



The Path To Follow

SHOFTIM

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Man's Advantage over Animals

In his book *Shmirat HaLashon* (Sha'ar HaTevuna, ch. I), the Chafetz Chaim explains: The Creator gave man a speaking soul – which is more than He gave to the animals – in order that he may earn the World to Come through Torah and mitzvot. When a person uses his tongue to speak forbidden words hundreds of times over, it would be fair if his ability to speak were removed from him and for his soul not to be returned to him the next morning. However in His great mercy, the Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrates patience, for a person might repent. Yet is this how he should thank Hashem, by continuing to disobey His will through Lashon Harah, scornful remarks, and other forbidden words? The Sages have said, "Which craft should a person pursue in this world? He should be mute" (Chullin 89a). In other words, he should always remember that, because of his many sins, he should rightly become mute. Yet since Hashem extends His goodness to us, how can a person continue to sin in this area?

– BeSha'arie HaLashon

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVING YOUR FELLOW

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "When you go out to the battle against your enemy and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not fear them, for the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ... The Kohen...shall say to them: 'Shema Israel...'" (Deuteronomy 20:1). We may say that this week's parsha alludes to loving one's fellow Jew and exhibiting good middot with others. We will begin with a question: Why must everyone love their fellow, as it is written: "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18)? We shall attempt to explain. When the Holy One, blessed be He, created man, He created him alone. He then created the woman, Eve, from the man himself – not as a separate creation. As such they are really one body, and even when separated they remain connected through the soul. It was the will of Hashem, Whose every action is perfect, that everyone should be connected to one another and united, for this is what gives Him satisfaction. It is not without reason that Rabbi Akiva said, " 'You shall love your fellow as yourself' is a great principle of the Torah" (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:3), for unity is of paramount importance.

Similarly, we see an allusion to the unity of the Children of Israel in the making of the Menorah, every part of which – knobs, flowers, and cups – had to be fashioned starting from a single block of gold. Despite the fact that people differ from one another in terms of their nature, habits, physical attributes – some being poor and others rich, some being large and others small – and despite the fact that tremendous differences exist among us, none of this should impede our unity. We must form a single entity and a single body.

Since we have reached this point, we can see how all this is alluded to in this week's parsha. Thus we have: "When you go out to the battle against your enemy" – the battle against the evil inclination; "and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you" – when you see that your fellow is wealthier than you, or has a more successful job or a better family, the evil inclination will fill you with feelings of jealousy in an attempt to make you hate him.

Sometimes a person does not even know the reason for his anger, which began with feelings of jealousy stirring inside, and he will attribute it to another reason. The truth is that if he looks deeply into his heart, he will see that his hatred began with his jealousy of his fellow, and little by little it grew until finally it controlled him to such an extent that he cannot stand to look at him. Here the holy Torah tells us how to escape such wicked thoughts: "You shall not fear them, for the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt." In other words, we are not to fear the enticements of the evil inclination, for Hashem is with us and everything is in His hands, as it is written: "Nobody can touch what has been prepared for his fellow" (Yoma 38b). This is what constitutes, "For the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt." We were slaves in Egypt, and the Holy One, blessed be He, delivered us from there and gave us wealth and honor. He alone knows what a person should be given and what he should not be given.

Hence this is man's goal in this world: To improve his middot and to work on himself. He must defeat the evil inclination that burns in his heart and tries to remove him from this world

through jealousy, hatred, and strife. We must exhibit the opposite traits in order for all mankind to be a single body – as it was when the world was created – living in perfect harmony. May this always be the case, for even when people are divided by the body, they must be united by the soul.

If we are right in this regard, we may explain another issue, namely why a person recites Shema Israel when taking the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven upon himself. It is because he must be united with the Jewish people and love all of them in order to undertake this responsibility. He can thereby reach a level of devotion that is comparable to having given his life for Hashem. In fact by saying, "You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" – even if He takes your soul (Berachot 54a) – a person is regarded as having actually given his life. Thus when he studies Torah, in which it is stated, "You shall teach them to your children and speak of them" (Deuteronomy 6:7), three things will be fulfilled in him, for the Torah, Hashem, and Israel are one. There is something else that is important about loving one's fellow Jew. If Heaven issues a decree against a Jew, the Holy One, blessed be He, takes that Jew's punishment and divides it into smaller parts to be distributed among the Jewish people. In this way the intensity of his punishment is automatically diminished. For example, if Heaven decrees that someone is to be burned, the Holy One, blessed be He, administers very small and easily-tolerated burns to several people, instead of burning that one person to death. As such, Heaven's decree is considered to have been carried out. This is only possible through unity. Similarly, when a person does something good, it is regarded as a merit for others as well, even if they did not participate in his good deed because they were somehow prevented, for everyone is considered as a single body.

