

The Path To Follow

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Under the Direction of Rabbi David H. Pinto Shlita
 www.hevratpinto.org | hevratpinto@aol.com
 Editor-in-Chief: Hanania Soussan
 32 rue du Plateau 75019 Paris, France • Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 • Fax: +331 42 06 00 33

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Principles Of The Fear Of Heaven

It is written, "Ve'eleh [And these] are the ordinances that you shall place before them" (*Shemot* 21:1). Rashi explains: "Wherever *eleh* [these] is used, it replaces what was previously stated; *ve'eleh* [and these] adds to what was previously stated. Just as what was previously stated was from Sinai, these were also from Sinai." In reality, how could anything think of not observing the social laws, even if they were not given on Sinai? In fact why does the Torah need to tell us that just as the other laws were given on Sinai, these were also given on Sinai?

The words of the Zohar also require an explanation: "These are the rules concerning reincarnation, the judgments of the souls, by which each of them receives its appropriate punishment" (Zohar II:94a). The comparison made by the Zohar between the social laws and reincarnation is equally mysterious, all of which we will attempt to explain as best possible.

Our Sages say: "Rabbi Nehemiah explained, 'The advantage of land is supreme' [*Kohelet* 5:8] means that even things which appear to you as additions to the actual revelation – for example, the laws of fringes, *tefillin*, and *mezuzah* – are also included in the revelation, as may be inferred from the fact that it says, 'Hashem gave me the two stone tablets, inscribed with the finger of G-d, and upon them according to all the words that Hashem spoke' [*Devarim* 9:10]. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained: 'It says, "upon them according to all the words," and it is also written, "all the commandment that I command you" [ibid. 8:1]. ... [This implies that every teaching,] even what a faithful student in the future will say before his teacher, were all conveyed to Moshe on Sinai' " (*Vayikra Rabba* 22:1).

Our Sages have explicitly said that every *halachic* teaching from Torah scholars in every generation was conveyed to Moshe on Sinai. Therefore why does Rashi feel the need to specifically tell us this about the social laws? It seems that he had another intention, namely to teach us about man's duty in this world, for the evil inclination will sometimes try to seduce man and distance him from Hashem's *mitzvot* by telling him: "You only have to fulfill what was explicitly given on Sinai. Anything that was not given on Sinai, you do not have to fulfill."

What do we find that was not specifically given on Sinai, and yet we are still obligated to fulfill? These are the fences established by Torah scholars in every generation, fences meant to distance man from sin.

Regarding the statement, "Make a fence around the Torah" (*Pirkei Avoth* 1:1), Rabbeinu Yonah comments: "As it is said, 'You shall safeguard My charge' [*Vayikra* 18:30]. 'Provide a charge to My charge' [*Yebamot* 21a]. Fences are an excellent, essential protection for *mitzvot*, preventing G-d-fearing people from stumbling over them. These fences are decrees instituted by our Sages. One who acts in accordance with these decrees shows a greater love for G-d than one who observes only Torah *mitzvot*. ... Taking special care to observe them indicates greater reverence for the fear of Heaven than observing a *mitzvah* itself. One who only keeps the basic *mitzvah* as outlined in the Torah, without the rabbinical decrees that protect him from transgressing it...is not concerned with breaking fences, despite the verse telling us: 'One who breaks a fence will be bitten by a snake' [*Kohelet* 10:8]. The words of the Sages are a foundation and support for the fear of Heaven, which is the essence of the world and the basis for all good attributes, whereas all the *mitzvot* are secondary to it."

He Will Eventually Return

This is what Rashi is alluding to by saying that *ve'eleh* adds to what was previously stated. That is, just as the previous laws were given on Sinai, these were also given on Sinai, meaning that a person must not say: "I will fulfill the 613 *mitzvot* given by G-d, but I won't bother with the fences that the Sages added to the Torah *mitzvot*." Just as it is a person's duty to fulfill the *mitzvot* written in the Torah, it is also his duty to fulfill the decrees of the Sages, which were also given to Moshe on Sinai. If someone fulfills *mitzvot* as is, he will eventually grow accustomed to them, as it is written: "like rote learning" (*Isaiah* 29:13). If a person adds more stringencies to the Torah's *mitzvot* than what is written, he will never observe *mitzvot* by rote in his life, for a new *mitzvah* will present itself to him each day.

Let us therefore say that whoever fails to heed the decrees of the Sages, it is as if he has done nothing, for he will end up transgressing the essence of the Torah. At that point, his soul will be reincarnated and return to this world because he did not pay attention to all the *mitzvot*. This is what Rashi was thinking of when he said that *ve'eleh* adds to what was previous stated (*i.e.*, that the decrees of the Sages are also from Sinai), and one who ignores them will eventually return to this world. Hence the Zohar states that it deals with the rules of reincarnation.

