



The Path To Follow

VAYIGASH

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Better to Refrain

In general, a person knows that as long as he is not completely certain that something he is about to say is not considered by Halachah as being Lashon Harah, slander, or will provoke a dispute, he should certainly not say it. This applies even if his desires push him to speak, and even if they claim that his words will actually constitute a mitzvah and that he will merit the World to Come by saying them. By not paying attention to all this, a person will certainly be saved from Heaven's judgment. In fact even if he really should say something, and in Heaven he will be asked why he did not disparage so-and-so (if doing so was a mitzvah), he can always respond by saying that he was in doubt as to whether he was allowed to say it, and therefore he refrained. This is not at all the same for someone who decides to disparage others when it is forbidden. What will he do when it turns out that he actually spoke Lashon Harah or provoked a dispute, and that only his evil inclination pushed him to do so? What answer will he give in Heaven? He will be unable to say that he spoke on account of a doubt, for in such cases it is better not to speak!

— Shmirat HaLashon, Sha'ar Tevunah ch. 16

THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY BASELESS HATRED (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Joseph could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out: 'Remove everyone from before me!' No one remained with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers" (Genesis 45:1).

The Sages say in the Midrash, "When they recognized him, they wanted to kill him. An angel came and dispersed them to the four corners of the house. Judah then screamed with a powerful voice, and all the walls of Egypt fell, all the women who were in labor had a miscarriage, Joseph fell from his throne, Pharaoh descended from his throne, both of them fell, and the faces of all the strong men who were standing before Joseph turned backwards and did not return to their place until their death" (Tanhuma, Vayigash 5).

This is surprising, for when Joseph saw his brothers going from street to street (Tanhuma, Yashan Mikeitz 17), and he asked them why they were running like this throughout the land, they said to him: "We have a brother that we sold as a slave. Since the time that we sold him, our father has been mourning for him. Therefore we have come with money to buy him back wherever we find him." He said to them, "Can someone who sells something change his mind?" They replied, "That is why we have come, for we have double the money needed to buy him back." Joseph said to them, "And if his owners don't want to sell him back to you?" They replied, "Even if we have to burn because of him, we will not leave before having bought him back."

On the verse, "Joseph's ten brothers went down" (Genesis 42:3), the Sages also stated: "Scripture should have said, 'Jacob's sons.' Why 'Joseph's ten brothers'? In the beginning they did not treat him with brotherly love, but instead they sold him. However they later regretted it, and each day they would say: 'Let us go and inquire about him and restore him to his father.' When Jacob told them to go down to Egypt, they all resolved to show him brotherly love" (Bereshith Rabba 91:6).

This means that they eliminated the resentment that they felt for him in their hearts, and they were even willing to be burned for his sake. Therefore how can the Midrash say that Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him when they discovered who he was, and that if an angel had not prevented them, they would have in fact killed him? Had their hatred for him returned? This is very surprising!

The Mishnah says, "Any love that is dependent upon a specific consideration, when that consideration vanishes, the love ceases. Yet if it is not dependent upon a specific consideration, it will never cease" (Pirkei Avoth 5:16). Likewise all hatred that is dependent upon a specific consideration will cease when that consideration vanishes. We see examples of this all the time. A person may despise someone and curse him each day, but if he were to be told that the object of his hatred has died, he would immediately forget his hatred and mourn the person's passing. Yet if he were to be told, "Actually, that person is still alive," his hatred for him would immediately return.

Since we only hate someone when he is alive, hatred is dependent upon life. When the object of our hatred dies, our reason for hating him vanishes, and so our hatred ceases. Similarly, Joseph's brothers despised him when they sold him

into slavery, and afterwards they thought he was dead, as it is written: "His brother is dead" (Genesis 44:20). Our Sages have said (Hadar Zekenim, Genesis 44:20) that Joseph asked, "You saw that he was dead?" They said yes. Joseph asked further: "You went to his grave?" They again said yes. Since they thought he was dead, their hatred for him ceased. However when they recognized him and saw that he was actually alive, their hatred for him returned.

Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt looking for him only when their father Jacob said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down and purchase for us from there" (Genesis 42:2). The Sages explained, "Since the day that Joseph was stolen, however, the Holy Spirit departed from him [Jacob], so that he saw yet did not see, heard yet did not hear. Why does it not say, 'Jacob heard that there was bar' or 'There was okel,' but rather: 'There was shever [grain]'? Do not read shever [grain] but sever [hope]: He saw in a vision that his hope was in Egypt, namely Joseph" (Bereshith Rabba 91:6). Although the brothers did not know that Joseph was still alive, it was revealed to Jacob.

I say that hatred which has returned is more vehement than when it first appeared. The Holy One, blessed be He, accepted it the first time, as the Sages have said: "Let us bind ourselves with a malediction to never tell our father Jacob! Judah said to them, 'Reuven is not here, and the malediction is only valid with ten.' What did they do? They joined the Holy One, blessed be He, to themselves in this malediction, so that He would say nothing to their father. Although it is written, 'He tells His word to Jacob' [Psalms 147:19], this He did not tell him, due to the malediction" (Tanhuma, Vayeishev 2). The hatred that returned to the brothers was baseless hatred, and the tribal ancestors believed that Joseph was liable to death because of the Lashon Harah he had spoken about them. In fact they wanted to unleash dogs on him (Bereshith Rabba 84:14), since one who speaks Lashon Harah deserves to be thrown to the dogs (Pesachim 118a). Joseph was eventually exiled for 22 years, and exile is considered as death (Midrash Tehillim 71). Therefore even if Joseph's brothers believed during his sale that he was liable for death, his exile atoned for his sin, and they no longer had any right to hate him. It was the hatred that returned to them which caused the death of the ten martyrs by the Romans (Midrash Mishlei 1:13).

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, their faces changed and they could no longer look at him. At that point we read, "His brothers were not able to answer him" (Genesis 45:3), and in the Midrash our Sages explained: "Woe to us for the day of judgment. Woe to us for the day of rebuke! ... Joseph was the youngest of the tribal ancestors, yet his brothers could not withstand his rebuke.... Thus how much more when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes and rebukes each man according to his deeds" (Bereshith Rabba 93:10). Judah said to Joseph, "You are judging us dishonestly!" Joseph replied, "There is no judgment more dishonest than to sell a brother" (Tanhuma, Vayigash 5).

In any case, this sin was not rectified before the ten martyrs were murdered on account of it.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Complete Responsibility

It is written, "They went up from Egypt and came to the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father. ... [When] he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived" (Genesis 45:25-27).

The Sages say that when Joseph sent chariots (agalot) to his father, he was hinting that he still remembered the last subject they had studied together, the one concerning the heifer (egla) whose neck is broken. When Jacob saw these wagons, he rejoiced because Joseph had remembered it.

Here we have one profound teaching wrapped within another. The passage on the heifer whose neck is broken – apart from all the rulings and laws contained in it, as well as their deeper significance – is a passage that deals with responsibility. The Torah wants a person to be responsible for everything that surrounds him, thinking of others and being concerned for them. When he focuses on all this, he becomes responsible for everything that can happen due to any negligence on his part. The passage on the heifer whose neck is broken teaches us that if there is a murderer lurking near a town, the leaders of that town become responsible for what happens. Who knows, perhaps if they had treated the murderer or his victim in another way, the murder might have been averted? As the Midrash states, "Perhaps we let him go without food? ... Perhaps we let him go without accompanying him?" (Sifrei). This responsibility falls on the leaders of the city – and precisely on them – for the greater the person, the greater his responsibility, which encompasses ever more things. When Joseph wanted to tell his father Jacob that the Torah which he had learned was deeply infused in him, and that all his deeds were carried out in relationship to that learning, he sent him wagons. By this he meant to say: Everything that I did in Egypt was in agreement with the passage on the heifer whose neck is broken, with an understanding of fundamental principles and total responsibility. Everything that I did to my brothers that seemed "strange" can be traced back to the passage on the heifer whose neck is broken.

