

The Path To Follow

Ha'azinu

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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

Days of Joy and Teshuvah Through Love

Regarding the verse, "You shall dwell in *sukkot* for seven days...so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in *sukkot* when I took them from the land of Egypt" (*Vayikra* 23:42-43), the Tur states that the *sukkot* which the verse is speaking of here, in which G-d made the Children of Israel dwell, were the clouds of glory that surrounded them to prevent the great heat of the sun from harming them. He commanded us to make these kinds of *sukkot* in order that we may recall His wonders, and although He brought us out of Egypt in the month of Nissan, He did not command us to make *sukkot* at that time. This is because that time corresponds to the days of summer, when everyone usually makes huts for shade, and people would not have recognized that they were in honor of the Creator. That is why He commanded us to make them during the seventh month, which is a time of rain, when people usually leave their huts for their homes, while we leave our homes to sit in a *sukkah*. In this way, we show everyone that we are fulfilling the command of the King (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 625). Nevertheless, the difficulty remains: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, command us to make *sukkot* around the time of Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur? If we say that He wanted us to make *sukkot* during the rainy season, when people return to their homes, so that the entire world would see that we are acting for the sake of the *mitzvah*, then why do we make *sukkot* after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, rather than before, in the month of Elul? From the fact that Sukkot is after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it seems that there is a connection between these festivals. We also need to understand what is written in the Zohar, namely that during the festival of Sukkot, the Holy One, blessed be He, silences the Satan and does not give him permission to make accusations. Why does He close his mouth on Sukkot? The Holy One, blessed be He, closes the mouths of accusers on Yom Kippur and prevents them from accusing the Jewish people on a day that is entirely holy, a day whose very existence atones for sins. Yet why does He also close their mouths during the festival of Sukkot, which is a festival of joy, as it is written: "You shall rejoice on your festival...and you will be completely joyous" (*Devarim* 16:14-15)? After all, we find no mention of atonement in regards to the festival of Sukkot.

The heart of every Jew is filled with fear during the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, for no one knows how he will be judged, whether he will be inscribed in the Book of Life or not. The Holy One, blessed be He, knows that Jews are liable to despair under such circumstances, and the *Shechinah* does not reside where there is sadness (*Shabbat* 30b). That is why He gave us the festival of Sukkot immediately following Yom Kippur. As such we may rejoice, eat, and drink, for at that point we are certain that the Holy One, blessed be He, has not decreed anything bad for us, and that all He does is for the good.

Hashem said, "My children, prepare *sukkot* for yourselves after the day of judgment. Leave your permanent dwelling and enter a temporary dwelling, so that you may reflect upon the fact that your dwelling in this world is but temporary. Your main dwelling is in the World to Come, and if you have prepared yourself in your temporary dwelling, you can enter your permanent dwelling." As the Mishnah states, "This world is like an ante-chamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the ante-chamber so that you may enter the banquet hall" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:16). The Sages say that a man is drawn after his deeds (*Sefer HaChinuch*,

Mitzvah 16). All his thoughts always follow the deeds that he performs, for better or worse. Even a person whose heart is completely wicked – someone whose thoughts are evil throughout the day – if he puts an effort into studying Torah and diligently performing *mitzvot*, even for selfish reasons, then he will immediately incline towards the good. The power of his deeds will kill the evil inclination, for the heart follows deeds. It is both known and true that everyone reacts in the way by which they act. Therefore when a person leaves his permanent dwelling to enter a temporary one, he strengthens in his heart the certainty that his dwelling in this world is only temporary.

Furthermore, King Solomon inaugurated the Temple in the month of Tishri, which is called "the month of the strong." This is because the "strong" of this world – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – were born at that time.

