



The Path To Follow

DEVARIM

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HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of
RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA
11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40
Fax +331 42 08 50 85
www.hevratpinto.org

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Turning Back on the Brink of Success

It was Purim, and a young ben Torah from the Radin yeshiva had consumed so much alcohol that he was drunk. In his stupor, he went to the Chafetz Chaim's home and asked the sage to promise him a place by his side in Gan Eden. The Chafetz Chaim replied, "What do you mean? I don't know if I'll merit Gan Eden."

The young man refused to leave the Chafetz Chaim alone, however, and for the next two hours he repeated his request. Even when it came time for the Purim meal, he stubbornly continued to beg his Rav for the promise that he hoped for.

However time was pressing, and the Chafetz Chaim turned to the young man and said: "I don't know if I'll merit Gan Eden. However if I do, it will be through the merit of never listening to or hearing Lashon Harah. Therefore if you promise me that you'll do the same, we will be together in Gan Eden." The young man was afraid of making such a serious promise, and therefore he refused. This raised the ire of the Chafetz Chaim, who asked that he be shown the door.

The Chafetz Chaim was angry because he was certain that if the young man had made this promise, Heaven would have helped him to keep it. Rabbi Shneur Kotler Zatzal stated that he knew the young man in question. He had been an important figure in his time, but he did not reach the level of the Chafetz Chaim.

– Sheal Avicha Veyagedcha

WHY WAS THE LAND DESTROYED?

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

This week's parsha states, "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf..." (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Commenting on Ecclesiastes 1:1, Rashi explains: "Wherever it says 'the words of,' it refers to words of reproof." He also states: "Since these are words of rebuke, and here [Moses] enumerates all the places where they angered the Omnipresent, it therefore makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead merely alludes to them out of respect for Israel" (Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:1). In reality, the generation that heard Moses' admonition was not the generation that had sinned, for their fathers were the ones who had sinned before Hashem. Moses merely alluded to these sins out of respect for their fathers. This concept is found in the term ba'aravah ("in the plain"), which evokes avar ("the past"). The question then becomes why he admonished them, given that Scripture is speaking of their fathers' sins.

The answer is that Moses warned them so that they would not follow in the footsteps of sinners and anger Hashem. Reflecting upon this, we note that Parsha Devarim is always read before Tisha B'Av, and the Sages have said that "these are the words" refer to

words of Torah (Shemot Rabba 38:4). This hints at why the Temple was destroyed, as it is written: "Why was the land ruined? ... Because they have forsaken my Torah" (Jeremiah 9: 11-12). This means that Eretz Israel's entire existence depends on the holy Torah, which can prevent the land's destruction. Hence Moses told the Children of Israel: "These are the words," meaning that if they strengthened themselves in "the words" – in words of Torah – they will be spared what Scripture states: "Alas, she sits solitary, the city that was so full of people..." (Lamentations 1:1).

We need to understand how it is possible that after all the admonitions and warnings repeated to the Children of Israel, and which they heard from the prophets in ever generation, they still sinned and failed to heed reproof. The result was that all their sins brought about the destruction of the land. The answer is found in this week's haftarah, which states: Chazon Yeshaya ben Amotz ("The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz" [Isaiah 1:1]). As we know, the Torah illuminates man's path in this world, saving him from misfortune and destruction.

The Gemara states, "Light surely means Torah" (Taanith 7b). The sins of our fathers are hidden within this concept, and it is why the Torah did not save them from the destruction of the Temple. The Sages have said that the problem was that they studied the Torah by rote, not as a personal endeavor to fulfill mitzvot. They lacked enthusiasm and joy in serving Hashem, which is why their hearts were dark. Observing the Torah by rote and through habit could not save them from the destruction of the land, without mentioning the fact that they failed to search their souls and reflect upon their deeds. They did not think that disaster awaited them, for they lived their lives out of habit. Yet what reason is there to study Torah and perform mitzvot without understanding the reason for each mitzvah, and without seeing the beauty hidden within the Torah? They failed to think about this, which is why Isaiah compared them to the animals of the earth, as it is written: "The ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's trough, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand" (Isaiah 1:3). The ox knows its owner despite the fact that it lacks man's intelligence, and so too for the donkey, which is at an even lower level than the ox, for it know its master's trough, the place where it eats. As for the Children of Israel, they were at an even lower level than the ox and the donkey, for although they knew Who created them, they did not consider His deeds, nor did they reflect upon the goal of Creation. In fact it is obvious that man was not created with the same goal as animals, for a Jew's goal in life is to connect himself to the Creator and the Torah. The demands placed on man are great, for his soul was taken from beneath the Throne of Glory, and he is greater than everything rest in Creation. Hence he must be very careful not to neglect his goal. May we all serve Hashem with enthusiasm and joy, and may we quickly merit the Final Redemption.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Weeping at the Sight of the Second Temple

