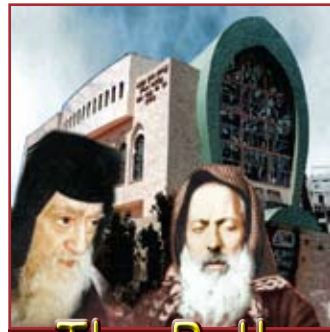


COMPANIONSHIP AND AFFECTION AMONG FRIENDS LEADS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



The Path To Follow MISHPATIM

221

February 2nd 08

26 Shvat 5768

Publication

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

Responsible of publication
Hanania Soussan

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Peddling Gossip

Obviously, the most serious type of rechilut [gossip peddling] is the type that causes two people who have been close friends to dislike each other. However even if two people were mortal enemies long before you said anything, you are still guilty of speaking rechilut if you tell one that the other has spoken against him.

Mr. Shapiro and Mr. Silver were both candidates for president of the shul. The campaign was fought bitterly, and by the week before election day they had become enemies. Aharon has just heard Mr. Shapiro's thousandth derogatory statement about Mr. Silver. Even though Mr. Shapiro and Mr. Silver already dislike each other, Aharon is still forbidden to report to Mr. Silver what Mr. Shapiro said about him.

– Guard Your Tongue, p.136

Regarding the passage on the Hebrew slave, Rabbi Abarbanel states: “ ‘He shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free, for no charge’ [Exodus 21:2]. This verse tells us that if he had the intention of making money by ridding himself of the weariness of having to support himself, his wife, and his children, then he will end up with nothing other than the shame of having worked as a slave for six years. In the end he will leave with nothing other than what he arrived with, his own body, having gained nothing from his work. If he has a wife and thinks that he can rely on his master to support her, in the end she will leave with him, and he will have to start working as at first. This is the meaning of ‘his wife shall leave with him’ [v.3].”

We see an amazing lesson here. The Torah is strict with this slave, who stole in the belief that he could gain by ridding himself of the responsibility of having to earn a living. The Torah leaves him with nothing other than the shame of having been sold as a slave, which is tremendously embarrassing in and of itself. Nevertheless, the Torah commands the slave's master to conduct himself with respect and mercy, to the point that the Sages have said: “Whoever buys a Hebrew slave is like buying a master for himself” (Kiddushin 20a). His master must treat him as an equal in everything, including food, drink, and rest. Therefore if he has only one pillow, he must give it to his slave (Tosaphot ad loc. from Yerushalmi, s.v. kol hakoneh).

Similarly, we see that it is forbidden to treat a slave with contempt, for his master also has a mitzvah to give him things when he leaves. These are things that he, the master, was given from Hashem, as it is written: “Adorn him generously from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar” (Deuteronomy 15:14). Why must he do this? It is because “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt” (v.15), meaning that just as Hashem treated you with mercy and granted you great possessions and the spoils of the sea when you left Egypt, so too should you act with your slave. Furthermore, you should not become accustomed to scorning other free men.

From another angle, however, this teaches a slave to completely submit himself to Hashem. We see this by the fact that his ear is pierced against a door, as Rashi says in quoting Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai: “This ear, which heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, ‘The Children of Israel are slaves to Me’ – yet went out and acquired a master for himself – let it be pierced” (Kiddushin 22b). Hence a slave's ear is pierced next to a mezuzah. In fact it would seem that the slave loves only his wife and children, as it is written: “I love my master, my wife, and my children” (Exodus 21:5). Hence it is precisely next to a mezuzah that he is shown that he must also love Hashem, for in the mezuzah it is written: “You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Still, we need to ask why it is a slave's ear that is pierced, rather than his mouth. After all, it was his mouth that said, “We shall do and we shall hear,” a declaration that the slave is now transgressing. Earlier, on Mount Sinai, he expressed his desire to be Hashem's servant, to submit to Him and to do

His will. Yet now he says that he loves his master and wants to serve a human being!