This is why the tzaddikim perform an important mitzvah even when they do not sin, due to the responsibility that all Jews have for one another. Otherwise it would be considered a sin for them as well, since it is written: "There is no man on earth so perfectly righteous that he [always] does good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). When the tzaddikim repent, their repentance also helps people who have truly sinned, due to the power of the Jewish people's unity. The concept of the participation of others in the punishment of the individual is, to a small degree, useful for everyone. Today it is the other who sins, and tomorrow it is the person himself who sins, for no tzaddik is immune to sin. Therefore tomorrow a person will need the help of others to lighten his punishment, which is why unity is so important. Since we have reached this point, we realize that we must be forgiven by others. When we wrong another person, we must seek his forgiveness, for repenting just before G-d is not enough to preserve unity, and we cannot say that another person should receive Heaven's punishment for a sin that he brought upon himself. It is not our job to distribute punishment to another person by thinking that since he is the cause of his punishment, it should be administered to him alone. We must put an effort into seeking only good for others, and to live in peace and harmony with them.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

With a Single Page

It is written, "He shall flee to one of these cities and he shall live" (Deuteronomy 19:5).

This verse contains the law regarding a person who accidentally kills someone, and who must be exiled to a city of refuge. The Rambam rules that for a student who is exiled to a city of refuge, his teacher is sent into exile with him (Hilchot Rotzeach U' Shemirat HaNefesh 7:1). This is because the verse says "and he shall live," meaning that he must be provided with all that he needs to live, and for those who seek wisdom, life without Torah is regarded as death.

In his book *Ohr Yahel*, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Chasman Zatzal states: Here we have a new principle concerning levels of spirituality. Although a student can suitably study Torah in his place of exile without a teacher, he is still considered to be missing an essential part of life because he lacks the benefit of studying with a teacher. The idea here is that spiritual success is not like material success. Spirituality is not measured in terms of quantity, but rather in terms of quality. This quality is similar in nature to the World to Come, which is infinite, and something that is infinite cannot be divided into tiny pieces, for each part would itself be infinite. For this reason, the gap between one spiritual level and the next is like the gap between life and death.

We often tend to reduce spiritual values to a number. This tendency can manifest itself by a reluctance to use our spare time for spiritual pursuits, or by a preconceived notion that we cannot possibly study everything (be it the entire Talmud, an entire order, or an entire tractate). Similarly, when we are finishing a prayer and we realize that we have not been focusing on it, we often fail to try and concentrate at the end. All this stems from the fact that we tend to quantify spiritual values. The following story deals with a person who acquired his reward in the World to Come with a single page of Gemara:

There was a man in the United States who earned a living as a boxer, a man who was very far from Judaism. All he knew was that his parents were Jewish. The man's son did teshuvah and changed his life around, leaving university and going to study in yeshiva. One day the man went to see his son and asked him to teach him at least one page of "this book." The son explained that it would be difficult, since he had to learn two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. Nevertheless, the man insisted that his son teach him at least one page. After being taught that one page, the man said to his son: "I want to celebrate the fact that I was able to study one page of Gemara." They organized a siyum, but on the following morning the man did not awake, for he had died in his sleep. In the eulogy that Reb Moshe Feinstein delivered for him, he said: "Some acquire their reward in the World to Come in a single instant, while others acquire it with a single page."

– Lekach Tov

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities... and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment" (Deuteronomy 16:18).

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states that judges and officers each have a different role to play. The officer watches out for people who break the law or disturb the peace. When he finds someone doing so, he brings him before the judge, who will render his judgment and decide what must be done with him. Yet from the above verse, we see that the officer also acts as a judge, for the text states that "they" shall judge the people. This means that both of them – the officer and the

judge – have been commanded to judge righteously. How must an officer judge? He must not act according to different rules, bringing some people before the judge while turning a blind eye to others. In other words, he too must learn from the judge to pass righteous judgment on everyone, not to favor one person over another.

Two Brothers in Ashkelon

It is written, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities" (Deuteronomy 16:18).

