

## THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF AND ITS ATONEMENT

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

*It is written, "Moshe gathered the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death' " (Shemot 35:1-2).*

Parsha Vayakhel begins with an order that Moshe gives to the Children of Israel regarding the observance of Shabbat. True, they had been gathered primarily to be asked to give for the construction of the Sanctuary. Nevertheless, the Torah begins by stating the prohibition against working on Shabbat, and only then does it mention that Moshe asked the people to give gold, silver, and copper for the noble aim of constructing the Sanctuary: "Take from yourselves an offering for Hashem; everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it, an offering of Hashem: Gold, silver, copper..." (Shemot 35:5).

The order of events in the Torah is not arbitrary, for it has been established to teach us a lesson. Moshe wanted to infuse the Children of Israel with the realization that despite the fact he had gathered them to collect all the material needed for the Sanctuary's construction, the observance of Shabbat was infinitely more important than the mitzvah of tzeddakah. In fact some people who profane and trample upon the sanctity of Shabbat often happily donate money, giving very generously to the poor so as to justify their actions to themselves. Such people console themselves by reasoning that, although they do not observe the sanctity of Shabbat, they are still careful to give tzeddakah. Now it is written, "Tzedakah saves from death" (Mishlei 10:2), which is why these people feel certain that no harm will come to them, nor will they be punished for their desecration of Shabbat.

When Moshe spoke of the mitzvah of Shabbat, he infused the following message into the heart of the people: The mitzvah of tzeddakah is truly extremely important, and one who is careful to accomplish it merits a great reward. Now we know that the kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital, may his merit protect us, wrote that although we can lose the reward of any mitzvah because of a transgression (Sha'arei Kedusha 2:7), the mitzvah of tzeddakah is negated by no sin. However not only is Shabbat not less important than tzeddakah, it is even more important, for the Holy One, blessed be He,

created the world in six days, and on the seventh day He ceased creating. Hence we also have to respect the day that Hashem ceased His work, and to sanctify it for Him.

Betzalel received the order to build the Sanctuary, and our holy books state that he had very profound and elevated intentions as he built it, for he contemplated the mysteries contained in the sacred Names by which the Holy One, blessed be He, had created the world in six days. Because the Sacred Names were found in intention within the Sanctuary, the Jewish people were forbidden to work on the Sanctuary during Shabbat, so as not to profane the Sacred Names which had been placed in it.

Not working on the Sanctuary during Shabbat constitutes a proof that, despite the fact that the dwelling place of the Shechinah was built through the offerings of the Children of Israel, nevertheless they were not to work on it during the seventh day. In this way, they demonstrated that the observance of Shabbat has greater importance than the mitzvah of tzeddakah. This does not diminish the importance of tzeddakah, but rather teaches us a lesson, making us aware of the gravity of Shabbat and the great attention that we must have on observing it in the smallest detail.

### The Voice of Jacob on Shabbat

A person who lives with complete faith in Hashem will merit for the entire Torah to be fulfilled in him. As we have said, Shabbat is what brings a person to this level. I have read in the name of the Ben Ish Hai that everyone must put an effort into learning Torah on Shabbat. Even if someone exempts himself from learning during the rest of the week because of his work, on Shabbat he cannot exempt himself by using the excuse that he does not have enough time, for Shabbat is a time of rest, and even the Holy One, blessed be He, rests from His work of creation. A person must therefore devote some of his time of rest to the study of the holy Torah.

We may say that the term vayakhel can be divided into two parts: (1) The letters vav and yud, and (2) the letters koph and lamed. The letters vav and yud have the same numerical value as the word tov (when counting the word itself), as it is written: "I have given you lekach tov [a good teaching], do not forsake My Torah" (Mishlei 4:2). The letters koph and lamed correspond to the expression: "The voice [kol – koph lamed] is the voice of Jacob" (Bereshith 27:22). We may therefore say that the voice of Jacob, which is the voice of Torah (called



Publication of  
**HEVRAT PINTO**

Under the Direction of  
**Rabbi David Hanania  
Pinto Shlita**

**CHEVRAT PINTO**  
207 West 78th Street  
New York - NY 10024  
Tel: 1 212 721 0230  
[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)  
[hevratpinto@aol.com](mailto:hevratpinto@aol.com)

Editor-in-Chief:  
**Hanania Soussan**

lekach toy, “a good teaching”) must resonate and be heard on Shabbat with even greater intensity. The fact that the mitzvah of Shabbat is mentioned in Parsha Vayakhel alludes to this very lofty subject.