When Joseph sent wagons to his father, it was as if he had said: "Father, the passage on the heifer whose neck is broken, with all its deep and extensive concepts – especially with regards to the development of the people of Israel – all of it I learned from you. I applied it in practice, day after day, hour after hour, as you will see by your sons, the tribes of G-d, the foundations of Yeshurun."

– Birkat Mordechai

A Pearl from the Rav:

Complete Forgiveness Only Through Speech

Our Sages cite Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levy as saying, "The fate of the ten martyrs who were killed by the Romans was sealed by the sin of Joseph's sale" (Midrash Mishlei 1:13). We need to understand why they were punished, since Joseph forgave his brothers for having sold him. Therefore why did anyone need to be punished? It would seem that although Joseph had forgiven his brothers in his heart, he did not actually say: "I have forgiven you." Since these words did not emerge from his mouth, they were punished. Thus when Moses asked G-d to forgive the Children of Israel, he did not move before G-d said to him: "I have forgiven according to your

word" (Numbers 14:20). Moses was not satisfied with knowing that Hashem had simply been appeased, but instead demanded that He express it with words. In light of this, we see that the Children of Israel were not forgiven for the sin of the golden calf, since G-d did not verbally express His forgiveness. Instead He told Moses, "Go, lead the people to where I have told you" (Exodus 32:34). What G-d then said ("My angel shall go before you, and on the day that I make My accounting, I shall bring their sin to account against them" [v.35]) teaches us that their sin was not forgiven. In fact it has lingered for all the generations, as our Sages have said: "No retribution whatsoever comes upon the world that does not contain a slight fraction of the first calf" (Sanhedrin 102a). Concerning the expression, "On the day that I make My accounting, I shall bring their sin to account against them," the Sages also said: "That day is still pending" (Sifrei Zutah 11:11).

Direct Communication

It is written, "[Judah said,] 'Please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears...for you are like Pharaoh'" (Genesis 44:18).

Rashi cites three explanations for these words: (1) You are as important in my eyes as Pharaoh; (2) You are a liar like Pharaoh; and (3) I will kill both you and Pharaoh. We may say with a smile that Judah asked Joseph to allow him to speak with him directly, meaning without an interpreter. This is because Judah suspected that the interpreter was not translating his words correctly, and that he was in fact twisting them. As proof of this, Judah said to him: "Look, I have said three words to you: Ki kamocho kepharo [for you are like Pharaoh], and I am sincere about this, for you really are as important to me as the king. However your interpreter can twist the meaning of my words and translate them as, 'You are like Pharaoh, who decrees and does not fulfill his decrees,' or, 'If you insult me, I will kill both you and Pharaoh,' and other such mistranslations. I am therefore asking for permission to speak to you without any intermediaries or interpreters."

– Rabbi Michelson of Warsaw

A King Who Forgives

It is written, "For you are like Pharaoh" (Genesis 44:18).

Rashi states, "Just as Pharaoh...makes promises and does not fulfill them, so do you." In reality, it is surprising to see that when it was necessary to arouse Joseph's compassion, Judah instead spoke harshly to him. We realize, however, that judges cannot demonstrate leniency or compassion by decreasing the punishment of the accused, and they especially cannot absolve the accused of punishment. However a king can annul even his harshest decree, both his own and those of judges. Thus Judah was saying: It is true that Benjamin sinned, and we cannot ask the judges to forgive him. However you are like Pharaoh, and just as Pharaoh can enact a decree and then annul it, so can you. Therefore in showing compassion to our elderly father, you can annul your decree against our brother and forgive his sin.

– Afikei Yehudah

Not Just at Any Price

It is written, "When Pharaoh summons you and says, 'What is your occupation?' you shall say to him: 'Your servants have been cattle owners since our youth....' For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" (Genesis 46:33-34).

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

I am With Him in Distress

It is written, “I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall bring you up, I also, and Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes” (Genesis 46:4).

