

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 92 MASEI 1 AV 5765 AUGUST.6.2005

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א
11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS
Tel: (331) 48 03 53 89 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85
8 Morris Road - Spring Valley NY 10977
Tel: 1-845 426 1276 • Fax: 1-845 426 1149

www.hevratpinto.org
Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

THE SIN OF LASHON HARAH: "YOU SHALL BE GUILTLESS TOWARDS THE L-RD AND TOWARDS ISRAEL" (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "You shall be guiltless towards the L-RD and towards Israel" (Numbers 32:22). This verse teaches us that if we accuse somebody of having done something that he did not do, the accused is forbidden to keep silent, for the suspicions raised about him could seem justified in the eyes of others. Instead, he should prove his innocence to everyone, otherwise he transgresses the Divine commandment, "You shall be guiltless towards the L-RD and towards Israel." However if he proves his innocence, yet people continue to have doubts about him and begin to speak ill of him, they will be the ones transgressing commandments, such as "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16). As the Talmud teaches, people who transgress in this way will be afflicted with physical pain (Shabbat 97a).

The gravity of Lashon Harah ("evil speech") is literally indescribable. Communities and entire cities have been destroyed because of it. We note in particular the gossip peddling of idle women on Shabbat and holidays, when they meet in their homes or in synagogue. This is the why the prophet proclaims, "My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times" (Isaiah 1:14). Hashem detests them because they are not celebrated in holiness, because peace and harmony do not reign between a man and his fellow, and because people gossip about one another. When Sodom and Gomorra were destroyed, it was essentially because people did not respect one another (a source of Lashon Harah). As for the generation of the flood, our Sages teach that their fate (to be wiped out) was sealed by the sin of theft (Sanhedrin 108a), as it is written: "The earth was filled with robbery" (Genesis 6:11), for each person stole from the other and there was no unity among them.

Rabbi Akiva had 24,000 disciples who all died between Passover and Shavuot because they did not show respect for one another (Yebamot 62b). The Talmud also teaches that the second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred that raged among Jews (Yoma 9b), and especially because of Lashon Harah, which is as serious as the three cardinal sins combined (Erchin 15b). The Holy One, blessed be He, detests the person who speaks ill of his fellow, even if it is the truth (see Sotah 35a). Lashon Harah generates hatred and controversy, putting the entire world in danger.

As we have seen, the generation of King Ahab of Israel worshipped idols. The Talmud even states that Ahab wrote on the gates of Samaria that he renounced the G-d of Israel. Neverthe-

less, they were victorious when they went out to war. Why did this king, who was among the 10 monarchs who reined over the entire world (Perkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 11), merit this? It is because in his time Jews did not speak ill of one another, nor were there informers among them (Vayikra Rabba 26:5). We therefore see that harmony reigns when Lashon Harah is not rampant, and thanks to such unity we achieve abundance, even if we deny our faith, as did Ahab, who nevertheless respected the Torah (Sanhedrin 102b).

"I would prefer that they forget Me but keep My Torah, because the light of the Torah would bring them back to the right path," exclaims Hashem (Eicha Rabbati, Introduction 2). This passage is difficult to understand, for if the Children of Israel do not respect Hashem, how can they respect His Torah?

The answer lies in the fact that for the Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah symbolizes the unity of the Children of Israel. This is of primary importance in His eyes, as we saw above in the case of King Ahab's generation, for idol worship was rampant at that time. The Torah tells us the story of the king of Aram, who sent messengers to Ahab demanding that he send him a Torah scroll in a disgraceful way. Despite the fact that he had renounced Hashem, Ahab and his people refused to comply with the king of Aram because they respected the Torah. Ahab said, "Understand now and realize that this man is seeking evil" (I Kings 20:7). Ahab then offered Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, silver and gold, but he refused. What he wanted was the most precious thing of all, a Torah scroll (Sanhedrin 102b), obtained in a disgraceful way. Ahab nevertheless refused. He waged war against Aram and was victorious, even though Ben-Hadad was stronger than he. This victory was due to the respect that Ahab showed for the Torah. Moreover, his servants testified to the respect that they showed one another and to many Torah commandments that actually deal with interactions between man and his fellowman.

