

SOME GOOD ADVICE IN THE WAR AGAINST THE EVIL INCLINATION (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Path To Follow KI-TISA

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Reward of Those Who Say Good Things

A person who accustoms himself to saying good things about others will merit to have Hashem call him by His own Name, which is Shalom. Thus it is written, "The L-RD [is] Shalom" (Judges 6:24). This verse was written about the Judge Gideon, the son of Joash, who defended Israel by his words. In his book *Orot Eylim*, Rabbi Eliezer Papo wrote: "If a man speaks good of others, even the angels will speak good of him. If he speaks ill of others, the angels will speak ill of him. If that were the only reward of one who speaks good of others, and the only punishment of one who speaks ill of them, it would be a sufficient warning. Thus how much more is it when it comes to transgressing Hashem's will!"

At the beginning of this week's parsha we find several passages that deal with various issues, the order of which is the following: The first passage deals with the half-shekel donation to redeem the souls of those numbered in the census, as mentioned at the beginning of the parsha: "When you take a census of the Children of Israel...this shall they give...a half-shekel of the sacred shekel" (Exodus 30:12-13). The second passage deals with the preparation of a basin and its accompanying base, as it is written: "You shall make a copper basin and its base of copper for washing" (v.18). The third speaks of the anointing oil, as it is written: "Of it you shall make a holy anointing oil, a blended compound, the handiwork of a perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil" (v.25). The fourth speaks of the incense and its 11 ingredients, as it is written: "The L-RD said to Moses, 'Take for yourself spices...and make it into incense' (vv.34-35). Next the Torah speaks in a special passage about the wisdom of Betzalel, for Hashem filled him with His spirit in order to understand how to work with gold, silver, and copper (Exodus 31:2-4), as well as everything else that required special skills. Immediately following this we find the passage on the observance of Shabbat, as it is written: "However you shall observe My Sabbaths.... You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you" (vv.13-14) and, "The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations" (v.16). In chapter 32 we have a lengthy account of the sin of the golden calf that the Children of Israel made.

We need to understand what these passages are trying to teach us, and what we can derive from the order in which they are given. The Torah is not simply a succession of stories, and the fact that these passages are written in the Torah, as well as the order in which they are placed, obviously means that we have something to learn from them. To me the explanation seems to be the following: We are aware of the Zohar's view that the Torah is composed entirely of words of advice and directives for man to follow in order to learn how to live in this world and deal with his archenemy, the evil inclination. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, warned the Children of Israel that if they wanted to be stronger than the evil inclination and to serve G-d, they would have to do several things. In doing so they could free themselves from being enslaved to their instincts, for the advice given by the Torah enables people to overcome all obstacles. From the order of the aforementioned passages and the instructions given within the parsha, we learn how man can spiritually elevate himself and conquer all.

The first piece of advice involves the half-shekel, by which the Torah tells us that even when a person is incredibly rich and well-respected, he still needs to realize that there is a Creator. He must also understand that the Creator does not consider him to be greater than a half-shekel, meaning that he has no reason to feel proud, for he is only a half. Now the proud and Hashem cannot live together in this world (Sotah 5a), and our text tells the wealthy that he is exactly like the poor insofar as the redemption of his soul is concerned, a lesson meant to prevent him from growing proud and congratulating himself for his abilities. Not so, for he is equal to the poor. Thus if he is wealthy, this does not mean that he can be proud of his wealth, for it is solely Hashem Who has made him rich. In fact it is Hashem Who impoverishes and enriches, Who lowers and elevates. If the wealthy reflects

upon this and clearly reaches this level of understanding, then it is said: "The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease" (Exodus 30:15), for combined they must give a complete shekel that is devoted to Hashem. This is the shekel of the Sanctuary, and with both halves the Name of Hashem will be sanctified and exalted in this world.

