds)
- Chachnasat Orchim (demonstrating hospitality)
- Chevra Lessipuk Atzei Hassaka (distribution of firewood)
- Chevra Lachalukat Tzitzit (distribution of tzitzit)
- Lev Almanot Arnin (rejoicing widows)
- Menachem Avelim (consoling mourners)
- Moshav Zekanim (retirement home)
- Mechassei Yeladim (clothing children)
- Madlikei Ner Shabbat (lighting Shabbat candles)
- Madlikei Ner Chanukah (lighting Chanukah candles)
- Neveh Shalom ("dwelling of peace")
- Ozer Dalim (helping the needy)
- Pidyon Shevuyim (rescuing prisoners)
- Simchat Haregel (celebrating the holidays)
- Shomer Emunim (guardian of the faith)
- Magishei Mincha (charity sponsors)
- Linat Hatzeddek (providing people with a place to sleep)
- Shomrei Mezuzot (checking mezuzot)

In Rome, for example, there were more than 30 charity organizations in the time of the Jewish ghetto, while in the wealthy and flourishing city of Livorno, there were 60!

Due to the particular discretion of the Jewish people, the mitzvah of tzedakah was most often performed in an indirect way. This was done by either financially supporting people so as to prevent them from going bankrupt, or by a more direct

means of assistance. Nevertheless, even when "direct" assistance was employed, it is clear that it took place through the intermediary of charity fund trustees, and later on by charity organizations.

Regarding the laws dealing with charity for the poor, the Rambam states that there are several elegant ways of supporting a person in need. As he so beautifully states, "The greatest level [of charity], above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, entering into a partnership with him, or finding work for him in order to strengthen his hand until he no longer needs to be dependent on others."

However it goes even further than that, for our Sages fault anyone who humiliates the poor by giving him tzedakah in public. The Gemara explains the issue as follows: "For G-d will judge every deed – even everything hidden – whether good or evil [Kohelet 12:14]. ... This refers to one who gives a donation to the poor in public" (Chagigah 5a).

One Who Does Good Deeds

The trustees of charity funds have earned the crown of "those who confer merit upon the community," for "one who makes others perform a mitzvah is greater than one who performs it." According to the Zohar, such individuals even obtain a reward for each donation which they bring about. The position of charity fund trustee was only given to the most loyal of men, such as Rabbi Hanania ben Teradion, who for generations served as an assurance and example of honesty for charity fund trustees. The same applies to Binyamin HaTzaddik, who was also responsible for a charity fund. Their position was so revered that a halachic ruling was made in their favor: "The trustee of a charity fund can marry the daughter of a kohen. It is pointless to inquire about them."

Nevertheless, some of these trustees suffered numerous assaults, suspicions and slanderous "proclamations." These kinds of incidents have always occurred, with one such incident being described in Sefer Chassidim:

"If a charity fund trustee hears that some ungodly individuals have suspicions about him, he should not pay any attention to them, since good men trust him. Thus a charity fund trustee who is suspected of theft, or favoritism in the distribution of funds, should not be concerned about it or change his behavior as a result."

Rabbi Zechariah Mendel, a disciple of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, recounted the following story regarding certain great figures in the Chassidic movement who also assumed the role of charity fund trustee. At one point, a large number of zuzim (coins) were found in their bags, money that had been given to them as "compensation." Some people then spread rumors about these tzaddikim, and as a result the following letter was written and published at the end of the book Noam Elimelech:

"Never has money remained with them, be it for a single night. They spend all of their time learning Torah, performing mitzvot, doing good deeds, helping orphaned children and widows to marry, freeing prisoners, ransoming hostages, healing the sick, consoling mourners, doing good to everyone, welcoming guests, warmly receiving all people, and loving the poor."

When we mention the subject of tzedakah, it is impossible not to discuss the important charity work that was done by Rabbi Haim Pinto. Lovingkindness is one of the pillars of the world, a pillar to which he cleaved with body and soul.

He was constantly performing acts of tzedakah for his people, working with all his might to provide food to the poor and needy in his city.

Rabbi Nissim Abitsror once told Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, who himself is a charity fund director, that Rabbi Haim Pinto often asked that he join him in collecting money from people in town, money that he would then distribute to the needy. It was a great honor to join Rabbi Haim Pinto in such an endeavor, and it would also allow Rabbi Nissim to witness incredible sights.

Every Friday, Rabbi Haim Pinto would not collect money, but rather food. He did this because he knew that there was not enough time on Friday for families to use money to purchase food for Shabbat. Hence every Friday, he would only collect everyday food to give to the poor for Shabbat. On the other hand, during the rest of the week he would collect money and distribute it as tzedakah.