This is sadly not the case in our days when rabbis, who consider themselves to be great sages, do not hesitate to speak ill of others. Transgressing the mitzvah of judging their fellow favorably and finding good in them (Perkei Avoth 1:6), they tarnish the image of G-d in their fellowman and taint the entire world with evil by means of their Lashon Harah.

I often see people being attracted by tidbits of gossip, rumor peddling, and slander during a Torah lecture. Instead of receiving the reward reserved for those who engage in Torah study, they

Continuation page 2

will be punished for having spoken ill of their neighbor. They obviously forget that a person who favorably judges his fellow will be favorably judged by the Holy One, blessed be He (Zohar I:79b). Why then should a person succumb to this sin, since it is so easy to watch over words coming out of one's mouth?

Someone once asked me for advice on what to do, given that he often hears Lashon Harah during a weekly Torah class. I explained to him that according to the Torah, it is forbidden to attend such a class, especially since the person organizing it at his home is attacking others and slandering them. Since that person sins and makes other people sin, how will his repentance be accepted? As we have seen, that person will not be given the chance to return to the right path. Instead of bringing heavenly abundance down into the world, that person (whose home is a meeting place for pious Jews) actually strengthens the forces of impurity and brings strict judgments, even illnesses, upon the world (Zohar II:122a, 264b). Those who organize Torah classes and whose goal is to bring their brothers to the right path should be especially careful to not speak ill of others. Otherwise, when they face adversity and call out to Hashem and implore Him for help, He will not come to their aid, for they have succumbed to the grave sin of Lashon Harah, a sin that destroys both body and soul. In addition, if they do not ask forgiveness of those against whom they have spoken, their sin will not be atoned (Yoma 85b).

Concerning this topic, we know that in the will that the Vilna Gaon left his wife and family, he forbid them to go to synagogue on Shabbat and holidays, lest they hear Lashon Harah from other women. The Zohar teaches that one who speaks ill of others creates an angel who brings accusations against him to G-d, and G-d cannot, so to speak, stop him (Zohar III:85a). As for the Talmud, it teaches that such speech shortens one's life.

My dear brothers, take a firm decision to stop speaking ill of others! Let us remember the episode involving Miriam the prophetess, by whose merit a well provided water to the Children of Israel in the desert for 40 years (Taanith 9a). Nevertheless, she was struck by leprosy when she spoke ill of her brother Moses (ibid. 16a). Let us also remember the episode of the spies, who did not draw a lesson from her leprosy and spoke ill of Eretz Israel (Tanhuma Shelach Lecha 5). Let us therefore refrain from this extremely grave sin and not listen to those who slander others and peddle rumors, nor accustom ourselves to listening to lies. In this way we will not come to hating others.

If we see two groups who do not share the same point of view, in no way must we get involved. Let us flee from all those who speak ill of the great of Israel. Concerning this subject, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said that because of ordinary individuals who speak ill of others, the Satan dances in the midst of the Tzaddikim. In order for controversy to not reign among them, these ordinary people must be taught to not speak ill of others. Peace and harmony will then reign among all.

Someone once asked me if the spies were punished for having spoken ill of the land and what were the consequences of their sin. I replied that not only have they no part in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 108b), but that they died of the plague, eaten away by the worm (Sotah 35a), and are called rebels (Pesikta Zutreta, Shelach Lecha 14:4). It was also because of them that all the generations that followed have continued to shed tears over the destruction of both Temples on the 9th of Av. Finally, their Lashon Harah brought about the death of an entire generation in the desert, and only their descendants had the merit to enter the Holy Land (see Numbers 14:31).

We may now understand why Eretz Israel was also punished. As we have seen, G-d poured out His anger on wood and stone. This is because Lashon Harah kills three people: The one who speaks ill of another, the one who is spoken ill of, and the one who listens (Erchin 15b). This is why Eretz Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Romans, and it is also why the spies were punished. The Talmud teaches that they ended up worshipping idols, a sin that is equal to Lashon Harah (ibid.). Their descendants too were punished, since they were not able to live in Eretz Israel, which vomited them out because they defiled it (see Leviticus 18:28).

