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The Path to Follow

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THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH AND DAVID'S DYNASTY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d shall choose. From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself; you cannot place over yourself a foreign man, who is not your brother" (Devarim 17:15).

When we analyze the order given to the Jewish people to appoint a king, we must understand why exactly it was Judah who was chosen from among the tribes to carry this title. Although he was never actually a king, his brothers nevertheless considered him as one. The proof is that when Joseph dreamed that he would rule over the tribes, his brothers inflicted on him the punishment reserved for those who rebel against the king, personified in their eyes by Judah. This explains why they decided to kill him, as well as why they ended up casting him into a pit. That being the case, we need to understand why it was precisely Judah who was designated as the head of David's dynasty.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she named him Judah, declaring: "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem" (Bereshith 30:35). We may ask why she felt a need to thank G-d only upon the birth of her fourth son, not the previous ones. The answer is that she knew, through prophesy, that Judah would complete the Divine chariot with four sacred wheels: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. She understood that he would also participate in the construction of this chariot, for David never would have seen the light of day without Judah. She therefore named him Judah to express her gratitude to G-d for having given her a son who would be David's forefather (the name Judah [Yehudah] comes from *hoda'a* – gratitude).

Even though Judah himself never wore the crown, he embodied royalty because he was the ancestor of David's dynasty, being the first link in this illustrious chain. Hence the verse clearly indicates this to us: "He [Jacob] sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen" (Bereshith 46:28). This shows us that Jacob also considered his fourth son as the holder of royal power.

Furthermore, the letters of the Tetragrammaton are contained in Judah's name. Since G-d is the King of kings, it was decided in Heaven that Judah, who carried the Divine Name within his own, would also be king among men.

Most blessings begin with the words, "Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe." We can explain this formulation in the following way: If a person fully realizes, at the start of a blessing, that Hashem is his G-d, then he will become completely infused with the concept that G-d is the King of the universe, and that He reigns over him just as much as He reigns over others.

Clearing the Way for Truth

The name Judah can be understood in yet another way. Indeed, it also denotes confession, the ability to recognize the truth. Therein lay the essence of Judah, who bears the seal of truth. We see proof of this in the incident involving his daughter-in-law Tamar, when Judah confessed without hesitation to his involvement in the matter, which is also why he became worthy for all Jews (Yehudim) to carry his

name. Judah therefore cleared the way for us: A Jew is a person who can recognize the truth, even if it requires him to confess his wrongdoings and mistakes. The seal of truth sometimes requires him to know his place and his abilities, and to act accordingly. The Ramban explained the hardships that the Greeks inflicted on the Hasmoneans in the following way: Seeking the privileges of the tribe of Judah, though being Levites themselves, they somehow rejected the only responsibilities that their status conferred upon them. This family was entirely scattered for having usurped the crown of the tribe of Judah. The same applies to King Uzziah, who sought to burn incense in the Temple despite not being a kohen himself. Because he desired things that were beyond him – things that did not correspond to his position – he was punished with leprosy. This forced him into isolation, having to live outside the camp of Israel.

King Solomon

The Gemara tells us that because of King Solomon's sins, the Sages thought of including him among those who have no place in the World to Come, despite the fact that he repented and was forgiven. We have to ask ourselves why the Sages were so strict, such that they counted him among the evildoers who perpetrated the greatest wrongs upon the Jewish people.

King Solomon's sins centered precisely around his royal duties, such that after him the kingdom of Israel was divided and Jeroboam reigned over most of the tribes of Israel. Now Jeroboam was an ungodly man, encouraging the people to sin and commit idolatry, which led to a spiritual catastrophe. The Sages therefore believed that King Solomon was partly responsible for this decline, since had he not sinned, Jeroboam would not have ascended to the throne and the Jewish people would never have fallen into idolatry. Yet the Sages' decision was not accepted in Heaven, for David, Solomon's father, defended him by arguing that he married many women, acquired many horses, and amassed large amounts of gold only so as to defeat the forces of impurity that dwelled within these very three things.

As a result, because this impurity was held in check by holiness, Solomon could have become Mashiach and delivered the Jewish people, as the Ben Ish Hai teaches. The commentators explain that Solomon only married the daughters of kings in the hope that, through these marriages, he could conquer the impurity found among the nations of those kings. Along the same lines, Solomon only acquired many horses because those animals came from Egypt, and therefore he wanted to conquer the specific impurity of that nation. Likewise, gold contained impurities due to the sin of the golden calf, and Solomon sought to amass great amounts of gold in order to defeat its impurity. Nevertheless, and despite his noble intentions, Solomon was unable to overcome the calls of his evil inclination. Thus he succumbed to sins associated with being a Jewish king, for whom it is forbidden to have many wives, acquire numerous horses, and amass a large quantity of gold. Still, Heaven had compassion on him, and he was not counted among those who have no place in the World to Come, since his intentions were completely pure.

