



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Throw Him to the Dogs

One who speaks Lashon Harah deserves to be thrown to the dogs, as we read: "Novach captured Kenat and its surroundings and called it Novach, after his name" (Numbers 32:42). In a letter of protest and a warning against the scourge of informing that had spread in a certain town, the Chafetz Chaim used this verse to allude to what the kabbalists have said, namely that a moser (an informer) who reports to non-Jewish authorities is punished by being reincarnated as a dog that noevach (barks). Thus it is written: Vayikra lah ("And he called it") – the term lah is an acronym for Lashon Harah – "Novach, after his name." A similar allusion is found in the Gemara: "Whoever speaks Lashon Harah...deserves to be thrown to the dogs, as it is written: 'You shall throw it to the dogs' [Exodus 22:30]" (Makkot 23a).

– The Chafetz Chaim

THE CITY OF REFUGE – A PLACE OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "There shall be six cities of refuge for you. Three cities shall you designate on the other side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you designate in the land of Canaan. They shall be cities of refuge. For the Children of Israel and the proselyte and resident among them, these six cities shall be a refuge, for anyone who kills a person unintentionally.... He must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, and after the death of the High Priest the murderer shall return to the land of his possession" (Numbers 35:13-15, 20).

We need to understand the basic points of this mitzvah:

1. What is the significance of the cities of refuge, and why is the unintentional murderer not to hide in his own city?
2. Why does Scripture make the unintentional murderer's return from the city of refuge dependent on the death of the High Priest? Why does it not establish a set time for him to return from there?
3. The Sages have also questioned the statement concerning the mothers of the priests, who would provide food for these unintentional murderers and care for them, lest they pray for the death of their sons. This seems to mean that if these unintentional murderers had prayed for the death of the High Priest, their prayers would have been answered. How could this be, given that it is written: "An undeserved curse will not come to rest" (Proverbs 26:2)? The Sages have explained that the High Priest should have asked for mercy for his generation, but he failed to do so.

It remains difficult, however, to understand how the prayer of a murderer could be accepted. Just because the unintentional murderer wants to return home, how can it lead to the death of the High Priest? Although the unintentional murderer is not a murderer in the real sense (since he killed by mistake, not on purpose), the Sages have said that evil occurs by means of a person who is already guilty. Therefore if the person in question has done something as serious as killing, it means that he is not beyond reproach.

Some have explained the situation in light of the verse: "You reduce man to dust and say, 'Repent, O sons of man'" (Psalms 90:3). We know what the Sages have said, namely that even if all other gates are closed, the gates of prayer and the gates of teshuvah (Eicha Rabba 3: 15) remain open. Since murderers are living in cities of refuge, they have certainly done teshuvah on account of the suffering and pain of exile. In fact their pain is considered to be almost like death, since they are separated from those they love and their place of birth, and they spend their days with strangers. Since the gates of teshuvah and prayer are not closed, it is certain that their teshuvah is accepted. Indeed, even the repentance of King Manasseh, despite his sins, was accepted, as the Sages have said: "Manasseh testifies that the Holy One, blessed be He, accepts the penitent." Therefore when those in exile repent and become great tzaddikim, we may fear that their prayers will be granted. That is, the High Priest may actually die when they curse him. This explanation remains difficult to accept, however, for in what way did the High Priest sin? What grave transgression did he commit, such that he will die from the curses of those who repented while in exile? Where is the justice in this?

We have already mentioned what the Sages have said on the passage regarding the choice of the cities of refuge. Although there were nine tribes in Canaan, and only two and a half tribes on the other side of the

Jordan, the cities of refuge were equally distributed among them, for the territory of Gad contained many murderers. To explain this, we must say that the evil inclination is stronger outside of Eretz Israel. Now if this is true with regards to a sin as grave as unintentional murder, how much will the evil inclination try to convince a person to transgress in a less serious way! This is especially true with regards to unintentional sins, ones that we don't see at first glance: The evil inclination tries as hard as it can to make a person stumble outside of Eretz Israel, and sometimes it succeeds. Hence a person who finds himself outside of Eretz Israel should be especially careful.