The Sages (Zohar III:103b) have said that the holy Patriarchs descend into this world and enter the *sukkah* of every Jew. When they leave it, they return to G-d and say to Him: "Sovereign of the universe, You know how Your children live in this world, like sheep among 70 wolves! What can Israel do among 70 powerful nations? What can the Jewish people do if You do not sustain them at every moment [*Pesikta Rabbati* 9]? Although the nations scorn them, they fulfill Your *mitzvot*, building *sukkot* and not fearing the other peoples. They go out and look for the four species, without considering those who mock them, O Sovereign of the universe. How much money do they spend on sending their children to school in order to learn Torah? They pay dearly for kosher food and the education of their sons and daughters. They emerge from their fixed dwelling to enter a temporary dwelling, and they prepare themselves to receive the holy *Shechinah*. Can You say that they are not worthy of forgiveness, since they devote themselves to the sanctity of Your Name with such intensity?" Thus the festival of Sukkot is also among the Days of Awe, and it is connected to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when all the inhabitants of the world are judged. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, hides Himself from the Satan on Rosh Hashanah, He covers the mouth of the Satan on Sukkot. The term *bekesse* ("at the time of covering") is formed by the same letters as *basukkah* ("in the *sukkah*"), meaning that Rosh Hashanah is equal to Sukkot, and the Holy One, blessed be He, hides Himself from the Satan and accusers. Thus Scripture states, "Blow the *shofar* at the new moon, at the time of covering" (*Tehillim* 81:4), for this entire month is hidden from the eyes of the Satan, who cannot accuse the Jewish people.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us Hoshana Rabba at the end of the festival, and the Sages say that a person's verdict is completely sealed on the night of Hoshana Rabba (Ramban on *Bamidbar* 14:9). Given that Hashem hides Himself from the eyes of the Satan during the festival of Sukkot, just as He does on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and given that He is filled with compassion for the Jewish people and does not listen to accusers, and also given that the favorable intercession of the Patriarchs on their behalf comes before Him, it follows that the night of Hoshana Rabba possesses tremendous power. Now everything depends on the final moment, and if a person repents on that night, he tilts the balance in his favor and his verdict will be for a good life. All the *teshuvah* that a person does during the months of Elul and Tishri is suspended until the night of Hoshana Rabba, when his verdict is sealed.



A Good Year

In Hebrew, the original meaning of the term *shana* ("year") is "return." Returning to a certain subject is called *shinun*, as in *veshinantam levanecha* ("you shall repeat them to your children") When the Sages speak of repeating an evil deed, they use the expression *avar veshana* (he committed a sin and repeated it). The book *HaKetav VeHaKabbalah* applies this meaning to every new year: It is an opportunity to return to the entire yearly cycle from the beginning. The Days of Awe once again. Chanukah and Purim once again, as well as Pessach and Shavuot, and numerous other days in between. These are days in which we can again try to do everything that we have not yet done, and at the same time to profit from an opportunity to progress in areas where we have already achieved results.

This provides us with an abundance of opportunities, 365 of them each year. Until the setting of the sun on the final day, we must still consider the few remaining moments as a unit within a complete entity ("this year"), and we continue to ask that it be used as best possible ("bless for us").

If the previous year did not bring satisfactory results, or it was not used as effectively as possible, it may return in a different configuration and result in greater success, "for everything concerning the world, be it good or bad, is a test for man." The book *Messilat Yesharim* states in chapter one, "Poverty on one hand and wealth on the other, tranquility on one hand and misfortune on the other." Consequently, if a trial in the previous cycle did not yield satisfactory results, it may be better to be tested in another way. It is not wise to try the same thing again and again.

Similarly, the opposite case is also possible. A trial that ends very successfully is complete, and there is no reason to continue it. On the contrary, we must benefit from the following cycle so that a trial takes on a different nature. This is because "a man knows that he is not in this world to rest, but to fulfill the *mitzvot*, serve Hashem, and overcome trials" (*Messilat Yesharim*).

Let us continue to pray until Hoshanah Rabba: "May it be Your will to renew for us a good and sweet year."

Heaven's Judgment

It is written, "The Rock! Perfect is His work, for all His ways are just. A G-d of faith without iniquity" (*Devarim* 32:4).

It is surprising to read, "A G-d of faith without iniquity," for how is G-d praised by saying that He is without iniquity? Even to say this of a human being would not be considered praise! The *gaon* Rabbi Israel of Salant explains that when someone is punished for a crime by an earthy kingdom, the accused is simply judged for what he has done, and if his punishment causes his family and friends to suffer, that does not lessen his punishment. The same cannot be said of the heavenly kingdom, for before punishing a sinner, the Holy One, blessed be He, considers his family to see if someone might suffer as a result of his punishment, and if anyone deserves to suffer in that way. This is because "all His ways are just" – be it towards the accused himself or towards his family – "a G-d of faith without iniquity," for each person receives the punishment that he deserves, not more.

