



# The Path To Follow

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## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### Regarding Potential Business Partners

If you are considering a partnership with someone in business, you are permitted to inquire about the details of that person's character and behavior. The same applies if you are seeking a partner in marriage. You are permitted to do so even in instances when you have not previously heard anything derogatory about that person. Even though your inquiry might provoke the revelation of derogatory information, it is nonetheless permissible, since your intention is to prevent future disputes or damage.

Yossi needs a carpenter to repair the cupboards in his home. Yossi is permitted to ask his friend Shimon about the reliability of a certain carpenter, and there is nothing wrong about his inquiry.

– Adapted from Guard Your Tongue, pp.64-65

## RENEWING YOURSELF IN TORAH WITHOUT FLAWS OR IMPERFECTIONS (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, and they put fire in them and placed incense upon it. They brought before the L-RD strange fire, which He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before the L-RD and consumed them, and they died before the L-RD" (Leviticus 10:1-2).

The Sages give numerous explanations for why Nadav and Avihu were punished, explanations such as: "Moses and Aaron once walked along, with Nadav and Avihu behind them and all Israel following in the rear. Then Nadav said to Avihu, 'Oh, that these old men might die so that you and I should be the leaders of our generation.' However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'We shall see who will bury whom'" (Sanhedrin 52a). It is also stated, "The sons of Aaron died only because they gave a legal decision in the presence of their teacher Moses" (Eruvin 63a). We also have, "Aaron's sons died on account of four things: For drawing near to the holy place, for offering, for the strange fire, and for not having taken counsel from each other" (Vayikra Rabba 20:8), and also because they had no wives (ibid. 20:9).

From all this it appears that Nadav and Avihu had several shortcomings. They were punished because of their greatness and sanctity, since it was not fitting for great men such as themselves to possess such flaws.

However we must understand how all this squares with the Torah's statement that Hashem would be "sanctified by those who are nearest Me" (Leviticus 10:3). The Sages have said: "Moses said to Aaron: 'My brother, at Sinai I was told that I would sanctify this House, and that I would sanctify it through a great man. I thought that either through me or through you would this House be sanctified, but now [I see that] your two sons are greater than you or I'" (Vayikra Rabba 12:2). It is also written, "Your brothers, all the house of Israel, may weep for the burning that the L-RD has kindled" (Leviticus 10:6). Therefore how can we possibly say that these sanctified men were flawed?

There is absolutely no doubt that Nadav and Avihu possessed tremendous holiness, as their fate testifies. Their life was certainly as holy as their death, and everything they did was for the sake of Heaven. Even when they entered the Sanctuary in a drunken state, or when they offered alien fire, or when they made their comments about Moses and Aaron, they did so only to teach the Children of Israel that if they want to come closer to Hashem and love Him with all their heart, all their soul, and all their might, then they must be attentive to observing mitzvot, be they easy or difficult. In fact they have to be so vigilant in this regard that they would be willing to give their lives for it. Yet the only way of reaching this level is through the study of Torah, for who can say that he is actually close to Hashem and loves Him if he has not diligently labored in the study of Torah day and night? Because of our many sins, a single shortcoming in serving Hashem can lead to a breakdown in all the ways that we serve Him. This is even more likely when we possess more than one shortcoming in serving Him.

This is still more likely when a person possesses shortcomings in his dealings with his fellowman, for such sins are not

rectified by Yom Kippur unless his fellowman has first forgiven him (Yoma 85b). A person can truly be far from Hashem in that case, even if he possesses Torah knowledge and good deeds. Besides, how many of us are faultless when it comes to serving Hashem? We must constantly examine our deeds in order to correct our shortcomings and come closer to the Creator. The problem, however, is that this is very difficult to do! It is here that Nadav and Avihu showed the Jewish people the path to follow. Nadav and Avihu saw that despite the sins of the Children of Israel when they made the golden calf, their repentance was accepted, Hashem gave them a second set of tablets, and the Sanctuary was built. They also knew that Hashem would dwell among them on the eighth day, as it is written: "Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8) – among each and every one of them. How would the Shechinah actually dwell in each person? Through Torah and mitzvot.