We are also familiar with the Sages' statement that each person constitutes an entire world. When the time comes for a person to leave this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, ensures that someone else is born. In this way, nothing will be missing from the world. These things are stated with even greater emphasis regarding the tzaddikim, as the Sages have explained on the verse, "The sun rises and the sun sets" (Ecclesiastes 1:5): A tzaddik does not leave this world until a similar tzaddik is born. Therefore when a person kills someone, he destroys an entire world, and the blood of the deceased, along with all his would-be descendants, is imputed to the murderer. If he killed intentionally, it is obvious that only his death can atone for him.

Yet even if he did not kill intentionally, he still requires atonement. What can he do to achieve this atonement? It can only occur through exile, through complete repentance and regret for his grave transgression. By dint of his tears, he can begin to rectify the loss that he brought upon the world.

It is for this reason that the Torah condemned the unintentional murderer to live in a city of refuge, for he must have time to think about what he did. In fact since he was the cause of something as serious as the destruction of an entire world, it is certainly because he is guilty, for evil only comes about through the guilty. He will therefore think of repentance, and he will plead with the Holy One, blessed be He, to forgive him for his sin. If he manages to feel that his prayers have had an effect, it is a sign that he has reached the level of a ba'al teshuvah, a person whose sins have been transformed into merits. He can then rectify the loss that he brought about.

Yet even if he feels that he has the ability to pray for the death of the High Priest in order to return home, he is forbidden to do so. He is also forbidden to pray that he may leave his city of refuge, for this request could bring about the death of the High Priest. The tikkun of the involuntary murderer is to do teshuvah without asking to leave, for otherwise it will be accounted to him as a mitzvah obtained through a sin: The mitzvah of teshuvah obtained by inadvertently cursing the High Priest and bringing about his death. If a person truly desires to repent, it is not enough for him to refrain from praying for the High Priest's death. He must also pray for the High Priest's welfare. It is measure for measure, for just as he killed a person, he must now pray for a person's life, even if it means that he will have to remain in his city of refuge. During all that time, he must repent and learn from the deeds of his neighbors the Levites. He must infuse himself with their holiness

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Drawing a Lesson for Life

The Torah enumerates all the journeys of the Children of Israel, from their departure from Egypt until their arrival at the borders of Eretz Israel. There were 42 journeys in all, and the Torah dwells at length on each of them. Given that we know how succinct the Torah is, we need to understand why it provides us with so many details concerning these journeys.

Rashi states regarding the beginning of the parsha: “Why were these journeys recorded? To inform us of the kind deeds of the Omnipresent, for although He issued a decree to move them around and to make them wander in the desert, you should not say that they were moving about and wandering from place to place for all 40 years and had no rest, for there are only 42 stages. ... [Y]ou will find that throughout the 38 years, they made only 20 journeys. ... Rabbi Tanhuma expounds it in another way: It is analogous to a king whose son became sick, so he took him to a faraway place to have him healed. On their way back, the father began citing all the stages of their journey, saying to him: ‘This is where we sat. Here we were cold. Here you had a headache....’”

If we want to really understand the moral of this story, namely why all their stages are mentioned, let us examine the contents of the story itself. The great gaon Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman Shlita explains that the king’s role is not to awaken pleasant or unpleasant memories. Rather, he is trying to draw a lesson here. There are many people who have gone through various stages in their life, though not everyone succeeds in learning from these stages. There are not many who take advantage of the vicissitudes of life to elevate themselves and improve their conduct for the future.

The king left with his “sick” son, who had to be healed and get better. When he eventually regained his strength, the king took advantage of their journey to learn what caused the boy’s illness, thus protecting him for the future. Such was the responsible outlook of the king: He tried to learn as much as he could from their long journey in order to heal his son.

