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# The Path to Follow

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## RESEMBLING ANGELS, NOT ANIMALS

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

**I**t is written, “You are children to Hashem your G-d – you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people from among all the peoples on the face of the earth. You shall not eat any abomination” (*Devarim 14:1-3*).

The chain of prohibitions cited in these verses implies a causal relationship. In other words, if the Children of Israel had not been the children of Hashem, they would not have been prohibited from cutting themselves. How can we explain this relationship? Furthermore, why does the Torah juxtapose the prohibition against eating something abominable with the prohibition against shaving and cutting oneself for the dead?

In the Mishnah the Sages teach, “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]... as it is said: ‘For in the image of G-d, He made man.’ Beloved are Israel, for they are called the children of G-d... as it is said: ‘You are children to Hashem your G-d’” (*Pirkei Avoth 3:14*).

The author of this Mishnah chose these two points that argue in man’s favor because they are related. In fact a person who scorns the image of the king scorns the king himself, for if he had no intention of scorning the king, he would not have scorned his image. Likewise, a person who scorns and irritates the king’s son brings suffering upon the king himself. We can now affirm that because the Jewish people were created in the image of Hashem, they are forbidden from harming their bodies, for they are scorning the image of the King by shaving and cutting themselves. This is why the text attests that we are the children of Hashem before discussing shaving and cutting, for we must respect these prohibitions regarding Hashem, Who is our Father, our King, and our G-d. Furthermore, He commands His children to not sully themselves with non-kosher food, just as a father distances his child from anything that can harm his body or soul, since everything prohibited by the Torah can harm the physical and spiritual welfare of man. Hence Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that the sole purpose of the distinction made by the Torah between permitted and prohibited foods is to develop man’s intellect, for the mitzvot constitute the foundation of physical and spiritual life (*Kad HaKemach Pesach 1*). As King Solomon said, “For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh” (*Mishlei 4:22*). The term “life” refers to the soul and physical health. Non-kosher food, which is prohibited by the Torah, harms the body and instills a negative and cruel disposition in man, for it is crude. Doctors are well-aware of this, and it is incumbent upon those who want to receive the Torah to purify their minds with clean food and distance themselves from cruelty. This is the meaning of the Sages’ teach-

ing: “What does the Holy One, blessed be He, care whether a man kills an animal by the neck or the nape? Hence its purpose is to refine man” (*Bereshith Rabba 44:1*). The mitzvot were only given in order to create harmony among men.

Likewise, our Sages have said: “[It is written] ‘Only be strong not to eat the blood’ [Devarim 12:23]. Now if in the case of blood – for which man’s soul has a loathing – anyone who refrains from it is rewarded, then how much more in regards to robbery and adultery – which man’s soul craves and longs for – shall one who refrains acquire merit for himself and for the generations to come, to the end of all the generations! Rabbi Hanania ben Akashia says, ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel meritorious, therefore He gave them the Torah and many mitzvot, for it is written: ‘Hashem desire, for the sake of his righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious’ [Isaiah 42:1]” (*Makkot 23b*). The Rivin (*Rabbi Yehudah ben Nassan*) gave the following explanation: “The goal of multiplying mitzvot and fences is to bestow merit upon a person who abstains from sinning – committing, for example, many sins by the eating of insects, which are repugnant to all men – the sole objective being to reward those who respect these laws.”

### The Sages are Angels

Our Sages say in the Aggadah, “You want to know the difference between the conduct of our G-d and the conduct of the nations? If a king imposes evil and unbearable decrees, then even if a person succeeds in respecting them, he will not be greatly rewarded. Yet those who transgress them will be put to death. On the other hand, Hashem prescribes laws in the interest of Israel, and He rewards those who put them into practice, as it is written: ‘You shall not make a cut in your flesh for the dead’ [Vayikra 19:28]. The nations cut their bodies and suffer, as the verse states: ‘They cut themselves with swords and spears, according to their custom’ [I Kings 18:28]. What does Hashem say? “I am Hashem” – I commit Myself to giving you a reward. In other words, do not bring suffering upon yourselves, and I will reward you” (*Ma’alot HaMiddot*).

