

# The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

## Earning Money at a Time Meant for Torah Study Brings an Abomination into the Home

**I**t is written, "The graven images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver and gold upon them and take it for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to Hashem your G-d. You shall not bring an abomination into your home and become banned like it. You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned" (*Devarim* 7:25-26).

For those who entered Eretz Israel, the Torah imposed the duty of destroying the idols of the peoples, which they fashioned out of gold and silver. If anyone ever thought, "I will burn their idols but take their silver and gold," the Torah states: "You shall not covet the silver and gold upon them and take it for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it." This teaches us that if a person takes them, they will do him harm. One must not say, "I will take the silver and gold and distribute it to the poor," or "I will put it aside for the yeshiva." One who acts in this way desecrates Hashem's Name, for the nations will say: "The Children of Israel did not destroy idols, but changed their shape: They worship them as we worship them."

It is a basic principle that it is forbidden to benefit from idolatry in any way, even if our intentions are good. What is idolatry? It is anything that Hashem did not command. If we conduct ourselves in this way, trying to be smarter than Hashem's word, misfortune will eventually come upon us, as it did to Saul. In the Gemara our Sages say, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: 'Now go and smite Amalek' [I Samuel 15:3], he thought: 'If on account of one person the Torah said to perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more for all these people? If the people have sinned, what have the cattle done, and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done?' A celestial voice came forth and said, 'Be not be overly righteous' [*Kohelet* 7:16]" (*Yoma* 22b). From here we learn that although Saul's intentions were pure, Hashem still punished him and took his kingship away, for he could have fulfilled G-d's command and done nothing that did not adhere to His will.

When we modify G-d's word, we end up losing, which is what happened to Saul. Hence the Torah forbids us from taking anything pertaining to idolatry, lest the nations say: "These people succeed only because of the silver and gold from our idols, which they took." Furthermore, the Torah has warned us: "You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned." Just as we do not bring an abomination into our home, we must not bring silver and gold that comes from idolatry into our home, for Hashem has commanded us to burn them. Even if our intention is to give this money to *tzeddakah*, it is like a sin because this *tzeddakah* stems from a sin, as the Torah states in regards to another issue: "You shall not bring a harlot's fee or the price of a dog to the House of Hashem your G-d for any vow, for both of them are an abomination to Hashem your G-d" (*Devarim* 23:19).

From here we learn that when a person excessively seeks out money – which is like idolatry (see *Iggeret HaKodesh* at the end of the book *Noam Eliemelech*) – and he engages in business when he should be studying Torah, Scripture regards him to have taken silver and gold from idols. How so? For example, suppose that a person has set aside a time during the day in which to study Torah at the Beit

HaMidrash. If a business opportunity presents itself to him during this time, and passing it up may prevent him from earning a great deal of money, the Torah tells him: "You shall not bring an abomination into your home." In other words: Let this profitable deal go and lose the benefits, but do not forsake your Torah study. Better to lose the life of this temporary world than to lose the life of the World to Come.

A person must not say, "I will put a portion of this money aside for *tzeddakah*, and so it will be for *tzeddakah* that I will have neglected my Torah study." Even then, since he left the Beit HaMidrash for his business and not for *tzeddakah*, Hashem says: This money cannot be accepted, for it was earned during a time that should have been devoted to learning Torah. This money stems from theft; it is banned and abhorrent, considered like the gold and silver derived from idols, for you have neglected eternal life. You have also neglected G-d, Who awaits your Torah every day, all so you could occupy yourself with this fleeting life. Since you acted in this way, it is clear that you worship your money, not G-d. You will therefore not derive any blessing from this money, just as one derives no blessing from a banned and abhorrent object. Although you want to give it to the poor, you have no right to modify Hashem's word. If you tell yourself, "I will modify it and give this money to the poor," much in the same way that Saul acted, Hashem will loathe you in the end.

Along the same lines, we learn that one who works on the eve of Shabbat or holidays, from *Mincha* onwards, or at the end of Shabbat or holidays, or at the end of Yom Kippur – in every situation where there is a slight risk of sin, such as during public fast days – such a person will never see any blessing (*Pesachim* 50b). Why is this so? Since he seeks to earn money dishonestly, his sustenance will not be blessed by money earned in such a way.