The second suggestion offered in our parsha involves the copper basin. As we know, the basin was made from the copper mirrors of the women (Exodus 38:8). This was meant to remind man of what the Sages have said, namely that there is "an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book" (Perkei Avoth 2:1). This means that everything a person does is seen in Heaven and inscribed in a book. If a person remembers this and takes it to heart, it will help him to carefully do all he can, both seriously and attentively, so as to properly observe Hashem's mitzvot. In this way he will not be trapped by pride.

The third suggestion involves the anointing oil. Man is like the priest who stands before Hashem and serves Him by studying Torah, observing mitzvot, and performing good deeds. As we know, oil represents the soul, for hashemen ("the oil") is formed by the same letters as the word neshama ("soul"). It is man's soul that must anoint his body so as to purify his 248 members and 265 sinews. All this is meant to protect him from going after the pleasures of this world. Furthermore, since all his endeavors should be for the sake of Heaven, let them be with his soul, for the service of Hashem without the soul makes a man like an animal. However every trial can be overcome through the soul and the anointing of the body in sanctity.

The fourth suggestion involves the offering of the incense, for Hashem not only wants us to perform mitzvot. He also wants a pleasant odor to emanate from a person when he does so, like the odor of the incense before Hashem. This is much like the idea expressed by the Sages, for due to the Temple's holiness, "No fly was seen in [it's] slaughter-house" (Perkei Avoth 5:5).

This is why the Torah places all these passages next to the verses dealing with the observance of the holy Sabbath. In fact if a person follows all these suggestions and attains a lofty spiritual level, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will double his reward once a week, on the Sabbath day. When a person observes Shabbat, it is as if he fulfilled the entire Torah, for Shabbat is equivalent to all the mitzvot (Shemot Rabba 25:12). This is the meaning behind the statement that his reward will be doubled, for he observes Shabbat and also fulfills the entire Torah. This view is supported by what Rabbi Israel Abuhatzera Zatzal wrote, namely that the word Tisa is formed from the initials of the phrase tishmor Shabbat achat ("observe one Shabbat").

As we have said, all these suggestions were given to each and every person in order to demonstrate that even the greatest individual is liable to transgress if he fails to keep these things in mind. Hence we must pay extreme attention to these words of advice, for through them we can overcome the evil inclination and achieve holiness and purity. This is alluded to by this Shabbat (Shabbat Parah), which teaches us about purity. At the same time, we can elevate ourselves and connect with our Creator.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Power of Money

It is written, “This they shall give” (Exodus 30:13).

Rashi explains: “He showed [Moses] a sort of coin of fire weighing half a shekel, and He said to him, ‘Like this they shall give.’” Fire is useful for heating and cooking, yet it can also do harm by burning and destroying. Money can also be useful, and if it is not used properly it too can do a great deal of harm. Let us examine how money can be useful. Rabbi Nathan Tzvi Finkel Zatzal, known as the Alter of Slabodka, believed that given the spiritual condition of man in our times, it is essential to devise useful and alluring strategies to draw people to the Beit Midrash and into performing good deeds. This is because it is almost impossible to make people agree to pursue goals that are purely spiritual and lacking the possibility of personal gain. This idea is confirmed by the facts of life, for the principle motivation behind most people’s actions is self-interest and pride. These motivating factors, however, are capable of giving people the ability to control themselves and halt their most powerful drives. For example, the Alter of Slabodka recounted an incident that he witnessed in a Vilna market during his youth. A traveling merchant woman had set up a stall at the market to sell her beans. As it turned out, she became enraged with a fellow merchant, a competitor in fact, and began to heap insults on him. People thought that she would need a great deal of time to calm down, but that wasn’t the case, for as soon as someone approached her stall and wanted to purchase a small quantity of beans, well, you wouldn’t believe what happened! Her face changed in a few seconds, and with a large smile on her face she politely addressed her customer and sold him what he wanted. This incident taught the Alter a great secret about the power of the soul, which is that a single penny can transform a person and put a halt to the emotional storms raging within. If such is the case with a mere penny, the same also applies to sensual pleasures, compliments, and even a polite word, all of which have the power to conquer a person’s heart and calm bitter feelings and evil desires. We can learn something else from this story, for once the buyer paid the woman her penny, she began to thank him and shower him with blessings of health, longevity, and so on. “I’m certain,” the Alter said, “that she blessed him with all her heart, from which we see that not only is it possible to control bad behavior by the power of potential gain, but also to transform people in this way. They can be changed into benevolent individuals who love others, are generous, and possess characters traits that are beyond reproach.”

