



The Path To Follow VAYISHLACH

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

When Financial Loss Results from Not Speaking Lashon Harah

There is no justification or permission granted for speaking Lashon Harah, even when not speaking Lashon Harah might result in great financial loss. We must be ready to forego all our money rather than to transgress even a single Torah prohibition.

For example, suppose that Mr. Goldberg's boss told all his employees to make derogatory remarks about the competition in front of their buyers. The more virulent and caustic the remark, the more important the employee became to the boss. Since Mr. Goldberg refused to speak Lashon Harah, he was fired. The loss of his income caused him and his family a great deal of suffering. Despite the circumstances, however, it was forbidden for him to have done otherwise.

– Netzor LeShoncha

OBSERVING TORAH IS LIKE LIVING IN ERETZ ISRAEL

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: '...I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now'" (Genesis 32:5). Rashi understands this to mean: "I have sojourned [garti] with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot."

The commentators ask why Jacob told Esau that he kept the 613 mitzvot while he was living with Laban. How would that diminish Esau's hatred for him? Furthermore, we may question whether Jacob truly kept all 613 mitzvot while staying with Laban. There are numerous mitzvot that can only be done in the land of Israel, others that only apply when the Temple is standing, and still others that can only be performed by the priests. Therefore how could Jacob claim to have kept all 613 mitzvot?

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said on the verse, "We will offer the words of our lips instead of bulls" (Hosea 14:3). The Sages said, "Whosoever occupies himself with the study of Torah is as though he were offering a burnt-offering" (Menachot 110a). This means that studying the regulations concerning a mitzvah is considered as having actually performed that mitzvah. Therefore even when Jacob was not living in the land of Israel, but was with Laban the Aramean, he was able to keep all 613 mitzvot. He could do this by studying the regulations concerning each mitzvah, for in this way it was considered as if he had, in fact, performed them all.

This explains why Jacob told Esau that he had kept the mitzvot while living with Laban. How would this diminish Esau's hatred for him? Esau went to meet Jacob with 400 men, a number that certainly hid a purpose. By this number, Esau was hinting that Jacob did not possess the greatness or the merit of Eretz Israel, since he had been living in exile. During the covenant of the parts, Abraham was told, "Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them and they will oppress them 400 years" (Genesis 17:13). Since the exile began with Jacob, as the Zohar states (Zohar II:2b, 5a), Esau tried to bring the decree of exile upon the head of Jacob, telling him that he had neither the merit nor the greatness of Eretz Israel to protect him.

Jacob therefore sent messengers to tell Esau: Know that I have the greatness of Eretz Israel along with all the mitzvot. I am not yet in exile because even when I was living with Laban, I observed all 613 mitzvot by studying the laws of each mitzvah, including the mitzvot specifically related to Eretz Israel. Therefore the merit of Eretz Israel will accompany me into battle against you.

In reality, Esau could not understand this. To him, Jacob's stay in Laban's home must have inflicted some spiritual damage on him, as the Sages have said: "Whoever lives outside the land may be regarded as one who worships idols" (Ketubot 110b). Hence Esau hinted to Jacob that the decree ("they will serve them and they will oppress them 400 years") had already been put into motion. Yet Jacob replied that it was the opposite! True, "Whoever lives outside the land may be regarded as one who worships idols," but this applies only when living outside Eretz Israel without Torah. It does not apply to a person who studies Torah and Halachah. For such an individual, the Shechinah lives, as it were, with him in exile. As the Sages have said, "A disciple who goes into banishment is joined in exile by his master" (Makkot 10a), this being in order for the disciple to continue learning Torah while exiled to a city of refuge. Therefore Jacob, who studied Torah in the Beit Midrash of Eber before going to live with Laban, was connected to the Holy One, blessed be He. Even when he traveled to Haran, the Shechinah was, as it were, exiled with him, meaning that Jacob did not feel that he was in exile. Instead he felt close to the table of our Father in Heaven,

just as if he were living in Eretz Israel.

This view also allows us to understand Rashi's claim that the messengers (malachim, lit. "angels") which Jacob sent to Esau were malachim mamash ("real angels"). We need to understand why it was necessary for Jacob to send angels rather than human messengers. The answer is that by doing so, Jacob was showing Esau that he was not in exile, nor had he descended from the spiritual level he occupied when he lived in Eretz Israel. The proof was that he now had real angels at his disposal! This is alluded to in the word mamash ("real"), a word formed by the initials of MiMitzvot Sheassiti ("from the mitzvot that I did"). In fact these angels had been created by Jacob's good deeds, proving that while he was in Haran his spiritual level did not deteriorate in any way. On the contrary, it was by studying Torah and performing mitzvot that Jacob was supported throughout his life.