To explain this, we may say that the main thing is hearing, for hearing leads to action, as we see with Jethro: “Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard...” (Exodus 18:1). The Sages ask, “What news did he hear, such that he came?” (Zevachim 116a). This demonstrates that a person is primarily motivated by what he hears, which is what prompted Jethro to take action. He not only heard a rumor of what had happened, but a sound deep within his heart that pushed him to leave all his glory behind and to place himself in the shadow of Moses and the Children of Israel in the arid desert. This is why we pierce the ear of a slave, for he heard: “The Children of Israel are slaves to Me” (Leviticus 25:55). We see a similar thing today with people who return to Judaism. Many of them experience a spiritual awakening due to some Mussar they heard, or because of some reprimand that emanated from a pure heart and entered theirs, words that changed their entire way of life, as it is written: “Words that come from the heart enter the heart” (see Berachot 6b; Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra, Shirat Israel, p.156).

We must understand what the passage on the Hebrew slave is alluding to, and we must learn from it. One who serves Hashem is like a master his controls his instincts, and he must acquire a man like one acquires an object, as the Sages have said: “Provide yourself with a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend” (Perkei Avoth 1:6). Let a friend be like an acquisition and a personal belonging that is connected to us throughout life. We must not have friends who love us at certain times and hate us at others. Thus it is written, “He shall work for six years” the word shesh (“six”) having the same numerical value as the word kesher (“bond”). This also alludes to the sixty years of a man's life (see Moed Katan 28a; Maharsha ibid.; Ohr HaChaim here on v.4), the time before he is exempted from observing mitzvot, meaning before he dies. Before that time comes, he should make sure to cleave to a special friend, as well as to other friends throughout life. In fact it is impossible to trust in just a single friend, for he may depart or get involved with other things. Hence a person needs many friends, as the Sage said: “The more friends the better, as it is written: ‘In a multitude of counselors there is safety’ [Proverbs 11:14]” (Mivchar Peninim, Shaar Chaverim). When one person is not available, a second or third person is, and in this way life becomes more secure. Yet a single enemy, even if all alone, can do a great deal of harm.

Only through friends can we elevate ourselves and progress in the service of Hashem and the fear of Heaven. Similarly, we can acquire many spiritual gifts by helping others, which is one of the ways in which the Torah is acquired, i.e., by “the companionship of friends” (Perkei Avoth 6:6). Just as the giving of the Torah took place amid unity, with the Children of Israel being as one person with one heart, so too does a person's friend connect him to Hashem. The same principle applies throughout life.

This is why it is vitally important to have the companionship of friends. Thanks to friends, we can continue to grow in the service of G-d, for they help us (Pesachim 88a). When a person has the companionship of a friend, the latter can help him connect to Hashem and get closer to Him.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Who Revealed This Secret to My Children?

It is written, “He took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people, and they said: ‘Everything that the L-RD has said, we will do and we will hear’ ” (Exodus 24:7).

The Gemara states: “Rabbi Eleazar said, ‘When the Israelites gave precedence to “we will do” over “we will hear,” a Heavenly voice went forth and exclaimed to them, “Who revealed to My children this secret, which is used by the ministering angels?” ’ ... There was a certain Saducee who saw Rabba engrossed in his studies, while the fingers of his hand were under his feet and he ground them down, so that his fingers spurted blood. ‘You rash people,’ he exclaimed, ‘who gave precedence to your mouth over your ears. You still persist in your rashness. First you should have listened: If within your powers, accept. If not, you should not have accepted.’ Said he to him: ‘We who walked in integrity, of us it is written: “The integrity of the upright will guide them” [Proverbs 11:3]. But of others, who walked in perversity, it is written, “But the corruption of the faithless will destroy them” [ibid.] ’ ” (Shabbat 88ab).