The Sages are teaching us that this is how we must view life. A person who has experienced ups and downs in life must take advantage of these situations to learn and benefit from them. The journeys of the Children of Israel were really the journeys of the sick on the road to recovery. Since there are 42 journeys, we must suppose that there are 42 goals to obtain. That being the case, on the return path we must take stock of life – we must search our souls.

– From Pahad David

A Pearl From the Rav:

Cites of Refuge

Concerning the cities of refuge, the Sages have said: “The word ‘asylum’ was inscribed at crossroads so that the murderer might notice and turn in that direction...[as it is written]: ‘Prepare the way for yourself’ [Deuteronomy 19:3]” (Makkot 10b). How could this be, given that there were no road signs indicating the way to Jerusalem and the Temple?

The Torah knows the inner workings of the unintentional murderer’s heart. If he has to ask for directions from people passing by, the avenger of blood was liable to find him and kill him. Road signs were therefore posted so he could quickly get there on his own. Yet for Jerusalem there were no road signs, since it is a place of Torah, where the Shechinah dwells. It is a place where we can draw G-d’s spirit and abundance, the place that we should be interested in and asking about.

That is the lesson being taught here: When it comes to Torah, we are not to say, “I know everything, and I don’t need to ask questions in order to understand.” Instead we must ask and begin anew; we must show interest and be enlightened until we know Torah. We must never be content with our knowledge, nor should we ever stop learning, lest we take a drastic fall. It is through Torah that we make our way, but only if we ask and remain interested in learning, wanting to understand and educate ourselves.

They Journeyed and Encamped – Why?

Why did the Torah decide that it was good to describe all the journeys of the Children of Israel?

The Rambam explains that Hashem ordered all the journeys of the Children of Israel to be recorded so that the coming generations would know of all the miracles that the Holy One, blessed be He, did for His people in the desert. We are not to mistakenly think that our fathers lived in the desert near an inhabited region, or that they encamped in places with vegetation and springs. Rabbi Ovadia Sforno writes that G-d wanted the journeys of the Children of Israel recorded in order to describe their merit, for they followed Him in the desert, in a barren wasteland, the merit of which enabled them to enter Eretz Israel.

Rabbi Avraham Menachem, the author of HaSolet Belula, wrote that these journeys were recorded in the Torah so that every Jew could recite, when passing these places, the blessing, “Blessed are You... Who performed a miracle in this place” (Berachot 54a).

Rashi explains: “Why were these journeys recorded? To inform us of the kind deeds of the Omnipresent, for although He issued a decree to move them around and make them wander in the desert, you should not say that they were moving about and wandering from place to place for all 40 years and had no rest, for there are only 42 stages. Deduct 14 of them, for they all took place in the first year.... Subtract a further 8 stages, which took place after Aaron’s death – from Mount Hor to the plains of Moab – during the 40th year, and you will find that throughout the 38 years they made only 20 journeys.” Rashi adds that Midrash Tanhuma provides another explanation: “It is analogous to a king whose son became sick, so he took him to a faraway place to have him healed. On their way back, the father began citing all the stages of their journey, saying to him: ‘This is where we sat. Here we were cold. Here you had a headache....’”

His Wisdom Departs

It is written, “Moses was angry with the commanders of the army...who returned from the military campaign. Moses said to them: ‘Did you let every female live?’” (Numbers 31:14-15).

The Sages have said, “As for any man who becomes angry, if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him.... [We learn this] from Moses, for it is written: ‘Moses was angry with the commanders of the army.’ It is also written, ‘Elazar the priest said to the men of the war that went to the battle: “This is the decree of the Torah, which the L-RD commanded Moses.”’ Thus Moses had forgotten it” (Pesachim 66b).

The gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that although Moses certainly had a reason to become angry with them, since they failed to kill the very ones who had made them sin, the laws concerning the vessels used for idolatry still escaped him. This proves that there is no difference between a good and a not-so-good reason for getting angry, for anger always leads to error. The fact that anger and wisdom are opposed to one another is not a punishment, but rather the reality of things. Hence, “If he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him.”

– Peninim MiShulchan Gavoha

Dividing Manasseh for the Unity of the People

It is written, “The tribe of Reuben’s descendants according to their fathers’ house, and the tribe of Gad’s descendants according to their fathers’ house, and half the tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance” (Numbers 34:14).

With regards to half the tribe of Manasseh, why does the verse not state, “according to their fathers’ house,” as it does for the tribes of Reuben and Gad? In his Torah commentary entitled Sifte Cohen, the Shach explains why Moses added the tribes of Reuben and Gad to the half tribe of Manasseh, despite the fact that they did not ask for this. He did so to prevent bonds of fraternity from being lost among the tribes, since the Jordan River separated them. Hence Moses divided the tribe of Manasseh on both sides of the Jordan so as to preserve the bond between each side. In fact the book of Joshua states that the descendants of Gad and Reuben also built a special altar to serve as a reminder to their children, lest “in the future your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the L-RD, the G-d of Israel? The L-RD has established a border between us and you, O children of Reuben and children of Gad – the Jordan! You therefore have no share in the L-RD’” (Joshua 22:24). According to this explanation, we may say that Moses even divided the families of the tribes, placing half on one side of the Jordan and half on the other side, ensuring that bonds of fraternity would not be lost among the different parts of the people. Therefore half the tribe of Manasseh is not described “according to their fathers’ house,” for they did not receive their inheritance in this way.

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Massei resumes the description of the people’s organization around the Sanctuary, providing us with a list of the people’s journeys in the desert. The parsha describes the distribution of the land on the other side of the Jordan River. The people’s journeys are listed from the time they left Egypt until they arrived at the plains of Moab. The borders and their inheritance in the land – the goal of all their journeys – are also described. The names of those who are to settle in the territories of each tribe on the other side of the Jordan are mentioned, as well as the cities of refuge. Following the complaint of Zelophehad’s daughters, rules are given to prevent inheritances from passing from one tribe to another.

EISHET CHAYIL

An Incredible Story

An incredible story circulated in eternal Jerusalem. The night of a Bar Mitzvah in the city, a family member went to purchase some meat at the Machaneh Yehuda market. The butcher shop was called Levy, and it carried the hashgacha of the Badatz. Another butcher shop by the same name was nearby, but it had a less reliable hechsher.

A mix-up occurred, but it was only discovered on the day after the Bar Mitzvah. The lady of the house fainted when she heard about the error, and upon regaining consciousness she went to see her Rav. When he told her that this hechsher could only be relied upon after the fact, she didn’t rest easy until committing herself to fasting every Monday and Thursday for the rest of her life. In fact she fasted for several years without anyone ever realizing it, and it was only when she fell ill that she was forced to drink every day. Thus both her secret and her tremendous fear of Heaven were finally revealed.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Sanctity of Life

It is written, “There shall be six cities of refuge for you. Three cities shall you designate on the other side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you designate in the land of Canaan” (Numbers 35:13-14).

Rashi explains: “Although there were nine tribes in the land of Canaan, and here [across the Jordan] there were only two and a half, He equalized the number of their refuge cities because Gilead had many murderers, as it says: ‘Gilead is a city of evildoers, polluted with blood’ [Hosea 6:8].”

The Ramban states, “Now although the refuge [cities] were only for those who killed in error [while the murderers in Gilead killed deliberately], they would kill in treachery and make themselves appear as if they had done so in error. It was therefore necessary to increase the number of their cities of refuge.”

In his book Gur Aryeh, the Maharal states: “It seems to me that every unintentional killer should have been more careful not to spill blood. This is why he was sent into exile, for otherwise why would he be exiled? His fellowman was killed by him, and in Gilead there were many intentional murderers. Thus in any case nobody would be discovered, not even the best of them, those who paid attention to not killing their fellowman by mistake. Since we find many intentional killers there, how much more should we find unintentional killers, for they were not careful with regards to spilling blood. Hence they needed many cities of refuge.”

