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The Path to Follow

7"03

FULFILLING MITZVOT WITH YOUR ENTIRE BEING

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab" (Bamidbar 25:1). It is also written, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand" (v.7). On the words, "[he] took a spear," the Zohar states that the term romach ("spear") alludes to the 248 (ramach) limbs of man (Zohar III:237a). When Pinchas aroused himself with zeal for Hashem, he went into action with all 248 of his limbs.

This presents a problem, for books of Mussar and Chasidut tell us that every mitzvah which a person does must be performed with all 248 limbs and 365 sinews. In fact the 248 limbs correspond to the 248 positive commandments, and the 365 sinews correspond to the 365 negative commandments (Makkot 23b), which together comprise the 613 commandments. The mitzvah of sukkah, which we accomplish with all of our 248 limbs and 365 sinews – since we enter the sukkah with our entire bodies, and even with our clothes – constitutes a lesson for all Torah mitzvot, one that teaches us to perform them with our entire being. Yet in that case, why did Pinchas only arouse his 248 (ramach) limbs when he was enflamed with zeal for Hashem? Why did he not include his 365 sinews as well? The truth is that he actually did perform this mitzvah with his 365 sinews as well, something alluded to in the words "[he] took a spear beyado [in his hand]." Here the term beyado seems redundant, for it would have been difficult for Pinchas to take a spear with his feet. Hence why tell us that he took it "in his hand"? It is because the term beyado has the same numerical value (counting the term itself) as gido ("his sinew") – thus alluding to the 365 sinews. Hence he "took a romach [spear] beyado [in his hand]" – romach for his 248 limbs, and beyado for his 365 sinews.

This represents a very great principle, meaning that we must literally grab hold of every mitzvah and fulfill it with our entire being. This is something of paramount importance in serving G-d. It is also something that is difficult to do, for by nature every person is proud, and if he fails to nullify his pride and does not submit to Hashem before fulfilling a mitzvah, he will fulfill it incompletely, for he will not have performed it with his entire being. In order to nullify the pride that is in his heart, a person must correctly prepare himself to fulfill a mitzvah. In this way, he will know before Whom he is standing, and he will deeply humble himself. In the opposite case, he will not be able to properly fulfill a mitzvah because of the pride that dwells within him. How do we prepare ourselves correctly? We can imagine an alcoholic when he sees wine: As soon as he catches a glimpse of it, he can no longer divert his thoughts from drinking. Nothing will be able to distract him, and he will find no rest until he drinks some.

The same applies to the spiritual realm. When someone readies himself to fulfill a mitzvah, as soon as he begins preparing himself, he will no longer divert his attention from it for anything in the world. All his thoughts will be focused solely on fulfilling the mitzvah at hand until he has done so, for only in this way – in thinking about what he has to do – will he know why he does it. Then his heart will automatically

be filled with humility, and he will carry out the mitzvah with his entire being.

If we are correct in this regard, it would seem that this constituted the difference between Avraham and Bilam. They apparently did the very same thing, insofar as they both rose in the morning to prepare for a mitzvah. To prepare himself for the sacrifice of Isaac, as Hashem had commanded him, Abraham "rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey" (Bereshith 22:3). Likewise, Bilam "rose in the morning and saddled his she-donkey" (Bamidbar 22:21), for he was leaving to bless the Children of Israel.

Nevertheless, Bilam's blessings are considered useless words, for he did not sincerely bless them. Rather, he blessed them just so he could show the Holy One, blessed be He, that he wanted the good of Israel. In his heart, however, Bilam despised them.

The difference between the two of them is that Abraham rose early in the morning to prepare for a mitzvah that G-d had given him. He knew that in order to carry out Hashem's will by sacrificing his son Isaac, he had to greatly prepare himself. Hence he did not turn his focus away from the mitzvah for an instant. In fact when the angel wanted to prevent him from slaughtering Isaac, he had to tell Abraham: "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, nor do anything against him" (Bereshith 22:12). This was because Abraham was so intent on carrying out the mitzvah that nothing seemed capable of stopping him.