The Te’amim Allude to the Rules of Tzedakah

It is written, “Every man shall give the L-RD an atonement for his soul.... The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel” (Exodus 30:12,15).

The Vilna Gaon noted the significance of the te’amim (cantillation symbols) on the word venatnu (“and they shall give”), namely kadma and azla. The Gemara recounts that Rav Chiya told his wife that if a poor person came to ask for bread, she was to quickly give it to him. As a result, if her sons would someday be in need, someone would also quickly give them bread. Rav Chiya’s wife replied, “You are cursing them!” Rav Chiya then explained to her that there is a revolving wheel in the world (Shabbat 151b). On this the Vilna Gaon said that the word venatnu is a palindrome, meaning that it reads the same from right to left and from left to right. This means that the world is a revolving wheel, for one day a person gives and another

receives, while on another the person who received now gives, while the one who gave now receives. This is why the te’amim on the word venatnu are kadma and azla, (literally “advancing quickly”) for we must quickly give because the world is a revolving wheel.

The te’amim in the phrase, “The wealthy shall not increase” are munach and revii, which the Vilna Gaon said allude to the words of the Gemara. There the Sages said that a person who wants to spend on tzedakah should not give more than a fifth of his money. That is, if he gives a fifth of his money to tzedakah, he will have four-fifths left to himself. Hence the te’amim in the phrase are munach and revii (literally “resting the fourth”).

Unequal in Wealth, Yet Equal in Souls

It is written, “The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease” (Exodus 30:15).

Why are the wealthy prohibited from giving more and the poor from giving less? Who will be upset if the wealthy gives 2,000 shekels instead of a half-shekel? The Maharil Diskin says that when offerings are brought, each person gives according to his level of generosity. However when it comes to the half-shekels from which the communal sacrifices were purchased to atone for the souls of the people, the soul of the wealthy is worth exactly the same as that of the poor.

Everything Must Teach Us How To Serve Hashem

It is written, “Stone-cutting for setting” (Exodus 31:5).

The Chiddushei HaRim said that a Jew must extract a lesson from every single thing on how to serve Hashem. We clearly see this among the great figures of Israel, who translated everything they saw into a way of serving Hashem. They were constantly asking themselves, “What can this teach me about serving Hashem?” There is no incident that we can overlook in this regard. The Chiddushei HaRim said that Rabbi Akiva was walking along when he noticed a stone with a hole in it. He realized that water dripping on the rock had managed, drop by drop, to bore a hole in it. Rabbi Akiva then thought that if water could bore a hole in this rock, the Torah could surely penetrate his heart. This is the meaning of the expression, “Stone-cutting for setting,” a reference to taking the hole that is cut in the rock and realizing that we can learn how to serve G-d from it. Concerning the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein Zatzal, it is said that his students sent him a gas stove from America. When the stove arrived, people unsuccessfully tried to assemble it. He then said, “There must be instructions that came with it,” and in fact he found the instructions that accompanied it. Upon reading them, Rabbi Yechezkel immediately shouted out in joy, “Here is proof that the Torah comes from Heaven! If a gas stove is not sent without instructions, how could the world have been created without an instruction manual?”

A Sinner Who Thinks He is Performing a Mitzvah Has No Chance of Repenting

It is written, “It happened as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, that Moses’ anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain” (Exodus 32:19).