Nadav and Avihu thought of telling the Children of Israel that when the Shechinah would come into the Sanctuary, and from there into them, then if they truly wanted to bond with Hashem – in the spirit of, "The Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah and Israel are one" (Zohar III:73a) – they had to put an effort into perfecting themselves through the study of Torah. They had to rid themselves of every flaw and imperfection that could distance the Shechinah from them.

Furthermore, when imperfections are commensurate with the greatness of an individual, they can lead to enormous problems if not quickly rectified. Sometimes the Shechinah will not want to reside in the heart of a Jew who has many shortcomings, particularly if he is a great man. Thus instead of protecting him, it can harm him because he did not put enough effort into studying Torah. This is what the Children of Israel learned from Nadav and Avihu, namely that when someone seeks to get closer to Hashem, he must love Hashem with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might by putting an effort into studying Torah and performing mitzvot, without demonstrating any signs of weakness. A person with weaknesses or shortcomings, especially if he is a ben Torah, will lose more than he can gain, and he may even be risking his life. Even when a person studies Torah, he may sometimes go through a period when the intensity of his study diminishes. In fact everyone can reach a point when he thinks, "I've already learned more than enough, and now I'm going to rest a little. I'm going to see what's happening outside. I'll go out a little and deal with my own things." Such thoughts will eventually lead to action, and they are capable of making him stray completely off the path of Torah and mitzvot. How will he be able to redeem himself afterwards?

He can do so by renewing himself in Torah. The Sages have said that the Torah should always seem new to a person, as if it was given today. A person must infuse himself with this concept, for the Torah does not contain old concepts; it is new each day. One can only continue to study when he thinks in this way, a way that is easier to accomplish now, on Shabbat HaChodesh. This day renews each person, enabling him to rise to greater heights in Torah study and mitzvot performance.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## Saving the Sons by the Merit of the Fathers

*It is written, "These are the living creatures that you may eat" (Leviticus 11:2).*

The author of Sheal Avicha Veyagidcha recounts the following story: "Someone sat next to me and said that he was a painter. Although he wasn't a religious man, he told me that he ate only kosher food. 'I can't eat non-kosher food. I find it disgusting. Aren't you a religious Jew? You're going to Amsterdam, and you certainly have the address of a kosher restaurant there. Could you give it to me please?' The man began to tell me about himself: 'My father was a religious man, and he served in the army of Emperor Wilhelm, the last German emperor. Yet because he only ate kosher food, he had nothing but bread and vegetables to live on. When my father's commanding officer saw how weak he was becoming, he warned my father that he would be punished if he persisted in his refusal to eat like the other men. My father still refused, and eventually his commanding officer had him beaten. My father then sat down and wrote a letter to the emperor in which he stated, 'I serve as a soldier in the Emperor's army, and as a Jew I observe the Jewish laws regarding kosher food. Yet not only am I not given kosher food to eat, I have even been beaten for refusing to eat non-kosher food.' Fifteen days later, an inspection was announced for all the soldiers. A commander arrived and said that a letter had been sent to the emperor. He then called my father out by name and ordered him to take three steps forward. My father's heart began to beat wildly, for usually a soldier is told to take three steps forward when he is about to be severely punished. Since he had written a letter to the emperor, perhaps he was going to be punished for complaining about his food? The commander then took out a letter and read it aloud: 'Since the soldier who carries the serial number [...] has complained that he is not given kosher food and that he has been beaten, I hereby order that kosher food be procured for him. If this food cannot be obtained in the camp, it must be procured elsewhere, and if that is impossible he must be given the money needed to purchase it himself!' Naturally, after this incident the stature of Jews was greatly elevated in the eyes of all the officers and soldiers in my father's regimen.'