Although Esau listened to what Jacob's messengers had to say, he still proceeded to advance against Jacob as if nothing had happened! As the Zohar states, he went to war along with great forces of impurity (Zohar III:163b). The fact that Esau did not take any of this into account, and that he still went out to fight Jacob, demonstrates just how proud he was. This pride was characteristic of Esau throughout his life. Even upon their father's death, when Esau and Jacob went to bury him, Esau still walked in front of his brother, as we read: "Esau and Jacob buried him" (Genesis 35:29). Esau did this despite the fact that he knew the truth, meaning that he had sold his birthright to Jacob. Even when his father lay dead before him, Esau's heart did not soften. Since Esau had greatly revered his father and honored him in life – even serving him in royal robes (Bereshith Rabba 65:16) – his death should have stunned and awakened feelings of repentance in him. Yet that did not happen, and Esau remained rebellious and immensely proud.

As for Jacob, he prepared himself to face Esau by means of the opposite character traits that dominated his brother. As he prayed, "I am too small for all the mercies and all the truth that You have done for Your servant" (Genesis 32:11), Jacob cloaked himself with incredible humility, not feeling that he deserved anything. He asked Hashem, "Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau" (v.12). He asked to be saved from Esau's dangerous influence, from having his unbearable pride reflected upon him. It is in this regard that Jacob said, "Save me...from the hand of my brother," the word yad ("hand") having the same numerical value as ga'avah ("pride"). Esau should naturally have had pity on Jacob, since he was his brother, his own flesh and blood. Yet because of his tremendous pride, Esau was not willing to admit that he had sold his birthright to him, and instead he advanced to kill him. Hence Jacob prayed: "Master of the universe, save me from being influenced by him, and allow me to retain my humility." From here we learn that to overcome pride, we must work at being extremely humble. In fact the word ga'avah ("pride") has the same numerical value as hod ("glory"), for the proud attribute glory to themselves. In reality, pride does not befit creatures of flesh and blood, but rather the King of glory, as it is written: "The L-RD... has donned geiut" (Psalms 93:1). When a person conducts himself with humility and recognizes that pride does not befit him, but rather Hashem, he can overcome those who plot against him.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Sanctifying This World

It is written, "He raised his eyes and saw the women and the children, and he said: 'Who are these to you?' He said, 'The children whom G-d has graciously given your servant' " (Genesis 33:5).

The book Michtav Me'Eliyahu explains that Jacob presented his outlook on the world in his reply to Esau: These are the few possessions that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave me to use for my needs in this world. I do not rejoice in the pleasures of this world – I make use of them. This world along with all its pleasures is a collection of possibilities and ways of doing what is upright and good in the eyes of Hashem, allowing one to merit life in the World to Come. Jacob used this idea to spearhead his fight against Esau, as the Midrash states: "When Rachel had given birth to Joseph [Genesis 30:25] – as soon as Esau's adversary [Joseph] was born – 'Jacob said to Laban: Send me away' " (Bereshith Rabba 73:7). When our father Jacob saw Esau and his men, he was afraid. Hashem said to him: You are afraid of these men? A spark from you and your son will leap out and utterly consume them. Thus it is written, "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble" (Obadiah 1:18; see also Bereshith Rabba 84:5).

Why was Joseph singled out in the war against Esau? Why would his flame consume Esau's stubble? As we know, Joseph was a tzaddik, and a tzaddik is the foundation of the world. Joseph resisted and overcame every pleasurable temptation in this world, remaining firm in his holiness from start to finish. Who more than he proved that Jacob – not Esau – merited to inherit even from this world? As Rashi states, "Fire without a flame does not burn anything at a distance" (Rashi on Genesis 30:25). The Shem MiShmuel explains that the difference between a fire with flames and a fire without them is the ability to spread. A fire that burns on a wick is indeed a fire, but its zone of influence is extremely limited. On the other hand, a large blaze can be seen from afar and is capable of spreading far and wide, charring a huge area in the process.