Rashi also gives us some advice on how to avoid the rote fulfillment of *mitzvot*. The term *eleh* replaces what comes before it, and *ve'eleh* comes to add to what was previously said. Every day, a person must ascend to a higher level than the previous day, and yesterday's service should seem of little value to him. Likewise in regards to serving Hashem, his service of the previous day should seem as if it was done by rote. That said, how can it replace what came before? By adding to what came before.

Boasting Brings Destruction

The passage on the social laws comes immediately after the passage dealing with the laws of the Altar. This tells us that just as the Torah prohibited the use of a metal sword to cut stones for the Altar, commanding the building of an Altar of earth, likewise man (who resembles the Altar) must not seek to boast of the Torah. Instead he must conduct himself with humility, like earth, which is lowly.

It is forbidden to study Torah in order to gain the respect of others, as it is written: "Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-glory, nor a spade with which to dig" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:5). Now a sword represents pride (*Devarim* 33:29), the term *cherev* (sword) being derived from the same root as *churban* (destruction), for one who boasts of his Torah study brings destruction, as Rashi explains: "The Altar makes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, therefore the cutter and destroyer shall not come upon it" (Rashi on *Shemot* 20:22). If it is a question of greatness, just as the first came from Sinai, these also come from Sinai. Now Sinai symbolizes self-annulment, for Mount Sinai merited the honor of the Torah being given upon it, for it had humbled itself before Hashem.

From here we learn that if a person observes the decrees enacted by the Torah scholars in every generation, and if he conducts himself with humility and adds stringencies and fences to the *mitzvot*, this provides solid proof that he fears G-d. This is because his deeds prove that he recognizes that the entire Torah was given on Sinai, including the words of the Sages, and that they are part of its essence.

It is written, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor among you..." (*Shemot* 22:24).

Throughout his life, Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen *Zatzal* of Radin (famous for his book *Chafetz Chaim*) concerned himself with *chesed*, which was in his blood and in his soul. He was constantly looking for ways to perform *chesed*, be it with his person or with his money, and he even felt the need to write an entire book on the subject. Indeed, it is every Jew's responsibility to strengthen himself in this virtue. He entitled his book *Ahavat Chesed* ("Love of Lovingkindness"), a well-deserved name, for it infuses its readers with a love for *chesed* and its reward in the World to Come.

In one section, the Chafetz Chaim deals with an often-recurring subject, namely lending objects or utensils:

"Everyone is capable of performing this type of *chesed*, since even small articles, household utensils, or a comb is included. *Chazal* have declared that the punishment is greater for laxity in respect to the white threads of the *tzitzit* than the blue (*techelet*). The blue threads are expensive, and not everyone can afford them. Not so in regard to the white. The same applies for us. In Heaven, no demands will be made of a person in financial straits if he could not lend his friend the large sums he needed to support himself. However a person will be brought to account for the small article that he could have helped his neighbor with by lending it to him, but did not because of his laziness.

"Likewise for us, everyone can give his neighbor the benefit of these small items. Even if the person seeking such a favor were wealthy, one is obligated to extend him this courtesy. How much more is one certainly obligated to lend such articles to a poor person, since the latter might not be able to afford to purchase them....

"There are even some people who, though not using an article at the time, refuse to lend it because of their stinginess. They resent others using their possessions. How despicable is this trait. We have already explained how vile it is and what punishment it entails.

"Even people who are not stingy by nature will often fail to lend their possessions due to sheer laziness, or for some other trivial reason. ... [T]heir souls have still never been illuminated by the light of *chesed*, and they have no idea of its value. Were they to realize its great worth, they would allow nothing to interfere with their exercise of this virtue in all their affairs. They would rejoice whenever the Almighty granted them an opportunity to be good and compassionate towards their fellow man" (*Ahavat Chesed*, part II, ch. 22).

Even if, for whatever reason, they do not have the ability to help others when asked, the Chafetz Chaim advises them to speak kind words to the person asking for help. They should demonstrate benevolence and make him feel as if they would love to help, but cannot do so now for whatever reason. In *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* we read, "One who greets his fellowman with benevolence, even if he has nothing to give him, Scripture accounts it as if he has given him all the gifts in the world."

The booklet *Amud HaChesed* ("The Pillar of Lovingkindness"), which accompanies the book *Ahavat Chesed*, recounts a terrible incident witnessed by the Chafetz Chaim himself, and which was told after his death:

A man had several sons, but they all died in their youth. In his misery, he went to see the Chafetz Chaim and explained his sorrow to him. He asked for some advice and a *segula* for having offspring.