### A Poor but Wise Child

If a person does not neglect his Torah study for money, what will his reward be? "He shall deliver their kings into your hand" (*Devarim* 7:24). Hashem says, "Since you have devoted yourself to words of Torah, and you have not gone off to earn money when you should be studying, I am placing the evil inclination under your control." The king designates the evil inclination, as it is written: "An old and foolish king" (*Kohelet* 4:13), and our Sages have taught: "Do not associate with a wicked man" (*Pirkei Avoth* 1:7). When a person wants to commit a sin, the evil inclination brings all his members into submission, for it reigns over them. In that case the good inclination is like someone who finds himself in prison. Yet when a person wants to perform a *mitzvah*, he encircles all his members so they do the will of their Father in Heaven and please Him. Here Scripture states: "Better is a poor but wise child" – the good inclination; "than an old and foolish king" – the evil inclination.

Since this person has controlled all his members and did not neglect his study, Hashem will reward him measure for measure. From then on, the good inclination will control all his members and the evil inclination will be placed under his control, becoming like a prisoner who cannot break his bonds. This is what constitutes, "He shall deliver their kings into your hand."

### Prepare to Meet Your G-d, O Israel

The daily prayers, which were organized by the Men of the Great Assembly, are described by our Sages as “service of the heart.” True, it is a *mitzvah* pertaining to thought, but as long as a person has not fulfilled his duty with regards to the heart, he has not really done anything. This is because prayer is uniquely a service of man’s heart, as it is written: “Serve Him with all your heart.” What is service of the heart? It is prayer.

The Rambam lists eight things that a person must pay attention to when praying. However if he is pressured, confronted by circumstances beyond his control, or transgresses and does not fulfill them, his prayer is not invalidated. These are: Standing, facing the Temple, preparing oneself, being properly dressed, being in a clean place, controlling one’s voice, bowing, and prostrating (*Hilchos Tefillah* 5:1).

In the Gemara (*Shabbat* 10a), we learn some of the habits of the Sages as they prepared themselves for prayer. They paid particular attention to their garments, as befits a servant who stands before his master and makes requests of him, as the prophet Amos says: “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

One of the ways in which a person can prepare himself, the Gemara explains, is to wear a belt during prayer. There are several opinions on this requirement. The *Ba’alei HaTosafot* (*Shabbat* 10a) cite *Machzor Vitry* in stating that it is because the heart must not see nakedness. For the *Ba’alei HaTosafot* (who did not wear pants), it was necessary to wear a belt during prayer. As for ourselves, who wear pants, we do not need a belt. The Rosh believes that although we wear pants, it is a *mitzvah* to wear a belt during prayer, for it is written: “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel.”

For the *Machzor Vitry*, the verse cited by the Gemara (“Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel”) is fulfilled when the heart does not see nakedness. Wearing pants is already enough to fulfill the *mitzvah* of preparing oneself for prayer, for in that case the heart does not see nakedness.

The Levush explains that someone who wears a belt resembles a person who is filled with zeal, more than a person who does not wear one. In fact we find that the prophets were commanded to gird their loins (*i.e.*, to wear a belt), for this denotes zeal.

Rabbi Reuven Margalio *Zatzal*, in his commentary on *Sefer Chassidim* (18), finds a source for the custom of wearing a belt during prayer in the fact that the *Shulchan Aruch* states that it is proper for a person to wear special clothing during prayer, just as the *kohanim* wore special clothing to perform their service (*Orach Chaim* 98:4). He writes that this may be the reason behind wearing a belt during prayer, since we are always wearing the shirt, underpants, and headgear of the priestly garments, and to complete them we add a belt for prayer.

The *Shulchan Aruch* states, “One must wear a belt while praying, even if he already has a belt, such that his heart does not see nakedness. This is due to [the verse], ‘Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel.’” (*Ohr HaChaim* 91:2). The Rema states that if, after the fact, we have prayed without a belt, we have still fulfilled our obligation.

The Beit Yosef cites Rabbeinu Yerucham in stating that we find it written that for a person who usually wears a belt every day, if he has removed it before prayer, he must put it back on in order to pray. However one who does not usually wear a belt does not need to put one on in order to pray.

The Acharonim have also written (*Kaf HaChaim* 91 and elsewhere) that even a person who is careful to wear a belt for prayer, if it happens that he has prayed without one, he does not need to pray again, for it does not invalidate his prayer.

### Zeal and Might

Rabbi Binyamin Zilber *Shlita* believes that there are two ways of explaining the verse, “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel.” The first is that wearing a belt denotes a common way of dressing, and the second is that wearing a belt denotes zeal and might, as we see with those who go out to war. The difference between them is demonstrated in places where people do not usually wear a belt to go outside. According to the first explanation, we have no reason to wear a belt for prayer, since it is not the common way to dress. Yet according to the second explanation (*i.e.*, due to zeal and might), we must wear a belt during prayer. This is the sense of the verse, “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel.”