Areas that are far from a spiritual fire represent things that are permissible to use in this world. A spiritual fire must spread its flames far and wide and cover these areas. This is the commandment, "You shall be holy" (Leviticus 19:2), meaning: "Sanctify yourselves in what is permitted to you." Holiness constitutes our timeless response to Esau, and Joseph symbolizes a flame that spreads far and wide. This flame spreads and burns Esau's reason for living, reducing his demands to zero. Esau certainly believed that he would inherit this world, but the fire of Jacob along with the flame of Joseph will show him what this world is like, and in the end he will lose. The end of Amalek, the descendant of Esau, will come when he completely loses every right to exist in this world, as it is written: "You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Deuteronomy 25:19). Being wiped out means the loss of human likeness. He will lose the human likeness that he was created with, the goal of which was to harmoniously blend matter and spirit (Maharal).

This world resembles a corridor; it is a passageway to the World to Come. Only one who uses it as a corridor has the right to dwell in it, and one who settles in it with the hope of transforming it into a palace will be forcibly expelled. As it is written, "Saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the kingdom will be the L-RD's" (Obadiah 1:21).

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Battle Between Jacob and Esau Alludes to the War Against the Evil Inclination

This week's parsha tells us that Jacob prepared himself to battle Esau by means of a gift, prayer, and warfare (Rashi on Genesis 32:9). From here we must learn how to battle the evil inclination, meaning that we must prepare ourselves by means of gifts, prayers, and warfare. Gifts allude to the holy Torah, as the Sages have said concerning the passage: "From the desert, Mattanah [a gift]" (Numbers 21:18). That is, "If a man allows himself to be treated as the desert, upon which everybody treads, the Torah will be given to him as a gift" (Eruvin 54a). It is also written, "I have given you a good gift, do not forsake My Torah" (Proverbs 4:2). Therefore the first thing to do in preparing ourselves to fight the evil inclination is to study the

holy Torah. As the Sages have said, "I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote" (Kiddushin 30b). Furthermore, we must put an effort into our prayers, at which point it will be possible to win by means of warfare.

What Was Jacob Afraid of?

It is written, "Jacob became very frightened and was distressed" (Genesis 32:8).

Jacob feared the accusations of Esau, who could declare that Jacob had not properly fulfilled the mitzvah of honoring his father and mother, since he left his parents when he departed for Haran. Not only that, but Jacob had married two sisters. Hence the text states that Jacob was "very frightened" of the accusation concerning the mitzvah of honoring one's parents, as it is written: "Every man shall fear his mother and his father" (Leviticus 19:3). Furthermore, Jacob "was distressed" because he had married two sisters, despite the fact that it is written: "You shall not take a woman in addition to her sister" (ibid. 18:18).

– Melo HaOmer

No Better Protection Than Torah

It is written, "I have sojourned [gartij] with Laban" (Genesis 32:5).

Rashi explains: "I kept the 613 [taryag] mitzvot." How could Jacob have kept all 613 mitzvot? He was not living in Eretz Israel, and there are numerous mitzvot that cannot be observed outside of it! The Chatam Sofer explains that this is why Rashi uses the word shamarti ("I observed," which can also mean "I kept"). This means that Jacob did not literally keep all the mitzvot, but guarded (shamar) in his heart the memory of the mitzvot that depend upon Eretz Israel, waiting for the time when he could completely perform them.

Fear Not, My Servant Jacob

It is written, "Jacob became very frightened and was distressed" (Genesis 32:8).

"Jacob became very frightened" – he was afraid of Esau, which is why he "was distressed." That is, he was distressed by the very fact that he was afraid, for a true believer has no right to fear man; he is only to fear the Holy One, blessed be He. By way of analogy, this can be compared to someone who sees a lion approaching him. Would he then be afraid of a bee?

– Sha'ar Bat Rabim

The Reason For Jacob's Certainty

It is written, "[Jacob] said: '...the remaining camp will escape' " (Genesis 32:9).

Rashi states: "The remaining camp will escape – against his [Esau's] will." Why was Jacob certain that one camp would escape?

We must answer this according to what we find in the Midrash. There we read that the camps were far from one another, a distance of a day's journey. Now Rebecca had prophesied, "Why should I be bereaved of both of you in one day" (Genesis 27:45), meaning that Jacob and Esau were destined to die on the same day. Thus if Esau destroyed the camp that Jacob was in, Esau would die on that same day. Hence he would be unable to reach the second camp, and so it would escape.

– Chanukat HaTorah

Between Israel and the Nations

It is written, "The sun rose upon him, and he limped on his hip. Thus the Children of Israel do not eat of the sinew of the thigh, which is upon the socket of the hip...for he touched the socket of Jacob's hip" (Genesis 32:32-33).