Speaking during Prayer

It is written, “Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates” (Devarim 16:8).

The gravity of the prohibition against speaking in synagogue, especially during prayer, has not yet been fully grasped by some of the faithful. The great shame resulting from chatting during prayer and the reading of the Torah generates serious accusations against us. An article was recently published that cites Rav Wozner Shlita as stating that, as we know, the spread of serious illnesses among the Torah-observant public is the result of contempt for the prohibition against speaking during prayer. Rav Wozner was given a Divine promise that when people would carefully avoid speaking during prayer, illnesses would end!

The following story is taken from the book *Barchi Nafshi*. It contains a great lesson, as well as tremendous encouragement, in regards to having the proper respect for prayer, the respect that it is due:

This story reached me from the yeshiva in which it took place. It contains several examples of contempt for the honor of the Torah, G-d help us.

There was a brazen boy at this yeshiva, and he was speaking in synagogue during the reading of the Torah. In fact he wasn't ashamed to be heard chatting out loud, to the point that his friends, who were standing nearby, couldn't hear the Chazan.

The boys asked him to be quiet, but he closed his ears and wouldn't listen. He continued talking incessantly, disturbing everyone around him. It was getting to the point where one of his friends decided to teach him a lesson, once and for all.

What did he do? He went to the Gabbai and asked him to give the boy an Aliyah on the following Shabbat, requesting that it be chamishi [the fifth Aliyah].

On the following Shabbat the Gabbai said, “Let him arise...” and announced the boy's name for the fifth aliyah. The boy was in mid-conversation, however, and didn't realize where they were in the reading. The boy who was behind the whole thing said to him, “You were called up for hagbah” [lifting the Torah]. He therefore approached the Sefer Torah, and before the eyes of hundreds of stunned individuals, took it in his hands and exclaimed: “This is the Torah that Moshe gave” and lifted it up!

When the boy realized what was happening, his shame was indescribable. As we said, this occurred in front of hundreds of yeshiva students, who either saw or heard about it, and for long afterwards the boy couldn't look at his friends in the eye.

His shame didn't stop with the reading of the Torah, for each time that the boy was near his friends, they would burst into laughter as they imitated him doing hagbah.

After this shameful incident, the boy came to his senses and realized what was expected of him. He therefore stopped talking during prayer.

However he went to find the other boy, the one who had set him up for the Aliyah, and said to him: “I'll never forgive you!”

The other boy did some soul searching before Yom Kippur, and wondered if he had done the right thing or instead should ask for forgiveness.

Not long before this incident, I met an honorable man who took advantage of every free moment to study Torah. He told me a similar story: In the synagogue where he prayed, there was a man who wouldn't stop talking during the reading of the Torah. Despite every request made for him to stop, he continued talking incessantly.

One day he was called up to the Torah, at which point the honorable man approached the Bimah, banged on it loudly, and proclaimed: “I protest here and now against this man who undermines the honor of the Torah by talking during its reading!”

In this case as well, the man who was talking told the honorable man that he wouldn't forgive him. Afterwards, however, he said that he would forgive him on one condition only: That he return to the Bimah and publicly proclaim that he regretted his actions and was withdrawing his criticism.

The honorable man had come to ask me if he should comply with this request, or if in fact he had acted correctly and did not require forgiveness.

I thought about it and told him that he should do as he was asked and return to the Bimah. Yet instead of saying that he regretted his actions and was withdrawing his criticism against the incessant talking, he should proclaim that he was seeking forgiveness from the Sefer Torah for having waited so long to express this criticism, and for not acting sooner!

In regards to the chazara [repetition] of the Chazan, the Shulchan Aruch states: “We must not speak mundane words while the Chazan is repeating the prayer. And if one has spoken, he is a sinner; he has committed an intolerable sin and must be reprimanded” (Orach Chaim 124:11).

Now if we compare the reading of the Torah with the repetition of the Chazan, we must reprimand the person who speaks. However we must do so gently, considering the best way in which to reprimand the person in question. The Smag writes that this also includes shaming him (Smag 122).