"The man seated next to me recounted this entire story without ever realizing the connection between it and the fact that he had asked me for the address of a kosher restaurant in Amsterdam. I knew right away that his father's devotion to eating kosher food is what enabled him to possess the same purity of soul. It was why he could not tolerate non-kosher food, even though he had no intention of refusing it because he wanted to obey the mitzvah. His father's devotion was the reason why he was repulsed by forbidden food, as if it was a natural reaction."

## A Pearl From the Rav

*It is written, "The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, and they put fire in them and placed incense upon it. They brought before the L-RD strange fire, which He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before the L-RD and consumed them" (Leviticus 10:1-2).*

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita notes that Nadav and Avihu had already seen the Shechinah, as it is written: "They saw G-d, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11). That is, they looked and became liable to death. Yet why did they continue to eat?

The answer is that their eating was so entirely for the sake of Heaven that they were able to come much closer to G-d's presence. They were not afraid to look at the Shechinah, for they were already used to it.

In fact their intentions were for the sake of Heaven, and they did not look deliberately. Indeed, it is not without reason that Hashem said of them, "I will be sanctified by those who are nearest Me" (Leviticus 10:3). Nevertheless, from Nadav and Avihu we learn not to grow too accustomed to anything, for there is a limit to everything. If we do grow overly accustomed, we are liable to sin. There is a good reason why we must demonstrate respect for the sanctity of synagogues and houses of study. We cannot enter them in a casual manner, for this may lead to a lax attitude, and even to contempt.

This is why their father Aaron was later warned "not [to] come at all times into the holy place" (Leviticus 16:2), so as not to die as they did. Why? The book Imrei Shefer states that habit is not a good thing, and therefore one was not to come into the Sanctuary at any time he pleased. A person must not grow accustomed to a mitzvah, for through habit he will eventually treat it lightly.

## The Glory of Hashem Will Appear to You

*It is written, "Moses said: 'This is the thing that the L-RD has commanded you to do, and the glory of the L-RD will appear to you' (Leviticus 9:6).*

The Children of Israel approached and were ready to attain higher spiritual levels. Moses said to them, "You want to attain higher levels? Do only what is incumbent upon you, which is to chase the evil inclination from your hearts. By doing so, 'The glory of the L-RD will appear to you' – higher levels will come about on their own."

– The Rebbe of Kotzk

## Degrees of Sanctity

*It is written, "Moses said: 'This is the thing that the L-RD has commanded you to do, and the glory of the L-RD will appear to you' (Leviticus 9:6).*

One particular Rosh Hashanah, the saintly Rabbi Naphtali of Ropshitz was with the Chozeh of Lublin. When the time came for the mitzvah of tashlich, Rabbi Naphtali went out and encountered the Chozeh, who was returning from tashlich.

When the Chozeh asked Rabbi Naphtali where he was going, he replied: "I'm going to collect what the Rebbe has discarded." (What he meant is that because of the Chozeh's great sanctity, what he considered a sin – what he had just discarded – was regarded by others, those far lower than him spiritually, as a mitzvah.)

This is also the meaning of the verse, "You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy" (Leviticus 20:7). In other words, once you have sanctified yourselves, you will need to sanctify yourselves again in order to remain holy. In fact new sins will awaken in you after you have been sanctified, meaning that you must sanctify yourselves again.

– Shem MiShemuel

## I Heard but I Forgot

*It is written, "When Moses heard, then it was pleasing in his eyes" (Leviticus 10:20).*

The Torat Kohanim states that Moses admitted the truth, for instead of claiming that he had never heard of the law in question, Moses said: "I heard but I forgot." Something that characterizes a wise person is that with regards to things he has not heard, he says: "I have not heard" (Perkei Avoth 5:7). This means that people prefer to say, "I forgot" instead of "I have not heard," for here a wise person is praised for admitting that he has not heard something. The reason is that after the Torah was given, everyone became responsible for hearing it, meaning to study it. Therefore it is more shameful to say, "I have not heard" than "I heard but I forgot," for we sometimes forget things and are not to blame for it.