The Chafetz Chaim replied, "I do not know any *segulot*. However my advice is that you open a *gemach* [free-loan fund] in town, and perhaps by the merit of the *chesed* you will do for others, Hashem will do good to you and grant you offspring."

The man followed the Rav's advice and immediately invested his time and energy into performing deeds of *chesed*. He established a free-loan fund and began lending people money in exchange for guarantees. Every three years he also committed himself, upon the reading of the verse "when you lend money to My people," to hosting a *mitzvah* meal for all the members of the community in order to strengthen his commitment to *chesed*.

After three years, the man's wife gave birth to a son, and the meal for the *Bris* was scheduled at the exact same time as the *mitzvah* meal. This was a sign and a witness that it was certainly the merit of the man's *chesed* that had helped him.

Thus over the course of the years, the man's wife gave birth to other healthy children, to everyone's great joy.

Eventually this man forgot the kindnesses of the Holy One, blessed be He, and one night he went to see the Chafetz Chaim and asked him to put someone else in charge of the *gemach*. The man explained that he was very busy and the *gemach* was constantly growing, without mentioning the fact that some people were questioning his honesty.

At first the Chafetz Chaim refused his request, since there was no one else who could direct the *gemach* with as much loyalty and devotion. Yet after the man implored him numerous times, he was obligated to accept his request and put someone else in charge of the fund.

That same night, as soon as the man left the Rav's home all content, something terrible happened. One of his children, sleeping in bed at the time, stopped breathing and died.

The grief-stricken man was thoroughly convinced that it was the *chesed* he had performed that gave his children life. He immediately and firmly decided to take over the *gemach* once again, devoting himself to running it as before.

In describing this incident in his booklet, the Chafetz Chaim states that it occurred before "a scholar." As we have said, this "scholar" was none other than the Chafetz Chaim himself, but he hid his identity on account of his humility. He ends the account by saying, "This is why a man must cleave to this *mitzvah* and not part from it."

Guarde Your Tongue

Do Not Get Ensnared

Another situation in which it is a *mitzvah* to listen is when an individual approaches a person and wants to complain about what someone did to him. This applies only when the listener knows that by listening to the speaker, he can quell his anger and prevent him from recounting his words to others, such that peace is enhanced among the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the listener should be very careful not to firmly believe what he hears, but to question its accuracy so as not to get ensnared in the sin of accepting *Lashon Hara*.

Only After Six Years

It is written, “His master shall bore through his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him forever” (*Shemot* 21:6).

In the Gemara, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai explains this verse in the following way: “How is the ear different than any other part of the body? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: This ear, which heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, ‘The Children of Israel are slaves to Me’ – yet went out and acquired a master for himself – let it be pierced!” (*Kiddushin* 22b).

In his book *Tzafnat Pa’aneach*, the *gaon* Rabbi Yosef of Trani expresses his surprise at Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai’s explanation. He states that if the slave’s ear is pierced because he went to acquire a master for himself, the piercing should have occurred immediately – as soon as the slave went to acquire a master for himself – not after six years had passed!

The *gaon* Rabbi Shlomo Algazi, the Av Beit Din of Jerusalem, answers this question by saying that because the Halachah states that only a slave who has been sold by the Beit Din can have his ear pierced (not when someone sells himself of his own free will), there is no difficulty here. Once he is sold by the Beit Din, we cannot say that he has acquired a master for himself. However once six have passed and he can leave on his own without owing his master anything – and yet he decides to stay and serve him – only then can we say that he has acquired a master for himself. Hence his ear is pierced at that point in time.

Intentions Notwithstanding

It is written, “If you cause him pain, for he shall cry out to Me, I shall surely hear his outcry” (*Shemot* 22:22).

When Penina caused pain to Hanna, the Sages say that she was acting solely for the sake of Heaven. Although Penina wanted to push Hanna to pray to Hashem and ask Him for offspring, she was still punished and all her sons died.

The Vilna Gaon explains that here, the Torah decreed that even “if you cause him pain” so he will “cry out to Me” – meaning that your sole intention in causing him pain is to push him to cry out and beseech Hashem – it is still a sin. In that case, “I shall surely hear his outcry” and you will certainly be punished for it.

Leave Them

It is written, “Cast it to the dogs” (*Shemot* 22:30).

The Midrash cites a story told by Rabbi Aibu: There was once a butcher in Sepphoris who caused Jews to eat forbidden meat. One year on the eve of Yom Kippur, he ate and drank, became inebriated, and went up to the rooftop, from which he fell and died. Dogs began licking his blood.

