

The Path To Follow

Lech Lecha

514

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

Under the Direction of Rabbi David H. Pinto Shlita

www.hevratpinto.org | hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief: Hanania Soussan

32 rue du Plateau 75019 Paris, France • Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 • Fax: +331 42 06 00 33

Heshvan 8th 5773

October 12th, 2013

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Man is Led Along the Path Which He Desires to Take

It is written, “There was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. ... So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not all the land before you? Please separate from me: If you go left, then I will go right. And if you go right, then I will go left’” (Bereshith 13:7-9).

After journeying together for so many years, our father Abraham spoke to Lot and said: “Please separate from me.” Abraham realized that during all the time that they had been together, Lot was not influenced by him for the better. Although Lot was not morally depraved at that point, Abraham knew that not everything was right with him. Hence he preferred to part ways with Lot.

The fact that Lot was close to our father Abraham, and yet was not influenced by him for the better, is somewhat surprising. After all, is it possible to live in the shadow of such a great tzaddik – to whom G-d had revealed Himself, and to whom He had spoken – and not to be influenced by him in the slightest way?

The Sages have said that everything is related to a person’s desires. If a person wants to, he can learn even from a small child. However if he does not want to, then he cannot learn anything, not even from a person as great as Abraham. Lot, who did not want to learn, and who had decided to let himself be drawn towards vanity and glitter – desires and wealth – did not want to take advantage of Abraham’s presence in order to learn from him.

Lot showed his true colors when he separated from Abraham, for he immediately went to live in Sodom. Why? Because “Lot raised his eyes and saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere.” The Sages and commentators explain how Lot chose the place where he wanted to live: By its external beauty! Here we retroactively see the true reason why, when Lot was still with Abraham, his heart was really in Sodom. When desires are actively at work, external beauty is enticing.

This is also why we do not find Lot’s response to Abraham in Scripture. The passage continues by simply stating: “Lot raised his eyes.”

This teaches us that Lot did not even try to argue with Abraham’s request that they part ways. He simply left for Sodom right away. This is similar to a child whose parents have forbidden him from playing with his toys. As soon as they allow him to play with them, he does so immediately, without even discussing it. Up until that time, Lot had been constrained by Abraham and thus unable to openly demonstrate his desires. He only did so through his herdsmen, whose thievery and violence testified to the fact that he was not upright. If the opposite had been true, Lot would have made certain that his flocks did not eat what was not his and indirectly benefit from theft. In fact when Abraham

mentioned the idea of them parting ways, instead of begging Abraham not to send him away, Lot immediately fled and went in search of a place to live. The place that suited him best was Sodom – like a child who runs away from school!

When we consider all this, we discover a great ethical teaching here: Lot tried to flee from Abraham, to distance himself from him and his Creator. Where did all this take place? Near a certain city, Sodom! The Sages have taught, “Man is led along the path which he desires to take” (Bamidbar Rabba 20:12). We know this from the Torah, for at first Bilam was told: “You shall not go with them” (Bamidbar 22:12). Yet once he became so brazen as to want to go, G-d said to him: “Rise up and go with them” (v.20). We know this from the books of the Prophets as well, for it is written: “I am Hashem your G-d, Who instructs you for your benefit, Who guides you in the path to follow” (Isaiah 48:17). We also know this from the Writings: “If to the scoffers, He will scoff. Yet He grants favor to the humble” (Mishlei 3:34).

All this means that if a person desires to walk along a certain path, even if it is harmful, he will receive assistance. Naturally, he will eventually be reprimanded for it, since it was on account of his desires that such help was given to him. This is something that we learn from Bilam, for when he wanted to curse the Children of Israel, he was first told: “You shall not go with them.” Yet afterwards, since he desired it so greatly, he was given permission to go, for “man is led along the path which he desires to take.” Bilam wanted to see Balak, and he was given permission to go. To this incident, the Sages applied the verse: “If to the scoffers, He will scoff.”

That is what happened here. Lot wanted to leave, to distance himself from Abraham. He wanted to become wicked, to commit violence and theft, and not to see the good in others. Thus Heaven led him to a place that was fully in accordance with his desires, namely Sodom.