The Jewish people were standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. They were the generation of knowledge, the one that witnessed miracles and wonders. When the Holy One, blessed be He, asked them to accept the Torah, they did not debate the pros and cons. They made no excuses, and they proclaimed with a single heart: “Everything that the L-RD has said, we will do and we will hear.” At that instant a great sound was made in Heaven; a celestial voice came forth and said, “Who revealed to My children this secret, which is used by the ministering angels?” The ministering angels can observe all that emerges from Hashem’s mouth, for they have the power to overcome all obstacles. But man? What would happen if it were G-d’s will for him to go through fire? Nevertheless the Children of Israel were prepared to sacrifice their very lives for the Creator, and it was in full knowledge of this that they proclaimed, “We will do and we will hear.”

At the same time, for us who follow Him in all innocence (like those who act through love and place their trust in Him), we have been promised that the Holy One, blessed be He, will not ask us for more than we can bear.

The gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Dov Ber Meislish Zatzal, the Rav of Warsaw, was a very wealthy man, the owner of a commercial fleet of ships. One day as he was attending a wedding, someone came to him with the news that his most important ship, which carried the majority of his goods, had sunk. When Rabbi Dov Ber heard this, he fainted on the spot. The Rebbe of Kotzk happened to be there at the time, and he spoke to Rabbi Dov Ber.

The Rebbe said to him, “What you heard isn’t true! Your boat didn’t sink!” Those who overheard the Rebbe asked him how he knew this information. He replied, “Misfortune only strikes a person who is capable of bearing it, not more. Rabbi Dov Ber was incapable of bearing this news, since he fainted. Therefore I am sure it is incorrect.” It is as we have said: Hashem will not ask us for more than we can bear.

A Pearl From the Rav

We read at the end of this week’s parsha, “Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights” (Exodus 24:18). In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita examines the significance of these 40 days. He states that they correspond to the Torah, which was given in 40

days (Menachot 99b). Since six of these days were used to prepare for receiving the Torah, we are left with 34 days (lamed-daleth), which corresponds to the word dal (“poor,” i.e., humble). This tells us by allusion that every person must accept the Torah like one who is poor. In fact the Torah only endures with one who is humble, for he must yield and submit himself to it.

Physicians Are Only Permitted to Heal

It is written, “He will certainly heal him” (Exodus 21:19).

The Sages say, “From here it may be derived that permission has been granted to the physician to heal” (Bava Kama 85a).

The Vilna Gaon’s sister once came to see him, asking him to implore Heaven for mercy because her son was seriously ill, on the verge of death. The Gaon said to her, “I’ll do what you ask, but you must also have faith in Hashem. Then the child will certainly recover.” His sister burst into tears and said, “But the doctors have already lost hope that he’ll ever recover!” The Vilna Gaon stood to his full height and said in a voice quivering with emotion: “Really? Is that what the doctors said? The Torah says, ‘He shall certainly heal him,’ from which we learn that doctors are given permission to heal. They have not been given permission to lose hope over a patient.”

Two-fold Healing

It is written, “And he will certainly heal him [verapo yerapei]” (Exodus 21:19).

The Sages say, “From here it may be derived that permission has been granted to the physician to heal” (Bava Kama 85a).

With regards to physicians, healing is literally mentioned twice – verapo yerapei. However with regards to Hashem, healing is mentioned only once, as is written: “For I am the L-RD, Who heals you” (Exodus 15:26).

This teaches us that with physicians, we need at least two visits before we are healed: The first time we go to explain the problem, and the second time the physician actually heals us and corrects whatever he did during our first visit. However when it comes to the Holy One, blessed be He, from the very outset He sends a complete healing.

The Thief

It is written, “If the thief is found digging in” (Exodus 22:1).

The tzaddik Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk once summoned a few of his close disciples and asked them to elaborate on the parsha of the week, which was Mishpatim.