If the land received such punishment, what of a person who speaks ill of his fellow, who was created in the image of G-d? He simply does not realize how much damage he causes, destroying both his life and that of his family, for they will certainly suffer a severe punishment. One who speaks ill of his fellowman changes the Divine image that he embodies, and people also begin to change their behavior with respect to him, thinking ill of him. Thus he tarnishes G-d's work. As the Talmud teaches, the entire world was created for this man, now a victim (Sanhedrin 37a). Therefore one who speaks Lashon Harah destroys G-d's universe, and the transgression of this sinner cannot be expiated other than by asking the victim for forgiveness before all who heard him being maligned. Otherwise, even if he is a Tzaddik, this sin cannot be expiated other than at his death, following which he must give an accounting to his Creator.

As we have seen, it was because of Lashon Harah that the first and second Temples were destroyed and the Jewish people exiled from its land. Cain, who murdered his brother Abel, was condemned to be a nah ve'nad ("fugitive and wanderer"—Genesis 4:12) because he spoke ill of him. Actually, instead of admitting his sin to G-d, he exclaimed: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (v.9). In other words: "I hate him and I don't know where he is. I'm not interested in him at all, and I'm not responsible for watching over him." Even though Cain later repented and was reconciled to his Creator (Bereshith Rabba 22:28), he was condemned to wander about in exile. With respect to this, we note that the last letters in the term Lashon Harah form the word nah.

The Talmud teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, acted measure for measure with Cain (Shabbat 105b). In fact, a person who speaks ill of another is trying to make him repugnant in the sight of others, so that people distance themselves from him and refuse to trust him. The person who has sinned is therefore forced to wander about and be humiliated wherever he goes.

My friends and brothers, let us strive to completely put a halt to this wicked trait and to live in peace with everyone. We will then be guiltless towards Hashem and Israel. We may say that the expression ve'hitem ne'kiyim ("and you shall be guiltless"—Numbers 32:22) has the same numerical value (681) as the phrase rodfeh shalom ("those who pursue peace"), which represents integrity and complete harmony. In addition, the expression ve'hitem ne'kiyim mei'Hashem u'mei'Israel ("and you shall be guiltless towards the L-RD and towards Israel") has the same numerical value (1334) as the phrase issur lashon harah u'fi tzaddik ye'he'geh chochmah ("Lashon Harah is forbidden, and the mouth of the righteous speaks words of wisdom").

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI SHLOMO BEN YITZHAK - RASHI

Born in the town of Troyes, France in 4800 (1040), Rabbi Shlomo ben Itzhak, better known as Rashi, stemmed from a prestigious line of rabbis that included the Tanna Rabbi Yochanan HaSandler, himself a descendant of King David. After having studied in the yeshivas founded by the disciples of Rabbeinu Gershon (the “Light of the Diaspora”), Rashi went to Mayenne, Germany to the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov ben Yakar. Following the death of the latter, Rashi traveled to the yeshiva of Rabbi Yitzhak ben Eleazar Halevi in Worms. There he continued to study, after his marriage, in conditions of extreme poverty.

Rashi, widely recognized as the leader of Jewry at the time, never accepted the post of rabbi. He preferred to gain his livelihood as a wine merchant. He returned to Troyes and founded a yeshiva that attracted students from France and Germany. Among his students, three would end up becoming his son-in-law: Rabbi Yehuda ben Nathan (who completed the commentary on the Talmudic Tractate Makot, which Rashi had been working on when he died); Rabbi Meir ben Shemuel (who married his second daughter and fathered three illustrious Torah commentators: Rabbi Meir [the Rashbam], Rabbi Yaakov [Rabbeinu Tam] and Rabbi Yitzhak ben Meir [the Rivam]); and Rabbi Ephraim (who married his third daughter).

Rashi commented on the written Bible (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings), as well as on the Oral Law (which is to say, on the Talmud). Thanks to his writings, Jewish children acquire a good understanding of the Biblical text at the beginning of their education, an understanding according to the perspective of the oral tradition, just as it has been transmitted without interruption from generation to generation from the time of Moses our Teacher.

In our days, the study of the Talmud without Rashi’s explanations would be absolutely unthinkable, to the extent that Rabbi Yitzhak bar Sheshet (the Rivash) and Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi (the Shitah Mekubetzet) have affirmed that without Rashi, the Talmud would be a “sealed book”.