We see that in the first case, when the boy was shamed by means of the hagbah, it was perhaps not what the Shulchan Aruch intended. This is because the shame that the boy experienced was enormous, and for such matters we must ask permission from the Beit Din or the local Rav.

However the honorable man's reprimand seems to have been issued in precisely the right way, which is why forgiveness was not required in his case.

Let's consider another incident, one involving the Rav of a certain community in the United States. This community is considered one of the wealthiest in the entire country.

There as well, people had become accustomed to speaking during the reading of the Torah. The Rav therefore reproached the members of the community and firmly demanded an end to their chatting. However the situation didn't change.

One particular Shabbat, after the reading of the Torah had begun, the chatting among the faithful could be heard throughout the magnificent synagogue. After two or three aliyahs, the Rav decided to act: He ordered the Sefer Torah rolled up and returned to the ark, and that they immediately begin reciting Yekum Purkan [the first prayer after the Torah reading].

“You don't have the right to hear the words of the Torah,” the Rav firmly told the talkative members of the congregation. This truly shook them, and ever since that Shabbat, the talking has completely ceased.

I sent a message to this American Rav, telling him that he had done what a responsible Rav must do by fulfilling the command, “You shall fear no man.” I also congratulated him profusely.

We must draw a lesson from this and commit ourselves to not speaking. This applies not only during the reading of the Torah and the repetition of the Chazan, but to the entire prayer service as well, avoiding mundane subject in synagogue.

It will then be transformed into a place of sanctity for us, creating an opportunity for all of our prayers to be accepted before the Throne of Glory.

The Role of Officers

It is written, “Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates” (Devarim 16:8).

Rabbi Elazar Ben Shamua said: “If there are officers, then there are judges; but if there are no officers, there are no judges!”

How so? Two people present themselves before a judge, who acquits the innocent and convicts the guilty. Both people leave. Yet if they refuse to comply with the verdict, what can the judge do?

This is why Hashem says, “Judges and officers shall you appoint,” so that those who refuse to obey the orders of the judges will obey the officers, whose function is to administer justice.

Likewise it is written, “David administered justice and kindness to his entire people” (2 Samuel 8:15), which is followed by: “Joab son of Zeruiah was in command of the army” (v.16). What’s the connection between the two? What does Joab have to do with administering justice? Rabbi Eliezer teaches us that without the stick that was Joab, David would never have been able to administer justice. – Midrash Tanhuma

Judging Yourself First

It is written, “Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates” (Devarim 16:8).

Rabbi Hanina Ben Elazar had a tree, and some of its branches fell into his neighbor’s field. One day a man came to Rabbi Hanina’s court and complained: “Someone’s tree is leaning onto my field!”

Rabbi Hanina replied, “Go and return tomorrow.” The man replied, “You always pass judgment on the same day, so why are you making me wait another day?” What did Rabbi Hanina do? He immediately sent workers to cut down the branches from his own tree that were encroaching on his neighbor’s field.

The next day, the same man returned to see him, along with the neighbor whose tree branches were leaning onto his field. The Rav said to the owner of the tree: “You must cut down your tree branches. The man answered, “Why, you yourself have a tree with branches falling into someone else’s field!” Rabbi Hanina replied: “Go out and look. What you see in my field, make sure to do in your own!”

The man immediately left and did as the Rav said. Hence it is written, “Judges and officers,” so that no fault can be found with the judge himself.

– Midrash Tanhuma

Loud and Clear

It is written, “For the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise” (Devarim 16:19).

Rabbi Israel Ben Elisha said, “See how serious bribery is! One day, someone offered me the first of the shearing of his flock. Now this very same person had a dispute with someone else, and he had to present himself before the judges. I happened to be there, standing by the side, and I thought to myself: ‘If he presents such and such an argument to the judges, he can win his case.’ I hoped for such an outcome, even though he had only given me what was my rightful share as a kohen, not a bribe. My heart leaned in his favor every time I saw him. Even when he appeared before the judges, I asked after him, worried if he had been found guilty. Just to show you how serious bribery is – how bribery blinds the wise – I had only received what was rightfully mine, and I only took what belonged to me. Nevertheless, I hoped that he would be acquitted! How much more does this apply to someone who accepts a bribe!”

– Midrash Tanhuma

Wicked from the Outset

It is written, “If there will be found among you in one of your cities, which Hashem your G-d gives you, a man or woman who commits what is evil in the eyes of Hashem your G-d, to violate His covenant, and he will go and serve gods of others and prostrate himself to them, or to the sun or to the moon or to any host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it will be told to you and you will hear; then you shall investigate well, and behold – it is true, the testimony is correct – this abomination was done in Israel” (Devarim 17:2-4).