We know that Jerusalem was destroyed because people did not observe Shabbat (Shabbat 119b). In principle, it seems that the generation which witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem did indeed observe Shabbat. However they were admonished because they were not careful to study Torah on Shabbat, which is the most elevated and purified

kind of study. Furthermore, if someone experiences misfortune, he should examine his conduct to see why this has happened to him. If he examines his conduct and finds nothing, he should attribute his misfortune to negligence in the study of Torah (Berachot 5a). The worst kind of negligence in this regard takes place on Shabbat, for then we have time to study. Hence we must devote this free time on Shabbat to the study of Torah.

## *The Words of the Sages*

### *It is written, “The seventh day shall be holy for you” (Shemot 35:2).*

The Shabbat table in the Jewish home is where people have some of the most powerful experiences, ones that lead the entire family to spiritual heights. How should we conduct ourselves at the Shabbat table so as to create such a lofty atmosphere during the three meals of Shabbat? It is up to the head of the household, first and foremost, to commit himself to achieving this by preparing himself for Shabbat, such that all his children of every age will gather around the table. Every husband must realize that just as the lady of the house must do a great deal of work to prepare appetizing Shabbat meals that her family members will enjoy, a man has the exact same duty to enliven the Shabbat table with words that will arouse the interest of all their children. This task is no less difficult, for each child requires special attention, and an avrech immersed in the study of Gemara and the poskim sometimes finds it difficult to properly prepare himself with intriguing stories and descriptions that will gather his children around him on Friday night and Saturday.

A beautiful example of this approach appears in the book Aleinu Leshabeach: “For a long time, we observed a great avrech who would stay in synagogue on Wednesdays and Thursdays. There he would be, sheets of paper next to him, and he would write, write, and continue writing! For two entire hours he would remain seated, unaware of what was happening around him, immersed in writing upon these sheets. Those seated around him were certain that they consisted of chavurot [group learning sessions], which he conducted in the kollel where he studied. Yet the fact that he looked into the Chumash from time to time led people to conclude that it was something else.

“At a certain point, we approached him and asked what all these sheets were for. It turned out that this talmid chacham was investing four hours a week going through the entire parsha in every possible sense. He would then prepare questions for his children on these sheets, questions that he would ask them as early as Thursday and Friday. He expected them to arrive at the Shabbat table with their answer sheets in hand, which each of his children would read. Naturally, the man attributed great importance not only to the answers that were fully correct, but also to those children who put a great deal of effort into finding an answer, but without success. Thus his Shabbat table was transformed into an exciting experience which all his family members waited for during the entire week.”

Although it is true that what works in one household does not necessarily work in another, the general principle is that we must invest our time and think about this subject in order to bring the home into a state where family members experience Shabbat in the sanctity and joy of the mitzvah. It is worth the effort to suggest, for example, that each child should say a devar Torah at the table, and that everyone should listen to him when he speaks, and not to be occupied with other things.

### *Honoring Shabbat*

An intriguing halachic discussion took place at the table of the gaon Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky Shlita. A question was raised by a married couple, and it pertained to the kind of cutlery that should be used on Shabbat. Because many pieces of cutlery are used on Shabbat, and because it was difficult for his wife to wash everything, the man felt that it was preferable to use disposable cutlery. Hence after a meal was finished, the tablecloth – which was also disposable – along with everything on it could be removed and thrown directly into the garbage, all in order to make things easier for his wife.

As for the man’s wife, although she agreed that it was certainly easier to use disposable cutlery, and that this was possibly an oneg Shabbat for her, on the other hand whatever happened to honoring Shabbat? She added, “Is it honoring Shabbat to use such cutlery? If an important guest were to arrive at our home, we would take out our best cutlery, those which shined the most!” In this context, Rav Kanievsky Shlita recounted a story that happened to his uncle, the Chazon Ish Zatzal. As we know, Lithuanian bnei Torah wear fine-looking ties in honor of Shabbat. However one yeshiva bachur came to the home of the Chazon Ish and described how difficult it was for him to wear a tie during the summer, for he sweated profusely and drops of sweat would fall from his forehead. “In that case,” asked the youngster, “is it better for me not to wear a tie, or does it show disrespect for Shabbat?” The Chazon Ish responded that if he found no pleasure in wearing a tie, then not wearing one did not demonstrate disrespect. In other words, if the boy derived no pleasure in wearing a tie, then wearing one was in no way honoring Shabbat. According to this explanation, we may say that here too, since it was very difficult to wash regular cutlery, using disposable cutlery did not show any disrespect for Shabbat.