Rashi died on Tammuz 29, 4865 (1105), yet because of the fact that Jews the world over learn and comment on his work day and night, we may say that “his lips move in the grave” (Yebamot 97a), on which Rashi simply remarked: “It’s as if he’s alive.” Rashi’s work remains alive in the mouths, the hearts, and the minds of students, which is the reason why the name Rashi also means Rabban Shel Israel (the teacher of the Jewish people).

In Calabria in southern Italy, Rashi’s commentary on the Torah was the first Jewish book to be printed in Hebrew. The year was 1475. Owing to its simple and precise language, this commentary can be understood by a five-year-old who just beginning to study Torah. Jewish tradition acknowledges that Rashi’s commentary was written with Divine inspiration (Ruach Hakodesh). Every expression, every word carries an importance of its own. Concerning Rashi the Chida wrote: “Rashi fasted 613 fasts [according to the number of Torah commandments] before beginning his work.” He also asserted that once this commentary was completed, Moses our Teacher appeared to Rashi in a dream and told him, “Rejoice, for your commentary has been approved by G-d Himself!” Moreover, Rashi wrote in his commentary on the book of Ezekiel, “As for me, I had neither Rav nor any help for this entire undertaking. Rather, I only wrote what was shown to me by Heaven.”

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

RABBI ISRAEL AND THE MASKIL

One day, when Rabbi Israel returned from a trip to Memel where he lived, he discovered that since his departure his landlord had changed his attitude concerning religion and had begun to scornfully treat everything that had to do with Torah and mitzvot. When Rabbi Israel asked him the reason for his change, he told him that some days earlier a renegade had lodged with him, one who disavowed before him the principle of reward and punishment. As proof of his words, he sent someone to get him a pork sausage, and he proclaimed that if a higher power existed and there was indeed a principle of reward and punishment, this forbidden food should go down his throat and make him choke. He then ate the sausage before his eyes and nothing happened to him. After this he brazenly proclaimed that there was no G-d, and he denied everything. Since that time, confusion took hold of the landlord’s mind and his faith was shaken to the core. Rabbi Israel gave no reply, but rather went to his room.

Several hours later, the daughter of the landlord came in from school and happily announced that she had passed her final exams with two excellent grades, one in math and the other in song. Rabbi Israel called the child over to his room and asked her to prove that she really knew how to sing and that she was worthy of this good grade. She refused. Rabbi Israel sent for her father and shared his astonishment with him over his daughter’s refusal. When the father asked her with amazement how she could dare refuse Rabbi Israel, she replied that she found it foolish to get up all of a sudden and begin singing in front of someone, without it being the proper place or time to do so, just so as to prove her talent. Was it normal that she should be obligated to get up before whoever didn’t believe her report card in order to prove that she knew how to sing? She would be considered as foolish to do so! It was precisely for this reason that someone is given a report card, and if someone else wants to verify it, he could find the proper occasion to do so. This response satisfied the father, who thought that she was completely correct. Rabbi Israel waited for the girl to leave, and then he explained to the father that what she had just said constituted the best response to his astonishment concerning G-d. Rabbi Israel said, “G-d already proved Himself before all the peoples by His great miracles during the exodus from Egypt, and we possess a document that proves it, meaning the Torah that was given to us. Similarly, He demonstrated His providence to the Prophet Elijah during his confrontation with the prophets of Baal, and then all the people bowed themselves and proclaimed that Hashem is G-d. The same thing happened during the time of Mordechai and Esther, as well as with the miracle of the Hasmoneans and other historical events, from which one can only deduce the presence and influence of Hashem.

“Is it therefore logical that G-d should change the laws of nature for any fool who comes along and all of a sudden declares that he doesn’t believe in anything? Must G-d do this to prove His existence to such a person? If G-d did this, there would be no end to it. Each day someone else would present himself and claim the same, asking if there is reward and punishment and having to be choked with forbidden food to be answered! Another would ask if there is Divine intervention over the world, and he would have to fall from his horse on Shabbat for proof, and so on. The one who wants to know G-d can verify our eternal “report card,” which was confirmed by the eyes of all the people. No further proof is needed.”

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “Moses wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of the L-RD, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth” (Numbers 33:2).

Many commentators have looked into this reversal of terms.

A rich man had two sons. When the older son got engaged, the younger one noticed that his father spent a great deal of money on his brother. “Why don’t you give me as much money too?” he asked. “Why should I have less than my brother?”

