



# The Path To Follow

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## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### Lashon Harah Stems from Ignorance

Although there are people who desire life and are very careful not to speak Lashon Harah, nevertheless they still transgress in this area. We must ask ourselves how this can happen.

Most people speak Lashon Harah because they do not fully understand the laws regulating speech. Sometimes the evil inclination deceives them by suggesting that what they want to say is by no means Lashon Harah. Alternatively, the evil inclination will suggest that the Torah did not prohibit us from speaking Lashon Harah about a certain person, and that on the contrary, it is a mitzvah to speak derisively of him! In fact most people speak Lashon Harah because they are ignorant about the laws relating to it. There is no way of correcting this sin other than by studying the details regarding its prohibitions, and by knowing them to perfection. Only then will a person understand when he should open his mouth and when he should close it. Furthermore, given that we are constantly using the spoken word, we are obligated to understand its prohibitions and their gravity. The use of the tongue is more serious than the use of any other bodily member, which is why we must be very careful when employing it.

## THE TORAH IS ACQUIRED BY HUMILITY

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

Appearing at the beginning of Parsha Behar (Leviticus ch. 25) are the laws concerning the Shmita year. We are commanded to observe the Shmita after having worked the land for six years. For one who observes it, the Holy One, blessed be He, promises that blessings will rest upon the work of his hands during all those years, as it is written: "Then I will command My blessing for you" (ibid. 25:21). On the other hand, we read at the beginning of Parsha Bechukotai: "If you walk in My statutes and you will keep My commandments... then I will give your rains in their time" (ibid. 26:3-4). What is the meaning of, "If you walk in My statutes"? Rashi cites the Midrash in explaining this to mean: "That you should labor in [studying] Torah" (Torat Kohanim).

This means that when a person puts an effort into studying Torah, he merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah. From here we may draw two lessons: When someone observes the Shmita year according to Halachah – this applying not only to a farmer in the field, but to each and every person who has to observe the laws of the Shmita year – he then merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah. Similarly, when someone studies Torah with fervor and puts an effort into it, he also merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah, and furthermore he receives rain at the proper time to water the earth.

It would therefore seem that these two things – the observance of the Shmita year and the diligent study of Torah – are linked by a powerful bond.

What is the mitzvah of the Shmita year? A farmer is the master of his fields for a period of six years. His fields are off-limits to the public, and he works, sows and reaps, collects and stores up his harvest and its fruits. Yet come the seventh year, he has nothing to do! He is in no way the master of his possessions in that year, and his fields are open to everyone. Anybody can walk into his fields and take whatever falls into his hand. A farmer cannot feel proud during the Shmita year. He cannot say, "Everything belongs to me, and I'm the master of my fields." It's out of the question! He is not the master during the Shmita year, for then he must conduct himself with modesty and humility, yielding before everyone, for each and every person is as much the master of his fields as he is, and perhaps even more.

As for the study of Torah, what does it consist of? The Sages have explicitly said that the words of the Torah resemble water (Taanih 7a), and furthermore that "water signifies the Torah" (Bava Kama 17a). Just as water moves from a higher level to a lower one, words of Torah move from a higher place to a lower one. This means that words of Torah cannot entrench themselves in, or even penetrate, the heart of the proud. The Holy One, blessed be He, says of a proud person: "I and he cannot both dwell in the world" (Sotah 5a). A person who is proud cannot study Torah or learn it

from someone else, for he feels greater than him and thinks, "How can this unimportant person explain the Torah to me?" Hence the Torah can only penetrate the heart of someone who is humble.

From this we see that humility is the principle means of acquiring the values of the Torah. It is only when a person conducts himself with humility and modesty that he can study Torah. Only in this way can he learn it from someone else, and only in this way can he elevate himself in learning.

Consequently, we see that everything mentioned with regards to the mitzvot of the Shmita year and Torah study are related. The central component of the mitzvah of Shmita is humility – to be self-effacing before each and every person – and the central component of diligent Torah study lies in humility. What lesson can we derive from this?

When a person conducts himself with humility, he merits the Torah. He also merits performing the mitzvah of the Shmita year according to Halachah, in the minutest detail, and through this he merits every blessing mentioned in the Torah. The painstaking study of Torah also provides a person with all his material needs, without interruptions or the need for calculations, because he conducts himself modestly, as he should.