### *The Rest that You Desire*

The spiritual loftiness of Shabbat is so great that we resemble angels on this day. In fact, during the weekdays we say in kedusha that the Jewish people are not brazen enough to want to proclaim Hashem’s holiness with the angels, but at the very most “like” the angels. However in the Musaf prayer of Shabbat, we say: “The myriad of angels above, together with Your people Israel who gather below.”

Together the angels and the Jewish people sanctify Shabbat and the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He. On numerous occasions, our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita has enjoined us to take advantage of each moment of Shabbat for true rest, which is accompanied by the fear of Heaven, “the rest that You desire.” We must experience Shabbat at an entirely higher level than a regular day, casting aside all our tarnished garments and donning the symbols of royalty. The Holy One, blessed be He, judges the entire earth and does not ask man to do what he is incapable of. If we succeed in elevating ourselves and raising the atmosphere of the home, even just a little, it will already be a completely different Shabbat. Then our souls will sing Mizmor Shir LeYom HaShabbat, a day that is entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting!

### Restoring Unity

It is written, “Moshe gathered the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (Shemot 35:1).

The Children of Israel were united at the giving of the Torah at Sinai, as it is written: “Israel encamped there, before the mountain” (Shemot 19:2). Here the Sages explain that they were like “a single man, with a single heart.” However this unity unraveled after the sin of the golden calf, and the Satan (the accuser) stirred up dissension and strife among the tribes of Israel.

In his book *Eretz Chemda*, the Malbim explains: “As we know, the building of the Sanctuary was meant to, among other things, atone for the sin of the golden calf committed by Israel. Thus Moshe put an effort into gathering ‘the entire assembly of the Children of Israel’ to speak to them about the work of the Sanctuary. In doing so, he wanted to restore Israel’s former splendor and unity, as it had existed at the giving of the Torah.”

### Nothing More

It is written, “Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded” (Shemot 35:10).

In his book *Pardes Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Patsanovski explains this verse in the following way:

The greatest wisdom consists of not being more intelligent than necessary. We must constantly strive to fulfill Hashem’s command with the greatest of fidelity, without removing or adding to it, for every deed must be fulfilled exactly according to His instructions.

This is what the verse is alluding to by saying, “Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded” – everything that Hashem has commanded, and nothing more.

### Carrying in the Public Domain

It is written, “Moshe commanded, and they caused a proclamation to pass through the camp” (Shemot 36:6).

What was the “proclamation” that passed through the camp? The Gemara states that it was the prohibition against carrying an object in the public domain (Shabbat 96b), meaning that Moshe prohibited objects from being carried from the private domain to the public domain.

Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua, the author of *Pnei Yehoshua*, asks why this warning appears here, just after the Children of Israel had brought their offerings for the Sanctuary.

He answers that Moshe saw that there were “100 sockets corresponding to a value of 100 talents of silver,” and he deduced that the Children of Israel numbered 600,000. Indeed, the total number of half-shekels offered by 600,000 donors was equivalent to 100 talents (Rashi on Shemot 38:26). Hence it follows that there was now a prohibition against carrying from the private domain to the public domain (with 600,000 souls, the camp of the Children of Israel became a public domain). This is why Moshe commanded a proclamation to pass through the camp in regards to this subject.

### Before Sitting at the Table

It is written, “When they came to the Tent of Meeting, and when they approached the altar, they would wash” (Shemot 40:32).

In his marvelous book *Peleh Yoetz*, Rabbi Eliezer Papo offers a beautiful allegorical interpretation of this verse:

“When they came to the Tent of Meeting – this is a place of prayer; and

when they approached the altar – this is the table, for the table is compared to the altar; they would wash – we must wash our hands before praying and before sitting at the table.”

