

The Path To Follow

Matot - Masei

501

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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 Influence of the Leaders of the Generation on the Community

It is written, “Moshe spoke to the leaders of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: ‘... When a man makes a vow...he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do’” (Bamidbar 30:2-3).

This requires an explanation. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu specifically address the leaders of the tribes, something that we find in regards to no other mitzvah?

We may start by discussing the juxtaposition of Parshiot Matot and Masei. The first two letters of the term matot are mem (numerical value: 40) and tet (numerical value: 9) which correspond to the 49 gates of impurity. The first two letters of the term masei are mem and samech, which correspond to the Samech Mem – representing the forces of evil and impurity. The remaining letters in the terms matot and masei are vav tav ayin yud, which combined have the same numerical value (486) as Ve’Lilit.

This alludes to a way of serving G-d. Someone who studies Torah, even if he were to unfortunately breach the 49 gates of impurity and cleave to the kelipah of Lilit and other such things – to the point of finding himself trapped by the Samech Mem – can still attain the 50 gates of holiness through Torah, which is called pito (“his bread”), the term pito [peh-tav-vav] having the same numerical value as Ve’Lilit.

Furthermore, the term pito also contains an allusion: The letters peh (numerical value: 80) and vav (numerical value: 6) have the same numerical value (86) as the Name El-kim, which designates strict justice. The letter tav (numerical value: 400) corresponds to Esau’s 400 emissaries and the angels of destruction who accompanied him in his war against Jacob. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, judges them by the merit of the Torah, and in this way they can also elevate themselves towards the 50 gates of holiness.

It is here that the Torah warns us by stating: “According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do.” The term mipiv (“his mouth”) contains an allusion: The letters peh and vav have the same numerical value as El-kim, alluding to the attribute of strict justice that reigns over the Samech Mem and its band (which impeded the Children of Israel and caused them to breach the 49 gates of impurity and to be tainted by Egypt). They can then elevate themselves and weaken Amalek by carrying out everything that emerges from their mouths, and by controlling what they say.

All this is alluded to in the term El-kim (same numerical value as peh vav). What remains in the term mipiv are the letters mem and yud, which have a numerical value of nun (50). This means that when a person guards his mouth, controls his tongue, and fulfills everything that emerges from his mouth, G-d (El-kim) will raise him from the 49th gate of holiness towards the 50th gate of holiness, slightly shy of it, as in the verse: “You have made him but slightly less than the angels” (Tehillim 8:6; Nedarim 38a).

If we are correct, we may clearly understand why this passage was addressed specifically to the leaders of the tribes. The reason is that there was a deficiency in the leader of the tribe of Shimon because of the incident with the Midianite woman. That incident had an influence on his entire

tribe, for tribal leaders have a direct influence on the members of their tribe.

This is why Pinchas was forced to kill a leader from the tribe of Shimon, in whom some aspect of the deeds of Bilam and Balak had remained, and which led him towards the band of the Samech Mem, Amalek, and Lilit. Pinchas wanted to prevent an epidemic from breaking out among the entire Jewish people, as it is written: “So that I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance” (Bamidbar 25:11). This is because the entire Jewish people were endangered by this harmful influence of a tribal leader. By his act, Pinchas put a stop to the influence of the kelipah.

That is why Moshe Rabbeinu issued a warning to the leaders of the tribes: You serve as an example and have an influence over all the Jewish people. Hence you must not profane your words, for if you do, the entire Jewish community will automatically emulate your deeds and your ways. Therefore do not utter any words in vain, and then the Jewish people will be drawn towards the 49 gates of holiness to fight for Hashem El-kim with strict justice against the band of the Samech Mem, Lilit, and other demonic forces. The kelipah of Amalek will then leave on its own, this husk of impurity that caused such serious damage through the 400 emissaries of Esau by disrupting the service of G-d and His Torah.