The passage on judges and officers is juxtaposed to the passage on the pilgrimage that every male was to make three times a year, a passage found at the end of Parsha Re'eh. We may explain this juxtaposition according to a story found in the Jerusalem Talmud: Living in Ashkelon were two brothers who had non-Jewish neighbors. These neighbors planned to steal everything from their house once they left to Jerusalem for the festival. When the brothers had gone, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent two angels in the guise of the brothers to their house, angels who were continuously coming and going. When the real brothers returned, they gave their neighbors fruits from the land as a gift. When the neighbors asked, "Where have you been?" they replied, "We were in Jerusalem." When the neighbors asked, "Who did you leave your house to?" they replied that they hadn't left it to anyone! At that point their neighbors exclaimed: "Blessed be the G-d of the Jews, Who did not abandon them and will never abandon them" (Peah 3:7). This is what the Torah concludes by the verse, "Three times a year all your males shall appear" (Deuteronomy 16:16). That is, we should not be afraid of making a pilgrimage to Hashem, since "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities" – these being the angels created by the merit of our pilgrimage. They are the judges and officers in all our cities who will protect our wealth.

– Vayomer Avraham

If Hashem Calls Him Wise...

It is written, "For a bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deuteronomy 16:19).

When Reuven says that Shimon is wealthy, this does not prove that he is so, for it all depends on Reuven's conception of wealth. If Reuven is poor, then even a person who lives comfortably will seem wealthy to him. However if we know an extremely rich person who states that Shimon is wealthy, this removes all doubts regarding his status. The same applies to wisdom: If Reuven says that Shimon is wise, we have to verify the degree of Reuven's wisdom. However if the gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger says that someone is wise – and especially if the Rambam says that someone is wise – then there is no doubt that the person in question is tremendously wise. How much more is this true if King Solomon states that someone is wise, for imagine how wise that person must be! Let us think about this: If the Holy One, blessed be He, personally testifies that someone is wise, there is obviously no limit to that person's wisdom. Therefore when the Torah states that a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, it is obvious that it is referring to a tremendously wise man, one whose wisdom even Hashem testifies for. Nevertheless, a bribe will blind him! From here we see just how harmful bribes are, for they blind the eyes of even the wisest!

– Chafetz Chaim on the Torah

Fearing the King

It is written, "You shall surely set a king over yourself" (Deuteronomy 17:15).

The commentators have questioned why, when the Children of Israel asked the prophet Samuel to set a king over them, he became angry and reprimanded them for their request. After all, it is a Torah mitzvah to "set a king over yourself"!

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Only With Hashem

It is written, “Tamim [simple, perfect] shall you be with the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 18:13).

Rashi states, “Conduct yourself with Him in simplicity and depend on Him, and do not inquire of the future. Rather, accept whatever happens to you with simplicity, and then you will be with Him as His portion.” Rabbeinu Elyahu Mizrahi Zatzal explains Rashi’s statement to mean that this constitutes a mitzvah and a reward: A person who does not try to determine the future – but instead accepts everything that happens to him with a simple faith that it is G-d’s will – merits to be “with the L-RD your G-d” in the spirit of the verse: “I will come to you and bless you” (Exodus 20:21). Thus he will save himself from all harm. As for one who tries to be clever and seeks out those who foretell the future, such a person distances himself from the Creator. His “reward” (if we may call it such) will be an irreparable loss.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh explained this verse by reading it in the reverse sense: One whose faith is strong and whose life is infused with the sentiment of being with Hashem his G-d will merit His help in becoming simple and perfect in every area. The Ohr HaChaim uses the example of Abraham, who cleaved to the Creator despite knowing that the stars predicted that he was sterile and could never have children. Hashem said to him: “Go out of your astrology,” raising him above the stars and “blessing Abraham in all.” Thus of Abraham it is said, “Walk before Me and be tamim” (Genesis 17:1), as it is written: “Tamim shall you be” – but only if you are – “with the L-RD your G-d.”

The Alsheich HaKodesh explains that there are some people who observe Torah and mitzvot in public, among the community and in synagogue, and possibly even with their families. Yet when they are alone and nobody sees them, they indulge in one thing or another. Thus the verse states: “Tamim shall you be” – let your conduct be perfect, even when nobody sees you and you are only “with the L-RD your G-d.”

What does being tamim mean? Rashi says it means that we do not try to determine the future, but instead that we simply accept everything from Hashem with love. Yet we are to act this way only “with the L-RD your G-d.” We should not always act in this way with people, and on the contrary we must clearly think about whatever situation we are in, lest we be deceived. This is what we find with Jacob, whom the Torah calls “a tam man” (Genesis 25:27). Yet Jacob was precisely the one who dealt craftily with Laban, which was the proper thing to do in that case.

The Chafetz Chaim once had the opportunity to explain this lesson. One day students from the Radin yeshiva went to see him and complained that they had lost their money to some deceitful merchants. The Chafetz Chaim replied that as yeshiva students, they were used to acting innocently with Hashem. However they had mistakenly assumed that they could do the same with people. Yet that was not the case, for Scripture states: “Tamim shall you be with the L-RD your G-d” – with Him, not with man.