Furthermore, because He distanced the Children of Israel from forbidden foods and sanctified them with permitted foods – as we are taught: “Sanctify yourself by that which is permitted to you” (*Yevamot 20a*) – Hashem wanted them not to resemble animals. In fact 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*).

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There are situations in which a person can, despite appearances, resemble angels. It is when he distances himself from forbidden foods, sanctifies himself by what is permitted, and does not eat like an animal, which swallows everything in front of it and pays no attention to the harmful effects of its food. From this we may deduce that man possesses four points in common with angels, and two in common with animals, meaning that he more closely resembles angels than animals. Our Sages affirm (*Tanchuma, Emor 9*) that we may explain the verse, “You save both man and animal, O Hashem” (*Tehillim 36:7*) by the Midrash which states that man is saved

by Hashem through the merit of animals. How is this possible? Man is superior to animals! In fact when a person behaves improperly, he degrades himself and becomes inferior to an animal, and therefore he requires its merit. Animals cannot, in fact, degrade themselves, just as it is impossible for them to elevate themselves. Yet man, through the Torah, can elevate himself to a great level and resemble angels, as it is said: “Who are the ministering angels? The Sages” (*Nedarim 20b*). However if a person is not meritorious, he degrades himself and resembles an animal. He will then depend on its merit, for it – contrary to man – cannot digress.

## The Words of the Sages

Yizkor

The following story occurred to a famous talmid chacham, and it appears in the book *In the Blink of an Eye* by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer. Heard during one of the talmid chacham’s flights abroad, this is the story that he told:

When I returned from washing my hands for bread, the man sitting on my left had already begun his meal and was eating heartily, apparently enjoying himself. I couldn’t help but notice, though, that he was consuming a treif cutlet. I happened to notice the name attached to the ripped plastic, which had been covering his “treif-as-treif-can-be meal.” It was Weinstein.

“Um, excuse me,” I said. “I don’t mean to be rude or anything, and the last thing I want to do is offend you, but can I ask you a question?”

“Sure,” he answered.

“Well, maybe you don’t know, or weren’t informed, that you have the option to order kosher meals on this airline.”

He stared at me and waited a second before replying. “I don’t eat kosher.”

“What do you mean, you ‘don’t eat kosher’?” I asked. “In the house – yes, out of the house – no, you couldn’t care less, or what?”

“None of the above,” he replied, “I don’t eat kosher, and I don’t eat it because G-d said that we should eat it, and anything that G-d tells me to do, well, I just go and do the complete and total opposite....”

“It was my son,” he said. “That was the final straw. ... You see, the entire time in the ghetto [during the Holocaust] I had one goal: To see liberation together with my wife and son. Yes, my Kasriel Menachem was our only child still alive, and I shielded him with my very soul. He was our link to a better future, and he was going to survive. I was sure of it.

“But one day, the Nazis, they should rot, announced on their dreadful megaphones that all inhabitants of the ghetto should gather in the center of the ghetto. ... The soldiers strode up and down in front of us, shouting and threatening us, forcing us to march, hitting us for not moving quickly enough. When we reached a deserted clearing in a nearby forest, the soldiers barked at some of the inmates to dig holes...[and] the soldiers opened up fire on all of us, and there was a huge stampede. I felt my son’s hand release mine, and we were separated in the frenzy. I saw how my wife and son were both shot...but I escaped somehow, leaving them behind, leaving a part of my heart buried in those graves forever.”

What is there to say to something like that? Absolutely nothing.

So I didn’t. I don’t remember what we talked about for the remainder of the flight. Six hours later we landed in Houston and went our separate ways.... I never dreamed that I would see Mr. Weinstein again, and the incident, disturbing as it was, slowly slipped out of my memory.... That would have been the end of my story, were it not for the fact that four years later I decided to bring my family to Eretz Israel for the Yamim Tovim, a decision that precipitated the second part of this story.