There is a great lesson to learn from this, be it for the good or not, for if a person has the misfortune of wanting to do evil, he will receive every opportunity to do so, whether this consists of money to steal, a desire for immoral behavior, forbidden work, or anything else. Nevertheless, G-d will call him to account for all these things. However G-d’s compassion towards us is greater than the pull in the opposite direction, and as a result when a person desires to do evil, we can barely imagine how much help he will receive from Heaven if he desires to better himself. We learn this from what the Sages have said: “If a man comes to defile himself, the doors are opened to him. If he comes to purify himself, he is helped” (Yoma 38b). A person who wants to defile himself is just provided with an opening, but he is not helped! As for someone who wants to purify himself, he is actively helped! As a result, we are obligated to belong to that group which “wants to purify themselves,” in which case we will receive unlimited help from Heaven.

In Your Hands

It is written, “I will bless those who bless you” (Bereshith 12:3).

What blessing did He give to him? When Abraham arrived, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: It is not honorable for Me to have to bless My creations. I will place blessings in the hands of Abraham and his descendants. Whoever they bless, I will sign off on what they say, as it is written: “You shall be a blessing...” (Bereshith 12:3).

What is the meaning of, “I will bless those who bless you”? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I place the blessings in the hands of whoever you will bless, and I will sign off on what you have decided.”

– Tanchuma Yashan

A Simple Conflict

It is written, “The land could not support them dwelling together” (Bereshith 13:6).

If we were to ask ourselves how it was possible that the land could not support them, the answer is not because of their possessions, which were sizeable. Rather, it was due to the fact that there was constant quarreling between their herdsmen, as it is written: “There was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.”

– Pesikta Rabbati

Mutual Love Offers Protection

It is written, “The people of Sodom were wicked and sinful towards Hashem, exceedingly” (Bereshith 13:13).

Another explanation: “He loves created beings [i.e., man].” How?

This teaches us that man must love his fellowman, not hate him. We find that because the generation of the dispersion loved one another, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to destroy the world. Instead, He dispersed them to the four corners of the earth.

As for the people of Sodom, because they detested one another, the Holy One, blessed be He, destroyed them from this world, as it is written: “The people of Sodom were wicked and sinful towards Hashem, exceedingly.”

“Wicked” – one towards the other;

“and sinful” – this is immorality;

“towards Hashem” – this is the desecration of His Name;

“exceedingly” – they sinned deliberately.

We therefore see that because that detested one another, the Holy One, blessed be He, destroyed them from this world and from the World to Come. – Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan

The Priesthood

It is written, “He was priest of G-d, the Most High” (Bereshith 14:18).

Why did he not transmit the priesthood to his descendants?

Rabbi Zechariah said in the name of Rabbi Yishmael: The Holy One, blessed be He, intended to bring forth the priesthood from Shem, as it is written, “He [Shem] was priest of G-d, the Most High.” Yet because he blessed Abraham before G-d, He brought it forth from Abraham. As it is written, “He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of G-d, the Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be G-d, the Most High.’” Abraham said to him, “Is the blessing of a servant to be given before that of his master?”

It [the priesthood] was immediately given to Abraham, as it is written: “The word of Hashem to my master, ‘Wait at My right, until I make your enemies your footstool’” [Tehillim 110:1], which is followed by: “Hashem has sworn and will not relent, ‘You shall be a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek’” [v.4] – meaning, “because of the words

of Melchizedek.” Hence it is written, “He was priest of G-d, the Most High” – he was a priest, but his descendants were not. – Nedarim 32b

Why Now?

It is written, “To your descendants have I given this land” (Bereshith 15:18).

Why did Hashem promise this to him now?

Rabbi Levi said: When Abraham was travelling through Aram Naharaim and Aram Nahor, he saw its inhabitants eating, drinking, and reveling.

“May my portion not be in this country!” he exclaimed.

Yet when he reached the highlands of Tyre and saw them engaged in weeding and hoeing in the proper seasons, he exclaimed, “If only my portion might be in this country!”

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: “To your descendants have I given this land.” – Bereshith Rabba 39:8

In the Light of the Parsha

No Atonement for Chillul Hashem in this Life

The Sages teach in the Midrash: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: ‘You have killed My enemies from midnight until morning. By your life, I will descend to kill the enemies of your descendants from midnight until morning’” (Yilamdeinu Bereshith 71).

We should be surprised by this teaching. It is truly astonishing, for were the four kings who took Lot captive G-d’s only enemies? Lot himself had left our father Abraham and denied G-d, saying: “I want neither Abraham nor his G-d!” (Bereshith Rabba 41:7).