Rashi cites the Gemara (Shabbat 87a) in explaining Moses’ actions: “He said: If for the Passover sacrifice, which is one of the commandments, the Torah said: ‘No alien may eat of it,’ [now that] the entire Torah is here and all the Israelites are apostates, shall I give it to them?” At the simplest level, this means that Moses used a kal vachomer to conclude that if one mitzvah (the Passover offering) is withheld from an alien, how much more should all the mitzvot (i.e.,

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

A Clear Glass

It is written, “He said, ‘Show me now Your glory.’...He said, ‘You will not be able to see My face, for no man can see My face and live’” (Exodus 33:18,20).

Moses asked Hashem to see His glory. In his *Shemonah Perakim* (introduction to *Perkei Avoth*), the Rambam explains that some prophets saw G-d through a very clouded glass, while others, depending on their spiritual level, saw Him through a less clouded glass. Moses, however, saw G-d through a perfectly clear glass, though the glass still remained. This is why the Sages said, “Moses looked through a clear glass” (*Yebamot* 49b). Hence Moses asked Hashem to “show me now Your glory,” so that he could understand Hashem’s nature without looking through any intermediary. To this request Hashem replied: “No man can see My face and live,” since it is impossible for a being of flesh and blood to achieve such knowledge.

Rabbi Yosef Leib Nandik, the Mashgiach of the Kletsk yeshiva, explained Hashem’s reply to Moses as follows: Man’s sole purpose in this world is to know his Creator and to cleave to Him. To reach this goal, a person is given 70, or even 80 years or more. Therefore if a person attains the supremely lofty level of seeing Hashem face to face, it means that he has already attained his goal in life, and consequently he no longer has a reason to live. This is why, “No man can see My face and live.” Rabbi Yosef Leib gave another explanation for this verse, but we must preface it by noting that Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kletsk, believed that anyone who saw the face of the Vilna Gaon would never lose faith in G-d. This is because the power of the Vilna Gaon’s holiness and purity, and the greatness of seeing such a man of Torah face to face, would have a huge effect on a person’s soul. That being said, Rabbi Yosef Leib cited the Gemara’s description of Eleazar ben Durdaya as he sought repentance for his sins (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). He sat down with his head between his knees and wept so intensely that his soul left his body. This occurred through the sheer degree of anguish that Eleazar ben Durdaya experienced when he realized the lowliness of his condition on account of his numerous sins. Thus how much more will a person realize, as he looks upon the face of G-d and gazes, as it were, upon the King of kings, just how lowly and insignificant he really is. He will feel so ashamed and shaken by such an experience that he will obviously be incapable of living any longer.

EISHET CHAYIL

Not A Single Woman Among Them

When the Children of Israel committed the sin of the golden calf, the men went to find their wives in order to take their jewelry and make the calf from it. The women said to them, “We’re certainly not going to give you our jewelry to make idols with! That would be denying Hashem, especially after all the miracles and wonders that He performed for us in Egypt, at the Sea of Reeds, and on Mount Sinai! No, we won’t obey you or give you our jewelry to make idols with!” It is written, “The Holy One, blessed be He, gave them their reward in this world, being the observance of Rosh Chodesh. He also gave them their reward in the World to Come, being that they will renew themselves as the New Moon” (*Perkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 45). Regarding this subject King Solomon said, “One man in a thousand I have found, but a single woman among them I have not found” (*Ecclesiastes* 7:28). In other words: Among those who sinned with the golden calf, I did not find a single woman who said, “This is your god, O Israel.”

the entire Torah) be withheld from everyone because they are apostates. From a moral perspective, the Pardes Yosef explains that Moses believed he could convince the Children of Israel to renounce their idolatry. He then saw, however, that on the golden calf it was written: “The Altar of the G-d of Israel.” This meant that they continued to recite the same prayers, yet in an idolatrous context, signifying that it was impossible for them to repent. The reason is that if someone knows he has sinned, he can be brought to repentance. However the Children of Israel believed they were serving the calf for the sake of Heaven! Therefore how could they be brought to repentance? Hence, “The entire Torah is here and all the Israelites are apostates,” which meant that repentance was impossible. Moses therefore broke the Tablets.

The Obstinate Need to Learn Mercy

It is written, “I shall not ascend among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I annihilate you on the way” (Exodus 33:3).