ESHET HAYIL

The Path of Success

Our Sages have said, “One must always observe the honor due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man’s home only on account of his wife” (Bava Metzia 59a). The Sages use the term bishvil (“on account of”) to stress the wife’s role in this abundance, which comes through the path (shvil) she lays out, and by which blessings come into the home. At first glance, one may think that the abundance stemming from honoring one’s wife is due to the spiritual laws of reward and punishment, since it is the blessing of Hashem that brings wealth. Yet we must add that this occurs even according to the natural order of things, for a person living in a home where mutual respect reigns between husband and wife thereby builds a holy and upright character for himself, and before such a man the gates of abundance are open on account of respect and trust.

– Shiurim BeAggadot Chazal

A king exists in order for his fear to be upon the people, as the Sages have said (Sanhedrin 22a). They have also said, “Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow one another alive” (Perkei Avot 3:2). It is in this regard that the Torah commands, “You shall surely set a king over yourself,” in order for the king to control the people and that his fear should be upon them. In that case the appointment of a king is desirable and constitutes a mitzvah. However during the time of the prophet Samuel, the Children of Israel asked: “Give us a king.” That is, they wanted a king to be under their control, one they could appoint or dismiss. Such a king would therefore need the people’s support and try to please them. This demand was evil in the eyes of Samuel, which is why he became angry and reprimanded them.

– Kli Yakar

Two Different Torah Scrolls

It is written, “She shall be with him, and he shall read from him” (Deuteronomy 17:19).

The commentators are surprised by this passage, asking why it begins with a feminine term (“she shall be”) yet ends with a masculine term (“from him”).

Da’at Zekenim MiBa’alei HaTosafot states that the Torah scroll that was attached to the king’s arm contained only the Ten Commandments. Since the Ten Commandments contain 613 letters – starting from the word anochi to the word re’echa – corresponding to the 613 mitzvot, it is called a Torah scroll. This is why the king wrote two Torah scrolls: “One that goes in and out with him, and the other to be placed in his treasure house” (Sanhedrin 21b). These were two different scrolls. The one placed among the king’s treasures was a complete Torah, whereas the one he constantly carried with him contained the Ten Commandments. Hence the latter is referred to in the feminine (“she shall be with him”), for it contains only one parsha, a feminine term. As for the Torah that was placed among the king’s treasures and out of which he would read, it was a complete Torah. In it he could refer to all 613 mitzvot in detail, and therefore it is designated by the word sefer (“scroll”), a masculine term. Hence we read that “he shall read from him.”

– MiShulchan Gavoha

In Either Case

It is written, “You shall be wholehearted with the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 18:13).

We know that the Tetragrammaton (“the L-RD”) designates the attribute of mercy, whereas Elokim (“G-d”) designates the attribute of justice. Now since the verse states, “You shall be wholehearted with the L-RD your G-d,” it means that whether Hashem demonstrates mercy to a person, sending him blessings and success, or He demonstrates justice to a person, sending him trials and hardship, in either case he should walk wholeheartedly in the ways of Hashem.

Overview of the Parsha

Following Parsha Re’eh, which deals with the mitzvot pertaining to the Children of Israel’s entry into the land, Parsha Shoftim deals with laws regulating social life. The parsha begins with the selection of judges and their powers, and it continues with the concept of the king and the mitzvot pertaining to him. It then deals with the priests and their share in the inheritance of the land and the service of Hashem. The Torah warns us against a perversion of justice and mentions the inadvertent shedding of blood and cities of refuge. It also deals with valid testimony in judgment, waging war against our enemies, the choice of soldiers and their preparation, and the heifer whose neck is broken in order to atone for the shedding of innocent blood.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yitzchak ben Sheshet – The Author of Responsa Rivash

The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak ben Sheshet Zatzal, known as the Rivash, was among the greatest Torah scholars of Spain. Although he studied constantly, he was an expert in every field of knowledge. The Rivash was born in Valence and raised in the Beit Midrash of the Rashba, where he acquired his understanding in Gemara. He also studied Torah with Rabbi Hasdai Crescas, Rabbi Nissim Gerondi, and Rabbi Peretz Hacoen, men who never ceased to compliment him and shower him with praise, for he was worthy of teaching Torah and Halachah to Israel.