No Iniquity in Judgment

It is written, "The Rock! Perfect is His work, for all His ways are just. A G-d of faith without iniquity" (*Devarim* 32:4).

To believe in G-d, Who created the heavens and the earth, does not require great wisdom, states the *gaon* Rabbi Yaakov Neiman *Zatzal*, for this is something that the most ordinary of minds can understand. The great test of faith is precisely when we see things that appear surprising, for then questions and doubts arise in the heart. At that point, if a person ignores all his doubts and firmly believes in the Creator of the world, he will achieve the necessary level of faith. What is truly required of man is that he believe that there is no injustice, even though the eyes witness apparently terrible injustices, incomprehensible ones. We have examples of this both in our era and previous eras, since the time that we have been a people, having experienced all the tribulations that have occurred to us until the present day. Nevertheless, we must believe that "there is no injustice" – and that everything G-d does is for the good.

Rav Neiman adds, "I've heard the Chazon Ish speak about this. He said that if a person were to see a tailor as he was tearing apart some fine new fabric, he would think that he was ruining his merchandise. However we know that he is actually making an even more beautiful garment. On the other hand, a person who is incapable of understanding a discussion in the Gemara, and whose understanding only extends to the Mishnah, will obviously not try to study a difficult and complex problem in the Gemara by himself. Likewise it is not possible for a creature of flesh and blood to comprehend the ways of Hashem, ways that surpass our understanding. We must only try to believe that 'all His ways are just. A G-d of faith without iniquity.'"

– *Darchei Mussar*

When Jews Are Bound Tightly Together

It is written, "Jacob is the measure [*chevel* – which also means 'rope'] of His inheritance" (*Devarim* 32:9).

A rope is composed of numerous fine strands, each of which is weak and unable to support any load. It is only by putting them together to form a single unit, a rope, that they are strong enough not to come undone. If they were to be bound less tightly, be it by ever so little, and the bond between them were to be looser, they would not have the strength to carry a load, and they would easily tear. Thus all the power of the Jewish people resides in unity, for they have the power to support life's burdens when they are unified, as well as to merit all the blessings sent to them from above. Thus the verse states, "Jacob is the 'rope' of His inheritance." We can therefore understand why, among the ten miracles that occurred in the Temple, there was the miracle in which people "stood tightly together, but prostrated with ample space" (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:5). Would it not have been better for them not to be stand so tightly, but to have ample space? The answer is that the Children of Israel's ability to receive abundance and blessing resides entirely in unity and peace. Hence it is precisely when they stand together tightly that there is peace among them, and that blessings may also rest upon them.

– *Rabbi Yosef, son of the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik*

Continuation Page 3

The Final Redemption

It is written, "When He sees that their power is gone, and none is saved or helped" (*Devarim* 32:36).

From here the Sages learn that the son of David [i.e., *Mashiach*] will not come before the Children of Israel have lost all hope of being delivered. He will only come once they have been abandoned, with no one to help them (*Sanhedrin* 97a). This is surprising, for must Israel forget the 13 Principles of Faith – to believe in the Final Redemption and to wait for it – as a precondition for the Final Redemption?

What this means, however, is that the Children of Israel will lose all hope of being delivered by *natural* means. As long as they seek the aid of the nations to build a homeland, or they invent an entirely new idea linked to their deliverance, it will certainly not happen. It is only when they completely lose hope in all these illusions, and they fully understand that we can only rely on our Father in Heaven, that the son of David will come and deliver us. It is for this very same reason that Hashem told Moshe to go and ask Pharaoh to free Israel. Hashem then immediately hardened Pharaoh's heart even more, to the point that he placed even harsher burdens upon them. Hashem wanted to eliminate, from the hearts of the Children of Israel, every hope or illusion that everything depended on Pharaoh's goodness. It was only when they saw that he did not let them go, and they completely lost hope in Pharaoh, that true deliverance came.