If unfortunately we do not conduct ourselves properly, then we will be punished for not having observed the Shmita year, as well as for not having studied Torah, and the punishment for both will be the same! Our Sages have said, "By the sin of not observing the Shmita year, the Children of Israel are exiled from their land, the Temple is destroyed, and the land becomes a desert" (Tanhuma, Behar 1). In the Gemara (Nedarim 81a), the Sages give a lengthy explanation for a verse in the book of Jeremiah: "Who is the wise man who will understand this? ... For what reason did the land perish? ... Because they forsook My Torah" (Jeremiah 9:11-12).

From here we see something amazing. Be it by not observing the Shmita year or by not studying Torah, in either case the Temple is destroyed and the Children of Israel are exiled from their country to lands unknown. That being said, we must ask the following question: In every generation there are people who observe the Shmita year but do not study Torah, and conversely there are people who study Torah but do not observe the mitzvah of the Shmita year. How is it possible to sort these things out? The answer is very simple, and it is given by the verse: "If you walk in My statutes" (Leviticus 26:3). That is, we must put an effort into studying Torah. It is true that anyone can study it, yet if he fails to put an effort this study, his Torah will be of little value and punishments will start to bear down on him. We must therefore acquire humility, put an effort into studying Torah, and observe the Shmita year. In this way we will merit all the blessings mentioned by the Creator of the universe in His Torah.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## The Shmita Year Rectifies the Sin of Negligence in Torah Study

*It is written, "The L-RD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai" (Leviticus 25:1).*

Although all the mitzvot were transmitted to Moses on Mount Sinai, only here is the location where Hashem spoke to Moses explicitly mentioned. Because the mitzvah of the Shmita year is introduced by the expression, "The L-RD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai," the Sages ask what the connection is between the Shmita year and Mount Sinai. They reply, "Just as the general principles and details concerning the Shmita year were given on Sinai, so too were the general principles and details concerning all the mitzvot given on Sinai."

The question, however, still remains: Why is Mount Sinai expressly mentioned here with regards to the mitzvah of the Shmita year, rather than with any other of the 613 mitzvot?

The Chida responds to this question by citing a passage in the Gemara: "Rabba said to the Rabbis: I would ask you not to appear before me during Nissan and Tishri, so that you may not be anxious about your food supply during the rest of the year" (Berachot 35b). Consequently, it follows that we do not study for two entire months (Nissan and Tishri) every year. Therefore in six years we do no study for a total of 12 months. This is why, in order to rectify the sin of a yearlong neglect of Torah study (over the course of six years), we have the mitzvah of the Shmita year. It is a time when a person does not work for 12 months, but instead devotes himself to learning Torah in the Beit Midrash.

### A Pearl From the Rav:

## The Connection Between Lending with Interest and the Exodus from Egypt

*It is written, "Take no interest from him.... I am the L-RD your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 25:36-38).*

This passage tells us that a connection exists between the prohibition against lending with interest and the exodus from Egypt. Let us attempt to explain: When the Children of Israel were in Egypt, they believed that despite the harshness of their servitude, Hashem would save them. They had a promise going back to Jacob and Joseph that by the words *pakod yifkod* they would leave the crucible they had lived in for 210 years. In fact this is precisely what happened, for when Moses told them the news of their impending deliverance, he used the words *pakod yifkod*, which is why they believed him. In fact they prostrated themselves upon hearing of the deliverance from Egypt and life in the land of Israel for the generations to come. Therefore by the merit of the Children of Israel's belief that Hashem would rescue them, they were actually delivered from Egypt. Not only that, but in Egypt they had already taken upon themselves some mitzvot to strengthen their faith and hasten the deliverance, mitzvot such as Shabbat and Passover. They also undertook to fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision, joyfully doing so while in Egypt for the sake of Hashem. In fact the Sages say that the blood of the Passover offering mingled with the blood of circumcision. Why did they circumcise themselves? With regards to the Passover offering, it is stated that the uncircumcised cannot eat of it, meaning that the Children of Israel could not have partaken of it without being circumcised. Hence they did this to emerge from the 49 gates of impurity, thereby reaching the 49 gates of holiness and being rescued from Egypt. They believed in Hashem above all, and by the merit of this faith the Divine Presence came upon them and they sang the Song of the Sea. They acted in solidarity with one another, according to the principle that every person is responsible

for the other. This is what enabled them to leave Egypt, for they could not have been delivered unless they were truly united.