One who wears a belt throughout the day to hold up his pants has fulfilled this requirement; he does not need to wear a belt specifically on his outer garment.

It is also written (*Beit Baruch* on the *Chayei Adam*, pp. 395-396) that if a person wears a good-fitting belt to hold up his pants, he does not need to pay special attention to this. However in communities where people usually wear a special belt for prayer, even if they are already wearing a belt for their pants, the custom must not be changed. He ends with the following words:

According to this, the custom today in numerous communities of wearing a belt over the coat is obviously part of the principle: “The secret of Hashem is with those who fear Him” (*Tehillim* 25:14). We have no right to argue it, even if it has no source in the Halachah, not even as a special expression of piety. Everything that has been said in this regard has almost no practical effect, for it is clear that it is forbidden for anyone to modify the custom of his forefathers and teachers. However the essential thing, which I would like to underline in all we have said, is that the custom of wearing a belt shows the unity of the community of Israel as a whole, as expressed in the blessing: “Who girds Israel with might.” Hence we must always focus our efforts on this and not cause any division [among Jews], regardless of how small, due to the wearing of a belt. This is especially true in our era, when the time for love has arrived and we must destroy, or at least lessen, the division that exists between different communities.

### Not their Custom

In regards to the custom of the Sephardim and all eastern Jewish communities, who do not focus on wearing a belt during prayer, the She’erit Yosef states: “Although it is good and proper to wear a belt before praying *Shemoneh Esrei* on account of [the verse], ‘Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel,’ today we are content with wearing good-fitting pants or undergarments with elastic bands. In fact some authorities say that one who wears no belt during the day does not need to wear one during prayer” (*She’erit Yosef* 2:91).

*Responsa Iggerot Moshe* (*Orach Chaim* 2:76) deals with the question of going out into the public domain on Shabbat while wearing a belt tied over the coat (a *gartel*) in places without an *eruv*. Reb Moshe Feinstein answers that if a person was already wearing a belt for his pants, he cannot go out like this into the public domain, or into a *carmelit* [rabbinic public domain], on Shabbat. From this response, the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss *Zatzal*, the Av Beit Din of Jerusalem, deduced that if a person does not have another belt, he is permitted to wear it on the outer garment (*Minchat Yitzchak* 5:41). A person who desires to be strict with himself will open the buttons of the outer garment and wear a belt.

### Paying on Credit

It is written, “The covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers” (*Devarim* 7:12).

The Maggid of Dubno said that when a buyer enters a store and orders some merchandise, if he promises and swears that he will pay for it, this proves that he has no intention of paying with cash. Instead, he wants to pay on credit, and he will provide a check, not cash.

Likewise the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to strengthen His promise with an oath, for “there is no reward for a *mitzvah* in this world.” Since we do not receive a reward for the observance of *mitzvot* right away – “in cash” – Hashem decided to strengthen His word with an oath.

This is also the explanation for the verse, “Your testimonies are most trustworthy...Hashem, for length of days” (*Tehillim* 93:5). Since the words of Hashem are trustworthy, why add an oath to them?

The Maggid replies that it is only because they concern “length of days.” Just as a check is cashed after a certain time, likewise in regards to *mitzvot* it is said: “Today is for doing them, and tomorrow is for receiving their reward” (*Eruvin* 22a).

### Except Chills

It is written, “Hashem will remove from you all illness, and all the evil diseases of Egypt that you knew, He will not set them upon you” (*Devarim* 7:15).

The Sages in the Gemara explain this verse in the name of Rabbi Chanina: “This refers to the cold. ... Everything is from Heaven, except chills, as it is written, ‘Chills are in the path of the perverse; he who guards his soul will distance himself from them’ [*Mishlei* 22:5]” (*Bava Metzia* 107b).

The book *Milin DeRabanan* states that this is why all other ailments are among the “evil diseases of Egypt,” of which it is written: “He will not set them upon you.” This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, will protect you from them and they will not come upon you. As for “all illness,” which are colds and chills, there is only the promise that “Hashem will remove [them] from you.” In other words, if you come down with such an illness, Hashem will remove it from you. Thus it is written, “Everything is from Heaven, except chills.”

### Serving Hashem

It is written, “You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d” (*Devarim* 8:10).

In regards to serving G-d, the author of *Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah* wrote the following to his sons:

“Before reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, after eating alone in my tiny isolated home, as you know, I fear that someone will come knocking at the door in the middle of *Birkat*, and I will lose my concentration by welcoming him in.