However for Moses, who was the first person to receive the Torah, everything he had heard was not yet part of the Torah. Thus for him there was no shame in saying, "I have not heard." Conversely, it was difficult for him to say, "I heard but I forgot."

– Pituchei Chotam

### Split Hooves

*It is written, "The camel, for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split [einenu mafris].... The hyrax, for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split [lo yafris].... And the hare, for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split [lo hifrisah]" (Leviticus 11:4-6).*

For the hare, the text uses the past tense *lo hifrisah* (literally, "its hoof was not split"). For the hyrax, the text uses the future tense *lo yafris* (literally, "its hoof will not be split"). For the camel, the text uses the present tense *einenu mafris* (literally, "it has no split hoof"). What do these variations mean? The simplest thing to do would have been to use the past tense throughout, as the text does in the case of the hare. What the Torah means by this statement is that the hare was not created with a split hoof. The other expressions use different tenses for reasons that apply specifically to the camel and the hyrax.

The camel: Zoologists include the camel among those animals that possess a split hoof, though not entirely split from one end to the other. Their hooves are split only in the middle, not at their ends. This is why the Torah does not consider the camel as having a split hoof per se. Hence it does not use the expression *lo hifrisah*, in the past tense, because its hoof is split to a certain degree. It's just that this split does not run from one end of the hoof to the other, and therefore it cannot be called *mafris*. The text therefore says *einenu mafris*, in the present tense (which is also the adjectival form).

The hyrax: Here the explanation is different, for living among the mountainous regions of Sinai, naturalists have found a certain kind of hyrax that ruminates and possesses split hooves on its hind legs, but non-split hooves on its front legs. For this kind of hyrax, people could have erred by thinking that since its hind legs have a split hoof, it may be classified as having a split hoof proper. This is because people may think that, as the animal grows older, the hooves in the front will develop a split like those in the back. Hence the Torah uses the expression *lo yafris* ("its hoof will not be split"), meaning that although some of its hooves are already split, this will not happen to its front hooves, for they will always remain as they are. Therefore the hyrax is an unclean animal.

– The Malbim

### Overview of the Parsha

The first part of Parsha Shemini ends with the sanctification of the Sanctuary by the offerings made on its inaugural day. The second part of the parsha deals with the sanctification of man and his purification in terms of obtaining meat for consumption. The beginning of the parsha describes the offerings made on the eighth day, up until the time that fire came and consumed them on the altar. This represented the ideal relationship between Hashem and His people Israel. Immediately afterwards, a fire comes forth and devours Nadav and Avihu, who had brought a strange fire. Following this incident, their father is told that priests are not to enter the Sanctuary in a drunken state, and Moses asks the grieving priests why they had not eaten the offerings. The remainder of the parsha deals with the sanctity of man, who must purify himself with regards to his food, even if it is not offered on the altar. The Torah also teaches us what we are forbidden to touch or eat.

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### Demonstrating Kindness at Home

*It is written, "And the chasida [stork]" (Leviticus 11:19).*

Rashi states, "Why is it called *chasida*? Because it does *chesed* [kindness] for its fellow birds with its food."

Rabbi Shalom Schwadron said, "One day I was going to the doctor with one of my children, and on the way I encountered the gaon Rabbi Eizik Sher Zatzal. After we greeted one another, he asked me where we were going. I replied that I was bringing my son to the doctor. He then asked me, 'Why are you bringing your son to the doctor?' I replied, 'Because the child is sick.' He asked me this question several times, each time stressing something different. He apparently thought that I would understand where he was going with all this, and that I wouldn't get upset. I realized that the answers I was giving him weren't the ones he wanted to hear, so I stopped answering. Rabbi Eizik then said, 'Don't animals care for their young?'