Why is it written, “If there will be found among you,” rather than simply, “If there will be among you,” as we read further: “If there will be among you a man who will not be clean because of a nocturnal occurrence” (Devarim 23:11) and many other places? Furthermore, why is it written: “and it will be told to you and you will hear, then you shall investigate well and behold – it is true, the testimony is correct – this abomination was done in Israel”? If these people had indeed devoted themselves to idolatry, as is evident from the entire passage, why does the Torah demand an investigation? We cannot say that it is because the death sentence cannot be imposed without witnesses, for the passage reads: “It is true, the testimony is correct.” This appears to mean that there’s no need for an investigation, since witnesses were already present!

More still, what is the meaning of the expression, “this abomination was done in Israel”? What does specifying “Israel” add? Could this abomination have been committed other than among the Jewish people? Our Sages teach, “We have a tradition that a good man does not become bad. But does he not? Is it not written, ‘But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and practices corruption’ [Ezekiel 18:24]? Such a man was originally wicked. However one who was originally righteous does not do so” (Berachot 29a). We may therefore deduce that if you see someone practicing idolatry, he was wicked from the outset, even if you were not aware of it until now, for he was sinning in secret. Hence the passage states, “If there will be found” – for finding implies something that already exists, but is hidden from sight, something that we fail to see. Here it means a man or woman who have sinned their entire life, but throughout the years no one knew, meaning that their misdeeds were never discovered.

Hence the verse commands us, “and it will be told to you and you will hear, then you shall investigate well, and behold – it is true, the testimony is correct – this abomination was done in Israel.” That is, although their crimes were ignored until the present time, do not say that they have become evil just now, and that they were righteous beforehand. Research the matter and investigate. Carry out your inquiry and you will discover that they committed such abominations even while being considered among the Children of Israel – and not only now, after they excluded themselves from the community by professing heresy and practicing idolatry – but before!

Guard Your Tongue

A Terrible Lesson

One who speaks ill of his fellow transgresses a prohibition, as it is written: “You must not go about as a talebearer among your people” (Vayikra 19:16). This is a grave sin that causes the death of numerous Jewish lives, which is precisely why the very next words in this verse are: “You shall not stand over [i.e., allow the shedding of] the blood of your fellow.” We learn this lesson by what resulted from the talebearing of Doeg the Edomite, which provoked the murder of all the inhabitants of Nov, the city of the kohanim. – Chafetz Chaim

The Memory of the Tzaddik is a Blessing

The Great Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto - Part III

This week marks the Hilloula of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us. A tzaddik for whom miracles were commonplace, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto was the beloved son of the venerated tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, may his merit protect us, and the father of our teacher the gaon and tzaddik David Hanania Pinto Shlita, may his merit render us worthy of blessings and deliverance.

In the Gemara, the Sages cite Bar Kaparah in explaining: "The work [i.e., deeds] of the tzaddikim is greater than the work [i.e., creation] of heaven and earth" (Ketubot 5a). This is a teaching that emerged from the Beit HaMidrash of the Tanna Bar Kaparah, namely that learning and contemplating the deeds of the tzaddikim has greater spiritual value than the creation of heaven and earth! Although this teaching has a deeper significance, we cannot disregard its direct and simple meaning, namely that we have a duty to learn from the deeds of the tzaddikim, to study their behavior and virtues, and to emulate them.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto came into this world in the year 5672. He was born into a holy and pure home, being the offshoot of a dynasty of pious men, tzaddikim who worked miracles, brought deliverance, and shined their sanctity and purity upon the Jewish people. He was another link in the Pinto family, whom everyone knew and respected.

From his early youth, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto adopted a holy and ascetic way of life, one that he had seen in his father, the saintly Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan. He received his education and most of his Torah teachings from his father, as well as from the gaon Rabbi Yosef Ben Attar Zatzal, a great talmid chacham.

He reached great heights in the service of Hashem and adopted numerous sacred customs from his father's home, customs that he conserved and even improved upon.

One of these special customs was to be extremely careful about what he allowed his eyes to see. As we know from our holy works, the essence of man's holiness and purity is focused on what he sees. A person who protects his eyes so that they see nothing prohibited will merit seeing Heaven. The tzaddik, may his merit protect us, was extremely careful in guarding his eyes. Even when thousands of people were coming and going from his home, he was very careful not to look at women's faces. Even when the Rebbetzin Mazal entered his room, he didn't recognize her!