Since the influence of the tribal leaders is indeed immense, it was truly for the sake of Heaven that Pinchas did what he did, prior to the Holy One, blessed be He, testifying of him: “Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel when he zealously avenged Me” (Bamidbar 25:11). The tribes had scorned Pinchas by saying, “Have you seen this son of Puti, whose maternal father pitem [fattened] cows for idolatry?” Hence Scripture underlines that he was a descendant of Aaron (see Sanhedrin 82b). Even after the death of the tribal leader from Shimon, his kelipah and deeds continued to exert an influence on the people. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, had to protect Pinchas and extol him for his action.

This is why the verse testifies that Pinchas did what he did for the sake of Heaven, and that he repelled the kelipah of Zimri, who derived his power from Bilam and Balak, whose names contain the letters of “Amalek.” It was this merit that earned Pinchas – who is Eliyahu (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 771) – the reward of becoming the angel of circumcision. At every circumcision of a Jew, when the foreskin is removed, it is a proclamation that he has no portion in the Samech Mem, Lilit, and their band. Rather, his portion is among the Jewish people and the Creator of the universe. He cleaves to the Shechinah and merits to burn the thorns covering the rose, meaning the Shechinah.

From all this, it follows that it is incumbent upon all Jewish leaders in every generation, and upon all leaders who possess the spirit of G-d, to sanctify what they say, not to profane it, and to keep their word. We also find that Jacob made a vow: “If G-d will be with me...” (Bereshith 28:20). Now this is an extremely serious issue, for children die as punishment for

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unfulfilled vows (Shabbat 32b). Children become guarantors for the Torah of their parents, which is why they must not profane their word.

Even if someone made a vow but later arranged to be released from it, this demonstrates his faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, and in his Torah, for he has thereby fulfilled what Moshe said. Since he observes the Torah's commands, he is not profaning his word, and he sanctifies his deeds. If he acts in this way, the Creator of the universe will help him to grow stronger in Torah and the fear of Heaven.

The Words of the Sages

Even if He Delays

Awaiting deliverance and the approaching Final Redemption has occupied the lives of the great men of Israel and their disciples in every generation. This fundamental principle of faith, according to which "I firmly believe in the coming of Mashiach, and even if he delays, I wait for his coming every day" was tangible among the great men of Israel. Numerous ways have been suggested to hasten the coming deliverance, be it by means of the community or the individual, the common factor being a desire to act and fulfill G-d's will to perfection.

Thus the Peleh Yoetz wrote about waiting for the Final Redemption: "From the fact that we await deliverance, we will be careful about everything that can delay it, and about doing everything good.... Even when a Jew does complete teshuvah, this can hasten the Geula [Final Redemption]."

The Delay Stems from Kindness

After the death of the Netziv of Volozhin Zatzal, his students had a tremendous sense that their teacher, who had greatly spoken about the arrival of Mashiach throughout his lifetime, would definitely exert an influence in Heaven to make him arrive soon. When a long period elapsed from the time of his death, yet Mashiach had still not arrived, one young yeshiva student asked an older student how he could explain the fact that despite everything, Mashiach had still not arrived.

Rabbi Moses M. Yoshor Zatzal recounted what this older student said: The verse says, "We hoped, El-kim, for Your kindness in the midst of Your Sanctuary" (Tehillim 48:10). This means that numerous events in this world appear to us as stemming from the attribute of strict justice, and in this regard it is said: "We hoped, El-kim [the Name which evokes strict justice]...." Yet when we arrive in the World of Truth, the overall situation becomes clear, at which point we realize that the things which appear in this world as stemming from the attribute of strict justice actually result from nothing but kindness and compassion. This is what constitutes, "Your kindness in the midst of Your Sanctuary."

The same applies to the Geula, he added. It is likely that as long as the Netziv (may his merit protect us) was in this world, he believed as we all did that deliverance's delay resulted from strict justice. Yet it is certainly possible that when he arrived in the palace above – in the World to Come, the "World to Truth" – he perceived through his holy spirit that the delay in Israel's Final Redemption resulted only by the power of Hashem's kindness, which is why he realized that there was no reason to hasten its end.