I was attending my father’s shtiebel on that memorable Yom Kippur morning [in Meah She’arim]. The davening had begun at 6 a.m., and by the time Mussaf approached I was feeling an urgent need for some fresh air.

I left the little building and walked out onto Meah She’arim Street in the direction of Malchei Yisrael Street. As I walked along, just mind-ing my own business, I saw something out of the corner of my eye that shocked me.

About fifty feet away from where I was walking, an elderly man was sitting on the bench of a bus stop.... I suddenly realized that the old man... was my old acquaintance Mr. Weinstein, he of the treif meat on the plane to Houston years before.

I approached him and sat down gingerly at the other end of the bench he occupied. He recognized me, too.

“You look familiar,” he said, squinting in my general direction.... I realized that I was being given another chance, and this time I prayed that I wouldn’t mess it up....

“I’m sure you know that today is Yom Kippur, and they are about to say Yizkor in most of the shuls around here. ... How about if we go into one of those shuls and you ask the chazan to say a Keil Malei Rachamim for Kasriel Menachem, who died al kiddush Hashem all those years ago? ... Don’t you think that it’s time for his soul to get a mention in the Heavenly Court?”

The Plan Succeeds

He looked at me, and there were teardrops gathering in the corners of his eyes just waiting to spill over onto his blue-and-white striped shirt....

We paused at the doorway of the first shul we came to, and I saw the fear cross his face. Clasp-ing his arm in mine, I led him through the doors of the large building made of Jerusalem stone, past the crowd of younger people.... We approached the chazan and asked if he would say a special hashkava. Mr. Weinstein leaned over and whispered, “Kasriel Menachem ben Yechezkel Shraga.”

The chazan’s face turned a chalky white, and beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. His eyes looked like they would pop out of his head, and he swayed for a second where he stood. He reached out toward the man standing next to me and called out in a strangled voice, “Father!” and he fainted.

The chazan in Meah She’arim was none other than the beloved Kasriel Menachem, who his father was certain had died in the Holocaust.

The talmid chacham summarized the moral lesson that he drew from this story, which he himself had witnessed, as follows: Once the father took the first step towards the synagogue, he merited to receive everything during his lifetime.

When he saw the family that his son had established, grandchildren who followed the ways of Torah, and who reminded him of the children of the shtetle, Mr. Weinstein eventually returned to Torah and mitzvot, leaving this world as a Torah-observant Jew.

### The Gravity of Provoking Sin

It is written, “You shall break apart their altars” (Devarim 12:3).

The Elders asked how wood and stone could have sinned. They responded by saying that since they can provoke man to sin, the verse tells us to break them apart.

Thus in regards to wood and stone – which are neither innocent nor guilty, and among which there is neither good nor evil – we may reason that if the verse tells us to break them apart when they are liable to provoke man to sin, how much more does it apply when a man provokes another man to sin, turning him away from life and towards the path of death!

– Tractate Semachot

### Broadening your Boundaries

It is written, “When Hashem your G-d will broaden your boundary” (Devarim 12:20).

Resh Lakish once went to Bozrah, where there was a man who was called Avin Ramaah, not because, Heaven forbid, he was deceitful [raham], but because he acted cunningly in matters of charity: After the congregation had announced their donations, he would offer an amount equal to the donations of the whole congregation. Resh Lakish made a collection there, and he [Avin Ramaah] gave as much as the whole congregation.

Resh Lakish then took him and placed him next to himself and applied to him the verse, “A man’s gift broadens [access] for him and leads him before the great” [Mishlei 18:16].