He made the Shechinah descend before Jacob, as it is written: “I shall descend” – this is the descent of the Shechinah; “with you” – this is the descent of Jacob. Yet when it comes to bringing him back from Egypt, the opposite takes place: “I shall bring you up” – this is the ascent of Jacob; “I also” – this is the ascent of the Shechinah. This is comparable to someone who brings his friend out to dive in deep waters. When he sees that his friend is afraid of drowning, he dives in first, followed by his friend. When they are finished, his friend resurfaces before him, all in order to prevent his friend from staying in the water alone for even an instant. Thus wherever the Children of Israel were exiled, the Shechinah went into exile before them. Likewise Hashem promises that when we find ourselves spiraling downwards, He will be with us in distress. When He saves us from our trials, He will emerge with us, and in this way our ascent is guaranteed. The revelation of Hashem’s glory and the ascension of the Shechinah will occur in any case, but it will only happen when we all merit it (see Beit HaLevi).

Next it is written, “Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes.” The end of this verse serves to encourage Jacob, for obviously it was still painful for him to hear the words, “I will descend with you to Egypt,” even when Hashem promised: “I shall bring you up.” Thus Hashem, in seeing the bitterness of Jacob’s heart, consoled him by saying: “Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes.” In other words: Place Joseph’s fate before your eyes and see just to what depths he was lowered, and how he later became the viceroy of Egypt. The events of Joseph’s life will serve as your eyes, and you will see the future of your children because the destiny of the entire Jewish people will be the same.

– Kol Yehudah

It seems that there could have been an easier way to solve this issue. Joseph was Pharaoh’s cherished viceroy, and therefore Pharaoh would have willingly given Joseph’s other brothers a high position. They were deserving of this, for we know that they were all very capable men. Therefore why were Joseph’s brothers told to respond in the opposite way, to say that they knew absolutely nothing other than herding animals, which the Egyptians despised? The truth is that if we reflect upon this situation, we will realize that the proximity of the Egyptians would have led them away from Hashem’s path, which is why they tried by every possible means to remain isolated in the land of Goshen. Before coming to Egypt, Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph in order to organize their stay in Goshen, his aim being not to look upon the land of Egypt. In fact a person must flee from a place that leads him away from Hashem’s path, even if he clearly knows that he will enjoy great success there.

– Chafetz Chaim

Like a Single Person With a Single Heart

It is written, “All ha-nefesh [literally ‘the soul’] that came with Jacob into Egypt” (Genesis 46:26).

Although many in number, they are all described by the singular term nefesh (“soul”). This is because Joseph’s brothers had previously been jealous of him, and therefore they were considered as separate persons. Yet now that they were united, their joyously disappeared and Joseph held no resentment towards them. Hence the verse tells us that everyone had a single soul. The singular term is also used to stress the righteousness of Joseph and his brothers, for initially we read: “All those who came to Egypt with Jacob” – thereby highlighting the righteousness of the brothers; and the next verse states: “And the sons of Joseph” – all the souls from the house of Jacob that came to Egypt were seventy in number, thereby highlighting the righteousness of Joseph.

– Kli Yakar

Their Work is Secondary

It is written, “The men are shepherds, for they have been cattle owners” (Genesis 46:32).

Shepherds – the reason why the Patriarchs adopted this kind of work is that it does not require great effort, and therefore they were free to serve Hashem. Thus Hashem tested Moses and David with flocks before they became the shepherds of Israel.

– Sha’arei Simcha

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha deals with the reunion of Jacob’s family when Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and brought his entire family to Egypt, where Joseph sustained them according to the size of their families.

Because of the plot surrounding Joseph’s cup, Judah describes to Joseph everything that has happened to them since arriving in Egypt, including the suffering of their father on account of Benjamin’s absence. Joseph then reveals himself to his brothers, being incapable of restraining himself any longer, and summons his father. Jacob prepares to see his son once again before dying, and thus all the Children of Israel descend into Egypt. Jacob goes to live in Goshen, for Joseph had given him the most fertile part of the land with Pharaoh’s permission. Joseph then sustains his father’s household and the entire land.