The Rivash became known throughout the Diaspora as a Posek, and as such people everywhere sent him questions. Although he was famous, he never refused to take up the duties of Rav. When he was living in Barcelona, his enemies conspired against him, and he was forced to leave for Saragossa, where he stayed for several years. Yet there he also experienced misfortune, for his son died at the age of 18 and his two brothers and mother died as well. Hence the Rivash went to live in a small town, telling himself that there were few people there, and that its sins were few. However he soon returned to Valence, his birthplace, where he taught Torah to thousands until Spain began massacring Jews in 5151. At that point he left Valence for Algeria, where he was welcomed with great honor by all the people, with the king at their head. In fact the king warned the people not to engage in secular or religious endeavors without the permission of the Rivash, who became the Rosh Kollel and Av Beit Din. People from everywhere sent him their questions, and he warmly responded to them all.

The Rivash left the rabbinate at the age of 80, being replaced by the Rashbatz, who did not want to occupy the Rivash's place while he was still alive. On Elul 2, 5168 the Rivash died in Algeria, where he lies buried. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

A TRUE STORY

The Malbim's Request for Three "Gifts"

It is written, "This shall be the due of the priests from the people... He shall give the priest the foreleg, the jaw, and the maw" (Deuteronomy 18:3).

When Rabbi Meir Leibush (the Malbim) was appointed as the Rav of Bucharest, the capital of Romania, he gave an impassioned speech to the community on his first Shabbat. Among other things, he said: My friends, when the Temple existed, the Children of Israel gave the priest "the foreleg, the jaw, and the maw." Yet in our time, when because of our many sins we have neither Temple nor offerings, the rabbi of the community is like the priest, as it is written in Parsha Shoftim: "If a matter is too difficult for you... you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days" [Deuteronomy 17:8-9]. I therefore ask you not to neglect these three "gifts":

1. The foreleg: Put your tefillin on every day, which is a segula for obtaining Hashem's help, "an outstretched arm."
2. The jaw: Do not shave the corners of your beard with a razor, for whoever does this transgresses five Torah prohibitions.
3. The maw: Do not eat forbidden food, for a kosher table and a kosher kitchen infuse holiness into the tents of Israel.

– Parperaot LaTorah

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

With His Learning in Hand

The Gemara (Pesachim 50a) states that Rabbi Yossef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, became ill and fell into a trance. When he recovered, his father asked him: "What did you see?"

He replied, "I saw an upside-down world, the upper underneath, and the lower on top."

"My son," he observed, "you saw a clear world. How are we there?"

"Just as we are here, so are we there. I heard them saying, 'Happy is he who comes here with his learning in hand.' I also heard them saying, 'Those martyred by the government, no man can stand close to them!'"

Just who does this refer to? We might be tempted to say Rabbi Akiva and his companions, but were they simply martyrs of the government, and nothing else? Rather, this refers to the martyrs of Lydia, who merited that "no man can stand close to them" because they accepted, of their own free will, to give up their lives for a lofty goal. They approached death as heroes who acknowledged a "sin" they had not deserved, and which they had not committed. A Roman ruler put them to death because of a plot hatched against the innocent inhabitants of Lydia: The daughter of this ruler was found dead in the courtyard of a prominent Jewish figure, and those who found her tried to prove that the Jews of Lydia had killed her. In order to save the inhabitants of the Lydia from the ruler's sword and the crazed masses, two brothers came to the Roman ruler and "confessed" to this murder, which they had not committed. When they were executed, peace reigned upon all the inhabitants of Lydia.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

You Will Neither Hasten Nor Flee

It is written, "You will not go out in haste, nor go out in flight, for the L-RD will go before you, and the G-d of Israel will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 52:12).

What is meant by haste, and what is meant by flight? To explain, we may say that a person can have two reasons for moving quickly: He is either hastening to reach a destination ahead of him, or he is fleeing from a danger behind him. One who wants to reach a desired destination can be described as leaving "in haste," whereas one who flees from danger can be described as leaving "in flight." Both elements were present during the exodus from Egypt, for the Children of Israel quickly fled from the Egyptians who were pursuing them, and they were hastening towards the Shechinah in order to reach the goal that Hashem promised them: "You shall serve G-d on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). The prophet Isaiah said that in the redemption to come, we will have nothing dangerous to flee, nor will we have a reason to hasten and collect the good we desire. Thus the verse states: "You will not go out in haste" – to hurry and reach the place of the Shechinah; "nor go out in flight" – to flee dangers or pursuers behind you. The reason is that "the L-RD will go before you," and you will not need to follow Him until the mountain of G-d, for He will be close to you. Hence it will not be necessary for you to hasten, for you will immediately reach the good you desire. "The G-d of Israel will be your rear guard" means that He will walk behind you and protect you, as a rear guard that marches behind the camp. Therefore you will not have to flee.

– Kol Eliyahu