– *Emet LeYaakov*

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzki – The Author of *Kli Chemda*

When the *gaon* Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzki *Zatzal*, the author of *Kli Chemda*, journeyed to the United States, he was asked to stay there permanently, and he was offered a great deal of money as an incentive. The *Kli Chemda* responded with Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma's statement ("I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah" – *Pirkei Avoth* 6:9), for America was a spiritual desert at the time, contrary to Poland, which was a metropolis of Torah.

Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzki added, "When this man met Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma and asked him to live among them, offering to give him a million gold *dinarim*, how did Rabbi Yosei know that it was not a place of Torah, to the point of replying with confidence: 'I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah'? Perhaps it was a genuine place of Torah?"

He replied, "We see that everything which is necessary for life can be found in abundance and freely: Air, water, bread, which are in easy reach of everyone. On the other hand, everything unnecessary is priced beyond the reach of all but the wealthy, for the life of the soul does not depend on such things. When Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma saw that the man was prepared to pay a million gold *dinarim* for a *talmid chacham* to just live among them, he concluded that in such a place, the lack of *talmidei chachamim* had reached such a point that exorbitant sums were needed to obtain one. This proved that a *talmid chacham* was considered by them as unnecessary, someone for whom the life of the soul does not depend. Hence that place was not a "place of Torah."

It is Your Life

It is written: "He said to them, 'Apply your hearts to all the words that I testify against you today...be careful to perform all the words of this Torah...for it is your life, and by this matter you shall prolong your days on the land' " (*Devarim* 32:46-47).

Moshe Rabbeinu warned the Children of Israel: Know that our holy Torah is an amazing thing. Not only is it amazing, it is your life – a life of happiness on earth. However it is only if you take to heart all the things that I testify before you today. Be careful to follow the path that I have laid out for you, and do not turn from it either to the right or to the left.

We can understand this by means of a parable: One Friday afternoon, several merchants returned home after working in a nearby town. The journey took longer than expected, and the day was getting late. They arrived back to their town with not much time left before Shabbat. One of them wanted to get off the carriage and run back home to wash up for Shabbat, and so he said to the driver: "I'm in a rush, and I don't have time to take my suitcase. I will pay you to bring it to my home." The man arrived home and had time to quickly wash himself and put on his Shabbat clothes, at which point the driver arrived. He was covered with sweat and breathing hard. "Those stairs!" he complained as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I left your suitcase by the entrance."

The man replied, "You've made a mistake. You brought me someone else's suitcase!" The driver looked at him with surprise: "How do you know? You haven't even seen the suitcase I brought you. Come and take a look!"

"Not necessary," said the man. "All I need to see in order to understand that you didn't bring my suitcase is that you're sweating and breathing hard. Mine contains only a few garments and is very easy to carry." The driver realized that the man was right. He had struggled to carry someone else's suitcase, and he wasn't even paid for it!

The same applies to those who complain about the difficulty of observing *mitzvot* with all their details and fences, claiming that it complicates life. To such people Moshe said: Take to heart everything that I testify before you today. If you are tired and find it difficult to serve Hashem, you are clearly not engaged in the true service of Hashem. You are not carrying the right suitcase, for "it is your life." Our holy Torah gives life, true life, a life of happiness, and as such "you shall lengthen your days." Thus we read, "The statutes of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart. The command of Hashem is pure, enlightening the eyes" (*Tehillim* 19:9).

A Chesed of Truth

The disciples of the Arizal state that he used to tell them, "Know that the world's atmosphere and its space are filled with wandering souls that have not yet found rest." The Arizal once went into the countryside to study Torah, and there he saw that all the trees were filled with innumerable souls. There were countless souls both on the meadows and on the water. The Arizal asked them what they were doing there, and they replied that they had been rejected, for they had not repented of their sins and had prevented others from repenting. Hence they wandered upon the earth and through the atmosphere, each crying out. Yet now a heavenly voice was proclaiming throughout the world that there was a *tzaddik* in Israel, the Arizal, who had the power to heal these rejected souls. They had therefore gathered there to ask him for mercy, and to heal them so they could finally have rest and no longer suffer so much. The Arizal promised to do everything he could to help. The chassid Rabbi Gedalia, one of the Arizal's disciples, told his friends that every Friday, they would go outside the city to welcome Shabbat, and the Arizal once described the wonders that he would see as he stood on the top of the mountain outside the city. He could see the entire cemetery of Sefat from the summit, and there he witnessed legions of souls arising from their graves and ascending higher and higher towards Gan Eden. He also saw numerous souls that were descending from their graves. These were the additional souls that pious individuals had been given on Shabbat.