On the root cause of indifference to human life, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch comments on the verse, “You shall not contaminate the land in which you dwell, in whose midst I rest” (Numbers 35:34). He states: “If the whole of G-d’s Torah rests on the three fundamental bases of justice, love of fellow man, and moral sanctification of one’s own life, then the whole Torah stands or falls with the recognition and consciousness, or the denial and repudiation, of the higher dignity and value of people being in the likeness of G-d!”

Rabbi Hirsch also states, “If man is only in the likeness of animal, purely a physical being like all living creatures around him in the Creation, then force and selfishness and satisfying animal urges are for him also the sole activating forces of his life; there can be no talk of justice and love and sanctifications of morals. Then impurity, ‘physical lack of freedom,’ ‘necessity’ with all its consequences of force and depravity is the exclusive stamp of the earth and human life, then it is the animal-ideal to which the tribute is paid in home and state of individual and national life.... Therefore it says to the state of Israel... ‘Do not proclaim the principle of impurity as the principle which rules the land... by your indifference to human blood,’ for ‘I am the L-RD Who rests among the Children of Israel.’”

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Toothpicks and Shofars

It is written, "Has a nation ever exchanged its gods, though they are not gods? Yet My people have exchanged their glory for something of no avail!" (Jeremiah 2:11).

The Maggid of Dubno used a parable to explain this verse:

A young avrech lived for a few years in the home of his father-in-law, until the latter gave him his entire dowry so he could start a business. The young man, who was quite lazy, took all his money and purchased a few cartloads of toothpicks. "You're useless!" cried his father-in-law when he learned of the purchase. "I'll never be able to sell this kind of merchandise in 70 years!" Having no other choice, he sent his son-in-law back to the Beit Midrash to learn more Torah.

After a few years, the man wondered what was going to become of his son-in-law. He therefore gave him another large sum of money and sent him to the town of Leipzig in order to purchase some merchandise. However he warned him not to buy toothpicks or anything like them.

This occurred near the beginning of the Days of Awe, in the month of Tishri. Thinking of what to buy, the avrech decided upon a huge purchase of shofars, since he thought that they would be indispensable during that time of year. When he brought his new merchandise back home, his father-in-law was furious. "You lazy good-for-nothing," he said. "We have enough shofars until the coming of Mashiach!" Having no other choice, he sent his son-in-law "the merchant" back to the Beit Midrash and placed the load of shofars next to the load of toothpicks. Later on, he invited a gifted salesman to his home and suggested that he sell the toothpicks. At the same time, he arranged for someone else to sell his load of shofars. Not long afterwards, he realized that they had exchanged his shofars for his toothpicks. When his son-in-law heard what had happened, he was furious with his father-in-law. "Even with experienced salesmen," he said, "you still ended up with toothpicks and shofars, just as I did."

"Don't be foolish," replied his father-in-law. "I had two huge quantities of merchandise that were impossible to sell. What could I expect but to exchange one for the other? You, however, started out with hard cash, and yet you purchased massive loads of worthless merchandise!"

This is what the prophet meant by stating, "Has a nation every exchanged its gods, though they are not gods?"

A TRUE STORY

Loving Admonition

It is written, "They approached him and said, '... We shall arm ourselves swiftly'" (Numbers 32:16-17).

Chassidim recount that when the Sefat Emes was a boy, he once studied Torah throughout the night with a friend. It was only in the morning that he managed to get to bed, and he slept until the middle of the day. His grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, went to see the boy and admonished him at great length for having risen so late in the day and lost time for learning Torah. The boy paid great attention to this harsh admonishment, not even interrupting with a single word to explain himself.