ESHET HAYIL

The House of Jacob

The Torah states, “So shall you say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel” (Exodus 19:3). The Midrash states that the expression “House of Jacob” refers to the women, while “Children of Israel” refers to the men. “Why did He command the women first?” the Sages ask. “Because they are prompt in the fulfillment of the commandments. Another explanation: So that they should introduce their children to the study of the Torah. Rabbi Tachlifa of Caesarea stated that G-d said, ‘When I created the world, I commanded Adam first, and then Eve was also commanded. The result was that she sinned and upset the world. If now I do not call the women first, they will nullify the Torah.’ It is for this reason that it says, ‘So shall you say to the House of Jacob’ ” (Shemot Rabba 28:2). This means that one who hastens to receive something comes before one who hesitates to receive it. Now women are quicker to receive than men. They also introduce the Torah to their children, whom they lead to its study.

–Tiferet Israel

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Alexander Ziskind – The Author of Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah

Rabbi Alexander Ziskind Zatzal was born to Rabbi Moshe and his wife Rivka in the large Jewish city of Horodna. He elevated himself in Torah and holiness by serving his Creator like an angel of Heaven. He never turned his attention away from cleaving to Him for an instant, a fact to which many of the great Torah figures in his generation attested. These great men of Torah often spoke of his tremendous devotion to serving Hashem, which he did without interruption for his entire life. His book Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah is overflowing with words that encourage the reader to serve Hashem with love and fervor, and whoever reads it cannot help but to be filled with a sense of holiness for serving Hashem. In the introduction to an edition of his well-known will, the publisher describes some of the details of Rabbi Alexander's life and behavior: "The great Rav, chassid, and kabbalist, the holy Rabbi Alexander Ziskind of Horodna, was an extraordinary tzaddik, a man whose every deed was upright, and who did everything solely for the sake of Heaven. He lived during the time of the Vilna Gaon and wrote the book Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, a phrase that describes him perfectly. By reading it, everyone can see the holiness and righteousness of the author, for he never took even the smallest step without trying to bring satisfaction to his Creator. Everything that he did – every word and thought – was entirely holy to Hashem, meant solely to bring Him satisfaction. In 5554 he left his sons this will, which he had written with his own hand before dying in holiness and purity. Whoever studies it can see wonders, and his soul will be enflamed for Hashem by realizing how Rabbi Alexander Ziskind constantly maintained his holy thoughts. He never rested in his service of the Creator, nor did he ever stop or grow weary of bringing Hashem satisfaction."

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Two Royal Houses

It is written, "Join them one to the other into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand" (Ezekiel 37:17).

It is explained in the Shelah that although royalty belongs primarily to Judah (i.e., the kingdom of the house of David, of which it is said: "His seed will endure forever, and his throne shall be like the sun before Me" [Psalms 89:37]), the initial establishment of royalty must come through the sons of Rachel. Therefore just as Saul preceded David, Mashiach ben Yosef will precede Mashiach ben David. Scripture alludes to this when the Holy One, blessed be He, tells Ezekiel: "Take a piece of wood and write upon it: 'For Judah and for the Children of Israel his companions.' Then take a piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Joseph, the wood of Ephraim and all the House of Israel, his companions.' Join them one to the other into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand" (Ezekiel 37:16-17). In fact wood alludes to royalty, as Daniel stated: "The tree that you saw...it is you, O king" (Daniel 4:17-19). Hence both kings were to be joined to one another in his hand, for the two are one. The first must prepare the path for the second, and in the end they will form a single piece, over which King David will rule forever. Therefore Joseph was present at the initial establishment of royalty, when the Children of Israel went down to Egypt. The Holy One, blessed be He, also brought about the initial establishment of royalty for the house of David when "Judah went down from his brothers" (Genesis 38:1) and eventually Perez was born, for King David descended from him. Thus when Joseph began to reign, the kingdom of David and Solomon started to take shape. Hence it is written, "Judah went down," for just as the formation of Joseph's royalty began with a tremendous descent (as evoked by the verse, "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to seat them with nobles" [Psalms 117:7-8]), likewise the kingdom of the house of David began when "Judah went down from his brothers." His brothers made him descend from his greatness and his royalty, as the Sages have said (Tanhuma, Vayigash 9), and from there he went on to reign. Just as Joseph was lowered by his brothers when they sold him, likewise the descent of Judah occurred with regards to his brothers, all in order to fulfill the verse: "Join them one to the other into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand."