Here we may say that Abraham only went to fight against the four kings in order to prevent a desecration of Hashem’s Name in the world. In fact when these kings captured Lot, they thought that they had captured Abraham, since they greatly resembled one another (Yilamdeinu Bereshith 70). That said, our father Abraham feared that G-d’s Name would be profaned, and that the nations would say: “In the past, his G-d saved him from Nimrod, but now his G-d has grown weak and allowed him to be captured by the king of Sodom. They have no strength, neither him nor his G-d.”

This is why Abraham quickly went out to war, and it is why he took his disciples away from their learning, in order to sanctify G-d’s Name in the world. Our father Abraham knew that a neglect of Torah study can be atoned for in this world, but Chillul Hashem (profaning G-d’s Name) can only be atoned for by death, a much graver sin than neglecting Torah study.

Things are now clear: Since Abraham went out to fight for G-d’s honor, Hashem said to him: “Just as you went out to war and killed My enemies – for if My Name had been profaned, these would have become My enemies – by your life, I will save your descendants from the hand of their enemies in the future!” This constitutes Hashem’s great promise to Abraham, that He would immediately deliver his descendants from Egypt at midnight.

We also find that when the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot were quarreling with one another – for the latter had led their animals to graze in the fields of others, and the former protested against this (Bereshith Rabba 41:5) – Abraham said to Lot: “Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers” (Bereshith 13:8). Our Sages explain that they resembled one another (Bereshith Rabba 41:6), and that anyone who saw Lot’s animals grazing in the fields of others would think, “Abraham lets his animals graze in the fields of others,” leading to a desecration of G-d’s Name. Thus Lot immediately parted ways with Abraham.

The Avrech Who Refused an Inheritance

It is written, “Also Lot, who went with Abram, had flocks, cattle and tents” (Bereshith 13:5).

A Jew from Bnei Brak who devoted himself to Torah learning was summoned to the office of a lawyer in Tel Aviv. A look of sheer astonishment passed over his face as he read the letter that he received from this lawyer. “What do I have to do with a lawyer?” he wondered to himself.

His surprise grew considerably when it turned out that, upon arriving at the lawyer’s office, he had been summoned to discuss an inheritance that had been bequeathed to him by an elderly woman who recently passed away. “Here’s the check,” the lawyer said to him. “All you have to do is sign that you received it, and you can return home.”

The avrech looked at the check and the will, but he couldn’t understand what it was all about. Nor could he recall the identity of the deceased, a woman kind enough to bequeath such a substantial sum to him, money that he could use to marry off his children, who were soon coming of age.

It was only after several minutes that he managed to remember that the deceased had been a childless woman without a family. She only knew him because of her friendship with his parents. Since she didn’t have any relatives, she had decided to leave this money to him.

A few doubts arose in the mind of the avrech as to the validity of the will. Had it been written in accordance with all the halachot transmitted from generation to generation?

He wasn’t sure that there was an actual problem with the will. He had never studied the laws regarding gifts and inheritances, meaning that he didn’t know them in detail. Whatever the case, he still had some questions, and even if he wasn’t sure as to what exactly they were, it was possible that taking the money was a problem, and it was possible that it was not.

Jewish Pride

Would each of us have gone to ask a rav a question like this? Perhaps it was perfectly lawful for him to accept this inheritance. Therefore why put himself in a position where he would have to renounce a large sum of money placed before him?

At that point, a person would start having all sorts of beneficial thoughts about tzedakah and ma’aser: “When this money comes into my hands, I’ll help a large number of families with their finances, so why hesitate on accepting it? It’s possible that all the doubts I’m having aren’t justified, and if I now go see a rav, he’ll be shocked that I feel the need to ask such a question!”

Yet none of these thoughts went through the avrech’s mind. He decided to leave the money in Tel-Aviv for the moment, and to go see the gaon Rabbi Silman in order to make certain that everything was completely in order.

The lawyer was totally shocked, saying: “Never has anything like this happened to me – to give such a large check to someone, tell him that it’s destined for him, and yet he calmly refuses to take it!”

The legal expert tried to convince the avrech to take the check and sign the acknowledgement of receipt. However the latter, who received a Torah education from his earliest years, firmly refused. “It’s possible that this money doesn’t belong to me, so how dare I touch it?” he said with Jewish pride.