Here in the struggle between Jacob and Esau's ministering angel, the Torah alludes to Israel's calling. In what domain would Israel prevail over Esau, and conversely in what domain would Esau prevail and Israel be subservient? Jacob had been told, "Be a master over your brethren" (Genesis 27:29) – not superior to them in terms of money or possessions – for he was not to rule over Esau by means of wealth. Jacob's calling was to be superior to him in the realm of spiritual virtues; he was to be a source from which all the nations would draw their spirituality. In other words: Be superior to your brethren so as to teach them the path to follow and the way to G-d. Experience teaches us that Jacob's power does not reside in

wealth; that is not his calling in this world. In fact poverty is befitting of Israel.

History has always demonstrated that when Jacob strives to amass possessions in this world, “[Esau] shall break his yoke from off your neck” (Genesis 27:40). That is, if Esau senses a spiritual decline in Jacob, Esau “shall break [Jacob’s] yoke from off [Esau’s] neck.” This is why the allusion appears in the struggle between Jacob and Esau’s ministering angel. At first the angel was unable to overcome Jacob, for Esau cannot defeat Jacob through spiritual strength. There is only one way that Esau can defeat Jacob, only one way that he can weaken him. That is by striking “the socket of Jacob’s hip,” meaning the wealth that steadies a man on his feet, and which he may choose to rely on. In this regard, “He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip” while struggling with him. The Jewish people should reflect on this, for it will always be the case. We cannot expect to cure our limp or stand firmly on our feet. Even if we experience a period of abundance – a time when we think that we will prosper, and that everything we do will succeed – we should not put our faith in this feeling. Sooner or later, the iron foundations that we imagine we are standing on will give way. Thus it is written, “The sun rose upon him,” meaning that if the sun’s rays show us success, we are forbidden to be blinded by this warm and comforting light. This is because “he limped on his hip,” for he limped even when the sun was shining on him. In the exile of Esau, the Jewish people cannot place their faith in worldly riches and possessions, for Esau plans on wiping us out with the sword. It is only when the sun of Torah and righteousness shines upon us that we can warm ourselves in its light. We cannot allow ourselves, living as we are in the exile of Esau’s descendants, to be seduced by the light of material success that shines in our eyes. In order to always remember this truth, and in order for us to never forget our calling on earth or replace it by accumulating wealth, we were given the prohibition concerning the sciatic nerve as an eternal reminder. Hence the Children of Israel do not eat the sciatic nerve, in order for us to always recall the injury to Jacob’s hip, for in this regard we will always be feeble.

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha deals with Jacob’s family, drawn from Laban’s home and having become independent of it. Jacob faced his enemies, Esau on the inside and Shechem on the outside, when he returned to the land of his fathers. In the description of Jacob’s fear and struggle, we see that he sent messengers to Esau in order to find favor in his eyes. He also struggled against a power that injured his hip. Afterwards Jacob and Esau met, and Jacob presented his wives and children to him, after which they went their separate ways: Esau traveled to Seir, while Jacob went to Sukkot. From there Jacob went to Shechem, whose residents were massacred by Shimon and Levi because of what had been done to their sister. As a result, Jacob bitterly reproached them. He then went to fulfill his vow of constructing an altar and a memorial pillar in Bethel. We are told of Rachel’s death on the way to Ephrat, and the death of Isaac in Hebron. At the end of Isaac’s life, the descendants of Esau are enumerated. They lived in Seir, whereas Jacob lived in Canaan, for their wealth was too great to allow them to live in the same land. The kings and leaders of Esau are listed, and then Scripture returns to the subject of Jacob and describes the beginnings of the Jewish people.

EISHET CHAYIL

By the Merit of Torah

The Gemara asks, “Whereby do women earn merit?” It replies, “By making their children go to synagogue to learn Scripture and their husbands to the Beit Midrash to learn Mishnah, and waiting for their husbands until they return from the Beit Midrash” (Berachot 17a). The question then becomes: Besides all these things, have women nothing else with which to merit the World to Come? After all, they fulfill many mitzvot! Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz said, “They certainly possess many mitzvot. However the evil inclination can only be defeated through Torah, as it is written: ‘I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote’ [Kiddushin 30b].” This is what the Gemara is saying here: How will women be able to overcome the traps of the evil inclination? By means of their share in the Torah of their husbands!