Rabbi Abahu said, “We have no need to learn this from elsewhere. We can learn it from its own place, for it is written: ‘Beware for yourself lest you forsake the Levite’ [Devarim 12:19], and later: ‘When Hashem your G-d will broaden your boundary’ [v.20].” – Devarim Rabba 4:8

### What a Name Reveals

It is written, “The ra’ah and the ayah” (Devarim 14:13).

What is the ra’ah?

Rabbi Abahu taught: The ra’ah is the same as the ayah. Why then is it called ra’ah? Because it can see [roah] very keenly, for so it is said: “That path no bird of prey knows, neither has the eye of the ayah seen it” [Job 28:7]. And a Tanna taught: It [the ayah] stands in Babylon and sights carrion in Eretz Israel.

Rav Yehudah said: The shalak [“pelican” – Vayikra 11:17] is a bird that draws fish out of the sea.

Rabbi Hisda said: The hassidah is the white stork. And why is it called hassidah? Because it shows kindness [hassidut] to its companions.

– Chullin 63ab

### Blessing his Handiwork

It is written, “In order that Hashem your G-d will bless you in all your handiwork that you may undertake” (Devarim 14:29).

Tanna D’vei Eliyahu: One day I was traveling from place to place, and I found someone who knew Scripture but not Mishnah. He said to me, “Rabbi! I would like to ask you a question, but I’m afraid that you will be angry with me.”

I replied, “I will certainly not be upset if you ask me a question about Torah.” He asked, “Rabbi, why is it written: ‘He gives food to all flesh’ [Tehillim 136:25], and also: ‘He gives to the animal its food’ [ibid. 147:9]?”

Does man prepare his own food?” I said to him, “This is how the world works – man must work with his hands, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will bless his handiwork.” Thus it is written, “Hashem your G-d will bless you in all your handiwork that you may undertake.” Is it possible for a person to remain seated, doing nothing, and for the Holy One, blessed be He, to make his food come to him? Hence it is written, “in all your handiwork that you may undertake.” – Midrash Tehillim

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Torah Secrets Are Revealed to Those Who Make an Effort

It is written, “Re’eh [See], I present before you today a blessing and a curse” (Devarim 11:26).

It seems that the term “see” is inappropriate, for are blessings and curses actually seen?

I would like to explain the meaning of the word re’eh (“see”) by noting that it has the same numerical value (including one for the word itself) as the term raz (“secret”). This means that whoever wants to search for and discover the Torah’s secrets will find them, and its mysteries will be revealed to him, as King David said: “Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah” (Tehillim 119:18). As for a person who does not want to see the Torah’s secrets, and who makes no effort to find them, even if he reads the same chapter and the same teaching as his friend, he will nevertheless not discover what his friend does.

This is also what King Solomon said: “If you seek her like silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of Hashem and discover the knowledge of G-d” (Mishlei 2:4-5).

To what can this be compared? It is like someone who loses something and gives up hope of ever finding it again. When does he stand a chance of finding it? Only when he looks everywhere for it. However if he stays home and whines about it, without looking, the object will not appear on its own.

The same applies in regards to Torah: A man cannot understand it, nor will he uncover the treasures it contains, if he puts no effort into looking for them.

The Sages say, “If a man says to you, ‘I have labored and not found,’ do not believe him. If he says, ‘I have not labored but I still have found,’ do not believe him. If he says, ‘I have labored and found,’ you may believe him. This is true in regards to words of Torah” (Megillah 6b).

From here we learn that no one can understand the Torah unless he puts an effort into it. As the Sages say, “Whoever occupies himself with the Torah merits many things. ... The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him” (Pirkei Avoth 6:1).

## Guard Your Tongue

### Even If Not Intentional

The prohibition against rechilus [talebearing] applies even if the speaker does not intend to arouse hatred in the listener’s heart against the subject, and even if the speaker believes that the subject’s actions were proper. For example, suppose that Shimon criticizes Reuven for something that Reuven said or did against him, and Reuven asserts that he was justified in this regard, and that Yehuda did the same thing. Even as such, if he causes Shimon to feel hatred for Yehuda, Reuven’s statement is forbidden.