Such was not the case with Bilam. When he rose in the morning to go and bless the Jewish people, he had no intention of blessing them properly. This is because his blessings were not considered genuine blessings, but rather words said in vain. This is because they were not said sincerely and wholeheartedly, but against his will. When he went to bless the Jewish people, he did not really go to bless them, but to infuse hatred for them into the hearts of the other nations.

We must be very careful not to resemble Bilam in this regard. Because of our numerous sins, we see people who get up in the morning and proceed with vigor to synagogue, where they don tallit and put on tefillin. We may think that there is no greater preparation for prayer, but in the final analysis such people allow themselves to speak Lashon Harah and utter useless words. How does this happen?

We must realize that their preparation for the mitzvah of prayer was not perfect. They were not focused on it, which is why they failed. If they had correctly focused on prayer, without turning their attention from it, they would certainly not have demonstrated such failings, and instead they would have prayed and fulfilled mitzvot correctly.

Hence it was crucial for Pinchas to prepare himself with all his 248 limbs and 365 sinews in order to accomplish the mitzvah of zeal for Hashem, without any jealousy or personal pride entering his heart. Pinchas therefore arose amid the community, took a spear in his hand, saw the act, and remembered the Halachah. We may think that his intention was to teach a Halachah before his teacher, in which case he would have lost the reward of his mitzvah. We are therefore told that Pinchas acted with all his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, solely for Hashem.

The Electrician who Connected Jews to their Father in Heaven

It is written, “If Balak were to give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem” (Bamidbar 24:13).

A rabbi who is very active in a Torah outreach organization in Israel once recounted an eloquent story, thanks to which an entire family returned to the path of Torah.

Before we get to that story, we shall first describe how certain media organizations in Israel tried to expose excessive increases in the costs of utilities. Their goal was to reveal to the public at large the identity of thieves and their dishonesty on the one hand, as well as honest and upright businessmen on the other. Nobody was aware of this plan, other than a certain housewife whose participation was requested in the greatest of secrecy. She was asked to cause a short-circuit in her home, meaning that she had to inverse some wires in an electrical appliance and then turn it on, causing a short-circuit.

The woman did as she was asked and called three electricians, but not before hidden cameras were installed in all the rooms of her home. These would record everything that the electricians would say and do in order to expose them.

The first electrician arrived. Within seconds – having only listened to what the client had told him, and even without approaching the electricity meter or doing some basic inspections – he had already “determined,” completely serious, “that the entire wiring of your home is damaged and there’s a lot of work needed to fix the problem.”

“What are you going to charge me?” she asked.

“About 3,000 shekels [roughly \$800],” was his response.

She tried to negotiate with the electrician, who agreed to lower the price to 2,800 shekels (\$750). “There’s nothing more to discuss about a discount, since this is a big job. What will I have left?”

The second electrician then arrived. Almost without looking for the source of the problem, he also declared that it was quite serious. He asked for 2,000 shekels (\$530) to repair it, with a discount being out of the question.

Finally, the third electrician arrived. He was a religious Jew from Holon by the name of Hasdian, and he listened to the woman’s description of the problem. Then, even before giving her an estimate, he asked her: “How did it happen, and what was the last thing you did that led to the short circuit?”

The woman showed him the electrical appliance and said that when she plugged it in, the circuit breaker blew.

Our friend therefore went to appliance, opened it, and checked the internal connections. He immediately found the inverted wires and fixed them in a few seconds. He then reset the circuit breaker and restored electricity to the home. Everything then worked.

The price was 120 shekels (\$32). Hasdian pointed out that in reality, the cost for such a procedure was 200 shekels. However he was giving her a discount and asking for only 120 shekels.

The people responsible for this entire ruse were in an adjacent room, and following this final “act,” they emerged from their hiding place. They asked the first two electricians how they could have charged so much, given that they hadn’t even verified a few simple things in the wiring system of the home.