The father replied, “Your brother has reached the age of marriage, yet you’re still young. But observe how much I give to your brother. Write it down in a notebook and I will sign it as confirmation. When you get married, I will give you just as much!”

The boy took him at his word and began to write everything down. Next, he saw that all sorts of fabulous fabrics were being brought to his brother, which filled him with joy. A little later a tailor arrived who took his brother’s measurements and gave him his full attention, without paying the least attention to his younger brother.

The boy began to cry and said, “The tailor will only make clothes for my brother from all this beautiful cloth. But for me he won’t make anything!”

“I’ve already told you,” the father replied, “that your brother is the one getting married. Take note of all the clothes that I’m having made for him, and when you get married I will have the same number made for you!”

During all those days, the young boy did not leave the tailor for a moment. He took note of all the clothes, large and small, as well as the jewels that he saw being given to the fiancée. When all these various tasks were completed, the father took all the clothes and jewels and put them away in a chest to keep them until the wedding.

The next morning the chest had disappeared, and the father was beside himself with anxiety. The wedding day was fast approaching, and whether he liked it or not, he was forced to quickly order more fabrics and call on the tailor once again. Faithful with his notebook, the younger brother again wrote everything down. The work was completed just before the wedding.

During the festivities following the wedding, the older brother went for a walk by the vineyards with his new father-in-law and little brother. He recounted everything that his father had done for him – how much he had spent, how many clothes he had made for him (for the week as well as for Shabbat and the holidays, several for each occasion) – and furthermore, how his father had more clothes made when the first batch had been stolen! At these words, the young boy exclaimed, “My dear brother, you didn’t say the truth when you said that father was forced to make other clothes because the first had been stolen. You should have said that it was for me that father was forced to have other clothes made, for I was the one who brought this all about: I was the one who helped the thieves steal the chest! I did it so that father would be forced to make other clothes for you and that the total number of items purchased for you would increase in my notebook, for father promised to give me exactly the same number of clothes that he gave you. The more he would give you, the more I would get too!”

Moses took his best writing quill and took note of all the events that had occurred to the Children of Israel while on route, as well as all the details of their journeys, including their hunger, their thirst, and the wars they fought. The Midrash says as follows: “‘These were their journeys’ – this is like a king whose son was ill. He was forced to bring his son to a faraway place to be healed, and on their return the father began to recount all the stages of their travel by writing, ‘Here we slept, here we were very tired, here you had a headache!’ In the same way, Hashem said to Moses, ‘Count all the places where they awoke My wrath!’ This is why it is said, ‘These were their journeys.’”

THE PATH OF THE JUST LOVE PART II

We continue with some of the different detrimental forms that love can take on when it blinds man’s perception:

Fifth form: The love of longevity. A man loves life so much that he doesn’t resist temptation.

Sixth form: The love of honors. A man in search of honors will not act in a selfless way. All the commandments that he performs (be it charity, Torah study, or others) will be done with the goal of attaining the praise and honor to which he aspires. This constitutes a great weakness in the service of G-d. Even if a man has the merit of Torah study and good deeds accounted to him, the pursuit of honors will wipe it out. All the more repugnant are the deeds of a man who possesses neither Torah study nor good deeds, yet still seeks out honor!

Seventh form: The worst of love’s detrimental forms is the love for pleasures and comfort (such as for food, drink, and other delights). It is certainly not necessary to elaborate on this subject, for in fact a man who is won over by drink, who consumes choice meals, and who frequents banquets will forget his Creator, as it is written: “you shall eat and be satisfied – beware for yourself lest you forget the L-RD” (Deuteronomy 6:11-12). Also, “you will eat and you will be satisfied. Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others” (ibid 11:15-16), and “Yeshurun became fat and kicked” (ibid 32:15).

The person desiring to escape the trap of these seven detrimental forms of love must employ immense wisdom and exhibit great courage. These forms of love take hold of a man’s heart, and even if he manages to reject some of them, others will take the lead in chasing him from light into darkness. Hence a person must become accustomed to being vigilant and energetic in order to redirect these forms of love to a single goal, that of knowing the ways of G-d, as it is written, “In all your ways know Him” (Proverbs 3:6).