One of his best disciples said, “This morning I thought about the verse, ‘If the thief is found digging in,’ which I would explain as follows: If someone is digging in the depths of his soul, then ‘the thief is found’ – he will certainly find a thief hidden there, none other than the evil inclination, which constantly tries to make a person fall into its traps.”

Rabbi Menachem Mendel congratulated the young speaker and remarked: “That’s exactly what I wanted to hear today. You are worthy of saying such things every day.”

The Portion of the Poor Among You

It is written, “If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act with him as a creditor” (Exodus 22:24).

Someone who is fortunate enough to use his money for tzedakah must remember that we all have a single Father, Who placed the portion of the poor with the wealthy. When the poor come to take their portion, it

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

is forbidden for the wealthy to feel proud. Hence Scripture states: "If you lend money to My people" – if you have more money than you require for yourself, and you lend to My people – then you must realize that the portion of "the poor [is] among you" – that it is not your portion. Instead it is the portion belonging to the poor, one that Hashem deposited with you so as to give you the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of giving. Hence you must give the poor person his rightful portion, not act like a creditor. You are forbidden to feel superior (kenoshe [as a creditor], understood here in the sense of nessiut [elevation]), for what you are actually giving him is really his.

– Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh

The Dog Who Decided Matters of Kashrut

It is written, "You shall throw it to the dogs" (Exodus 22:30).

A certain Jew would always go to his Rav with all kinds of questions regarding the kashrut of his chickens. However it had been a few months since his last visit, and when he eventually appeared with a new question, the Rav was curious. The man explained his absence: "In Parsha Mishpatim I saw that it is written, 'You shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field. You shall throw it to the dogs.' I thought to myself, 'Why should I have to travel a great distance to see the Rav for every question I have concerning my chickens? I just have to throw the chicken to my dog, and if he eats it, it means that it's treif. If not, then it means that the chicken is kosher!' The Rav then asked him, "In that case, why have you come to see me today?" The man replied, "Well, it seems that my dog is very strict when it comes to kashrut, because he keeps on eating every chicken I throw him!"

Two Hundred and Forty-Eight

It is written, "Of all the things that I have said to you, you shall guard" (Exodus 23:13).

Why does the verse state, "Of all the things that I have said to you"? The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh cites a well-known statement by our Sages regarding the mitzvot: There are 248 positive mitzvot, which correspond to the number of man's limbs, and there are 365 negative mitzvot, which correspond to the number of man's sinews (Zohar I:170). Here Scripture is teaching us by allusion that a person should not say, "I will do a certain number of mitzvot, and that will be enough to protect me." Hence we read: "Of all the things I have said" – by all the mitzvot – "you shall guard" – you shall be protected. If just one of them is missing, the bodily member corresponding to that mitzvah will be lacking protection.

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Mishpatim lays the foundation for the social life of Hashem's people, who have just received the Torah. The laws of Israel begin with the regulations governing slavery, meant to protect the liberty of a Jew's life. It continues with the laws regarding corporal punishment administered by the Beit Din, meant to protect the liberty of a Jew's body. There are laws related to property, meant to protect a Jew's possessions, and moral laws, meant to protect the general rights of individuals in society. Next come the laws concerning society in general, which regulate social conduct such as the observance of Shabbat, the Sabbatical year, and work concerning the festivals. Hashem then announces that a protecting angel will accompany the Children of Israel to their land, and He promises them the blessing of prosperity. The parsha ends with the covenant between Hashem and His people, who are sprinkled with the blood of the offerings.

Digging Pits in the Public Domain

It is written, "If a man uncovers a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it..." (Exodus 21:33).

The Torah warns us against harming others, which is why it states that if someone discovers a pit that was already dug, or if he digs a new pit but does not cover it, he is responsible if it injures others, according to the parsha. We may ask how this mitzvah applies to us, for have we ever dug a pit? Actually, we may have already dug numerous pits in the road, more than once in fact, without even realizing it! How could this be? The Sages tell us that every obstacle that we place in an area destined for public use is called a "pit in the public domain."