The two electricians were absolutely shamed. They tried to deny that they had demanded such a high price, but obviously no denials were possible because video cameras had recorded everything they did in detail. Hence making foolish contradictions would have shamed them even more.

Before telling the three electricians about the hidden video cameras, they

asked Hasdian why he had not tried to deceive the client by confirming that there was indeed a severe short-circuit in the electrical wiring system. They said to him, “Even without charging the same amounts as your two colleagues, you could have at least asked for 700 or 1,000 shekels.”

Now Hasdian was a G-d-fearing man, and he looked at them with curiosity, as if he didn’t understand the question. He then almost screamed: “Do I have the right to lie? Hashem dwells in the supernal heights and records all my actions and everything I do. After 120 years, when I have to render an accounting for all my deeds, will I be able to deny the facts?”

He then added, “Our Sages assure us that everyone’s livelihood is determined from one Rosh Hashanah to another. In that case, whatever I steal here would be taken by doctors or lawyers. Do I really need to suffer like that?”

“Why did you give her a discount of 80 shekels?” they asked. Hasdian replied: “When I entered this home, I immediately noticed that the people living here aren’t rich, and so I decided to be kind. Furthermore, the Torah teaches us that we lose nothing by acting in this way. In fact if I act with kindness to people, G-d will do the same to me, providing me with an abundant livelihood.”

Everything that took place in the home was filmed, recorded, and televised to hundreds of thousands of people. The great faith practiced by this Jew – who did not try and deceive his client, and who asked for a minimum fee for the repair work – resulted in a beautiful sanctification of the Divine Name.

As mentioned in the book *Aleinu Leshabeach*, the rabbi from the Torah outreach organization recounted that for years, he had unsuccessfully attempted to lead a certain family to doing teshuvah. Following the broadcast of this report, all the members of that family told him that “if other people like this exist on earth, for whom faith leads to great spirituality, then we want to join them.” That is how they did complete teshuvah.

We ourselves are aware that there is “an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book” (Pirkei Avot 2:1). Yet what do we do with this awareness? Do we allow it to penetrate to the depths of our hearts, or is it a superficial awareness that has no effect on us deep inside?

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

The Prophet of Essaouira

The great tzaddik Rabbi David ben Hazan, a friend and companion of Rabbi Haim Pinto, did have not children for many years. He took advantage of every opportunity to beseech Hashem to grant him sacred offspring, a boy who could serve G-d and fear Him.

His prayer bore fruit, and to his great joy he was blessed by the arrival of a son a few years later. However his joy was short-lived, for this boy died under unusual circumstances while still a child.

Rabbi David ben Hazan was known for his great diligence in learning Kabbalah, as well as for his understanding of Torah mysteries. Once, when his son was only seven years old, Rabbi David sat down to examine a sacred text. Suddenly, the boy joined his father and began to study the hidden Torah along with him, the concealed wisdom of the Torah and its incredible secrets.

He understood what he was learning quite well. This extraordinary child even revealed numerous Torah secrets (see the books *Shenot Haim* and *Mekor Haim*) to his father’s disciples. From then on, all the inhabitants of the city called him “the prophet.” In fact everything that he perceived proved to be right. Nevertheless, Rabbi Haim was very frightened by the situation, and therefore he prayed for the boy to leave this world, to no longer frighten people by revealing their most closely-guarded secrets.

Thus the boy left this world. His grave is found in the cemetery of Essaouira, next to that of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. There he rests in peace to this day.

– Shevah Haim

His Name is Lavan

It is written, “He sent his messengers to Bilam, son of Beor” (Bamidbar 22:5).

A Tanna taught: Beor, Cushan-Rishataim, and Lavan the Aramean are identical. Beor denotes that he committed bestiality. Cushan-Rishataim denotes that he perpetrated evils upon Israel: One in the days of Jacob [when he pursued Jacob to take all that he possessed], and the other in the days of the judges [“Hashem’s anger flared up against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Cushan-Rishataim” – Shoftim 3:8].