“What do you mean, the money doesn’t belong to you? This woman wrote her will when she was completely healthy. She used valid witnesses

to testify that she was of sound mind and body in writing this will, so how can you say that this money doesn’t belong to you? Why? For what reason?” the lawyer said to him, completely stunned.

The avrech was adamant: “It’s not enough for the deceased to have wanted to bequeath her money to me. The Holy One, blessed be He, also has to agree to it. Before I’m certain that He also agrees to it, I won’t touch this money.”

His suspicions proved accurate when he went to see Rav Silman and explained the situation to him. The Rav asked him to check if a kinyan had been made for the will. When the avrech contacted the lawyer to find out, he was told that it had not been made. “In that case,” said the Rav, “the din is that the money does not go to the avrech, who is not a relative of the deceased, but must go to the natural inheritors.”

In other words, testators [those who make a will] can bequeath their money to whomever they wish, but only if their will completely conforms to the laws of the Torah. If that is not the case, the inheritance goes to the natural inheritors. Although nobody knew who the natural inheritors were in this case, since there is no Jew without an inheritor, “it is forbidden for you to take this money,” said Rav Silman.

“Am I allowed to start a gemach [interest-free loan fund] with this money?” asked the avrech. “Are you allowed to start a gemach with money that isn’t yours?” the Rav shot back.

The rabbis declared that it was forbidden to take this money, but that the avrech had the status, from that point on, of one who keeps a lost object. It was therefore his duty to open an account [which maintains its value] in order to preserve the value of the inheritance until the deceased’s relatives could be found.

The avrech’s reaction was particularly interesting: “I want you to know that it wasn’t difficult for me to accept this decision. As soon as I realized that the money wasn’t mine, I had no regrets for having asked the question to the rabbis. On the contrary, I’m filled with gratitude to G-d for having protected me from the sin of theft.”

When it Comes to Money

When it comes to money, a person’s actions say a great deal about his faith in the Creator of the world, and whether his faith in Him is strong. If everything is just going well in life, but it comes to a person’s money, well....

When a Jew knows that, regardless of the situation, money will always reach him if it has been destined to him by Heaven, then he will always pursue the most upright and dignified path. If he has the slightest doubt as to the validity of money that comes into his hands, he will have no difficulty forgoing it, even if it is a sizeable and enticing amount.

Guard Your Tongue

Upright in Principle

When a person hears that an individual has spoken ill of him, or has done or wants to do something to harm him, he must be careful not to believe it. He may only suspect the information to be true. In other words, he must consider this individual as being upright in principle, meaning that he has probably not spoken or done anything wrong.

Hence it is forbidden to do anything that would harm that individual, or to shame him as a result, either much or little. Even hating him in one’s heart is forbidden by the Torah.

– Chafetz Chaim

The Merit of the Tzaddik is a Blessing

Taking place on Heshvan 15 will be the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, a man accustomed to miracles and a member of the illustrious Pinto family, which for generations lived and worked in Morocco. Numerous Jews from around the world are quick to praise him, people who yearn for his sanctity. Rabbi Haim Pinto was able to obtain help and deliverance for both the community and the individual, something for which he was famous.

His grandson, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, told his students the following story, one from which we can draw a lesson on the exceptional confidence that we may have in the sages of Israel:

My host in Morocco, Rabbi Mordechai Knafo, had great confidence in the holiness of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto.

A few years ago, his daughter had to travel to France to undergo a serious medical test. At the last minute, however, he discovered that her passport was missing.

He was very embarrassed, especially since obtaining a passport in Morocco is a lengthy and complex bureaucratic process.

Rabbi Mordechai knew exactly what he had to do: He prayed that he would receive the passport by the merit of the tzaddikim. At night, he lit candles as he addressed a prayer to Hashem, a prayer so sincere that he felt certain that “someone” would bring it to him on that very night.

His wife begged him to go to bed, but he refused.

“I won’t sleep until the passport is back home.”

“How can it arrive tonight?” she asked.

“I have faith that it’ll arrive by the merit of the tzaddikim,” was his response.

In fact at around three o’clock in the morning, somebody knocked at his door. The Rav opened it and saw an Arab standing there, holding a bag. He briskly grabbed hold of it.

“Why are you tearing my bag away?” the man asked. To answer his question, the Rav opened the bag and took out his daughter’s passport.