An example of this occurred during one particularly hot day, when people avoided going outside. They took advantage of the fact that their homes and businesses were cooled with powerful air conditioners, which made the temperature inside very comfortable. After someone told his friend about a new air conditioner he just had installed, and how much he was enjoying it, he went to see it for himself. His friend hung his head and said, "It's true that you have a very powerful air conditioner." He then cried out, "But you're digging a pit in the public domain!" The owner of the air conditioner didn't understand what he meant. "Yes," his friend said, "look at how your air conditioner can harm people on account of the water it produces. It flows into the street and can injure someone passing by, such as a child on a bicycle. It's a pit in the public domain!"

There is another kind of pit, one that moves. It is a pit that travels with you wherever you go, sometimes in your heart. This kind of pit harms you alone, sometimes even in public, and it does more harm with each step you take.

What are we talking about? The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner Zatzal would often cite a statement by the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal: "A heart filled with sadness is a pit in the private domain, but a face filled with sadness is a pit in the public domain!" Incredible, but true. Such a person carries a pit with him into the private domain, harming none other than himself. Yet he sometimes makes it apparent to others, at which point it becomes a pit in the public domain. Whoever sees this person may be hurt, for he spreads discouragement and sadness wherever he goes, especially at home and around his family. We have to see the good in everything, and it is vitally important to have faith in the Creator and His deliverance. Such faith enables a person to experience great joy, to the point that instead of resonating negative feelings, he begins to radiate feelings of joy. The Shechinah, which resides in joy, will then accompany him in everything he does.

EISHET CHAYIL

He Isn't Home

Rebbetzin Elisheva Schechter's brightest diamond, her crown jewel, consisted of her share in her husband's Torah. One day she went to borrow a drill from her neighbor, who quickly realized that the Rebbetzin herself was going to use it. When he offered to help, the Rebbetzin's reply came as a shock: "If I didn't ask my husband for help, it's because I don't want to distract him from learning Torah. Why would I ask this of you?"

One night the Rebbetzin was speaking with a friend over the telephone. She was very tired after a full day of work, and she took the opportunity to rest as they spoke. At the time, one of her children was playing in the next room. When the child wanted to go to sleep, the Rebbetzin asked her friend to wait so she could put the child to bed.

When she got back to the phone, her friend said, "Why didn't you ask your husband to put the child to bed?"

The Rebbetzin instantly replied, "When my husband is studying, to me it means that he isn't home."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim – The Aderet of Jerusalem

The gaon Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz Zatzal was a great Torah figure. Born in Byelorussia, he eventually moved to Jerusalem and became known as a gaon and tzaddik in every sense of the word. Indeed, he was among the greatest rabbis of Jerusalem.

From his youth, Rabbi Eliyahu David was known as a child prodigy, a boy who was completely uninterested in material pursuits. He could always be seen with a Gemara, swallowing word after word and page after page. Due to his tremendous diligence in study, he eventually became fully versed in all areas of the holy Torah.

When he reached adulthood, many in the Diaspora saw him as the ideal candidate for the rabbinate of Byelorussia. However this was not the view of Rabbi Eliyahu David. He lifted his eyes toward the holy city of Jerusalem, for it was there that he wanted to live, next to the place of the Temple. In fact it wasn't many months later that he went to live in Eretz Israel. He settled in the Old City and continued to grow in Torah. Yet he could not hide there, for the gaonim of Jerusalem could see his greatness in Torah. He was therefore appointed as one of the rabbis of the city, where he became known as the Aderet (Eliyahu David Rabinowitz Teomim). People from everywhere sent him Halachic questions, some of which were exceedingly difficult. Unfortunately, he did not live long in Jerusalem, for on Adar 3, 5665 his soul ascended to Heaven. His body was laid to rest in Jerusalem. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Who's Supporting Who?