"He finally explained: 'Every animal takes care of its young. Therefore aren't you doing the very same thing? Each parent who takes his child to the doctor should realize that he is demonstrating kindness to him, demonstrating kindness to a Jewish soul that needs help.'"

In our homes we also fulfill the mitzvah of demonstrating kindness. When we help others at home, we should realize that we are fulfilling the Creator's will, for He commanded us to emulate His deeds by demonstrating kindness to His creations. Sometimes we do a great deal of good outside the home by helping the people we meet, even if it means going beyond our normal abilities. We then feel like kings when we return home, content with all the acts of kindness that we performed on one hand, yet exhausted on the other. We forget that at home there also exists the mitzvah of demonstrating kindness, such as by helping our wives with housework or our children with schoolwork, or simply by listening to them.

The Arizal taught that not only must we fulfill the mitzvah of kindness at home, but that Heaven judges all our deeds in light of our actions there. It is in this regard that Heaven decides if our deeds outside the home are done just to glorify ourselves, or if we are truly kind because that is what the Creator wants of us. If Heaven sees that we demonstrate kindness at home and show interest in each family member, then our intentions are truly for the sake of Heaven and we will receive a great reward for it. On the other hand, if we are not ready to lift a finger at home, then Heaven will decide that the kindness we demonstrate outside the home stems from pride. This pride pushes us to demonstrate kindness in order to make ourselves feel good, or because we want our deeds to be recognized and people to speak favorably of us. In that case we are far from fulfilling the mitzvah of demonstrating kindness.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### A Clandestine Circumcision

In the Soviet Union there existed a secret minyan of Jews that attended circumcisions, ceremonies for which people risked their lives just by attending. One day a high-ranking official contacted this minyan and invited its members to attend a circumcision that would be held on the following day. They arrived at a designated spot, and from there they were driven to a house located within a double courtyard. When they came into the house, they found richly-laid tables, and the whole atmosphere was like one of the festivals, as if no Russians were present. The circumcision went ahead, and an instant later the baby was brought to its mother, who proceeded to faint!

When the mother regained consciousness, she explained that her son was more than a year old, and that she and her husband had waited all that time to perform the circumcision. During that entire year she had refrained from kissing her son, for how could she kiss an uncircumcised infant? Therefore when the child was brought to her after being circumcised, she gave him a kiss, and the emotion she felt was so intense that she fainted.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Shemuel Halevi of Koeln The Author of Machatzit HaShekel

Born to Rabbi Nathan Halevi of Koeln, the gaon Rabbi Shemuel Halevi Zatzal was among the greatest of the Poskim. His great and penetrating mind plumbed the depths of Halachah. He was close to the gaon and Kabbalist Rabbi Nathan Adler, as well as to his disciple the gaon Rabbi Moshe Sofer (the Chatam Sofer). Rabbi Shemuel once saved his teacher from a government decree that ordered every citizen to give all his silver to the state. Since Rabbi Nathan had a Sefer Torah that was decorated with silver rings, Rabbi Shemuel secretly climbed into the attic where it was housed and removed the rings without his teacher's knowledge. In this way he prevented him from having to give the Sefer Torah to the government.

Other than his greatness in Torah, Rabbi Shemuel was very humble and possessed Divine inspiration. He was also imbued with lofty character traits, which is why he was asked to serve as a Rav. He initially refused by saying that he wasn't worthy of such a position. However faced with the community's insistent requests, he eventually agreed to become the Rav of Boskowitz, the town where he served as both Rav and Av Beit Din for close to 60 years. He founded a great yeshiva that attracted hundreds of students to learn Hashem's Torah from him. His yeshiva produced great Torah figures that became rabbis in numerous Jewish cities.