“That is why, before I start reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, I pray to Hashem in the following way: ‘My Creator, protect me so that nobody comes to my home during *Birkat Hamazon*, so that I not lose my concentration.’

“After *Birkat Hamazon*, if no one has interrupted me, I thank Hashem with great joy: ‘I thank you, my Creator, for having saved me from losing my concentration during *Birkat Hamazon*.’”

### The Destructive Angel

It is written, “Your sin that you committed, the calf, I took and burned it in fire” (*Devarim* 9:21).

We must ask how it is possible to take a sin, which has no substance, and to burn it in fire, as the verse states: “Your sin that you committed, the calf, I took and burned it in fire.” If the verse is really referring to the calf, it should have said: “The calf that you made, I took and burned it in fire!”

In the book *Ohr HaChaim*, Rabbeinu Chaim Ben Attar states that we know that for each *mitzvah* a person performs, he creates a holy angel, and likewise he creates a destructive angel for every sin he commits. Thus when a person repents, he must also erase the destructive angel that he created when he sinned.

Therefore when the Children of Israel committed the sin of the golden calf, a destructive angel was created, and Moshe testified before the Children of Israel that he also “took and burned it in fire.”

### Whom the King Loves

It is written, “You shall love the convert” (*Devarim* 10:19).

Concerning this important *mitzvah*, which does not present itself every day, *Sefer HaChassidim* states:

“Moshe commands us, when we will have entered the land, to love the

person who has come under the wings of the *Shechinah* to perform all the *mitzvot*. In 36 places, the Torah enjoins us to love him, not to wrong him, be it with money or with words.

“They are loved by G-d even more than the Children of Israel. This situation can be compared to two people: One loves the king, and the other is loved by the king. Who is greater? It is the one who is loved by the king.

“The Children of Israel love the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Holy One, blessed be He, loves the convert, as it is written: ‘[He] loves the convert, to give him food and clothing’ [*Devarim* 10:18]. This is why we have the *mitzvah* of loving the one whom the King loves.”

## In the Light of the Parsha

### To Constantly Remember the Creator

It is written, “You will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He has given you” (*Devarim* 8:10). From here the Sages learn that reciting *Birkat Hamazon* is a Torah *mitzvah* (*Berachot* 21a).

We need to understand why the Torah gave the law regarding *Birkat Hamazon* near the warning against self-assurance. We also need to understand the connection between the two.

In regards to this subject, the Rambam writes: “The Sages have instituted numerous blessings as praise and thanks, as well as requests in order for us to always remember the Creator, even if we have not rejoiced in anything or performed a *mitzvah*” (*Hilchot Berachot* 1:3). This teaches us that the Sages instituted the blessings mainly in order for man to remember his Creator. Hence the *mitzvah* of reciting *Birkat Hamazon* is among them, for when the Children of Israel would enter Eretz Israel and find great abundance there, the Holy One, blessed be, He, was concerned that they would forget Him. Thus it is written, “A lion does not roar over a basket of straw, but over a basket of meat” (*Berachot* 32a). By reciting a blessing each time that we eat something, as well as after eating, we will not forget the Creator, nor will we make the mistake of thinking, “My strength and the might of my hand have made me all this wealth.”

Furthermore, by reciting each blessing with concentration, we fulfill the verse: “I have set Hashem before me always” (*Tehillim* 16:8). From here we achieve a fear of Heaven, for the Sages have said: “A man is bound to say 100 blessings each day, as it is written: ‘Now, O Israel, *mah* [what] does Hashem your G-d ask of you?’” (*Menachot* 43b). Rashi explains: “Do not read *mah* [what], but *meia* [100].” By reciting the blessings, we achieve a fear of Heaven.

## Guard Your Tongue!

### Strong Feelings of Hatred

It is forbidden to gossip, even if it is completely true and contains no trace of falsehood. It is forbidden even if the person in question is not present, and even if we are certain that we would say the same thing in that person’s presence. How much more is it forbidden if we have the audacity to tell an individual, in this person’s presence, that he said or did something against him, for that is a much graver sin. It is forbidden because we are stirring up strong feelings of hatred in the individual in question, who will now accept what we say as being completely true. He will think, “If it wasn’t completely true, he wouldn’t have the audacity to say it in front of that person.” – *Chafetz Chaim*

### Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto

The *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto *Zatzal*, the favorite son of the holy *tzaddik* Rabbi Haim Pinto *Hakatan*, was born in 5672 to a holy and pure family. He was a descendant from a dynasty of sanctified *talmidei chachamim*, men who performed miracles and spread the glory of their holiness and purity upon the Jewish people.