When Hashem said this to Moses, he replied: On the contrary, You should come with us, for we are a stiff-necked people! Thus it is written that Moses said, “If I have now found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, let my L-rd go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and You shall forgive our iniquity and error, and make us Your heritage” (*ibid.* 34:9). The Maggid of Dubno said that this is comparable to a merchant who sold special fabric for repairing clothes. One day he traveled to a large town and tried to sell his merchandise there, yet no one was interested. After a while the merchant realized that the local inhabitants were wealthy and did not repair their clothes. Once a garment became torn, they would throw it away. People said to the merchant, “You have to try and sell your wares in a poor area. People there will buy your merchandise.” Moses said to Hashem: You have said that You possess 13 attributes of mercy. Where can You demonstrate these attributes, among the angels? It is only among us that You can best put these 13 attributes to use, for we are a stiff-necked people. We commit sins! With us Your “merchandise” is extremely useful!

– Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Ki Tisa continues with the instructions regarding the necessary preparations for the Sanctuary and the service of Hashem. It lays out the demand for a half-shekel from each person, the redemption price for every individual when he is counted in the census and consecrated to the service of the Tent of Meeting. We also find the commandment to make the basin and its base for ritual washings, and to make the oil and incense for anointing. Betzalel is then designated as head craftsman, and the Torah stresses that the people must be extremely careful with respect to guarding Shabbat.

When Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, the Children of Israel tried to concretize his connection to Hashem by means of a golden calf, not by the Sanctuary. After this incident Hashem said, “I shall not ascend among you,” though He later revealed Himself to Moses as he stood in a cleft in the rocks. Hashem said to him, “You have also found favor in My eyes,” and He gave Moses a second pair of Tablets to replace the ones he had broken. Hashem established a covenant by announcing the laws pertaining to the community, with the text going on to speak of the radiance of Moses’ face.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Cleansed and Saved from Impurity

It is written, “I will save you from all your impurities” (Ezekiel 36:29).

In this chapter it is stated that Hashem will purify the Children of Israel with the waters containing the red heifer’s ashes. The Mishnah states that nine heifers were prepared from the time that the mitzvah was given until the destruction of the Second Temple. Moses prepared the first, and from its ashes purification was achieved until the destruction of the First Temple. Ezra prepared the second, and according to the Sages seven more red heifers were prepared from his time until the destruction of the Second Temple (Parah 3:5). The tenth red heifer will be prepared by King Mashiach, may he come speedily and in our days. The prophet Ezekiel states that when Hashem will purify Israel (as it is written, “I will sprinkle pure water upon you, that you may become cleansed” [Ezekiel 36:25]), He will also save them from all their impurities, as stated in the verse cited at the beginning. We need to understand why they will have to be saved from their impurities even after the ashes of the red heifer have cleansed them. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz Zatzal said, “Even once they have repented and rectified their sins, the effect of those sins will still be imprinted on their souls. They will remain drawn to sin and impurity because they will have become second nature, a habit that is difficult to break. Hence the prophet cites Hashem as saying, ‘I will save you from all your impurities.’”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld – The Rosh Av Beit Din of Jerusalem

The gaon Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Zatzal was born to the tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Shlomo in the Slovakian town of Worboj in 5609. At the age of four he lost his father, and starting from the age of eight he began to demonstrate exceptional abilities in the holy Torah. He went to study in the yeshiva of the gaon Rabbi Tzvi Manheim Zatzal, and at the age of 13 he was given Smicha and received the title of Moreinu (“our teacher”). He also learned Torah from the gaon Rabbi Avraham Shemuel Sofer Zatzal, the author of Ketav Sofer, and the gaon Rabbi Avraham Shag Zatzal, the Rav and Av Beit Din of Kobelsdorf. Rabbi Yosef Chaim’s reputation quickly began to spread, and when his teacher Rabbi Avraham Shag left for Eretz Israel, he accompanied him there and was treasured by all the Torah greats of Israel. Rabbi Yosef Chaim aided his teacher in strengthening Jewish observance in Israel, and with his help the districts of Mea Shearim, Beit Israel, and Beit Ungarin were built in Jerusalem. Rabbi Yosef Chaim was also among the founders of the great Diskin orphanage, and later he was unanimously appointed as the Rosh Av Beit Din of Jerusalem. He was effective in vigorously and boldly working for the holiness of Jerusalem, and he was also active in Jewish institutions connected to the government. His humility was legendary, and in his will he stated that his casket was not to be brought into his Beit Midrash. Rather, people should only say of him: “We mourn an old Jew of Eretz Israel who has passed away.” Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld’s soul ascended to Heaven on Adar 19, 5692, and his body was laid to rest on the Mount of Olives as all the inhabitants of Jerusalem mourned his passing. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Paying Close Attention to Good Students