Tisha B'Av, the day of misfortune and affliction, occurs during this week. It is a time when the Jewish people weep over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. In Scripture we read, "Many of the elder priests, Levites, and heads of families who had beheld the First Temple on its foundation, wept loudly [when] this Temple was before their eyes, while many raised their voices in shouting for joy" (Ezra 3:12). This verse describes how all Israel assembled to rejoice over the construction of the Second Temple. Among them, however, were some elders who wept and lamented at the time, for they remembered the majesty and holiness of the First Temple, which contained five more things than the Second Temple:

1. The Ark and its Cover, with the Cherubim.
2. The Urim and Thummim.
3. The fire crouching like a lion (in the Second Temple, the fire was crouching like a dog).
4. The Shechinah.
5. The Holy Spirit.

Hence the elders were filled with sadness, for they were mourning this irretrievable loss. As for the others, people who were not fortunate enough to see the First Temple, they were filled with joy when the Second Temple was built. Therefore they did not share in the remorse of the elders.

As Tisha B'Av approaches, we too should not rest easy, nor should we be indifferent to the plight of the Shechinah and this long exile. A great Torah figure once said that we all have a home, whereas our Father in Heaven still has no "house." If we mourn as we should, we will certainly merit the promise made to us by the Sages: "Everyone who mourns for Jerusalem will merit to share in her joy" (Taanith 30b).

A Blessing Found Among Rebukes

It is written, "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel" (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Rashi states, "These are words of rebuke."

The book of Deuteronomy is filled with harsh rebukes, and it contains the terrible curses of Parshiot Ki Tavo, Vayeilech, and Haazinu. Yet such admonition has a purpose. If the Children of Israel fulfill the Torah and mitzvot as they should, they will merit a blessing, and the curses themselves will become blessings.

The blessing connected with the observance of Torah and mitzvot is alluded to in a marvelous way throughout the entire book of Deuteronomy. In fact 613 letters from the letter beit in the word devarim (Deuteronomy 1:1), we find the letter resh, and two more jumps give us the letters kaf and hei, all of which are separated by 613 letters. Together these letters form the word beracha ("blessing").

– Ma'assei Chemed

The Exiled Prince – A Story for Tisha B'Av

We have arrived at the days known as Bein Hametzarim, a period of anguish and mourning over the destruction of the Temple. The Sages enacted numerous decrees for this time so that we would never forget the destruction of Jerusalem. We are also to sense the loss of the Temple and wholeheartedly yearn for its rebuilding. In spite of all

this, it would seem that we don't feel this absence, nor do we grieve its destruction. Even the fasts we have been prescribed to awaken us from our spiritual slumber have become a habitual practice, for we fail to realize what we have lost. What can this be compared to? It is like a blind man who has never seen the light: He therefore fails to understand its value or importance. Similarly, we lack something whose importance we fail to understand, and therefore we are incapable of feeling pain or grief.

We cannot elude the pain over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, for we too have a stake in it, as the Sages have said: "Any generation in which the Temple has not been rebuilt, it is like it had been destroyed in their time" (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1). If our deeds had been worthy, the Holy One, blessed be He, would have seen to its rebuilding. It seems, however, that spiritual blindness has so blunted our emotions that we live our lives in tranquility, and some parts of our heart may even find consolation in material wealth!

However this is not how the Chatam Sofer felt. In his time Jews were the victims of anti-Semitism and inequality on the part of the government, which is why a group of well-known Jewish leaders came together to help their brothers. In fact after lengthy discussions with the authorities, the government offered Jews equal rights. The Jewish leaders immediately went to announce the good news to the Chatam Sofer, but were stunned to see him crying upon hearing it! In shock, the leaders asked him why.