*It is written, “All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom” (Shemot 35:26).*

Rabbi Abba said, “When the women brought articles for the Sanctuary, they used to specify what part each was for: ‘This is for the holy place, this for the curtain...’ All the craftsmen acted in the same way so that sanctity would reign over their work, and so that it would be completed in sanctity. Thus each article went to its place accompanied by sanctity.”

Likewise when a person starts to build a structure, he should explicitly declare that it is being built for the service of G-d, for it is written: “Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness” (Jeremiah 22:13). He will then benefit from the help of G-d, Who will place sanctity and peace upon it, just as the verse says: “You will know that your tent is at peace” (Job 5:24).

– Zohar, Tazria 50a

## In the Light of the Parsha

### The Term ‘Al’ – Spiritual Growth and Loftiness

It is written, “The men came al [with] the women. Everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, earrings, rings, body ornaments – all kinds of gold ornaments – every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem” (Shemot 35:22).

This verse deals with the donations that the Children of Israel brought to the Sanctuary. Why does it say, “The men came al [with] the women” rather than, “the men and the women came”? In reality, the Sanctuary was meant to atone for the sin of the golden calf, a sin which only the men had to rectify, since they were the only ones responsible for it.

The women had no part in this sin (Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 45). Thus in order to be forgiven and to rectify their sin, the men yearned to participate in the construction of the Sanctuary more than the women. Hence they brought their offerings with even greater zeal, something that we learn from the phrase: “The men came with the women.” Given the fact that it was the men who committed the sin of the golden calf, it was incumbent upon them to quickly build the Sanctuary in order to return to the spiritual level that they once occupied, but then lost. As for the women, they brought their offerings for the sake of the mitzvah alone, something evident in the very letters of the terms *ha-nashim* (“the women”) and *ha-anashim* (“the men”). The letter aleph, which only appears in the term *ha-anashim*, refers to the Sovereign (aluph) of the universe, namely Hashem. This indicates that in making the golden calf, the men sinned before Hashem. Furthermore, we should underline that in contrast to women, men are obligated to study Torah. Now it is a well-known fact that “one who is commanded and fulfills [the command] is greater than one who fulfills it, though not commanded” (Kiddushin 31a). When a person has been given a Divine command, the evil inclination cleaves to him in an attempt to prevent him from fulfilling G-d’s will. Hence for a person to conquer his evil inclination and fulfill Hashem’s command as should be, he needs to invest more energy and demonstrate even greater zeal.

This is why the men, who were obligated to bring an offering for the construction of the Sanctuary, had to act with extra zeal in order to fulfill their obligation. Hence it is stated that the men “came al [with] the women” – the term *al* alluding to spiritual growth and loftiness. It means that in order to grow spiritually, men need a greater impetus than women.

### *Zeal in the Performance of Mitzvot*

It is written, “And the leaders brought the shoham stones” (Shemot 35:27).

Rabbi Nathan asked, “Why were the tribal leaders the first to give for the inauguration of the altar, and yet for the construction of the Sanctuary they were not the first?” This is what they said, “Let the community give what it wants to give, and we will supply what is lacking.” Since the community gave everything that was required – as it is written: “The materials were enough for all the work, and more” (Shemot 36:7) – they thought: “What shall we bring?” Hence they brought the shoham stones. Since they initially demonstrated little zeal, there is a letter missing in their name, for the term *vehanesi'im* (“and the leaders”) is written without the letter *yud* (Rashi). Conversely, what is said about the community? “They continued to bring him [Moshe] free-willed gifts every morning [literally, ‘by morning, by morning’]” (Shemot 36:3). The Chatam Sofer compares what the Sages have said on the verse, “that which remains of it until morning” (Shemot 12:10) – namely that it consists of the “morning of the morning,” the very first rays of dawn – with what is alluded to here, meaning that the Children of Israel brought their offerings with zeal on the “morning of the morning,” i.e., as soon as the first rays of dawn appeared. However they did not bring their offerings on the night before, since zeal for mitzvot applies only from the morning, as we find in regards to circumcision, which we learn from the words: “Abraham rose early in the morning.”