From here we can understand the connection between lending money with interest and the exodus from Egypt. Actually, when a person lends money with interest, he undermines the concept of faith in Hashem. As such he is saying that Hashem does not have the power to bestow goodness and abundance, which is why he resorts to charging interest. He also undermines the unity of the Children of Israel, for instead of feeling responsible for others and wanting to help them, he takes money from his fellowman and makes things difficult for him. Furthermore, he undermines the sign of the covenant, for the word *ribit* ("interest") is formed by the same letters as *brit* ("covenant"), and the covenant of circumcision was one of the signs by whose merit the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt. Therefore one who lends money with interest undermines faith, unity, and the covenant of circumcision, meaning that he undermines the very exodus from Egypt.

## The Significance of a Rabbinic Prohibition

*It is written, "For six years you may sow your field...but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land" (Leviticus 25:3).*

It is written in the Tosefta (Bikkurim) that people who do business with goods that were harvested in the Shmita year will never see any sign of blessing. The Sages have also said, "Come and see how hard are the results of [violating the provisions of] the seventh year. A man who trades in seventh year produce must eventually sell his movables" (Kiddushin 20a; cf. Sukkah 40b) and eventually everything else he possesses.

However the Sages call those who observe the mitzvah of the Shmita year "valiant ones who accomplish My word." In fact during the Shmita year a person sees his fields abandoned, his trees neglected, his barriers knocked down, and his produce being eaten by everyone, yet he says nothing. If Jews unfortunately treat the Shmita year with disdain, they will be exiled from their land.

Hence it is fitting for every G-d-fearing Jew to put an effort into observing in detail all the mitzvot pertaining to the seventh year by studying its relevant laws. He will thereby merit being one of Hashem's valiant ones. We learn just how meticulous we must be in observing the laws of the seventh year by the following story:

One day a talmid chacham was invited to the home of the Chazon Ish Zatzal in Bnei Brak. The guest tried to persuade the Chazon Ish to issue lenient directives regarding the Shmita year, adding that the Shmita year in our time is nothing but a rabbinic law. For this guest, there was no reason to be overly strict in observing it, especially since it incurred a financial loss for those who did. The Chazon Ish reflected for a moment on what he had said. He then replied, "It is true that today some prohibitions are of rabbinic origin. For example, salting meat before cooking it is not a law of the Torah, for according to the majority of Poskim cooked blood is only prohibited by rabbinic decree. However if a person doesn't salt his meat, he will appear to others like someone who is eating *treif*." The face of the Chazon Ish was flush with emotion as he said this, and when he arose to accompany his guest out, he added: "It is true that according to Halachah, prohibitions regarding the seventh year in our time are of rabbinic origin. Yet I often ask myself if we know what a rabbinic prohibition truly is."

## The Mitzvah of Tzedakah is Given in the Singular

*It is written, "If your brother becomes poor and his means fail with you, then you shall support him" (Leviticus 25:35).*

Concerning this verse, Rabbi Moshe Alsheich asked the following question in his book *Torat Moshe*: Why are all the preceding verses in the plural, yet when the Torah tells us to give tzedakah to the poor, it is stated in the singular: "If *achecha* [‘your brother’ – singular] becomes poor”?



## MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The answer lies in the fact that when a poor person needs help from someone, the latter will respond: "You're better off going to see so and so. He's rich and can help you more than I can." This is why the Torah addresses itself to each person individually, in effect saying: "You are personally responsible for helping your poor brother. You have no right to exempt yourself by sending him to others."

### The Proud Miser

*It is written, "You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years seven times. The years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you 49 years" (Leviticus 25:8).*

The Maggid of Dubno said that there was once a miser who was proud of his wealth, which consisted of bags of coins. He was told, "Although you have a tremendous amount of coins, in total all you really have is about 200 rubles." The man began to boast, saying: "I live 365 days a year!" He was told, "Count your days in years, and if it seems like much, then count your years in Shmita cycles, as it is written: 'You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years seven times.' In total it's about a single Jubilee."

How long does a person live? In total he lives about a Jubilee, or a Jubilee and a half.

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### The Seventh Year is a Shmita for Hashem

*It is written, "The seventh year shall be...for the L-RD" (Leviticus 25:4).*

During the Shmita year, every Jew is commanded to stop all agricultural work and to put the holiness of the seventh year into practice. The Sefer HaChinuch comments on the reason for this mitzvah: "The principle of this mitzvah is to fix in our hearts a strong sense of the world's renewal, for during six days Hashem created the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day – when nothing was created – He decided to rest. This is why we have six days of work and one day of rest in the week. It is also why Hashem commanded us to leave all that the earth produces in the seventh year to everyone's disposal (besides commanding us not to work the land), in order for people to remember that the land – which brings man food each year – does not do this on its own. People are to realize that both land and landowner have a Master, and that when He so desires, it is a mitzvah to leave the fruits of the land to everyone's disposal. It is also meant to increase a person's faith in Hashem, for if he can give the produce of his land – the heritage he received from his fathers – to others, then he will never become greedy or lack faith in G-d."