His friend, who was there at the time, was stunned. He later asked him, "Why didn't you tell your grandfather that you were awake all night long studying Torah?"

He replied, "I didn't want to interrupt my grandfather. I wanted to hear every word of admonishment that he had to say."

While the boy was explaining this to his friend, he took out a Chumash and showed him the aforementioned verse. He said, "If in principle the children of Gad and Reuven had the intention of crossing the Jordan and taking part in the military campaign, they should have immediately mentioned this to Moses when he started admonishing them: 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here...' [v.6]. They should not have waited until Moses had finished reprimanding them [v.15], for his words contained very harsh expressions. He called them 'a society of sinful people' [v.14] and said, 'You will destroy this entire people' [v.15]. They didn't interrupt Moses, however, because they wanted to hear all his words of Mussar."

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Honors Are Enslaving

The Gemara states that Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua were once traveling on a ship. Rabban Gamliel had brought some bread with him, while Rabbi Yehoshua had brought both bread and flour. When Rabban Gamliel finished eating his bread, he depended on Rabbi Yehoshua's flour. He said to him, "How did you know that we would be so delayed that you brought flour?" He replied, "There is a star that appears once every 70 years and fools the captain of boats. I told myself that it might appear and lead us astray" (see Rashi). Rabban Gamliel then asked, "You possess so much knowledge, and yet you must roam the seas to earn a living?" Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "Rather than being surprised at me, be surprised at two yeshiva students of yours, Rabbi Eliezer ben Chisma and Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgeda. They know how many drops of water there are in the sea, and yet they have no bread to eat or clothes to wear." Rabban Gamliel took note of this and decided to place them at the head of the yeshiva so they could earn a good living. He had them summoned when he returned to the yeshiva, but they did not present themselves, for they fled from honors despite their hardships. Once again he had them summoned, and this time they came. He said to them, "Do you think that I am bestowing honors upon you? I am bestowing servitude upon you, as it is written, 'If today you will become a servant to this people' [I Kings 12:7]." (See Horayot 10ab).

In fact an elevated position enslaves a person, for the yoke of the people's needs rest upon him. When a Torah scholar is appointed to public office, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to him: "Before you were appointed, you were not reprimanded concerning the community. Yet now that you have been appointed, you have become surety for the community" (Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 6). The Holy One, blessed be He, says: "I am holy, I am pious. If you possess these qualities, take office. If not, refrain from taking office!" We must therefore run from honors as much as possible!

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Maskil L'Eitan

The gaon Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Maskil L'Eitan was among the greatest rabbis of Russia. Born in the year 5600, he was the grandson of the great gaon Rabbi Avraham, the author of Be'er Avraham, Mitzpeh L'Eitan, and Maskil L'Eitan. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak died in 5665 in the city of Stoibetz. Impulsive by nature, he was among the great figures of the Jewish people, having a complete grasp of the Gemara and the Poskim. He was an exemplary leader as well, demonstrating tremendous diligence in his work and leading with his head held high. In his first position as Rav, he had a disagreement with a leading city figure, an abrasive millionaire who owned almost everything in town. This hot-headed man once taught a Halachah before his Rav, but his harsh style proved useless on that day, for Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak put him in his place. He began to detest Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak from then on, but the Rav was a very confident man and did not let him control people in town. When Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak later moved to Haslevitz, this violent man himself complained: "It's difficult to find a Rav who respects his position and task as much as the Rav with whom I fought." In Haslevitz as well, everything regarding the community was decided by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak, and everyone who wanted to free themselves of their obligations trembled before him. When a pharmacist in town replaced some medication in his pharmacy without the approval of a doctor, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak decreed that his pharmacy would be closed for a month. Although butchers are difficult people to deal with, they still yielded before the Rav. Hence the standard of kashrut in town was impeccable. When one doctor began desecrating Shabbat other than for medical emergencies, the Rav brought another doctor into town and decreed that the first doctor was not to receive an aliyah during the holidays.