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Sciatic Nerve

Parsha Vayishlach contains a negative mitzvah, namely the prohibition against eating the gid hanasheh (sciatic nerve), as it is written: “Thus the Children of Israel do not eat of the gid hanasheh” (Genesis 32:33). The statement, “The Children of Israel do not eat of the gid hanasheh” is not part of a simple narrative, as if the text were saying that something happened to Jacob and therefore his offspring avoid eating this nerve. On the contrary, this statement constitutes Hashem’s warning to the Children of Israel: They are not to eat it!

One of the reasons for this mitzvah is that it serves as an allusion to the Jewish people. It tells them that just as they suffered greatly at the hands of the nations and descendants of Esau during their exiles, so too can they rest assured that they will survive, that their offspring and their name will endure for all time, and that a redeemer will come and deliver them from their enemies. They should always keep this in mind by means of a mitzvah that reminds them of it, for in this way they will always retain their faith and their righteousness. In fact tradition tells us that the angel which struggled against Jacob was Esau’s ministering angel, for it wanted to tear both Jacob and his descendants from this world. Since the angel was unable to overcome him, it injured Jacob by touching his hip. Similarly, Esau’s descendants harm the descendants Jacob, but in the end the Jewish people will be rescued from them. Just as it happened to their father Jacob – for whom the sun rose and offered healing, and who was rescued from his trial – so too will it happen to his descendants, for the sun of Mashiach will rise to heal and rescue us. May it be so, quickly and in our days. Amen!

– Sefer HaChinuch

“He saw that he could not prevail against him” [Genesis 32:26].

Now the Rabbis have said in Bereshith Rabba, “He touched all the righteous people who were destined to come from Jacob. This refers to the generation of religious persecution” [Bereshith Rabba 77:4]. The purport of this Midrash is that this entire event continues a hint to his generations, indicating that there will be a generation from the seed of Jacob against whom Esau will prevail to the extent of almost uprooting his seed. This occurred in one generation during the period of the Sages of the Mishnah, which was the generation of Rabbi Yehuda ben Baba and his companions. As they said: “Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said, ‘If a person were to tell me, “Give your life for the sanctification of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He,” I would give it, providing only that the slay me immediately. But in the generation of religious persecution I could not endure!’ And what did the Romans do in that generation? They would bring iron balls and heat them in fire and then place them under the armpits and cause their death” [Shir Hashirim Rabba 2:18]. And there are other generations in which they have done to us such things as these, and even worse, but we have endured and it has passed over us, just as it is hinted in the verse, “Jacob came in peace” [Genesis 33:18].

– Ramban on Genesis 32:26

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi David ben Shimon

Rabbi David ben Shimon (or as he was known by the community, Tzuf Devash, the acronym he used when signing his name) was born in Rabat, Morocco in 5586. It was there that he received his early education, where he grew up, and where he became one of the greatest figures in the Torah world. It was also there that he taught Torah and made numerous disciples, men who were great in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and who eventually spread across Morocco to guide their communities. In the year 5614, at the age of 28, Rabbi David went with a group of friends and disciples to settle in Jerusalem. He rented a room and established the first synagogue in the Maghreb community, where people prayed according to their own traditions (which they had been unable to do up until that time). Rabbi David enacted decrees and judged between man and fellowman, issuing Halachic rulings and teaching Halachah. As time went on and the community grew in size, their concerns also grew. Therefore Rabbi David appointed a seven-member committee to help direct the community.

Rabbi David also established a Talmud Torah where children from the community could learn, as well as a yeshiva where people could seriously study Torah. Every major problem was presented to him, and he established a court of justice, which he led until his final day. The sages of Maghreb called him “the father of orphans and the defender of widows.” In 5628 he established the first district outside the walls of Jerusalem, known as Mahane Israel. At its center he built a magnificent synagogue, which was named after Rabbi David himself: Tzuf Devash.

Rabbi David devoted a great deal of his time to studying the customs of Eretz Israel. He published the book HaTakanot VeHaMinhagim by Rav Gaguin and added many things in the process, entitling this work Sha’ar HaMifkad. Rabbi David also published other books for the glory of Eretz Israel and its holiness, including Sha’ar HeChatzer (Jerusalem, 5625), Sha’arei Tzedek (Jerusalem, 5622), Sha’ar HaMatara, and Sha’ar HaKadim. Rabbi David ben Shimon passed away on Kislev 18, 5460.

A TRUE STORY

The Deeds of the Fathers are a Sign for the Children

It is written, “Let my lord go ahead of his servant, and I will move on slowly” (Genesis 33:14).

Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman Zatzal, the Rav of Ponevezh, often traveled around the world to strengthen the chain of Torah institutions that had been established after the Holocaust. He founded yeshivot gedolot, yeshivot ketanot, kollelim, orphanages, and learning centers for girls. He once recounted what happened to him upon arriving in the United States on his first trip for the yeshiva.

“When I took the subway in New York, I didn’t know that there were areas where people carrying money should not ride alone. This is especially true of a Jew, who has always attracted the attention of evildoers. As I was riding on the subway, I suddenly found myself surrounded by some thugs who clearly looked like they wouldn’t hesitate to rob a lone Jew. A group of young men was converging upon me from all around, looking at me with a piercing gaze. At that point I realized that they were going to assault and rob me, yet I saw no way to call for help. At that point an idea came to mind: From my pocket I took out a piece of paper that contained a nearby address, and I asked them at which station I should get off to reach my destination. “You should get off with us,” they said, getting a good laugh from my naïve request, for they never imagined that their victim would fall into their hands so easily. When the subway stopped, we all got up and I gave them the honor of getting off before me. I then hesitated for a moment, at which point the subway doors closed with me inside! I was thus saved from those thugs.”

The Rav of Ponevezh explained his actions: “I learned this lesson from our father Jacob, for when Esau offered to travel with him, Jacob replied, ‘Let my lord go ahead of his servant, and I will move on slowly.’”

– Moreshet Avoth

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Prophet Elyahu

Rabbi Yossi says, “I was once traveling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elyahu of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door until I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me: ‘Peace be with you, my master!’ and I replied: ‘Peace be with you, my master and teacher!’ And he said to me, ‘My son, why did you go into this ruin?’ ... I replied, ‘I heard a Divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying, “Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My Temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!”’ And he said to me, ‘By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, but three times each day does it exclaim this! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into synagogues and schoolhouses and respond, “May His great Name be blessed,” the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says: “Happy is the king who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father!”’”

– Berachot 3a

Elyahu, may his memory be blessed, said: “One day I was walking along the road when I came upon a man who mocked me. I said to him, ‘What answer will you give on the day of judgment for not having studied Torah?’ He replied, ‘I have an answer: Heaven gave me neither discernment nor intelligence to study Torah!’ I said, ‘What is your occupation?’ He replied, ‘I catch birds and fish.’ I said, ‘Who taught you weave a net from flax and to use it to catch birds and fish and to sell them?’ He said, ‘Heaven gave me discernment and intelligence for that.’ I said to him, ‘For procuring flax, weaving it into a net, and casting it out to catch birds and fish, you were given discernment and intelligence from Heaven? Yet for studying Torah – of which it is said, “The matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it” [Deuteronomy 30:14] – Heaven gave you neither discernment nor intelligence?’ He immediately pondered the matter and began to weep.” – Midrash Tanhuma, Vayeilech

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Man’s Ultimate Fate

It is written, “Even if you rise like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there – the word of the L-RD” (Ovadiah 1:4).

Rabbi Acha said in the name of Rav Huna: In the future the wicked Esau will envelop himself in his tallit and sit among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, but the Holy One, blessed be He, will drag him from there. Thus it is written, “If you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there – the word of the L-RD.” Now the stars always designate the tzaddikim, as it is written: “Those who teach righteousness to the multitude [will shine] like the stars, forever and ever” (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 3:5). The Sages say that in the future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will show the tzaddikim Gehinnom and the empty places there. He will say, “These empty places have been set aside for you, but you have done good deeds and merited Gan Eden.” The Holy One, blessed be He, will do the same for the wicked: He will show them Gan Eden and the empty places there. He will say, “These empty places have been set aside for you, but you have committed evil and merited Gehinnom” (Midrash Tehillim 6). When a man ascends to Heaven, we will be shown the place reserved for him among the tzaddikim if he had properly used the free will that Heaven had given him. He will then realize just how much he squandered this eternal reward. This is the worst punishment in Gehinnom, for he will see just how good things could have been if he had controlled himself, mastered his desires and yearnings, resembled the image destined to him from Heaven, and attained the level that he was supposed to reach. His reserved place in Gan Eden will be thrown back in his face, and he will be ashamed upon realizing that he failed to do what was necessary to earn it. He will then be placed before his friends, who managed to control themselves and master their desires and yearnings by choosing to do good. He will stand before the tzaddikim, who conquered their evil inclination, studied Torah, cleaved to Hashem, and purified their souls. He will be forced to look at the faces of the tzaddikim, his friends, and his teachers, and their gaze will burn his body and soul, leaving him no escape. – Ma’ayanei HaChaim