Learning About the Temple

In his book *The Chafetz Chaim: The Life and Works of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin*, Rabbi Moses M. Yoshor, who was a disciple of the Chafetz Chaim, writes the following: "In regards to his faith and waiting for the arrival of Mashiach, it seems there was none comparable to the Chafetz Chaim among the tzaddikim of numerous generations. He shed abundant tears in his prayers for Mashiach, since it is a mitzvah to await deliverance!"

The Chafetz Chaim even wrote a brochure on this subject in which he describes the importance of awaiting Mashiach.

If the leaders of the tribe and the leaders of the generation are not careful with their words, the kelipah and impurity will cleave to them. Yet when they push away the kelipah by learning Torah, and when they sanctify their words and their deeds so as not to render them profane, the Holy One, blessed be He, will fight against the Samech Mem, Lilit, and their band of 400, and He will judge them. The entire Jewish people will then cleave to their leaders and to their ways, which will elevate them as a whole.

Whoever heard the Chafetz Chaim speaking about Mashiach – and when did he not speak of him? – had the impression that he was already hearing the footsteps of Mashiach as he approached. He spoke about him in such a serious way, with such tremendous confidence, that it was impossible for anyone to express the slightest doubt as to whether he should quickly prepare himself to welcome the deliverer of Israel. The Chafetz Chaim even had a special suit prepared in order to welcome him, and from time to time he would wear it while waiting for him.

Our teacher the Chafetz Chaim constantly complained that "if we are truly awaiting the arrival of Mashiach soon, everyone must obviously motivate themselves to learn about the Temple [service]."

He acted in accordance with his words, for he himself studied *Order Kodashim*. He encouraged others to do the same, in preparation for his real hope of seeing the Geula.

He often underlined, "Though we want him to come, he wants to come even more. However he will not do so unless all Israel waits and hopes for him." The following story demonstrates this concept in a tangible way.

They're Waiting for Me!

The Chafetz Chaim was present when emissaries from the Jewish community of Brisk came to see the gaon Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. They were carrying an offer for Rabbi Yosef Dov to become the Rav of Brisk. At first he refused, for upon leaving the town of Slutsk he had decided that he would not accept another rabbinical position.

At that point, one of the emissaries addressed him and said: "Rabbi, how can you refuse? There are 25,000 Jews waiting for you!"

Rabbi Yosef Dov was quite moved by these simple words. He quickly went to see the Rebbetzin and excitedly told her: "Please, bring me my coat and my shtreimel. I have to go, for 25,000 Jews are waiting for me! One does not have the right to leave such a community of Jews waiting!"

Upon hearing this, the Chafetz Chaim let out a deep sigh and said: "If Rabbi Yosef Dov is in such a rush because he cannot allow 25,000 Jews to wait for him, imagine if Mashiach knew that the entire Jewish people were awaiting his arrival! He would certainly hasten to put on his hat and coat, and he would come running! He would definitely not keep the entire Jewish people waiting. However the sad part is that the Jewish people are not waiting for him. With our lips we say, 'for we await you,' but in reality we do not wait for him at all, alas! We simply do not wait for him." The

Guard Your Tongue

The Mitzvah of Admonishment

If a person finds himself among a group of habitual speakers of Lashon Harah and hears them speaking Lashon Harah, then if he believes that admonishing them will persuade them to stop, he is certainly obligated by the Torah to do so. Even if he believes that admonishing them will be useless, he should not remain silent, lest people think that he is in agreement with them. – Chafetz Chaim

The Fire of Torah

It is written, “Everything that comes into the fire, you shall pass through the fire” (Bamidbar 31:23).

This verse is explained by the author of Simchat HaRegel, who states the following:

“Everything that comes into the fire” – this is the evil inclination, which we must pass through the fire. Now there is no fire but Torah, as it is written: “My word is like fire, says Hashem” (Jeremiah 23:29).