People asked Rabbi Chanina, “Is it permitted to remove his body from before the dogs?”

He replied, “It is written, ‘Holy men shall you be to Me. You shall not eat the flesh of any animal that was torn in the field – cast it to the dogs’ [*Shemot* 22:30]. This man stole from the dogs, and he also caused Jews to eat forbidden meat. Leave them – they are eating what is theirs” (*Vayikra Rabba* 5:6).

Majority and Minority

It is written, “You shall not follow the multitude to do evil [i.e., rule in favor of the majority – *Sanhedrin* 2a]” (*Shemot* 23:2).

In his book *Get Pashut*, Rabbi Moshe ben Habib (the *Rishon*

LeTzion) describes a great principle regarding this subject. He notes that ruling in favor of the majority only applies when opinions differ concerning a certain law in cases presented to the Sanhedrin or rabbinical court; when an issue has been placed before the rabbis, then the principle of the majority applies.

However this ruling is not immutable for all the generations, such that no other Beit Din can debate the rulings of its predecessors, for the Torah states: “To the judge who will be in those days” (*Devarim* 17:9). If another Beit Din comes up with another reason for ruling differently – and even if they offer no other reason, but simply adopt the minority opinion – the ruling is to be in favor of their view, not the majority.

In light of this important principle, Rabbi Moshe ben Habib solves the astonishment of several Acharonim in regards to instances in which rulings are taken in favor of the minority opinion (*Tosafot Moed Katan* 20a: “In many places a ruling is taken according to the minority”), whereas Scripture says that we must go according to the majority.

As we have said, the answer is that a ruling in favor of the majority is valid only temporarily, not for all the generations.

In the Light of the Parsha

A Hebrew Slave: Enslaved to the Evil Inclination

It is written, “When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work for six years” (*Shemot* 21:2).

We must point out that a “Hebrew slave” is a “slave” who is “Hebrew.” Yet since he is not a slave at the time he is bought, but rather a free man, why does the verse not say: “When you buy a Hebrew to work”? The expression, “When you buy a Hebrew slave” is only accurate if he buys him from someone who already owns him as a slave!

I would like to explain this by saying that in reality, every Jew is Hashem’s slave. We may therefore say that every Jew is a Hebrew slave.

We may even say that this man, by following the advice of his evil inclination and stealing, allowed his evil inclination to rule over him. He therefore acquired a master for himself in the form of the evil inclination, which is why the Torah calls him a Hebrew slave, for he served the evil inclination even before he was sold as a slave.

We may likewise explain this verse allegorically, according to what is written in our holy books, namely that a person’s spiritual state is never static, for he is either spiritually ascending or descending. He must therefore always pay attention to ascending, for otherwise he will descend against his will. The slave mentioned in the verse is a man who went lower and lower, at first serving the evil inclination and stealing, and then being sold as a slave and saying, “I love my master, my wife, and my children – I shall not go free.” All this is contrary to what he heard on Mount Sinai, as Rashi tells us. This is probably what the Torah is alluding to by stating, “*Ve’eleh* [And these] are the laws” (*Shemot* 21:1), the term *ve’eleh* adding to what came before. This hints to man that he must always add to the commitment he took on Mount Sinai to be Hashem’s servant. He must rise from level to level in the service of Hashem, for in this way he will no longer descend and enslave himself to men.

Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim – The Aderet

During the festival of Shavuot in the year 5603, twin boys were born to Rabbi Binyamin Rabinowitz, the Rav of Vilkomir. An extraordinary *talmid chacham*, Rav Binyamin would normally complete the study of the Talmud every month. These twins were Eliyahu David (later known as the Aderet) and Tzvi Yehudah.

From their youth, the twins studied Torah with great devotion, demonstrating prodigious abilities. Like most rabbinic households in Lithuania at the time, they lived amid tremendous poverty, but the Torah was their joy and they studied it day and night. In their youth, they wrote many Torah commentaries over the course of their studies. During that time, people began to abandon the observance of Torah in Lithuania, a process led by the *Maskilim* [followers of the Enlightenment Movement]. However Rav Binyamin waged a firm battle against them, raising his sons in an environment of sanctity and devotion to Torah study. In this setting, the story is told of what happened after Rabbi Eliyahu became engaged: The mother of his fiancée died, and her father married a woman from the great city of Vilna. This woman had a preference for the teachings of the *Maskilim*, and therefore she changed the customs in their home. Following this, Rav Binyamin broke off his son's engagement.