He said to them, "I will give you a parable: The king's only son refused to obey him, which caused him a great deal of distress. What did the king do? He ordered his servants to take the prince to a distant land and to leave him there. The heart of the spoiled prince wasn't moved at all, for he thought that after a few days his father would certainly summon him back to the palace. Yet a few days later, the king's servants returned with the prince's belongings (his bed, dresser, table, etc.) and began building him a miniature 'palace' so he could live there for a long time, far from the king. When the prince saw this, he immediately burst into tears, for he understood that his father didn't want to see him anymore."

The Chatam Sofer finished by saying, "As long as we have been in exile, our eyes have been turned to the Holy One, blessed be He, so He would save us and return us to His palace. However now that we have received equal rights, now that we feel at ease in our surroundings, who knows how long the exile will last?"

An Answer to the Nations

It is written, "Moses began explaining this Torah" (Deuteronomy 1:5).

Rashi states, "He explained it to them in 70 languages."

Why is it now, precisely on the eve of the Children of Israel's entry into the land, that Moses explained the Torah in 70 languages to them? The entry of the Children of Israel into Eretz Israel was a reason for the nations to claim, "You are robbers who have come to conquer the land of the seven nations." The Children of Israel replied, "The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, Who created it and gave it to those who are righteous in His eyes. It was His will to give it to them, and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us." To provide this answer to the nations of the world, however, would require that we speak their language. Hence the Children of Israel's impending entry into the land was precisely when the claim of the nations arose, the time to learn their 70 languages.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Role of Jewish Women

It is written, “So that He will not see an indecent thing among you and turn away from you” (Deuteronomy 23:15).

Concerning this verse, the Chafetz Chaim said: “What was the worst calamity to ever strike the Jewish people? It was when Hashem hid His Shechinah and removed His guiding hand from them, like a mother who abandons her children to any assailant or predator. Thus the people of Israel find themselves without Hashem’s guidance, which is why they have suffered every possible disaster in the world.”

What is the main reason for the disappearance of Hashem’s guiding hand over His people? It is the violation of safeguards for holiness and modesty, as it is written: “So that He will not see an indecent thing among you and turn away from you.” However when safeguards for holiness and modesty are preserved, Hashem’s Shechinah and guiding hand accompany us.

In that case, who can do anything to harm us? Jewish women have an important role to play in the observance of Hashem’s laws, which require modesty in terms of speech, dress, and conduct. Entrusted with the holiness of Israel, Jewish women are the main factor behind the dwelling of the Shechinah among the Jewish people and the removal and revoking of every evil decree.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Recognizing Authority

It is written, “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s trough, but Israel does not know, My people do not comprehend” (Isaiah 1:3).

The prophet Isaiah begins this week’s haftorah by comparing the Jewish people to an ox and a donkey with regards to the ability to recognize authority. The donkey, which is at the lowest level in terms of comprehension, recognizes its master’s authority from the straw that it eats.

The ox, which enjoys a greater level of comprehension, recognizes its master as the one who puts an effort into feeding it. However the Jewish people, who sinned, saw their senses blunted to the point that the truth became blurred, for Hashem had hidden His face from them because of their sins. It would seem, therefore, that there is no reason to compare the Jewish people to animals!

With animals, their ability to recognize authority is firmly anchored in them. This is not the case with man, for he must put an effort into recognizing the reality of Hashem.

The prophet Isaiah’s words tell us that just as the ability to recognize authority is fixed in animals, so too did Hashem fix it in us. However we must be willing to find it.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Tisha B’Av

Maran writes in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim) that Parsha Va’etchanan is always read after Tisha B’Av. The Biur Halachah gives the reason why: Before Tisha B’Av, we must read Parsha Devarim (which contains Moses’ rebukes) in order to read the haftorah found at the beginning of Isaiah (“The vision of Isaiah...”) that contains Isaiah’s admonitions. Another reason is given in Ziv HaMinhagim, namely that since Aaron died on the first day of Av – as we read in Parsha Massei: “Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the word of the L-RD and died there...in the fifth month on the first of the month” (Numbers 33:38) – the Sages arranged for Parsha Devarim to be read during the week of Tisha B’Av. As such we read Parsha Massei, where Aaron’s death is described, on the same week in which Rosh Chodesh Av occurs, which is the day of his death.