Rabbi Eleazar said, "If not for the Torah, heaven and earth would not endure, for it is said: 'If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the laws of heaven and earth' [Jeremiah 33:25]" (Pesachim 68b).

The laws of nature are considered by everyone to be real, despite the fact that we don't fully understand them. For example, nobody would ever think of denying the force of gravity simply because we don't understand it.

Likewise, the laws of the Torah should reside in our hearts as firmly held truths, not subject to doubt of any kind, even when we fail to understand them.

The Torah, which is Hashem's covenant "with day and night," must be considered as "the laws of heaven and earth."

The gaon Rabbi Leib Gurwitz Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Gateshead, once traveled to Scandinavia in order to convince a student to return to the right path. This student was very moved by Rabbi Leib's concern, but he still refused to change his ways. The Rav then told him the story of Rabbi Eliezer Gordon Zatzal, whose father-in-law had advised him not to take a rabbinical position, though Rabbi Eliezer wanted to start earning a living. His mother-in-law protested and said, "We barely have enough to live on ourselves! How can we continue to support them?" Her husband replied, "Who knows just who's supporting who?"

When Rabbi Eliezer Gordon's in-laws finally gave him their consent to leave and become the Rav of Slabodka, on that very same day his father-in-law collapsed and died. His wife exclaimed, "I killed you! You were right when you said that he was the one who was supporting us, not the opposite!"

A TRUE STORY

Returning Empty-Handed

It is written, "Do not act with him as a creditor" (Exodus 22:24).

It is said that Rabbi Yaakov Berlin, the father of the Netziv of Volozhin, provided a large dowry for the marriage of his youngest daughter, whose future father-in-law was also a rich man. They deposited the money with a trustworthy third party, a wealthy merchant from the town of Slutsk. A few days later, however, they learned that this person was not paying his creditors, meaning that the money they entrusted to him could be lost.

The family strongly urged Rabbi Yaakov to go and find this man in order to save the dowry, which is what he did. He traveled for a day and a half from Mir to Slutsk, where he stayed for two days, and traveled another day and a half on his return.

When he arrived back home, his family was curious as to whether he had been successful. Yet to their great surprise, Rabbi Yaakov calmly explained that after he had arrived in Slutsk and inquired as to the person in question, he decided not to go and see him. Why not? It was because the man had lost all his money in a disastrous business deal, and he was now left with nothing. Rabbi Yaakov did not go and see him due to the prohibition, "Do not act with him as a creditor," which is why he returned empty-handed.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

A Source for Each Hair

A certain Kohen from Eretz Israel became poor, and he didn't know how he was going to support his wife and children. He tried to earn a living in various ways, but without success.

He said to himself, "Maybe I'll travel abroad. I heard that people earn a good living there." He thought about this several times, and in the end he decided to go ahead and leave. He summoned his wife and informed her of his decision, and then he added: "You may have to wait a long time until I return, since I may have to be away for a few months until I find a source of revenue. Now you know that people usually come to see me regarding their skin lesions, to know whether they have leprosy or not. Since they'll certainly continue to come, I'll teach you all the signs you need to know." Despite her pain over her husband's departure from Eretz Israel, she did what he asked and began to learn the signs of leprosy.

The Kohen said to his wife, "Know that the Holy One, blessed be He, created a special source for each hair in the body. Every single hair has a small cavity in the skin from which it draws its nutrients. If you notice a dry, colorless hair, it means that its source has dried up. This is one of the signs of leprosy."

His wife explained, "Your ears should listen to what your mouth is saying! If the Holy One, blessed be He, created an individual source from which each hair draws its nutrients, then what about you? You also have to provide for the needs of your family! Does the Holy One, blessed be He, not care about your needs? Have faith in Him, and He will sustain us here!"

The Kohen said to his wife, "You're right. I'll listen to what you say and place my trust in the Creator." Hashem then came to his aid and turned his fortunes around, enabling him to earn a living without worries.