



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Duty to Study the Laws of Speech

The truth is, every Jew wants to fulfill the Torah to perfection, without neglecting any part of it, as it is written: "Your people will all be righteous" (Isaiah 60:21). However there are many reasons why people are persuaded not to be careful about what they say. Three reasons in particular are: (1) A lack of understanding, for many people do not know what constitutes Lashon Hara; (2) The power of desires in this area, which work against us, to the point that our prayers are not accepted; and (3) Not knowing the strategies to use in order to escape the evil inclination, as it is written: "For with strategies you can wage war" (Proverbs 24:6). Hence everyone must put an effort into learning these laws and reviewing them.

– Shmirat HaLashon

THE SANCTUARY SIGNALS THE ETERNAL PRESENCE OF THE SHECHINAH IN ISRAEL (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "It was on the eighth day" (Leviticus 9:1). Here the Midrash states that there was tremendous joy before Hashem in Heaven, as on the day when the world was created (Torat Kohanim, Shemini 1:15). The Children of Israel also celebrated with tremendous joy, as it is written: "A fire went forth from before the L-RD and consumed the burnt-offering and the fats upon the altar. The people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces" (Leviticus 9:24). In fact they experienced as much joy as is humanly possible. Commenting on the expression, "A fire went forth from before the L-RD," the Sages said: "When they saw a new fire descending from Heaven and consuming the burnt-offering and fats upon the altar, they opened their mouths to sing, at which point it is said: 'Rejoice in the L-RD, O you righteous, for praise befits the upright' [Psalms 33:1]" (Torat Kohanim, Shemini; Mechilta D'Miluim 20).

This joy had great significance, for until the Sanctuary was erected, before sacrifices were offered, the Shechinah would leave the Children of Israel whenever they sinned, such as during the incident of the golden calf. When the Sanctuary was erected and the Shechinah returned to them, the Children of Israel knew that sacrifices would atone for their sins from then on, and that the Shechinah would no longer leave them. The Midrash also states, "For the most part, the Shechinah dwelled with lower beings prior to the sin, but afterwards it left the earth for Heaven. On the day that the Sanctuary was erected, the Shechinah returned to this world and the glory of G-d filled the Sanctuary" (Tanhuma, Pekudei 6).

Furthermore, when the Shechinah returned to the Sanctuary, everyone immediately knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven the sin of the golden calf. Now the Midrash states, "Before they made the calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, came and dwelled among them. When He became angry with them, they said that He would never return. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them' [Exodus 25:8], and all the inhabitants of the world will know that I have forgiven Israel" (Tanhuma, Pekudei 2). The Midrash also states, "It is written: 'These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony' [Exodus 38:21] – it is a testimony for everyone on earth that the sin of the golden calf was forgiven" (Tanhuma, Pekudei 6).

Hence there were two aspects to the tremendous joy that occurred on the day the Sanctuary was erected: The joy of the Holy One, blessed be He, over never having to remove His Shechinah from Israel, and the joy of the Children of Israel over the fact that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven and the Shechinah would never again leave them. Even when the Temple was destroyed on account of our numerous sins, leaving us with neither sacrifice nor priest nor altar, we still have the prayers that were instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly. These prayers replace the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple, as it is written: "We will offer our lips instead of bulls" (Hosea 14:3). Our prayers procure atonement so that our sins do not cause the Shechinah to leave, for it remains among Jews even when they sin, as it is written: "Which dwells among them in their impurity" (Leviticus 16:16). Furthermore, even when Jews have been exiled, the Shechinah has been exiled with them. In the Gemara our Sages said, "In every place to which they were exiled, the Shechinah went with them" (Megillah 29a). Instead of removing His Presence from the Children of Israel, as He had done before, Hashem would punish them for their sins. However while the Children of Israel were rejoicing in the descent of the Shechinah, the tragedy involving Nadav and Avihu took place. The Midrash states, "Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu were punished only for minor sins." This means that it was according to their great spiritual level that Scripture considered them

to have committed a grave sin. It is also written, "The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took" (Leviticus 10:1) – they too were the sons of Aaron. In their joy, upon seeing a new fire that was descending from Heaven and consuming the burnt-offerings and fat upon the altar, they added love to their love, as it is written, "each took," for the act of taking denotes joy. This entire Midrash needs to be explained. Furthermore, this text gives the reader the impression that they did not commit any sins, so why were they punished?

It would seem that Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, were great tzaddikim, to the point that our Sages enthusiastically spoke of their qualities and said that they surpassed Moses and Aaron (Tanhuma, Shemini 1). That being the case, they understood better than anyone else that this moment – with fire descending from Heaven and the Shechinah revealing itself – was very great indeed. Their hearts were filled with great joy, which is why they entered the Holy of Holies and wanted to touch the fire in order to draw upon themselves the holiness of the place. Because they suddenly jumped to a great level of sanctity, however, their bodies could not tolerate it. They could not withstand the great fire of the revelation of the Shechinah, for man cannot cleave to the Shechinah all at once. He must ascend little by little until he merits cleaving to it. Yet Nadav and Avihu believed that they could reach this level in one step, and they rushed into the Holy of Holies, intoxicated and with their heads uncovered (Vayikra Rabba 12:1). This was certainly not because they had a casual attitude towards the Shechinah, but because they did not have time to prepare themselves. The proper way to prepare requires a person to ascend little by little, step by step, with enough time to work on himself and rectify what needs to be rectified, until he becomes worthy of cleaving to the Shechinah. In any case, we need to explain why the Holy One, blessed be He, punished Nadav and Avihu so severely amidst this great joy, thereby ruining it. Were the actions of Nadav and Avihu more serious than that of other people, those whom the Holy One, blessed be He, had been patient with and did not punish immediately? We can understand this according to what we said earlier, namely that the Shechinah returned and descended upon this world on the eighth day of the inauguration. From then on, whenever Jews sin, it does not depart, but sinners are punished until they repent. How did the Children of Israel know this? It is because Hashem punished Nadav and Avihu right away. Hence they knew that the Shechinah would not leave, since Hashem is usually patient with sinners. This is why it was precisely when the Sanctuary was erected that they were punished, to tell them that the Shechinah would no longer leave them, even at a time of sin.