– Kovetz Mevakshei Torah

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin

The gaon Rabbi Meir Shapira Zatzal was a shining star in the firmament of Polish Jewry in the years following the First World War, a beacon of light that was extinguished before its time. He demonstrated extraordinary abilities from childhood, and he received Smicha from leading Torah figures at the age of 11. His first rabbinical position was in the town of Gliniany, where he founded a yeshiva for hundreds of students.

When he was appointed as the Rav of Sanok, he brought his yeshiva with him. He was chosen as a member of Poland’s parliament as a representative of the Agudath Israel movement, and he became widely known as a brilliant orator. That same year, he proposed the Daf Yomi concept, one that was enthusiastically welcomed by the entire Jewish people. In 1924 he was appointed as the Rav of Piotrikov, and in the same year he laid the foundation to the Chachmei Lublin yeshiva.

Rabbi Meir Shapira moved to Lublin in 1930 in order to devote himself to the development of the yeshiva. Three years later, he was appointed as the Rav of the wealthy community of Lodz, which undertook to support his great yeshiva in Lublin. However on Cheshvan 7, 5704, Rabbi Meir Shapira suddenly passed away. Although a few of his Halachic decisions were published during his lifetime in the book Ohr HaMeir, his students assembled the majority of his discourses and articles after his death. The Zichron Meir district in Bnei Brak is named after him. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

A TRUE STORIE

YOU GRANT WISDOM TO MAN

In his youth, Rabbi Shmelke of Nickelsburg had a friend who was extremely intelligent and G-d-fearing. He was named as the Rav and Av Beit Din of the city of Yanov. This Rav was very diligent in his Torah study and service of G-d, and everyone considered him to be a holy man. However by nature he was very obstinate and never changed his mind, regardless of anything that happened around him.

The Rav of Yanov arranged for his son's marriage to the daughter of a rabbi who lived far away, and when the time came for the wedding, he invited the scholars and notable figures of Yanov to his firstborn's wedding. They all accepted, and together they left in regal fashion in beautiful carriages, with the Rav riding in a majestic coach with his son the groom and the leaders of Yanov. Among these was a certain avrech who was noted for his brilliance in Torah study and fear of Heaven. The Rav had wanted him to come along in order to discuss Torah while on route. When the time for Mincha arrived, everyone descended from the carriages, and the Rav went to isolate himself, as was his habit, among the trees of the forest in order to pray. Those who were accompanying him returned to their carriages and waited quite a long time for his return, but to no avail. The sun went down and he had still not returned. People didn't know what to think, and so the groom, the head of the community, and the avrech searched for the Rav in the forest just in case he was still praying. Nevertheless they did not find him, and because of the darkness that was quickly descending upon the forest, they became frightened and returned to the main road where their carriage was. In the meantime a few other carriages with more guests arrived, and they asked why the head vehicle had stopped by the side of the road. When they were told that the Rav had disappeared, they suggested that the Baron of Yanov, who was also invited to the wedding, had certainly picked up the Rav and taken him in his own carriage in order to honor him, and that they were probably together at that very moment. Everyone agreed that this was a reasonable assumption, and so they proceeded with their journey.

When people arrived at the wedding, they realized that the Rav, the father of the groom, was not there, and they were greatly distressed. The wedding finally took place amid great sadness, and as people returned home they asked everyone they encountered if they had seen the Rav, yet nobody had. Envoys were then sent to all the surrounding towns to find him, but without success.

As it turned out, the Rav had penetrated deep into the forest to pray, but when he decided to return to his carriage, he got lost and found himself even deeper in the forest, which was both large and dense. He wandered about for several days in the thick of the forest with no discernable way out. Whenever the sun arose, he recited Shema, prayed without tallit or tefillin, and continued to wander about. This continued for several days, as he ate wild fruits and felt constant fatigue. He slept in the middle of the forest, until by dint of confusion and exhaustion he lost track of time and believed that Friday was actually Shabbat. He therefore kept Friday as Shabbat in the forest as best he could, and G-d protected him from all harm. Then finally, after a long time meandering about, he finally made it back to civilization. People told him where he was, and he eventually made it back to his home in Yanov and told his family everything that had happened.