The Kli Yakar writes that the reason for this mitzvah is to infuse the Children of Israel with faith and confidence in G-d. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want the Children of Israel to enter the land and constantly occupy themselves with working it. They would then forget Hashem, turning their confidence away from Him in thinking that their own strength had produced their wealth, or that the world follows its own course. In that case they would think that the land was theirs, that they were its sole masters. This is why Hashem completely removed them from following the natural order of things, for in a six-year period people usually plant for two years and leave the land fallow for one year in order not to deplete the soil. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "For six years you may sow your field" (Leviticus 25:3) – every year – and I promise to add to the vitality of the soil so it will not become depleted.

This is another case of a miracle within a miracle, for after having worked the land for six consecutive years, not only did it not become depleted, it became so fertile in the sixth year that Hashem states: "It shall yield the produce of three years" (v.21). By virtue of all the miracles that G-d would do for us, we would know that the land belonged to Him, and in this way we would raise our eyes to Heaven. We see this with regards to the manna that fell each day for the Children of Israel, ensuring that their eyes were always raised to Hashem and that they always trusted in Him.

The Chatam Sofer adds to this by saying that here we have definitive proof that the Torah was given by Hashem, not by Moses through his own initiative. In fact how could it have been possible to promise those who observed the Shmita year that in the sixth year the land would produce enough food for the next three years? This is something that is completely miraculous. The answer is that the Torah obviously originates from Heaven, and that Hashem – Who directs the world – is the only One Who can make such a promise. As a witness to this, we have miraculous stories of people who observed the Shmita year and saw Hashem's blessings with their very own eyes.

The book *Mateh Moshe*, written by a disciple of the Maharshal, gives a marvelous reason for this mitzvah: The earth lies fallow and rests for a period of time equal to all the Sabbaths that it worked during the previous six years. Since each solar year contains 52 Sabbaths, in six years there are therefore 312 Sabbaths that must be compensated for by the land resting on the Shmita year. Now due to the fact that on the Shmita year the earth works on its own every Sabbath, each Shmita year itself produces 52 Sabbaths that must be compensated for by the land resting. Hence every seven Shmita cycles, there would be another  $7 \times 52 = 364$  days to be compensated for by the land resting. This is done on the Jubilee, which takes place after every seventh Shmita cycle, a time when the earth rests for an entire year, making up for the time that it worked on Shabbat during the seven previous Shmita years.

Abarbanel wrote that the reason for the mitzvah of the Shmita year is to remind man that all his days in this world amount to 70 years. He must therefore be careful not to waste his time in useless pursuits, for a loss of time is more serious than a loss of possessions or money. Hence during the Shmita year, a person is free from work and has the opportunity to do good for his soul by serving Hashem.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### Modesty Brings the Shechinah Into the Home

We know from the ancient tzaddikim that each generation has its own trials. In addition to the general trials that the evil inclination uses to make Jews stumble, there is one trial that is destined for this generation, as the great men of Israel have affirmed in recent times. Our generation has experienced two trials to a greater extent than any other, namely the trial of faith and the trial of modesty. It is precisely during such difficult days as these, a time before the Final Redemption, that we must strengthen ourselves as much as possible.

The situation we face is similar to that of a person on a boat near the shore, when suddenly a mighty storm develops and begins to move things out to sea. This person will fight with all his might against the waves that threaten to drown him. When he feels his strength waning and hope fading, people will cry out to encourage him: "You're almost there! You'll soon be safe!" Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, cries out to the handful of righteous women in our generation: "You have courageously overcome all kinds of difficult and bitter trials. Well done! Here is Mashiach, who is standing at the door!" Just how happy will these women be when Mashiach points to them and says, "My people were saved by their merit!" May we merit and make others merit the Final Redemption, speedily and in our days. Amen!