But what was his real name? Lavan the Aramean. – Sanhedrin 105a

The Movement of the Lips

It is written, “Hashem put a word [davar] in Bilam’s mouth” (Bamidbar 23:5).

G-d said to Israel, “My children, this evildoer wanted to curse you, but I twisted his words and transformed his speech into a blessing.” In fact it is written, “But Hashem your G-d refused to listen to Bilam” (Devarim 23:6). An angel lodged itself in his throat, and when Bilam wanted to utter a blessing, the angel allowed him to do so. On the other hand, if Bilam was preparing to curse the people, the angel closed his mouth and prevented him from doing so. Thus the term *davar* (“a word”) actually designates an angel, as in the verse: “He would send *devaro* [His word] and cure them” (Tehillim 107:20).

According to Rabbi Yochanan, He placed a fiery nail in his throat. It allowed him to open his mouth to bless the Children of Israel, and yet stopped him when it came to curses. The term *davar* therefore designates this fiery nail, as in the verse: “Every *davar* [thing] that can come into the fire” (Bamidbar 31:23). – Midrash Yelamdenu

Absolute Protection

It is written, “How can I curse? G-d has not cursed! How can I be angered? G-d is not angered!” (Bamidbar 23:8).

In Hebrew, the expression “I curse” is *ekov* [aleph kuph beit]. What do these letters conceal?

The three letters that make up this word are the initials of Amen, Kadish, Barechu.

In reality, the wicked Bilam said: “How can I curse them, for several times a day they say Amen, the Kadish, and Barechu?” – Menorat HaMaor

The Blessing of Shabbat

It is written, “Bilam said to Balak, ‘Build me here seven altars’ ” (Bamidbar 23:29).

“Build me here seven altars” – in parallel with the seven days of Creation.

On the first day, he wanted to curse them by the heavens and the earth, which were the first to be created. However his curse was transformed into, “How goodly are your tents, O Jacob” [Bamidbar 24:5], followed by: “Like aloes planted by Hashem” [v.6]. How do we know that the heavens are called an *ohel* [tent]? Because it is written, “Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent [ohel] to dwell in” [Isaiah 40:22].

On the second day, he wanted to curse them by the firmament from which water streams. However his words were transformed into, “Water shall flow from his wells” [Bamidbar 24:7].

On the third day, he wanted to curse them by bodies of water and by seeds. Instead, he said: “Stretching out like brooks, like gardens by a river...his seed shall be by abundant waters” [ibid.].

On the fourth day, he wanted to curse them by the stars and constellations. However his words were transformed into, “A star has issued from Jacob” [v.17].

On the fifth day, although he wanted to curse them by animals, he asserted: “He has the strength of a wild ox” [Bamidbar 23:22].

On the sixth day, he wanted to curse them by the destiny of man’s creation. However his tongue slipped and he exclaimed: “Who can count the dust of Jacob?” [v.10].

Shabbat arrived, and Bilam thought: “Today, I will succeed in cursing them, for none of their prophets can write the [Divine] Name or oppose me in any way.” However Shabbat beat him to it with a blessing, as it is written: “G-d blessed the seventh day” [Bereshith 2:3]. His words were thus transformed into a blessing, as it is written: “Bilam saw that it was good in Hashem’s eyes to bless Israel” [Bamidbar 24:1].

– Midrash Hagadol

In the Light of the Parsha

The Torah Saves and Protects

It is written, “It is a people that dwell alone. Among the nations it shall not be reckoned” (Bamidbar 23:9). This verse was said only in regards to our current, bitter exile, which precedes the coming of Mashiach. Every street corner is filled with impurity, and it is impossible not to look and stumble. How can we avoid sin?