– Be'er Mayim Chaim, Vayeishev 38

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Looking into the Face

As recorded by his disciples, the Arizal taught that within the body of man there exist 613 limbs and sinews that are the sparks of the nefesh. The same also occurs with the ruach and neshama. Each spark depends on one of the 613 mitzvot, and the Arizal could perceive which mitzvah a person was deficient in. He could see if a person had committed a sin and a spark of holiness had subsequently disappeared, and he would give a tikkun to that person in order for the missing spark to return. He perceived all this by the letters that he could see on a person's skin, especially on his face and hair, where it was most evident. He could see signs in the creases and lines of a person's hands and face. One day a great Torah figure, Rabbi Chaim Vital, came to see him. The Arizal said to him, "Among the 22 letters of your forehead, I see that everything is shining except the gimel, which is reversed." Rabbi Chaim Vita immediately began to tremble, asking the Arizal what this meant, for it certainly meant something. The Arizal told him that he was not as generous (gomel chesed) with his father as he should be. He added that even if he conducted himself generously with his father, it was still not complete, which is why the gimel was reversed. The Arizal also told his disciples that whoever performs a mitzvah, it is inscribed on his forehead among one of the 22 letters of the alphabet, and it makes his face shine when he performs the same mitzvah again. In fact the first time a person performs a mitzvah, it is swallowed within, but the second time it emerges and shines. All this applies to mitzvot other than tzeddakah. When performing tzeddakah, one's face shines immediately, as it is written: "His righteousness [tzidkato] endures forever" (Psalms 112:9). Similarly, when someone commits a sin, it can be seen on his forehead in black fire. Yet when he repents and puts an effort into rectifying it by teshuvah, this distortion disappears, both it and the black fire that appeared as a result of the sin. On Shabbat, when a Jew receives an extra soul after midday, that sin is entirely covered over. This applies to every sin except bodily impurity, which does not disappear without ritual immersion, even if a person has rectified his deeds. – Kav HaYashar, ch. 22

A TRUE STORY

The Sanctity of the Mouth

It is written, "Behold, your eyes see...that it is my mouth which speaks to you" (Genesis 45:12). Rashi states, "It is my mouth which speaks to you in the holy tongue."

Rabbi Chaim Vital Zatzal found himself in the Beit Midrash of the Arizal one day. A sick woman was brought in, a woman who was suffering from an illness that produced something like a bad wound. However people didn't know what misfortune had befallen her, whether it was a spirit, a demon, or something else. The woman told the Arizal that she had been strong and in good health, with no pain, but that sometimes her body transformed into a human shape with wounds. When the Arizal saw the woman, he said that a spirit had entered her. He then sent her home, and towards evening he commanded Rabbi Chaim Vital to visit the woman and expel the spirit. The following day after prayers, he went and commanded the spirit to leave the woman through her small toe. People could see the spirit, which appeared to them like a strand of luminous fire, crying and weeping over its deeds. Rabbi Chaim Vital asked the spirit what had happened to it, and what sin it had committed. The spirit replied that it had been a known informer who turned over the money of Jews to non-Jews. Rabbi Chaim Vital then asked the spirit what permission it had to enter and dwell within this woman. It replied that higher powers had given it permission to enter her, for at first it had been lying on the ground and did not have the right to enter a human being. However this woman eventually came along to prepare a fire for cooking on Shabbat, and she was singing obscene songs. At that point the spirit was given permission to enter this woman, where it had dwelled for the last three years.

– Kav HaYashar