For the Hilloula that will take place next month (Elul 5), we are printing an extract from the biography of the *tzaddik*. This will allow us to follow the progress of his life and be amazed by his incredible customs and the beauty of his character. We will naturally learn from all this, putting an effort into cleaving to the ways of our forefathers and walking in their footsteps.

From his earliest years, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto adopted customs of holiness and asceticism, which he had witnessed from his father, the venerated Rabbi Haim Pinto *Hakatan*, may his merit protect us. He completed his education and studied Torah with his father and the *gaon* Rabbi Yosef Ben Attar *Zatzal*, who was a great *talmid chacham*.

### Loved Above and Appreciated Below

Humility and discretion were the crowns that constantly adorned him, in addition to his glorious lineage that shined like a jewel in the crown of the Pinto family. Son after son, generation after generation, these were men of faith, pious and holy men who performed wonders and miracles, men who illuminated their generation by the light of Torah and holiness.

In his personality, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto embodied the very image of a sanctified and pure Jew who served Hashem and devoted himself to Him. He was *ahuv lema'ala venechmad lemata* ("loved above and appreciated below"), the initials of which form the word Elul, the month in which he passed away.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon was especially known for his righteousness in serving Hashem. Upon the order of his father, the *tzaddik* Rabbi Haim Pinto, he enclosed himself within his home for 40 years. During those many decades, he studied Torah with inconceivable diligence, beyond all human comprehension. There, enclosed within the four walls of his small room, he elevated himself in holiness and purity, having no connection to the outside world, and without yielding to the needs of the body or material concerns. His sole desire was to completely devote himself to serving Hashem.

### By Two Witnesses

Many readers will certainly raise their eyebrows and privately ask: "How can this be? Can anyone imagine a human being as completely in control of his material needs, to the point of shutting himself inside his home for 40 years?"

Rabbi Eliyahu Sitbon once told our teacher, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita* (the son of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto), that a certain Jew, a great *talmid chacham*, told him that he had heard about the reputation of the *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe

Aharon Pinto, about his customs and the miracles that he did. Rabbi Eliyahu asked him, "Did you know that this *tzaddik* shut himself in his home for 40 years without leaving it?"

The *talmid chacham* found this hard to believe. He thought that it was impossible for a person not to leave his home for so long; it just wasn't humanly possible!

Some time later, Rabbi Eliyahu Sitbon met this *talmid chacham* again, and suddenly a very old Jew approached them. In the course of the ensuing conversation, he said to them: "I knew a great *tzaddik* in Morocco who didn't leave his home for 40 years. I remember that when he moved from his home in Essaouira to live in Casablanca, dozens of people covered him with blankets so he wouldn't see the street or the light of day." When the *talmid chacham* heard this, he was stunned. He looked at Rabbi Eliyahu Sitbon and said with emotion, "By two witnesses shall a matter be established."

### Happy is He Who Devotes Himself to Torah

The intensity of Rabbi Moshe Aharon's Torah study, as he devoted himself to learning for long hours without interruption, can be gauged by the following incident: The *tzaddik* would wash his clothes once a week, every Friday in honor of Shabbat, and wear his shirt immediately after washing it. Although he put it on while it was still humid, in little time it would dry up on account of the heat that his body radiated from the effort, both physical and spiritual, that he exerted in learning Torah!

### The Garment of the Rabbis

At the end of the 40 years in which he remained enclosed in his home, Rabbi Moshe Aharon emerged towards the world of action. When he went out into the streets of the city, doubts began to grow in his heart concerning what garments he should wear. Up until then, he wore a djellaba (white robe), in accordance with the custom of his holy forefathers. Yet when he realized that the way of dressing had changed – now being in accordance with the European style that had made its way into Morocco, and that all the Jews of Morocco were wearing such garments – the *tzaddik* wondered if he should dress like his forefathers, or whether it was better not to make himself noticed in the community.

Some time later, he realized that this change to the European style was now prevalent among the people, as well as among the *talmidei chachamim*. Rabbis were now wearing a suit and hat, and so Rabbi Moshe Aharon purchased a suit and hat, which he wore for many years.

Several years later, when he became publicly known and famous among Jewish communities, his son Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita* asked him, due to the honor of the Torah, to wear a long coat, "the garment of the rabbis," as rabbis customarily did. In his great humility, Rabbi Moshe Aharon did what his son asked. After getting used to this new mode of dress, he confirmed to his family that wearing a black coat gave him an added sense of humility, helping him to increase his fear of Heaven.