– Chafetz Chaim

## *The Great Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto - Part II*



### *The New Building Will be Yours*

Rabbi Sidney Elhadad is one of the leaders of the Montreal Jewish community, where he heads the Yavne Talmud Torah, a school that enrolls hundreds of students. Yavne was initially located in a very small building, where things were extremely cramped. Rabbi Elhadad planned on acquiring a new and larger building, but the price was so high that it was financially impossible. Furthermore, the heads of other schools were also thinking of purchasing it for themselves.

At the time, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita arrived in Canada for the inauguration of a Sefer Torah at the Yismach Moshe Kollel in honor of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us. For the occasion, a gala dinner was organized to benefit the institution, with the participation of the Rishon LeTzion (Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel), the

gaon Rabbi Shlomo Amar Shlita. The guest of honor was our teacher, Rav Pinto.

During the dinner, Rabbi Sidney Elhadad came up to Rav Pinto and said, "What are we going to do? We have hundreds of students, and it's the only orthodox Talmud Torah! We have no space for these students, these tinokot shel beit rabban [children in the house of study]!"

The Rav asked what he expected of him, and he said: "Not far from here, there's a new building for sale, but it's very expensive." The Rav asked him, "Do you believe in G-d?" When he said yes, the Rav continued: "Do you do everything for sake of Heaven?" "Yes," he replied.

The Rav then closed his eyes and told the head of the Yavne Talmud Torah: "If you have faith in G-d and you do everything for the sake of Heaven, the new building will be yours." He then tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry about anything. The new place will be yours, and with G-d's help I'll go there and give Torah classes to the students." G-d's mercy is infinite, for no one else purchased the building, and Rabbi Elhadad was able to acquire it with indescribable joy. Not long after Rosh Chodesh Elul, the month of mercy and selichot, our Rav traveled with great joy to this new building and gave a speech there, being the first to inaugurate the building with the teaching of Torah.

The main hall of the Talmud Torah was full from one end to the other with parents of students and noted guests. In his introduction, Rabbi Elhadad recounted the moving story of how he had benefited from Divine Providence. He told the audience that he initially didn't think that he would be able to purchase the building. However the Rav's blessing had encouraged him, pushing him to make a bid and successfully purchase the building.

After his speech, our Rav received the public. Rabbi Elhadad introduced him to his mother-in-law, who had lost her sight and was declared medically blind. He asked the Rav to give her a blessing, for she really needed help in order to walk.

Our Rav said to him, "At the next end of Shabbat [Parsha Shoftim, Elul 5], the day of my father's Hilloula, Rabbi Moshe Aharon, may his merit protect us, may it be G-d's will that we hear good news, and may our holy forefathers continue to demonstrate their power."

That's when the miracle occurred: At the end of the following Shabbat, Rabbi Elhadad arrived at the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, which took place in the same building where our Rav had given his speech. Immediately after the Rav's speech on that night, Rabbi Elhadad approached the Rav with tremendous joy and told him that since Friday, his mother-

in-law had opened her eyes and could see as well as anyone. In fact her doctors were amazed by this, unable to understand how such a miracle had occurred. Our Rav, who was accustomed to witnessing miracles by the merit of his holy forefathers, told Rabbi Elhadad: "From here we learn to have faith in G-d. It is He Who cures the sick. When we pray to Him, He sends a complete healing, and we are nothing but His envoys. The essential part involves you – you must pray to Hashem. That's not what doctors do, for doctors can only make an effort; it is G-d Who cures the sick among His people Israel. He is the real doctor. He tells the doctor what remedy to give, and without His help, nothing can happen."

### *Nothing is by Coincidence*

That same year, 5764, the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto took place in Montreal at the end of Shabbat Shoftim, Elul 5.

The following morning, our Rav had to travel from Montreal to New York, from where he was to fly to Eretz Israel.