The Sages have taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote” (Kiddushin 30b). Chametz is the evil inclination, and we can rectify it by burning it, by the fire of Torah.

Greatness Requires no Titles

It is written, “These are the names of the men: For the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh” (Bamidbar 34:19).

In this book Yismach Israel, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer Zatzal states that we may ask why, in regards to the three tribes mentioned in verses 19-21 (Judah, Shimon, and Benjamin), the term nassi (“leader”) is omitted. It only appears once the tribe of Dan is mentioned: “For the tribe of the children of Dan, a leader, Bukki son of Jogli” (v.22).

To explain this, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer states that since the first three tribes (Judah, Shimon, and Benjamin) were the most well-known, it was unnecessary to employ the term nassi for them. This is in keeping with the teaching of the Sages: “Greater than being called ‘Rabban’ is to be called by one’s own name [i.e., not by a title].”

This is why the Torah placed Judah before Shimon, for the leader of Judah was Caleb son of Jephunneh, the more important of the tribal leaders. The verse does not list them by order of tribal birth, but by order of importance.

He Can Never Truly Return

It is written, “After the death of the Kohen Gadol, the murderer shall return to the land of his possession” (Bamidbar 35:28).

The verse describes him as a “murderer” even after he received his punishment by having lived in exile in a city of refuge.

The book Sifte Cohen offers an explanation for this, basing itself on a statement from the Rambam: “Although the killer has gained atonement, he should never return to a position of authority that he previously held. Instead, he should be diminished in stature for his entire life because of this great calamity that he caused” (Hilchot Rotzeach 7:14).

The verse uses the phrase “the murderer shall return” in order to teach us that even if he has repented and his sin has been atoned, he should still realize that he is a “murderer.”

By Allusion

Rashei Hamatot...

It is written, “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: ‘This is the thing which Hashem has commanded’” (Bamidbar 30:2).

I heard a nice allegorical explanation for this verse by Rav Yechiya Eltzaram:

“Moshe spoke to the rashei hamatot [heads of the tribes]” – this designates teachers, for they take a *match* (“stick”) in their hand to strike children in order to motivate them in learning Torah [Note: The book *El Rashei Hamatot Livnei* cites the gematria for *melamdei*

tinokot (“teachers of children”)]. This is alluded to in the first and last letters of the expression *rashei hamatot*, the numerical value of which is equal to “Torah.”

This is *leimor* (“saying”): That children learn Torah by speaking; that they bring forth words from their mouth. If they ask, “Why are you striking us for the sake of learning?” we should respond: “This is the thing which Hashem has commanded” – that they should learn Torah.

– Chen Tov

Eleph Lamateh

It is written, “A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe, for all the tribes of Israel, you shall send to the army” (Bamidbar 31:4).

The Name *yud vav hei kaf* – alluded to by the last letters in the words, “*Ki malachav itzaveh lach* [For He will command His angels for you]” (Tehillim 91:11) – is a Name that is known to offer protection on a journey.

Hence those who accompany someone who is about to go on a journey say to him: *Yachid verabim Halachah karabim* (when the majority is of one opinion, but an individual is of another, the Halachah follows the majority), their focus being on the holy Name *yud vav hei kaf*.

There is also the Name *kaf lamed kaf*, which offers protection on a journey as well. It is alluded to in the same verse by the letter *kaf* in the word *ki*, and by the letters *lamed kaf* in the word *malachav*, as our teacher the Arizal has said. These two names have a combined numerical value of 111, like the letter *aleph* (when spelled out as *aleph-lamed-peh*). The verse is thus saying: “*Eleph lamateh, eleph lamateh* [A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe]” – it was hinted to Moshe that he should spread upon each tribe a protective influence stemming from these two Names, whose value is *aleph*. In this way, “for all the tribes of Israel” – worthy of it or not – *tishlechu latzavah* (“you shall send to the army”) without the Satan attacking them in any way.