When Thursday night arrived, the Rav began preparing to welcome Shabbat, and he was shocked to see that his family wasn't doing the same. People explained to him that his calculations were off, and that today was Thursday. He had become confused while in the forest, and the notion that he was right – that his calculation of time was correct – became fixed in his mind. Therefore to him, all his family members (as well as everyone in town) were wrong. Every discussion and argument presented to him in order to demonstrate that he was mistaken proved useless. His family was greatly saddened by this, yet there was nothing they could do; they even had to prepare his Shabbat meals. On Thursday night he went to synagogue and welcomed Shabbat with great joy.

Everyone mocked him and said that he had gone mad, yet he received Shabbat with great honor, and on Friday he read the Torah portion for Shabbat, recited Birkat Hagomel, and did not don his tefillin.

The next day, when Shabbat arrived and he saw that his entire family was preparing for it, he became enraged. He promptly donned his tefillin and began working. The joy occasioned by his return had turned into mourning and grief, which continued for many days. When his childhood friend, Rabbi Shmelke of Nickelsburg, heard of the situation, he went to see him on a Thursday, a day that (at least by the Rav's calculation) was Friday. Everyone was happy to welcome Rabbi Shmelke, and the Rav of Yanov asked him to stay at his home for Shabbat. He replied that he had come for just such an occasion.

Rabbi Shmelke asked all the residents of Yanov to prepare for Shabbat according to their Rav's erroneous calculation, and to also prepare some good, aged wine. On Thursday afternoon they went to dip in the mikveh, and by sundown they had donned their Shabbat clothes and went to pray with their Rav. All the residents in town were surprised and asked themselves how Rabbi Shmelke could be mistaken into believing the same as their Rav. Rabbi Shmelke asked the Rav to lead the prayer service for welcoming Shabbat, whereas he and the rest of the community recited the weekday prayers.

After praying, they joyfully returned home as if it was Shabbat, and many people went to the Rav's home in honor of his guest Rabbi Shmelke. People sang Shalom Aleichem with joy, then Kiddush was said over the wine and people sat down to eat and discuss Torah at length. Rabbi Shmelke said to his friend, the Rav of Yanov, that he should celebrate this occasion as a thanksgiving meal for the miracle of having returned home from the forest safe and sound, and he very much insisted that he drink increasingly greater quantities of wine, all while reciting praises and giving thanks to G-d. At Rabbi Shmelke's signal, the Rav was given very old wine that caused anyone who drank it to fall asleep for a very long time. The result was that the Rav of Yanov fell asleep at the table during the meal. Rabbi Shmelke then instructed his family to put a pillow under his head so that he would sleep peacefully, then he lit his pipe and began to smoke, telling the people gathered around to go back home to their jobs and occupations, and that with G-d's help everything would work out. He ordered them to return the following night at the same time, and he made sure that nobody woke up the Rav during that night and the entire Friday that followed. He slept for the whole day, while on Friday evening Rabbi Shmelke prayed alone in the Rav's house. All the townspeople who were at the meal the night before then arrived at the home of the Rav, who was still sleeping.

Rabbi Shmelke ate the Shabbat meal with joy, and to those assembled around the table he spoke words of Torah until midnight. It was then that Rabbi Shmelke woke up the Rav and said to him, "Wake up now. We're about to bench." The Rav, who awoke from his long sleep, came to his senses and said to Rabbi Shmelke, "I have the feeling that I've been sleeping for a long time." He then got up, washed his hands, spoke some words of Torah, and then joined the guests in reciting Birkat Hamazon.

Until his death, the Rav of Yanov never knew what really happened to him. In fact, much to the contrary, he boasted that everyone finally recognized that he was right in observing Shabbat when he did. He was even grateful to his friend Rabbi Shmelke, who had supported him and helped his family and all the townspeople realize that he was right all along. In his mind, everyone now understood their mistake and honored Shabbat along with him, according to his "true" reckoning, a belief that he held for the rest of his life.

As for Rabbi Shmelke, who was a great sage, he prohibited the residents of the city from ever mentioning the Rav's mistake to him, and to never speak of the incident again.