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz Zatzal gave a wonderful testimonial in this regard (found in the book *Da'at Torah*): “Anyone who knew the Kohen Gadol of our time, Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen Zatzal, the author of *Chafetz Chaim*, perceived that he never spoke about a mitzvah. People never heard him say things such as, ‘I will do such-and-such,’ for he would do things before even mentioning them. Thus, for example, when someone asked him for a letter of approbation, even before answering him verbally, he was already writing the letter. He would then tell the person who made the request: ‘Here is your letter. It is ready.’”

### *Return Home Immediately!*

What follows is another story regarding the deep insight of the *tzaddikim*, who “speak little and do much.” Rabbi Eizik Zatzal once went to visit his brother, the Rabbi Dovid of Lelov Zatzal, the Rebbe of Lelov. Rabbi Dovid addressed him after a few minutes and said, “It’s not very polite to tell a guest to return home, but I must tell you: Return home immediately!” Rabbi Eizik was very frightened, for a thought crossed his mind: “Who knows what could have happened at home? Perhaps there was some catastrophe, which is why my brother is sending me home in such a hurry!”

Needless to say, Rabbi Eizik did not walk back home, but ran! He hurried as quickly as he could, but when he made it back, he discovered that everyone in his family was alright. He then thanked the Creator for His kindness, but at the same time was puzzled by his brother’s remark. Why had he told him to return home so quickly? He was still thinking about this when the door to his home suddenly flung open, and a Jew he didn’t know stumbled inside and fainted. Rabbi Eizik immediately ran to pick him up, and then placed him on a bed and helped him to recover. When the man regained consciousness, Rabbi Eizik asked him what happened, and he said: “Today my son is eight days old. I ran everywhere looking for a mohel, and yet everywhere I went I was told, ‘This one is away on a journey’ or, ‘This one isn’t home,’ and so on. I

thought that I was going to lose my mind, for how can a circumcision not take place on time?”

“I continued looking, going from village to village in search of a mohel, until I arrived here. I ran all along my journeys, which left me completely drained, which is why I fainted!” Without saying a word, Rabbi Eizik hurried to take a knife for circumcision, and then left with this Jew for his home. They arrived before sunset, and Rabbi Eizik brought the baby into the covenant of Abraham on the proper day. It was only then that Rabbi Eizik understood why his brother had sent him back home with such urgency.

### *The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family*

Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, would usually go to synagogue every night to recite *tikkun chatzot*. One night, as the Rav arrived in synagogue to pray, he met a man on the stairs whose body was afflicted by a condition that left him unable to walk. Indeed, he could only crawl on all fours, unable to even stand.

“What are you doing here?” asked Rabbi Haim. “Get up and walk outside like everyone else!” The man responded in a tearful voice, saying that he was disabled, which is precisely why he was there. “I am asking you to pray for me. Please ask, by the merit of your holy fathers, that I should recover from the terrible illness that has struck me.”

Rabbi Haim invited the man to recite *tikkun chatzot* with him, and afterwards he would see what he could do to help.

After reciting *tikkun chatzot*, Rabbi Haim summoned several people and asked them to carry this disabled Jew to the cemetery. That was where Rabbi Haim’s grandfather was buried, the holy *tzaddik* and *kabbalist* Rabbi Haim Hagadol, may his merit protect us.

When they arrived at the cemetery, Rabbi Haim approached his grandfather’s grave and began to weep and cry out: “Grandfather, grandfather, pray to Hashem for this man! Neither him nor I will move from here until he has been cured of his illness.”

As Rabbi Haim was praying and imploring G-d, the disabled man began to feel pain in his body, and after a few minutes he stood up and began to walk normally.

Later on, this man was fortunate enough to get married and have children. He told his entire family about the miracle that he experienced by the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, and by the merit of his grandfather, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol.

– Recounted by Rabbi Hillel ben Haim, who lived in Beersheba and served in Rabbi Haim Pinto’s synagogue

### *Guard Your Tongue*

#### *Even for a Significant Financial Loss*

Even if a person realizes that he will suffer a significant financial loss by not disparaging another Jew, he is still forbidden to do so. For example, if he works for someone who does not possess the faintest light of Torah, such that he considers anyone to be a fool if his mouth is not as open as his own, and this boss will fire him as a result – leaving him with no way to feed his family – even in that case it is still forbidden. This prohibition is just like every other, for which one must lose all his possessions in order not to transgress. – Chafetz Chaim