– Od Yosef Hai

In the Light of the Parsha

Kiddush Hashem Atones for the Sin of Chillul Hashem

It is written, “Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites” (Bamidbar 31:2).

We must ask ourselves why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the Children of Israel to take vengeance themselves, rather than G-d avenging Himself upon the enemies of Israel.

We may explain this by saying that the Children of Israel had committed a very grave sin. Although all the sinners involved died, a serious deficiency among the community of Israel still remained as a result of this sin. There had also been a very serious profanation of G-d’s Name throughout the world, for all the nations had certainly rejoiced when the Children of Israel, who had received the Torah, committed such a reprehensible sin.

It was therefore necessary for the Children of Israel to fight against Midian and avenge themselves. This constituted the rectification of their sin, and it would also silence the jubilation of the world’s nations. In this way the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, would be sanctified throughout the world, and this Kiddush Hashem would atone for the Chillul Hashem that had preceded it.

Although the sin of Chillul Hashem is not atoned for by death, as the Gemara (Yoma 86a) and the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:4) state, Rabbeinu Yona writes in *Sha’arei Teshuvah* that when a man sanctifies G-d’s Name, he thereby atones for the sin of having profaned G-d’s Name.

I Will Stand Before Your Temple to Pray

Constantly standing before the remnants of our Temple and our glory are people in prayer, men and women invoking the Name of the Creator of the universe. Although prayer is good regardless of place and time, we know that prayer said by the Kotel is always answered. The book *Kav HaYashar* (chapter 93) testifies to an awe-inspiring story that involves the holy Arizal and his disciple Rav Avraham Halevi (author of *Tikkunei Shabbat*), who lived in Sefat. The Arizal greatly admired Rav Avraham's piety, saying that he was the reincarnation of the prophet Jeremiah.

One day the Arizal said to him, "Know that your days are coming to an end, and that your time has come, unless you do something that I will tell you, in which case you will live for 22 more years. This is what can save you: Go to Jerusalem and pray by the Kotel. You must pour out your supplications there, and you will merit seeing the Shechinah."

The man went home and shut himself inside for three days and three nights, fasting and mortifying himself. He then traveled to Jerusalem. At the Kotel, he poured out his soul in prayer, supplications, and tears. At that point he saw, above the Kotel, the form of a woman dressed in black. Immediately filled with terror, he prostrated himself to the ground, crying out and weeping. "Woe to me for having seen you like this!" he shouted. "Woe to my soul!" He continued to cry out and weep like this for a long time, even pulling out his hair, until he finally fainted and fell asleep. In a dream, he saw the Shechinah approaching him wearing beautiful garments, saying: "Do not worry, my son Avraham, for there is hope for the future: The children shall return to their borders, for I will bring them back and have compassion on them."

He awoke and left for Sefat, where he went to see the Arizal. The Arizal immediately said to him: "I see that you merited the vision of the Shechinah. You can now rest assured that you will live for 22 more years." This is precisely what happened, for he lived 22 years following this incident.

They Gathered by the Kotel

For hundreds of years, the Kotel has served as a place of prayer in times of misfortune. Each time that an evil decree or tragedy struck the Jewish people, everyone has realized that they

should go to pray at the Kotel. The following account is from the book *Tevuot Ha'aretz*:

In the year 5559, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte came to the Holy Land and conquered Gaza and Jaffa. His soldiers caused numerous problems for our Jewish brothers. When the Jews of Jerusalem heard that Bonaparte was preparing to make his way to Jerusalem, they were seized with great fear, for the non-Jewish fanatics living in Jerusalem spread rumors that Jews were allied with Napoleon's enemies and were helping them by spying. The non-Jews hoped that when the French reached the gates of Jerusalem, they would kill the Jews of the city.