When he would visit a family home, he would eat something and begin to prophesy: He could tell the woman of the house how much food she had cooked on that day, and how much of it would be eaten.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto

The life of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto was infused with a tremendous degree of self-sacrifice. He completely devoted himself, both body and soul, to the service of the Creator, to Klal Israel, and to the “suffering” of the Shechinah. This is because he fervently yearned and sought to hasten the deliverance, which he considered to be imminent.

The fact that he lived for 40 years within the four cubits of his tiny home testifies to this: He was occupied with prayer and serving G-d, and he did not even step over the threshold of his door. He began doing this after the awe-inspiring vision of his father, Rabbi Haim Pinto, concerning the terrible Shoah that was quickly approaching the Jewish people, meaning the Holocaust that took six million Jewish souls. Because of this calamity, his father ordered him to shut himself in his home, accept G-d’s sovereignty, and distance himself from this inhuman world.

Thus the Second World War broke out in the year 5699, and with it came the Shoah that took the lives of six million Jews – whole communities and their leaders, rebbes and their courts, entire estates, holy and pure cities and villages – may G-d avenge their blood.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon kept his word by not leaving the isolation of his home, except for the funeral of his father, which took place in Casablanca. He then immediately returned to Mogador, where he remained isolated and studied Torah, served G-d, and fulfilled mitzvot.

During the five years of the war, Rabbi Moshe Aharon led a difficult life that was filled with pain, all while joining in the distress of the Jewish people. Rumors of atrocities and the tragic picture emerging from eastern Europe intensified his sorrow, and therefore he took it upon himself not to change his clothes throughout the war years.

Every Friday afternoon, the tzaddik would climb to the top of his roof and wash his clothes for Shabbat. During that time, he ate only a minimal piece of bread with olive oil, and he bathed only once every six months.

At the end of the war, Rabbi Haim revealed himself to Rabbi Moshe Aharon in a dream at night. He asked him to stop afflicting himself, for the war was over. Hence that is what he did.

Sufferings Are Precious

At the end of his life, the tzaddik received afflictions of love, ones that cleansed and purified his body. It was also at this time that he revealed his tremendous spirituality. His sheer determination allowed him to dominate his illness, for he never turned his thoughts or devotion away from the Sovereign of the universe for even an instant.

The members of his family, who stood near the door of his room, truly felt the words of our Sages: “The Shechinah hovers above the bedside of the sick.” They also heard, with a shiver, the cries of the tzaddik as he multiplied his prayers and supplications for the Jewish people, as if his terrible suffering was of no concern to him.

After Rabbi Moshe Aharon’s passing, his family described just how painful his afflictions were, to the point of making him lose the ability to speak. At that excruciating point, when his mouth could no longer let him express the feelings of his heart, he stood up and raised his hands towards Heaven, as if to thank the Creator. He then cried out from his pure heart: “Sufferings are precious to G-d!”

When his illness worsened, Rabbi Moshe Aharon considered, by dint of his complete submission to G-d, that he was being given a gift: Afflictions of love. In the depths of his being, he knew that such punishment



constituted an atonement for the sins of all Israel. His suffering ended an extraordinary life of Torah study, of being content with little, learning for the merit of the entire Jewish people, voluntary isolation, and withdrawing from the life of this world.

The Tzaddik’s Grave

Towards evening on Wednesday, the day that the luminaries were created, during the week of Parsha Shoftim, on Elul 5, 5745, the tzaddik passed away. Already early in the night, the angels had conquered this lower world, a crown was removed, and a jewel taken away from the Jewish people. The soul of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon ascended to Heaven in a whirlwind, towards the Celestial Court, to the great sorrow of his family, close friends, students, and all the Jewish people.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto was buried in a cemetery in Ashdod, and a mausoleum was built by his grave. It constitutes a kind of fortress for men, women, and children who come to pray by his holy grave throughout the year, and especially on his Hilloula. Crowds gather from all corners of Israel and around the world to pray, beseech, receive a blessing, and to be saved by the merit of the tzaddik, be it in the spiritual or material realms.

Many amazing and miraculous stories are exchanged among those who come to pray by the grave of the tzaddik. We have been told directly by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, his cherished son, about the obvious miracles resulting from the prayers recited by the grave of his father. Numerous Jews have told him of the miracles and deliverances which they witnessed and heard firsthand. In fact they have faith in the saying of our Sages: “The tzaddikim are greater in death than in life.”

It is a well-known fact that among those who paid their last respects to Rabbi Moshe Aharon at his funeral, there were some women who had been trying in vain to have children for years. They stood by his grave at that time as people walked around the tzaddik (according to the custom of Jerusalem), and they asked for deliverance.

Their supplications at that auspicious time were accepted and bore fruit. All these women gave birth in the very same year by the merit of their prayers, uttered by the grave of the tzaddik at the time of his funeral. In gratitude to the tzaddik, many children born that year were named Moshe Aharon. This name also served as a reminder of the deliverance that arrives by the power of the tzaddik, the son of pious and holy men, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us. Amen.