



## The Path To Follow

MATOT

246

July 26<sup>th</sup> 08

23 Tamuz 5768

Publication

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## GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

### The Lesson of the Peddler

*The Midrash states, "A peddler used to go around the towns in the vicinity of Sepphoris, crying out: 'Who wishes to buy the elixir of life?' and drawing great crowds around him. Rabbi Yanai was sitting and expounding in his room and heard him calling out, 'Who desires the elixir of life?' He said to him, 'Come here and sell me it.' The peddler said, 'Neither you nor people like you require that [which I have to sell]. The rabbi pressed him, and the peddler went up to him and brought out the book of Psalms and showed him the passage: 'Who is the man who desires life?' [Psalms 34:13]. What is written right afterwards? 'Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully' [v.14]. ... Rabbi Yanai said, 'All my life have I been reading this passage, but I did not know how it was to be explained, until this peddler came and clarified it, namely: "Who is the man who desires life?" ' ' (Vayikra Rabba 16:2).*

*In reading this Midrash, our first impression is that a segula for long life would be to obey the Torah, such as by distancing ourselves from evil and doing good. However in examining the Midrash more closely, we realize that life depends only on the tongue, and that the primary way of distancing ourselves from evil and doing good is by watching what we say.*

— Sama DeChayei, ch. 3

## THE ROLE OF THE TRIBAL LEADERS

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

**I**t is written, "Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: '...When a man vows a vow to the L-RD, or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do'" (Numbers 30:2-3).

Several issues seem unclear in this passage:

1. In designating the tribal leaders, why does the text use the expression *rashei hamatot* ("the heads of the tribes") rather than *nessi'im* (leaders), since the passage concerns the leaders?

2. Why does the verse begin with the term *vayedaber*, a term that denotes strictness, but continues with *leimor*, which is a milder term?

3. Regarding the expression *rashei hamatot*, Rashi states: "He honored the leaders by teaching them first, and only later the rest of the Israelites." Now it seems obvious that the leaders are to be honored first, so what is Rashi telling us by this? The explanation is that Moses knew that the leaders had the power to influence the Children

of Israel for better or for worse, as we see in the case of the spies. Although the spies were some the greatest men among the people, they still had a harmful influence on the Children of Israel, who did not want to enter the land after listening to them. The result was that they remained in the desert for 40 years and an entire generation died, all because the spies only cared about their own interests, which led them to disparaging the land. Yet when the *nessi'im*, the leaders of Israel, conducted themselves with humility and annulled themselves before Hashem – when they studied Torah and performed mitzvot unselfishly – they obviously had a good influence on the people and encouraged them to serve Hashem. However this only hap-

pened when they weren't focused on seeking their own glory.

We now have answers to all three of our questions. The verse begins with the term *vayedaber*, which denotes strictness, because the text is concerned with the welfare and honor of the leaders. Moses wanted to teach them how to serve Hashem, and his strict words would be beneficial to them. He therefore addressed himself to the *rashei hamatot*, not the *nessi'im*, for the word *matot* ("tribes") alludes to the fact that the leaders must turn their heads downwards (*matah*) and demonstrate humility and obedience. In fact they have a very important role to play as leaders, a role that conferred great honor to them, and therefore they had to be careful not to grow proud as a result.

Our third question is also resolved. To achieve humility, we must study Torah, since it is impossible to uproot pride without it. Moses therefore began by honoring the leaders and teaching them the passage concerning vows, for vows and the Torah are connected, as the Sages have said: "He who says, 'I will rise early to study this chapter or this tractate,' has vowed a great vow to the G-d of Israel" (Nedarim 8a). By making a vow, a person becomes holy to Hashem, and he can conquer the evil inclination by vowing to study Torah. Doing so enables a person to establish fences for himself that lead to sanctified conduct, as it is written: "He shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do" (Numbers 30:3). By emulating the leaders in this regard, the Children of Israel would learn to conduct themselves with humility and carry out everything they say, and Hashem would act with them measure for measure. He would honor what they say, similar to the teaching that Hashem carries out what the righteous decree (see *Moed Katan* 16b).

From all that has been said, we understand the true power of the leaders of Israel. They have a great responsibility, for the entire spiritual fate of the people is in their hands, and they must serve the public by setting a personal example. In order to do this, they must demonstrate exemplary conduct and use their lofty position to elevate people to great heights in the fear of Heaven and the service of G-d.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## Freedom of Speech, You Say?

*It is written, "He shall not profane his word" (Numbers 30:3).*

The Sages have explained, "He may not profane it, but others may dissolve it for him" (Chagigah 10a).

We see the power of Torah scholars in this week's parsha. Not only can they confiscate money in monetary affairs, they can also decide matters dealing with prohibitions. That is, they can annul what a person has prohibited to himself, as the Sages have declared: "Others may dissolve it for him."

The Kli Yakar writes, "The reason why a vow can be annulled by a single competent person, or by three ordinary people convened as a Beit Din, is because just as a woman's father or husband have the power to annul her vow (since a woman is under the authority of her father or husband, and she cannot do anything without their approval), it is as if she uttered her vow on condition that her father or husband agreed with it. When they do not agree with it, her vow is null and void, for she certainly uttered it thinking that they would approve. Similarly, every Jew is under the authority of the Beit Din, and he is obligated to do whatever it tells him to do. Whenever a person utters a vow, it is conditional on the Beit Din's approval, otherwise the vow is null and void."