The Rav of Jerusalem at the time, Rabbi Moshe Yosef Mordechai Meyuchas (who served as the Rishon LeTzion from the years 5562-5565) would go to the Kotel with his shamash every Friday night after midnight, and there they would read the entire book of Tehillim and the *ma'amadot*. Once during that time, as he was standing there in prayer, he saw five alephs hovering over the Kotel. On that same day, the Pasha of Jerusalem enacted a solemn decree which stated that all Jews whose windows faced the location of the Temple or the Kotel would be driven out of the city. The non-Jews began to pillage the homes of Jews, and the Rav immediately understood what he had seen: Amar Oyeveh Erdof Asig Achalek ["The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide...'"] (Bamidbar 15:9).

A few days later, Napoleon's forces approached Jerusalem. The Pasha of the city sent a message to the Rav, asking for the Jews of the city to begin praying for Jerusalem not to be conquered. The Rav sent him a message: "Why is my lord asking his servant to implore [G-d] for mercy on the holy city and to grant it peace, since his own servants do not desire the peace of the city nor the peace of its people, whom he has removed from all its holy places, not allowing them to pray before the Western Wall in order for G-d to protect this holy city and to save it?" The Pasha immediately ordered his men to allow Jews to come to the Kotel. A herald sent by the Rav and his Beit Din went out and proclaimed to all Jews, both young and old, to gather by the Kotel and implore G-d for mercy.

When they had finished their prayers, the Rav went to see the Pasha and vigorously encouraged him not to fear, for the French army would not reach the gates of Jerusalem. He also advised him to strengthen the walls of the city, and he ordered Jews to help in this construction work. Napoleon and his great army reached Kiryat Yearim, located along the road to Jerusalem, but there Hashem sowed confusion in his heart and he decided to backtrack and lay

siege to the city of Akko. It was in Akko that he confronted British forces, but an epidemic broke out in his own army as well.

I Almost Fainted

A special atmosphere reigns over the Kotel during the Bein Hametzarim [Three Weeks of Mourning]. Pain and grief over the destruction of the Temple, the place of the desolate Sanctuary, is felt even more intensely during this time.

We find an interesting description concerning these days from Rabbi Yehudah Aharon Segal Weiss, when he travelled to Jerusalem with his father. The first stage in their journey consisted of reaching the old city of Jerusalem. It was already the middle of the afternoon when they arrived, as the *Tikkun Chatzot* prayer was being recited:

"My father took a penknife out of his pocket and began to tear his clothes, mourning with a broken heart. It was already the third time that he had done this. The first time occurred as we were traveling by boat, when the lighthouse of Jaffa appeared at a distance and on the horizon we could see waves breaking upon the shores of Eretz Israel. He tore his garment for the second time as we were on the road to Jerusalem. Now he had done it for the third time, by the Kotel. When he calmed down, he approached the Kotel and kissed its mute stones, letting out a torrent of tears that had fallen from eyes for generations, for thousands of years. The entire crowd was weeping, and from these tears emerged the words of the Psalm: 'By the rivers of Babylon.'

"It was only as evening approached that my father arose, kissed the Kotel, wiped dry his eyes – which were wet with tears – and gathered his strength. He remembered that we had still not found a place to sleep for the night, a place to rest our heads in Jerusalem.

"The pinnacle of mourning would no doubt take place on Tisha B'Av. At that point everyone would be sitting on the ground and grieving over the destruction of the Sanctuary and the Temple. The book *Kessef Tzaruf* recounts: 'I heard people saying that on the night of Tisha B'Av, a voice of mourning and grief emerges from the Temple, and everyone hears it.'

"Since I wanted to hear it, one night on Tisha B'Av I left synagogue and stood by the window of my house, which was near the Temple, and from where I could see the Kotel. As I was standing there, waiting to hear a voice, suddenly a great sound of mourning emerged from the Holy of Holies. It gave me goose bumps, and I burst into tears, weeping so powerfully that I almost fainted."