Our holy books state that these souls can be elevated by the prayer of a *tzaddik*, for the *tzaddik* prays with concentration, and his prayer ascends beneath the Throne of Glory. By such a prayer, several souls can reach the Throne of Glory, and there is no greater act of *chesed*. It is incumbent upon every Jew to attain merit and to confer merit upon others. How much more should a person pray for the ungodly living in his own generation, in order for them to repent.

– Kav HaYashar, ch. 5

Guard Your Tongue!

Preparing for the Day of Judgment

We must realize that at the moment a person judges his fellow, be it for better or worse, he provokes a judgment against himself by the very same words. If the Holy One, blessed be He, were to strictly evaluate how a person fulfills *mitzvot*, most of them would not count as such. The *mitzvot* attributed to him would be very few in number compared to his sins, and he would forever receive the name of *rasha* [evildoer]. However if the Holy One, blessed be He, were to show him mercy and seek out his merits in all circumstances, he would maintain these merits. Furthermore, even if his deeds are not counted as *mitzvot* and the majority of his deeds are sins, their number will diminish if the Holy One, blessed be He, shows him complete mercy. This is because several of his sins will have certainly been committed inadvertently or for some other reason. It all depends on the way that a person acts with others. If he usually finds reasons to exonerate people, he too will be judged favorably. However if he is strict with others and speaks ill of them, the ministering angels will speak ill of him above.

– Shmirat HaLashon

It is written, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak, and may the earth hear the words of my mouth" (*Devarim 32:1*).

The explanation of this verse is that it consists of a severe reprimand to those who consider themselves to be great, those whose heads reach the heavens. They believe that they already know the entire Torah, meaning that there is no one from whom they can still learn. It is precisely such people that Moshe Rabbeinu had in mind when he issued his reprimand by saying, "Listen, O heavens." In other words: Although you are important people, you must still listen to what the Torah says. And if you fail to listen, then know that the Torah will require an accounting from you. As the Sages said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, "A heavenly voice goes out from Mount Horev every day, saying: 'Woe to those who neglect the Torah' " (*Shemot Rabba 41:7*). We must realize that the very fact that pride exists in the heart of man is an affront to the holy Torah, for it must not reside in man. As the Sages say, "Words of Torah only remain with one who makes himself as if he were nothing" (*Sotah 21b*). It is therefore incumbent on every person to humble himself, and even if he is competent in every field of Torah, he must still listen to reprimands and *mussar* from another Torah great, even if that person is not as great as himself. Thus it is written, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak," teaching us that these words are addressed to all great men, those who may be described as the "heavens." They are addressed in a harsh tone, using the term *adabera*. We also find that *diber* designates a reprimand, for it is written: "These are the words that Moshe spoke [*diber*]" (*Devarim 1:1*). Here Rashi states, "These are words of rebuke." This is because a person who speaks harshly considers himself to already know everything, having nothing further to learn. He feels that his head has reached the heavens, meaning that he is already perfect in character and deeds. Hence for such a person, harsh language must be used in issuing a reprimand.

A True Story

Go!

The *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Meir Kagen, the author of *Chafetz Chaim*, was once in Warsaw, where the leaders of a yeshiva invited him to give a class on the importance of diligence in Torah study. He accepted, and all the students gathered from the yeshiva's seven classes and assembled in the large hall. When the Chafetz Chaim began to speak, he could hear several students who were disturbing him, for they did not know how to sit quietly and listen to the words of the living G-d. Not only that, but they were also preventing others from listening. The Chafetz Chaim addressed them several times, asking them not to disturb the class and to sit quietly. When he saw that they were completely disobeying him, he turned to them and said: "It is written, 'Go, sons, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of Hashem' [*Tehillim 34:12*]. It would seem that this should read, 'Come, sons, listen to me.' However this verse is addressed to you, to those who do not want to listen and who, in addition, disturb others. The verse is saying: 'Go, sons' – leave this place. Then, to those who remain, 'listen to me.' They can then listen because there will be nothing to disturb them further."

At that point they stopped talking and sat quietly.

– Yad Yosef