The only way to escape immorality is to attach ourselves to the Torah at all times, for it alone has the power to save and protect us. The Gemara states, “It is said that Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai used to take a myrtle twig and dance before the bride and say: ‘Beautiful and graceful bride.’ Rabbi Shemuel the son of Rabbi Yitzchak danced with three [myrtle twigs]. Rabbi Zeira said, ‘The old man is putting us to shame.’ When he died, a pillar of fire came between him and the whole world, and there is a tradition that a pillar of fire has made such a separation only for either one or two [great men] in a generation. ... Rabbi Acha took her [the bride] on his shoulder and danced. The Sages said to him, ‘Can we do the same?’ He replied, ‘If they are on you like a beam, yes. If not, you cannot’ ” (Ketubot 17a). Rashi explains that the expression “like a beam” means: “Like a simple piece of wood that nobody gives a thought to.”

How could these tzaddikim act in this way, without their minds being disturbed by it? It is because they were constantly immersed in the holy Torah, which protected them from improper thoughts. True, they looked at the spectacle before their eyes, but they paid no attention to it and the evil inclination did not awaken as a result. Along the same lines, the Gemara recounts: “Rabbi Giddal was accustomed to go and sit at the gates of the mikveh. He used to say to the women, ‘Immerse yourself like this’ or ‘immerse yourselves like that.’ The Sages said to him, ‘Is the teacher not afraid that his passions will get the best of him?’ He replied, ‘To me they look like many white geese’ ” (Berachot 20a).

One Sage, the Rambam, teaches us: “An immoral thought assails only a heart devoid of all wisdom” (Hilchot Issurei Biah 22:21). This concept is hinted at in the verse, “It is a people that dwell alone.” The term *levadad* (“alone”) has a numerical value of 40, alluding to the Torah, which was given after 40 days. Hence devoting ourselves to the study of Torah allows us to fulfill the verse, “Among the nations it shall not be reckoned.”

The study of Torah allows us to escape evil thoughts even if improper things appear before our eyes. “Among the nations it shall not be reckoned” means that we will not have the same concerns as the nations that surround us, since we have committed ourselves to the study of Torah.

Five disasters took place on Tammuz, 17, the date of the fast of the fourth month: The first Tablets of the Covenant were broken, the continual burnt-offering ceased to be offered in the Temple, the walls of Jerusalem were breached, the wicked Apostumus burned a Sefer Torah, and an idol was erected in the Temple.

The Tablets Were Broken

On the morning of Sivan 7, after the revelation of G-d on Mount Sinai, Moshe ascended the mount (which the Children of Israel had still not been allowed to approach) in order to learn the principles, details, and nuances of the Torah from Hashem, as well as to receive the Tablets of the Covenant. Before leaving them, Moshe told the Children of Israel: "In 40 days, within the first six hours of the day, I will bring you the Torah." Although Moshe was counting 40 full days (40 days and nights), the people included the day of his departure in their count. Now Sivan 7 did not enter into the count, since the night was not included in it. Hence the 40th day corresponded to Tammuz 17.

On the 16th of Tammuz, the Satan came to confound the people, showing them darkness and obscurity, clouds, fog, and confusion. In fact word spread that "Moshe is surely dead. Six hours have already passed, and he still hasn't returned!"

The Satan asked them, "Where is your teacher Moshe?" They replied, "He has ascended to Hashem." The Satan said, "But the sixth hour has already passed." However they ignored him. "He is dead," he added, but they ignored him. When the Satan then showed them a vision of Moshe's casket, they went to Aaron. In their distress and confusion, they said to him: "Make us a god!"

On the following day, Moshe descended from the mountain. Now the Tablets that G-d had entrusted to him carried themselves. Yet when Moshe approached the camp and saw the golden calf, the supernatural power of the letters engraved by G-d flew away, and the Tablets were suddenly heavy in his arms. At that very instant, "Moshe's anger flared up, and he threw down the Tablets from his hands" (Shemot 32:19).

It was also in the month of Tammuz that a breach was made in the walls surrounding Jerusalem. This happened on the 9th of the month. However in order not to overly burden the people, our Sages did not establish two days of fasting in close proximity to one another. Hence they only established a fast on the 17th of Tammuz, since the destruction of the second Temple is even more painful for us.