Rabbi Shemuel is known for his great work on the Shulchan Aruch, entitled Machatzit HaShekel. In it he deciphers the cryptic teachings of the Magen Avraham on the Orach Chaim. It was a book that was warmly welcomed by all the Torah scholars of his generation. Rabbi Shemuel Halevi passed away on 28 Adar Beit, 5567. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### What Hashem Never Commanded

*It is written, "For I did not speak with your forefathers...concerning burnt-offerings or peace-offerings. Rather, it was only this thing that I commanded them, saying: 'Hearken to My voice, that I will be your G-d and you will be My people, and you will go on the entire way that I command you'" (Jeremiah 7:22-23).*

Hashem, however, did indeed command them to bring offerings!

To solve this apparent contradiction, we must understand the verse in the following way: "For I did not speak with your forefathers...concerning burnt-offerings or peace-offerings" – such that they were a goal in and of themselves. "Rather, it was only this thing that I commanded them, saying" – this is what I meant by commanding them to bring offerings: "Hearken to My voice" – learn to do My will in such a way that the offerings primarily express your desire to bring satisfaction to Hashem by obeying Him. "I will be your G-d and you will be My people" – the offerings are meant to be a sign of the covenant between Israel and G-d, so that He accepts their offerings as a king accepts his people's gifts. "You will go on the entire way that I command you" – for the offerings are to remind you to walk only in Hashem's ways and to depart from evil. Such were the goals of the offerings. However if you do not perform My will, if you do not acknowledge Me as your King, and if you fail to walk in My ways, then you will regard the offerings as being independent things, and that is what I never commanded your fathers!

– The Malbim

## A TRUE STORY

### An Ant in the Soup

*It is written, "These are the living creatures that you may eat" (Leviticus 11:2).*

The gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky Zatzal was careful not to eat meat that had been slaughtered by a shochet over a certain age. If a shochet was older than that age, Rabbi Yechezkel would not eat what he slaughtered.

One day Rabbi Yechezkel came to a certain town and stayed with one of its residents. Since there were two shochatim in town, one old and the other young, Rabbi Yechezkel asked his host to serve him meat that had been slaughtered only by the young shochet. During his stay, Rabbi Yechezkel's host offered him some chicken soup, but Rabbi Yechezkel found an ant in it. When his host asked him why he wasn't eating his soup, Rabbi Yechezkel replied, "I found an ant in it." He then added, "I'm sure that the only reason for the ant is to prevent me from eating this soup. Please go and find out which shochet slaughtered the chicken that went into it." His host went and asked, and sure enough, the chicken had been slaughtered by the older shochet!

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

### The Mice that Disappeared

During one of his journeys to free Jewish prisoners, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair arrived in a certain town where the people looked noticeably worried. Rabbi Pinchas asked them, "Why do you look so sad? What happened here?"

With a collective sigh they replied, "How can we not worry or be sad? We're afraid of starving to death! We had a bountiful harvest, but it was devoured by a plague of mice, the likes of which we've never seen before! They ate most of the harvest, and we haven't been able to get rid of them."

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair sympathized with them. He called upon all the townspeople to come out with him into the fields, and he commanded the mice to assemble and present themselves before him. Obeying his orders, the mice arrived in huge numbers. They instantly filled up the area and began to make a shrieking sound. Mice of every size and shape were seen all around.

People began to shout in despair: "They're going to eat the remainder of the harvest! What can we do against so many of them?"

"Don't do anything," exclaimed Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. "Listen! Do you know why they're making this sound?" They said, "No, do we understand the language of mice?"

"Then I will tell you," said Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. "They're saying that you didn't take the ma'asser [tithe] from the crop as you should have. They were therefore sent to punish you by eating your produce even while it's still in the field."

Stunned, the townspeople replied: "It's true, we didn't take the ma'asser as we should have. We beg you, Rabbi, please be our guarantor. Please promise us that the mice won't eat our food anymore, and we will take the ma'asser. But help us in this, for we don't know how to do it properly." Naturally, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair guided them in the laws of the ma'asser, and the mice disappeared on their own.

– From Yerushalmi, Demai 1