Rabbi Mordechai then looked at the stranger and asked him, “Where did you find this?”

“By the French Embassy,” he said.

“Why did you return it?” he asked once again.

“To tell you the truth,” said the man, “That wasn’t my intention. I actually thought of tearing it up, but during the night my mother appeared to me in a dream and told me to quickly return the passport to its owner. ‘If you want to respect your parents,’ she told me, ‘go and bring joy to this family by returning their passport.’”

Moroccan Arabs are known for being very respectful to their parents, which is why this man obeyed his mother’s order and returned the passport to its owners. The Rav therefore gave him a tip and bid him farewell.

From here we learn the greatness of trusting in the tzaddikim. This story did not take place decades ago, but just ten years ago. In reality, each person can attain this level of faith and confidence, as the prophet Habakkuk said: “The righteous shall live by his faith.” In other words, even a simple man can become a great tzaddik if he is infused with deep faith.

By the merit of faith, each and every person can experience miracles and wonders. If such were not the case, it would be difficult to understand the miracle that took place in the above story. Nevertheless, faith is not so easily acquired, for a person must work to strengthen it.

A Good Living Through Prayer

Rabbi Mordechai Knafo described another miracle that he experienced by the merit of the tzaddik.

He had a wine business in Tiznit, but it wasn’t going well. And for good

reason! Arabs did not purchase wine because it was prohibited by their religion, and his main clients were French, who were few in number. Furthermore, fights often broke out among the drunks near Rabbi Mordechai’s store, which greatly annoyed him.

He was so distressed that he decided to go to Mogador, to the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, along with his friend Rav Israel Cohen. There he prayed that by the merit of the tzaddik, the authorities would shut down his store, for it was creating huge problems for him.

His prayer was answered beyond all expectations. That very same week, the authorities closed his store under the pretext that the French had left the city, meaning that he had no more potential clients.

When the police arrived to carry out this order, Rabbi Mordechai knelt down and beseeched them, saying with tears in his eyes: “You’re robbing me of my income! Why are you closing my store? How will I earn a living?”

Rav Israel Cohen, who was present at the time, was surprised by his reaction. “Why are you crying? You yourself asked for the authorities to close your store, and now your prayer is being answered!”

This is how the Rav ended up moving to Casablanca, where he opened another business that flourished.

You Saw an Angel!

Rav Shimon Cohen, the son of Rabbi Yechiya Cohen, who was a good friend of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, told our teacher Shlita that he once traveled with his father to a remote village in Morocco, which they reached by journeying through the desert. They were going to see an Arab who owed them money.

In the middle of their journey, in the darkest hour of the night, their car broke down. Hence they found themselves in the remote desert, dark and dangerous, without a telephone, electricity, or any help. They feared for their lives, dreading not only thieves, but also the foxes, wolves, and scorpions that dwelled in the desert. Exactly where were they? They had no idea! Only a stretch of endless desert lay before them. When Rabbi Yechiya realized the gravity of the situation, he began to pray for the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto to protect them, for they were incapable of handling this serious danger on their own.

A miracle then happened, one worthy of Ishmael (Abraham’s son) when he thirsted in the desert: As they were still praying by their broken down car, from a distance they saw a motorcyclist who was carrying all the tools needed to repair a vehicle. This motorcyclist approached them and asked Rabbi Yechiya Cohen: “What are you doing in the desert in the middle of the night?”

“My car broke down on the road,” he replied.

The motorcyclist took out his tools, worked on a few parts of the engine, and then said to Rabbi Yechiya: “Get back in the car and try to start it.”

No soon said than done – the car started! He then got out to thank the man for having rescued them...but they couldn’t find him! He had just vanished!

They had merited, in this situation, two things:

Their prayer had been accepted and had an immediate effect. But more than that, they had seen an angel!

In fact, who else could that man have been, if not an angel from Heaven who came to save them by the merit of the tzaddik? The desert stretched out hundreds of miles in every direction, with no village or dwelling to be found, so where else could this motorcyclist and his tools have come from?

When our teacher Shlita heard this incredible story, he told his student Rabbi Shimon Cohen: “You have merited much, Shimon, in that you saw an angel of Hashem. Since you benefited from such a miracle, never lose sight of the fact that there is a Creator, and be scrupulous in the performance of each mitzvah, the lightest just like the most important.”