The Torah wants every Jew to adhere to Torah scholars, and if they do not agree with a decision that a person has taken, they can annul it. Faith in the Sages is one of the 48 qualities by which the Torah is acquired (Perkei Avot 6:6), and a person must not rely on his own understanding, as Scripture tells us (Proverbs 3:5). He must instead conduct himself according to the Torah that he is taught. A person must therefore verify that every action he takes is done in the spirit of the Sages' teachings.

## The Promises of Leaders

Parsha Matot begins with the laws concerning vows and oaths, given by Moses "to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel" (Numbers 30:2). The question becomes: Why does the Torah stress that Moses addressed "the heads of the tribes," since all Jews were warned regarding vows and oaths? Our teacher the Chatam Sofer explains that the heads of the tribes, leaders in terms of material affairs, usually make all kinds of promises to the people, sometimes even swearing to do things. In the end, however, they may not keep their word, and they may even do the very opposite of what they said! The sad reality of things is that it is precisely public leaders – individuals who should serve as an example to the people by their actions and character traits – who allow themselves not to do what they have said, dismissing any promises they have made by an oath or a vow. This is why the Torah specifically addresses the "heads of the tribes" in this passage, warning them to "not profane" their words. Instead, every leader is to carry out "all that proceeds from his mouth"!

## The Power of Words

*It is written, "When a man vows a vow...he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do" (Numbers 30:3).*

Concerning the fact that a person is not to profane his word, the tzaddik Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kosov said: "One who always pays attention to not profaning his words, and who ensures that each word he utters is sacred, will merit that the Holy One, blessed be He, honors what emerges from his mouth and what leaves his lips. In him will be fulfilled, 'According to all that proceeds from his mouth, He shall do,' for the tzaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes."

## The Implications of Understanding

*It is written, "Moses was angry with the commanders of the army...and said to them, 'Did you let every female live?'" (Numbers 31:14-15).*

In reality, the army commanders did not initially receive orders to kill the women. Therefore why was Moses angry with them now? This proves that when a person understands that something must be done, he must do it without waiting for an order. Hence Bilam said, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing before me" (Numbers 22:34), meaning that if one fails to understand something that he should understand, he has sinned.

– The Holy Shelah

## Another War Awaits

*It is written, "Moses was angry with the commanders of the army...who returned from the military campaign" (Numbers 31:14).*

Moses was angry with the army leaders returning from battle, an allusion to those who have returned from war and feel proud, for a war that is a hundred times harder awaits them.

– Sha'ar Bat Rabim, Citing the Yitav Lev

## The Art of Speech

*It is written, "Bilam the son of Beor, they slew with the sword" (Numbers 31:8).*

Rashi explains: "He came against Israel and exchanged his art for theirs, for they are victorious only with their mouths, through prayer and supplication, and he came and adopted their art to curse them with his mouth. Thus they also came against him by exchanging their art for the art of the nations, who come with the sword, as it says: 'You shall live by your sword' [Genesis 27:40]." The Chafetz Chaim notes that Rashi's explanation teaches us that the Children of Israel's art is speech. Through this art, they can create material and spiritual worlds, as it is written: "I have placed My words in your mouth...to plant the heavens and to establish the earth" (Isaiah 51:16). Thus every Jew must be careful not to ruin the instrument of his art – his mouth and his tongue – through forbidden words, such as by speaking Lashon Harah or uttering slander. Instead he must use them to recite words of Torah, prayer, and other sacred things.

## Fulfilling Hashem's Orders with Joy

*It is written, "Moses spoke to the people" (Numbers 31:3).*

Rashi states, "Although he heard that his death depended on the matter, he did it joyfully, without delay."

Hashem told Moses, "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites" (v.2), whereas Moses told the Children of Israel: "Inflict the L-RD's vengeance against Midian" (v.3). In point of fact, the Midianites sinned against G-d, for they had ensnared the Children of Israel in immorality. They also sinned against Israel, for they brought about the death of 24,000 Jews. Hence Hashem told Moses: I forgive with regards to an offence against Myself, but with regards to what they did against Israel, this I cannot forgive. Therefore, "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel."

When Moses heard, "Afterwards you will be gathered to your people" (v.2), meaning that his death would follow the war against Midian, he feared that the Children of Israel would – in order to prolong Moses' life – say that they also forgave what was done to them. Therefore Moses told them that the war was meant to "inflict the L-RD's vengeance against Midian." He asserted that Heaven's honor was at stake, and therefore they had no reason to forgive. Hence the text states, "So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel...twelve thousand armed for war" (v.5), meaning that they went to war against their will (Rashi). They were forced to go because Moses had told them to carry out Hashem's vengeance.