## A MATTER OF EDUCATION

### Taking a Risk to Earn a Profit? Not in Education!

Commenting on the end of Parsha Behar, Rashi states: “These parshiot are also said in order. At first He warned regarding the seventh year, and if [a person] coveted money and was suspected of [trading during] the seventh year, his end will be to sell his moveable property. ... If he does not repent, his end will be to sell his estate. [If] he [still] does not repent, in the end he sells his house. [If] he does not repent [at this point], in the end he will borrow with interest. ... [If] he has still not repented, in the end he sells himself. [If] he does not repent, not only will he sell himself to a Jew, but even to a non-Jew” (Rashi on Leviticus 26:1).

Even if we believe that the order of these events is miraculous, and that this is what Hashem does to those who love money, we may also explain this order in light of how people normally act. A person who is overly attached to money will typically risk his wealth for the possibility of making a small profit. Although in general, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” it is preferable to take only small risks in order to achieve large profits. Now one who loves money will act out of desperation, taking a large risk in order to acquire even a small profit. Hence he will end up selling his land, his home, and so on. What can we learn from this? In the area of finances, it is preferable to take only a small risk in order to earn a large profit. However with regards to education, all risks are considered large. Furthermore, what can we hope to achieve by taking a risk, since “what is crooked cannot be made straight” (Ecclesiastes 1:15)? Also, once a mistaken concept has been engrained in a person’s mind, it is very difficult to remove.

Some people want to expose their children, and well as the children of others, to all kinds of new pedagogical techniques. They do this with the intention of using everything that Hashem has given to man in order to better understand His word. We tell such people that granted, when children grow up and their minds become capable of discerning between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, it will be possible for them to understand everything they need in order to know Hashem. Many great Jewish figures have become interested in various educational techniques, examining their merits when asked. Yet beyond that, “Do not sin against the child” (Genesis 42:22): We are not to consider any possible profit when it comes to risking the religious education of our children in any way. Here the Sages have said, “There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the L-RD” (Proverbs 21:30), and this is included in the commandment, “You shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes” (Numbers 15:39).

## A TRUE STORY

### Land Sold For Perpetuity

*It is written, “Do not take from him interest or increase” (Leviticus 25:36).*

The prohibition against taking interest is one of the most serious in the Torah. In fact the Sages have said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, states that one who lives off of interest in this world will not live in the World to Come.” In other words, such a person will not participate in the resurrection of the dead.

In the western Polish town of Posen, a wealthy man who had spent his entire life taking interest from his fellow Jews passed away. When the Chevra Kadisha demanded an exorbitant price for his burial plot, the deceased’s inheritors became upset, and in their anger they went to complain to a local police official. The official demanded that the rabbi of the town, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, be immediately summoned in order to explain the meaning of the exorbitant price that the Chevra Kadisha demanded of the deceased’s inheritors.

In his wisdom, Rabbi Akiva Eiger said to the official: “We Jews believe with an unwavering faith in the resurrection of the dead. Therefore when the time comes, all the dead will rise from their graves. However the Torah teaches that a person who lent money on interest will not be resurrected. Therefore the deceased who lies before us, who lent money on interest, will occupy his plot of land for all time, and so it is only fair that the Chevra Kadisha should ask his inheritors for a large sum of money for it.”

Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s brilliant response satisfied the police official, who at that point decided not to get involved in the matter.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto – The Ramchal

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto Zatzal, known as the Ramchal, was among the greatest Kabbalists who ever lived. He was born in 5467 to Rabbi Yaakov Chai, one of the prominent Italian figures of Padua. The Ramchal studied the revealed Torah with the gaon Rabbi Yeshaya Bassani and his father-in-law Rabbi David Finzi, the Av Beit Din of Mantua. He also studied the hidden Torah with his teacher Rabbi Yeshaya Bassani, and he composed many works of Kabbalah. However on the advice of this teacher, he hid all his books in a locked box, giving one key to his teacher and another to the representatives of the rabbinate of Venice.

The Ramchal ended up leaving Italy and traveling to Amsterdam, where he began working to support his family. Although he learned to grind optical lenses and took up this craft for a living, he quickly realized that he had nothing to do in the galut. The Ramchal had a powerful yearning for the Holy Land, since many of his disciples were already there, and he wanted to follow them.

In his fortieth year, in 5507, the Ramchal settled in the city of Akko. However a few days later an epidemic broke out in the city, and both he and his family members fell ill. The Ramchal died as a result of the epidemic on Iyar 26 (yesod of yesod) at the age of 40. He was buried in Tiberius next to the grave of Rabbi Akiva. Of the books that the Ramchal wrote, his most famous is a work of Mussar entitled Messilat Yesharim. May his merit protect us all.