At the time, the Rav didn't have his plane tickets with him. Instead, they were with someone who was supposed to bring them to him. Naturally, the Rav couldn't travel to New York without his plane tickets, and at that moment he lifted his eyes and said, "From where will my help come?" (Tehillim 121:1). All of a sudden, without any advance knowledge, someone arrived at the Hilloula, proceeded directly to the Rav, and asked him: "Do you intend on traveling to New York tomorrow and from there to Eretz Israel?" The Rav replied, "And what if that's the case?" The man responded, "Where are your tickets?" to which the Rav replied: "I don't have them with me." Affectionately the man said: "In that case, you should know that your tickets are at my house, and I'll bring them to you right away."

It was truly extraordinary! The man hadn't been invited to the Hilloula, so how did this happen all of a sudden? It was nothing other than Divine Providence. An hour and a half later, he returned with plane tickets in hand.

From that time on, our Rav spoke words of wisdom to him: "We are taught that nothing happens by coincidence, and that everything comes about by G-d's will. A person can't say that everything happens simply by chance. If he does, then he will never cleave to Hashem and never have genuine faith in Him. A person must see G-d's hand in everything, and the more that he does, the more he will cleave to Him. He will then see the miracles and wonders that Hashem does for him each day. It is not without reason that people lose much, for they do not have great faith in Hashem." In this regard, we should point out that one individual would constantly come to see the Rav for advice, and the Rav always told him to perform a certain mitzvah to achieve success. In amazement, the man asked the Rav: "What relationship is there between this mitzvah and the success that I seek?" He replied, "Perform the mitzvah and you'll succeed." After the Rav insisted several times, the man

eventually performed the mitzvah in its entirety, and as a result he experienced great success. When he returned to the Rav and told him about it, the Rav said: "You've seen for yourself that if you had performed this mitzvah earlier, when I first told you to, you would have succeeded long ago." For some people, the evil inclination does not allow them to understand and listen. All of this comes from the Satan, and only their stubbornness holds them back. However they must realize that everything comes from G-d, and that everything in the world is the result of Divine Providence on the individual level.

### *It's for the Best*

In the year 5738, the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto traveled with his son Rav David Hanania Pinto from Eretz Israel to several countries, visiting France, Morocco, England, and the United States.

This was the first time that Rabbi Moshe Aharon had returned to Morocco. Our Rav, who was accompanying him, was under great pressure. A heavy responsibility weighed upon his shoulders, for the tzaddik was diabetic. By the grace of G-d, and after special prayers for the success of their journey, they departed. For several months, our Rav accompanied his father on this special trip.

Our Rav recounts that while they were in Morocco, "I saw and heard all the problems that people came to my father with. I was stunned to see how the tzaddik listened to the problems of the poor as well as the rich, and how he gave advice and encouraged them, instilling in them a complete faith in our heavenly Father. He told them that they didn't need to worry, that everything would go well, and that everything the Merciful One does is for the best. Even people who were not Jewish came in great number to receive the blessings and advice of my father, who would repeatedly say: "By the merit of my holy forefathers, may the Name of Heaven also be sanctified in the eyes of these non-Jews." Indeed, he blessed them, promised that their prayers would be answered, and told them that they did not need to worry about their problems.

In fact a year later, during another visit by Rabbi Moshe Aharon and our Rav to Morocco, everyone who had initially come to receive a blessing from the tzaddik for a particular problem – or for a blessing for their children, a cure for an illness, or for any kind of help – now returned to thank him for the miracle they had experienced on account of his blessing.

People recounted that as early as the month in which they received his blessing, their problems had been solved: A cure had arrived, a woman had conceived, resulting in a great sanctification of Hashem's Name throughout Morocco, even among non-Jews who had faith in the tzaddikim. In fact even important dignitaries and various government officials came to see the tzaddik to receive his blessing for their children, or to be promoted to a more important and honorable position.

Thus Hashem's Name was exalted and sanctified in the world.