It is written, “The wealthy shall not increase” (Exodus 30:15).

The Ramban concludes that if a wealthy individual gives more than a half-shekel, he transgresses a mitzvah. From here the masters of Mussar have derived that it is a positive mitzvah for all the donations to be of equal value. Giving a greater donation results in a transgression which indicates that not only is something positive absent, but that something negative has occurred. Hence they explain that this is related to the subject of personal education. Imagine that we are engaged in a public drive to collect money for constructing the Temple. In synagogue an announcement is made that an individual who is known to be extremely poor (to the point that he normally has a difficult time coming up with even a quarter of a shekel) has managed to donate half a shekel. Those in attendance will congratulate him for the enormous effort that he made for the sake of Hashem’s house. Next, the wealthiest person in the synagogue is addressed, a man whose name is famous for having built institutions around the world, one known as the person to go see in times of trouble. Thus when it is announced that he too has given half a shekel, he will be filled with shame for having donated the same amount as the poor man. This is the hardest trial for the wealthy to endure, the most difficult part being to perform the mitzvah exactly as Hashem has commanded it – giving neither more nor less – even though he is used to making a spiritual fortune in the performance of mitzvot.

We find the same thing with good students, those to whom Hashem has given special abilities. Thoughts of spiritual grandeur easily come to their minds, intentions that are opposed to the pure and lofty goal of performing Hashem’s will for its own sake, nothing more. It follows that from Torah study itself – the goal of which is to bring man closer to Hashem – a separation between man and Hashem may occur. The author of Mussar VaDa’at said: “We have received the commandment to carefully guard our souls when studying Torah and performing mitzvot – not to forget that the Torah is ‘fire and flame’ – for at each instant that a person studies Torah, it is liable to devour and consume him. As the Sages have said, ‘The sword and the book came down from Heaven wrapped together’ [Devarim Rabba 4:2].”

A TRUE STORY

Two Brothers From Ashkelon

It is written, “No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before the L-RD your G-d” (Exodus 34:24). This verse explains that people traveling to Jerusalem for the festivals would not have their possessions stolen or damaged during that time. The Jerusalem Talmud (Peah 3:7) recounts the following stories with regards to this assurance: A man left a stack of wheat in his field when he departed for the pilgrimage festival in Jerusalem. Upon returning, he discovered that lions and bears were standing around the stack and guarding it! Another story regards a man who left his house unlocked when he departed for the festival. When he returned, however, he discovered a serpent coiled around the door lock to protect his home! Rabbi Pinchas recounted the story of two brothers who lived in a house in Ashkelon and had non-Jews as neighbors. These neighbors planned to steal everything from their house once they departed to Jerusalem for the festival. When the brothers left, the Holy One, blessed be He, brought angels to their house who looked like the brothers, angels who were continuously coming and going. When the real brothers returned, their neighbors asked, “Where have you been?” They replied, “We were in Jerusalem.” The neighbors asked, “Who did you leave your house to?” and they replied that they hadn’t left it to anyone! These non-Jews immediately realized that Hashem had performed a miracle for the brothers, at which point they exclaimed: “Blessed be the G-d of the Jews, Who did not abandon them, and will never abandon them!”