In his memoirs, the Aderet recounts: "The new wife had opinions that were absolutely contrary to those held by her husband up to that point. She introduced new customs to him, which is why [my father] broke off the engagement.... He realized that it was definitely not fitting for me to marry the daughter of this man, and to eat in his home while he had yielded to another generation." After a certain time, the Aderet became engaged to the daughter of a *talmid chacham* who worked as a merchant in the city of Ponevezh (Lithuania's fifth largest city, with a majority Jewish population). He therefore went to live with his father-in-law in Ponevezh. At first his wife worked in commerce while he continued to study Torah, but eventually the residents of Ponevezh recognized that he was a great *gaon*. When their current Rav left the city, they appointed the Aderet, who was only 32 years old at the time, as his successor.

Who Gives His Wisdom to Those Who Fear Him

We find a concrete example of how great Torah figures viewed his wisdom and righteousness by the respect paid to him by the leader of the generation, the Netziv of Volozhin. When these two men met in person, the Netziv gave him the blessing: "Who has given of His wisdom to those who fear Him," a blessing reserved solely for the exception men of the generation. The Chafetz Chaim, who was older than the Aderet by a few years, requested his approbation for several of his books, for he considered him to be a *gaon* and a *tzaddik*.

The Aderet put a great effort into fulfilling his responsibilities as a Rav, not hesitating to address the rich as he collected money for the poor. When kosher food was needed for Jews who had been drafted into the king's army, he worked for several days without stop. He visited the sick and did many good deeds, while at the same time building and strengthening synagogues in addition to constantly learning Torah with great diligence.

Many fires broke out in small towns around Lithuania, where the houses were made of wood, and he would often travel to towns and communities in order to collect money for the poor. It is said that the leaders of the Warsaw community offered him the position of Rav, but he declined and said that he would remain in Ponevezh. When he was asked about his refusal, he explained that whenever he

borrowed money to help the poor in Ponevezh, creditors would ask him for loan guarantees, and he showed them the offer made to him from Warsaw. This proved that if he wanted to, he could become the Rav of that great city, along with a much greater salary, meaning that he could repay whatever he borrowed. However if he had actually taken the position as the Rav of Warsaw, and if he then needed to borrow money for the poor of the city, he would no longer know what to tell his creditors, and no one would lend him any more money.

He Slept on Chairs

The Aderet and his wife experienced many hardships. They had twelve children, seven of whom died in childhood. If that wasn't enough, the Rav's salary was quite small, meaning that they lived in a state of poverty that grew continually worse. The leaders of the community often promised to increase his salary, but failed to keep their word. For many years, the Aderet would sleep on chairs in the room in which he kept his books, both because he had no bed and because there was no place in the house to put one.

Once, during the period when he had committed himself to providing for his young son-in-law (Rav Kook), a period that lasted several years, he was unable to find him a bed. Thus to keep his word, the Aderet took his own bed and gave it to him. This is apparently one of the reasons why the Chafetz Chaim, who was very fond of the Aderet and aware of his financial situation, advised Rav Kook to accept an offer made to him by the Zoimel community when he was only 22 years old, for it alleviated the Aderet's situation. Yet it seems that even after his bed returned, the Aderet was once again obligated to part with it in order to repay loans that he had incurred for the city's poor and sick members of his family. Thus he once again slept on chairs in the room that contained his books.

The leaders of the community paid no attention to his misfortunes. When his salary diminished to the point of becoming insignificant, the Aderet agreed to hear rabbinical offers from other communities. Hence after about 20 years as the Rav of Ponevezh, he eventually agreed to become the Rav of Mir, which possessed an important yeshiva despite being a small and poor city.

When the residents of Ponevezh learned of this, a tremendous cry arose. How could they allow their great Rav to leave them for such a small community? Not only did they promise to substantially increase his salary, they ordered coach drives and porters not to help him leave town. Faced with this new situation, and given that his livelihood would now be assured because his new salary in Ponevezh would be even greater than in Mir, the Aderet agreed to stay in Ponevezh. A certain number of rabbis (including the Sdei Chemed) were asked if the Aderet acted correctly in this regard, and they expressed the opinion that he was allowed to change his mind and remain in Ponevezh. However since the inhabitants of Mir did not agree with the Aderet's decision to renounce his commitment, he decided not to go back on his word. It is said that as the Aderet was about to stay in Ponevezh, he heard that a local cobbler renounced a commitment that he had made to hire someone because he heard that the Rav had been allowed to renounce his own commitment. The Aderet therefore declared, "I will not say in Ponevezh for any reason whatsoever, not even for all the promises in the world, without the permission of the residents of Mir."