Therein lies the proof that Moses carried out Hashem's instructions with joy, for he could have easily delayed things by relaying Hashem's words to Israel exactly as he had heard them: "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel." Moses nevertheless wanted to fulfill Hashem's will, even though he would die as a result. – Kli Yakar

### Connected to the Leaders

When a king goes out and wages war in order to avenge his people, this in no way proves that he is doing so because he loves them. In fact it is quite possible that he is doing this exclusively out of self-interest. Because "there is no king without a people," he must defend his people in order to maintain his rule. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted the Children of Israel to realize that Moses waged war against Midian solely for their benefit and honor. In fact Moses himself would not benefit from it in any way, since he was to die immediately afterwards. This was the novelty of the situation: Moses acted willingly and with joy, since in any case he sought nothing but the welfare of Israel.

When the Children of Israel saw the magnitude of Moses' love for them, their love for him increased several fold, and they refused to go out and wage war. Hence they "were delivered" (Numbers 31:5), meaning that they went against their will. – Ketav Sofer

## ESHET HAYIL

### The Merit of a Modest Woman

It is written, "The daughter of the king is all glorious within" (Psalms 45:14). This means that every woman who is careful with regards to modesty and is constantly inside, hidden within the home, will merit sons resembling the High Priest, who was clothed in the golden garments of his office. Due to their sanctity and purity, they merited the lofty level of the High Priest, who was Hashem's greatest servant. It is a level to which every Jewish man and woman aspires: Having descendants who are true servants of Hashem.

One may ask what connection there is between a woman's modesty and the garments of the High Priest. We may compare the garments of a modest Jewish woman to the sanctified garments of the High Priest, for when the Jewish woman clothes herself with sanctity and modesty, it constitutes a true service of Hashem. She will thereby merit that her descendants are worthy of the sanctity and purity of the garments of the High Priest, Hashem's greatest servants.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbi Moshe Sofer – The Chatam Sofer

Rabbi Moshe Sofer was among the greatest Torah scholars of Europe during the first part of the nineteenth century. He was the disciple of Rabbi Nathan Alder (the Rav of Frankfurt), and the son-in-law of Rabbi Akiva Eiger. In 1803, Rabbi Moshe Sofer was named as the Rav of Pressburg, the capital of Slovakia, a great Jewish city. He established a large yeshiva with hundreds of students in Pressburg, where he remained until his dying day.

His principle battle lay against the Reform movement, which had begun to be active during his lifetime. He often recited the phrase Chadash Asur Min HaTorah (Kiddushin 38b), a reference to the prohibition against eating the new harvest before the Omer was brought to the Temple, but which can be understood as, "Innovation is forbidden by the Torah," an allusion to the novel practices of the Reformists.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer left behind numerous manuscripts, and his sons continued to serve as rabbis after him.

Among Rabbi Moshe Sofer's most important works are Chatam Sofer (responsa and commentaries on the Talmud) and Torat Moshe (on the weekly Torah portion). – Paperaot LaTorah

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### Bein Hametzarim

The 21 days that separate Tammuz 17 from Tisha B'Av are known as bein hametzarim, an expression drawn from the verse: "All her pursuers overtook her bein hametzarim [in dire straits]" (Lamentations 1:3). The Sages have said that a period of misfortune separates Tammuz 17 from Tisha B'Av, a time when pestilence occurs. Other forces of evil reign during this time as well, a period in which the Jewish people have endured numerous tragedies over the generations, such as the destruction of both Temples, the siege of Jerusalem, and famine. This period of time was therefore established to mourn the destruction of the Temple.

During this time we abstain from rejoicing more than at any other time of the year. We do not listen to music, nor do we recite Shecheyanu on new clothes or new fruit, for it is a time of misfortune. Hence we do not wear new clothes during this period.

Since the forces of evil reign at this time, people must be careful – even more than at any other time of the year – not to place themselves in danger. Very pious individuals set a time each day to reflect upon the destruction of the Temple and to mourn. In some communities, people recite tikkun chatzot during the day, which is a good practice to follow.

– Shulchan Aruch 551:17-18 and the Acharonim

## THE MERIT OF THE FATHERS

### Stories of the Tzaddikim From the Pinto Family

In the city of Mogador there lived a wealthy government minister who detested Jews. One day the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto and his servant were walking near the home of this minister, who immediately ordered his servants to summon the Rav without delay.

When the tzaddik arrived, the minister asked him: "Why are your pants so long?"

The tzaddik normally covered his legs on account of modesty. However the minister threatened to have him beaten if he ever passed through the streets wearing such long pants again. The tzaddik remained silent and went on his way. At midnight, the minister began feeling intense pains throughout his body, until they finally became unbearable. Doctors were summoned to his home, but all their medication and pain suppressants were ineffective. An honorable Gentile, a servant of the minister, whispered into his master's ear that perhaps his pain was due to his encounter with Rabbi Haim Pinto earlier that day. The minister understood the gravity of the situation, and he quickly went to the home of the tzaddik with carts loaded with precious goods. The honorable Gentile also accompanied him, and he bowed before the Rav in asking for his master to be healed. The tzaddik refused the minister's gift, but promised that he would be healed. The minister's pain disappeared that very night, for when he arrived home his body was completely healed. He became a protector of the Jewish people from that moment on.