Rav Moshe Aharon traveled to England in the year 5738. One day, after Rav Israel Melloul's visit, Rav Moshe Aharon went to the optician with his son, Rav David Hanania Pinto. Rav Moshe Aharon led the way, walking like someone who knew where he was going, without anyone guiding him. Furthermore, he didn't even look at where he was going, for he never raised his eyes from the ground to see where he was walking. His eyes were always looking at the ground when he was at home, and all the more so on the street. Incredibly, without looking at anything at all, he clearly knew how to get to the optician's office, despite never having gone there before!

This virtue – the ability to guard one's eyes and thoughts – made the tzaddik worthy of numerous and awe-inspiring revelations concerning the coming of Mashiach. One day he heard his father Rabbi Haim Pinto say, "There will come a day when people will go to the moon; there will be great wars, and the whole world will want to destroy us, but Israel will always triumph. From there the end will come, king Mashiach and deliverance will arrive, and the house of Jacob will be saved from all its misfortunes."

Happy is the One Immersed in Torah Study

The tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon would immerse himself in the study of Torah for many hours without interruption, to the point that he only washed his clothes once a week, on Friday afternoon in honor of Shabbat.

In regards to this subject, it is said that after washing his shirt, Rabbi Moshe Aharon would immediately wear it, still wet. Yet because of the heat generated from

his body due to his intense efforts in Torah study – both physical and spiritual – it would dry almost instantly!

Rabbi Moshe Aharon was especially well-known for the purity of his service of Hashem. Among other things, he committed himself, upon the orders of his father the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, to shut himself in his home for 40 years. During these four decades, he studied Torah with tremendous intensity, inconceivable for the mind to comprehend. It was there, between the four walls of his tiny home, that he elevated himself in holiness and purity, without any connection to the outside world and without yielding to material or bodily needs. His will and desires were completely focused on serving Hashem.

Nothing To Worry About

Not long before his passing, Rabbi Moshe Aharon was afflicted by terrible suffering. As he was preparing food for Shabbat, as he normally did, a container of hot water spilled its full contents on his legs. The boiling water seriously burned both of his legs, and his screams rose to the heavens.

At the time, his son Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita was in Los Angeles, where he learned that the tzaddik's life was in danger.

As soon as he learned of the news, he flew to Tel Aviv and proceeded directly from the airport to Hadassah Medical Center, where he found his father unconscious. With great sadness, the doctors informed him that they would have to amputate the tzaddik's legs in order to save his life.

After conducting several tests, they confirmed that amputating his legs was necessary. On the night before the planned operation, however, Rabbi Moshe Aharon opened his eyes and told everyone around him: "You have nothing to worry about. The doctors will never be able to remove my legs, which Hashem gave me as a gift on the day of my birth, and which I've used to serve Him."

After he had spent 40 years enclosed in his home in Morocco without ever leaving, his legs brought him to synagogue every Shabbat. There he had prayed to the Creator for the coming of Mashiach, until he had a dream in which his father, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, appeared and said that the time had come for him to go to Eretz Israel.

His legs had brought him to Eretz Israel, a place where he built a Beit HaMidrash. From all over the world, men and women had started to visit him for blessings, which as we know bore fruit because of his great holiness and righteousness. Hashem is close to those who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. Hashem always accepted his prayers, and his legs were not going to be amputated.

In fact, that's exactly how things turned out. When it came time for the doctors to wheel Rabbi Moshe Aharon into the operating room, one of them noticed a tremendous improvement in the Rav's legs. He was also taken aback by the radiance of the Rav's saintly face, so much so that he immediately asked his assistants to bring him all of the Rav's test results.

After all of Rabbi Moshe Aharon's test results were brought to him, additional tests were performed. Something extraordinary then happened, a great miracle, for all the previous tests – which had been meticulously carried out – clearly showed that his legs had been severely injured and were liable to kill him if not amputated. Yet now, new tests showed the opposite! Blood was flowing through his legs, and they were gaining strength!

They immediately wheeled him out of the operating room and back into his room. When he awoke, he began moving his legs and said: "You see, there was no reason to take away my legs, which accomplished the mitzvah of honoring Shabbat." The Holy One, blessed be He, does not hinder a person when he is performing a mitzvah, and all the more when it comes to the mitzvah of honoring Shabbat! Rabbi Moshe Aharon then started walking in his hospital room, all while chanting piyutim of Rabbi Haim Pinto and emotionally singing songs of praise to thank the Creator of the universe for sparing his two legs, preventing them from being buried before his death.