The Continual Burnt-offering Ceased

When the First Temple was destroyed, the walls of Jerusalem were breached on Tammuz 9, and our enemies invaded the city and destroyed it. However they could not enter the Temple because the kohanim had barricaded themselves inside, thereby assuring that the Divine service would continue until Av 7. Nevertheless, already from Tammuz 13, the lambs for the continual burnt-offering were blemished (non-blemished animals meant for this purpose were always kept in the Temple courtyard for four days). Starting from Tammuz 13, while the siege tightened around them, they lowered gold and silver to the other side of the wall to their besiegers in exchange for lambs, which they hoisted up and over the wall. This is what they did until Tammuz 17, when the walls were breached.

Jerusalem's Walls Were Breached

At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, the walls surrounding Jerusalem were breached on Tammuz 17, and Titus and his legions took the city. As for the First Temple, which was destroyed in the time of King Zedekiah, it is written: "In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, the famine in the city became critical. There was no food for the people of the

land. The city was breached, and all the men of war fled and left the city during the night" (Jeremiah 52:6-7).

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, in regards to the destruction of the First Temple, the city was taken on Tammuz 17. Yet because of the terrible suffering which they endured, people lost track of the days and believed that it occurred on Tammuz 9. The chronology of events was therefore related in an erroneous manner.

G-d and the prophet Jeremiah were aware of this, and they knew the truth. However G-d allowed the prophet to assert in his writings that it had occurred on Tammuz 9, just as the Children of Israel believed, in order to show them that G-d shared, as it were, in their suffering and that His reckoning was also distorted... which is obviously inconceivable!

Apostumus Burned a Sefer Torah

This event is mentioned in the Mishnah, although we do not know its details from original sources. The Jerusalem Talmud simply states, "Where did he burn it? Rabbi Acha says at the crossroads of Lod, while other Sages say at the crossroads of Tarlusa."

The Acharonim believe that this event is connected to the period of the Roman proconsul Cumanus, and that it took place about 16 years before the great uprising against the Romans. During that time, the proconsul's forces attacked Jews and everything which they held sacred, which was followed by a massive uprising. Flavius Josephus describes events in the following way:

"Before their first tragedy was over [when 10,000 men were killed on the Temple Mount following an incident started by a Roman soldier], another trouble also befell them. As they were traveling along the public road, about 100 furlongs from the city [Beit Choron], some of the men responsible for the previous incident robbed Stephanus, a servant of Caesar, as he was traveling, and stole all that he had. When Cumanus heard of this, he immediately ordered soldiers to plunder the neighboring villages and to bring him their leading figures in chains. As this was occurring, one of the soldiers seized [a Torah scroll] that was in one of those villages. He brought it out before the eyes of everyone there and tore it to pieces. This was accompanied by abusive and vulgar language. When the Jews heard of this incident, they ran together in great numbers and came down to Cesarea, where Cumanus was at the time. They implored him not to avenge them, but to avenge G-d, Whose laws had been offended. Otherwise they could not bear to live any longer, since the laws of their forefathers had been offended in this way. Accordingly Cumanus, lest the multitude rise up in rebellion, and also on the advice of his friends, made certain that the soldier who had scorned the Torah would be beheaded. He thereby put a stop to a second rebellion."

This incident occurred on Tammuz 17, several years before the destruction of the Second Temple. We must assume that the name Stephanus was changed to Apostumus, for names were often changed in this way.

An Idol was Erected in the Temple

According to some commentators, this vile act must also be attributed to the wicked Apostumus on the same day, Tammuz 17. According to others, it refers to the idol that King Manasseh made and erected in the Temple, which also occurred on Tammuz 17.

Guard Your Tongue

We Are Still Listening

It is forbidden to live in a neighborhood where people speak Lashon Harah. All the more is it forbidden to sit among them and hear them speak, even if our intention is not to believe anything they say. This is because we are still listening to them. – Chafetz Chaim