This is why "Aaron was silent" (Leviticus 10:3). Aaron, the holy one of Hashem, accepted this judgment with love, not protesting G-d's decision. He understood the great benefit that the Children of Israel were given for all the generations by the fact that his sons died on account of their sin, for it was a testimony to everyone in the world that the Shechinah resides among the Children of Israel, and that all the storms in the world cannot make it leave, even if the Children of Israel sin. Despite their sin, they are still called Israel (Sanhedrin 44a). Even if they would be exiled from their land, the Shechinah would be exiled along with them, and where the Children of Israel would be, the Shechinah would also be. Aaron had only to accept Hashem's decision and rejoice over the fact that his sons were such great tzaddikim that Hashem chose them to inform the Children of Israel that He would reside in their midst. It was through them that His Name was sanctified and His dwelling was among men, and in them He fulfilled the verse: "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me" (Leviticus 10:3).

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

A Minor Sin

The Sages say that Nadav and Avihu awaited the death of Moses and Aaron in order to succeed them as leaders of the generation. Many have asked how the Sages could have expressed such a view of Aaron's sons, making it seem as if they were waiting for Moses and Aaron to die.

The answer lies in the fact that the greatest tzaddik of all time and an ordinary person in the street are both repulsed by grave moral sins, such as theft and murder. Yet the difference between them is immeasurable. To what can this be compared? It is like an army that does not hesitate to fight even a powerful enemy face to face, because it is confident of its own power. However an army is sometimes not ready to risk victory through open combat, in which case it places various obstacles around its territory, obstacles that the enemy encounters as it comes closer little by little, until finally its strength and courage are completely destroyed. Likewise an ordinary person, as well as any non-Jew, is horrified by violence and murder, but does nothing to distance himself from it. For such people, the battle is always a face-to-face confrontation with the evil inclination, and with sin itself, to the point that it gives them no opportunity to defend themselves or fall back. Hence if a person encounters but a single instant of weakness, or a tremendous temptation, he will immediately fall victim to it. Thus by his very nature, a Jew – and especially a tzaddik – is so far from sin that he does not encounter the enemy fact to face. In fact the more a tzaddik is great in spirituality and Torah study, the more he feels repulsed by the very thought of sin, even in the slightest degree. It is this feeling that greatly distances him from sin itself.

Rabbi Israel Salanter comments on a passage in the Gemara regarding a particular financial case in which the Sages ruled, "He can only bear resentment against him" (Bava Metzia 79a). Rabbi Salanter explained this to mean that in any other case, and all through the year, it is forbidden to even bear resentment against someone. It is only in this particular case that the Sages allow him to feel this way. Hence this represents a tremendous sensitivity to the concept of wronging others, a highly refined sense of what constitutes a wrong in life. For an ordinary person, such notions are nowhere found in his views of the world, for he is repulsed only by the most serious acts of evil.

Therefore when the Sages tell us, "Nadav said to Avihu: 'Oh that these old men might die, so that you and I should be the leaders of our generation'" (Sanhedrin 52a), we should not suspect them of having committed such a grave sin. It simply means that according to their great spiritual level and respect for Moses and Aaron, even their tiniest thoughts had very serious implications, as if they were already waiting to succeed them as leaders.

– Rabbi Yosef Leib Nandik

A Pearl From the Rav:

Aaron's Suspicion

It is written, "Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them. Then he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering. Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting, and they went out and blessed the people, and the glory of the L-RD appeared to the entire people" (Leviticus 9:22-23).

Rashi cites the Midrash: "When Aaron saw that all the sacrifices had been offered and all the procedures had been performed, and yet the Shechinah had not descended for Israel, he was distressed. He said,

'I know that the Holy One, blessed is He, is angry with me, and on my account the Shechinah has not descended for Israel.' So he said to Moses, 'My brother Moses, is this what you have done to me, that I have entered and been put to shame?' Moses immediately entered with him, and they prayed for mercy. Then the Shechinah came down for Israel.'

In commenting on this parsha, the holy book Noam Elimelech (Leviticus 9:22) states that a tzaddik is at such a level that he is constantly evaluating himself, lest he may have sinned by some small thought. According to these holy words, we may say that Aaron was afraid that a trace of pride dwelled in him. Now pride is worse than idolatry, as the Sages have said: "Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares, 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'" (Sotah 5a). It is also said, "If one walks with a stiff bearing even for four cubits, it is as if he pushed against the heels of the Shechinah" (Berachot 43b). Rashi explains that Aaron was thinking, "The Shechinah is not here." He was afraid that due to some wicked thought of pride that he had, Hashem would not accept his service, and as a result the Shechinah would not descend upon the Children of Israel. This is because Hashem detests pride, as it is written: "Every haughty heart is an abomination to the L-RD" (Proverbs 16:5). Aaron was also afraid that he had not yet been forgiven for the sin of the golden calf. He therefore raised his hands and blessed the people. The term *nasa* (to lift) is formed by the same letters as the term *sana* (to detest), meaning that he detested and completely removed the fault of pride from his heart, which is an abomination to Hashem. Hence it is said that "he descended." Had he climbed to a high spot, such that he needed to descend from there in order to bless the people? No. Instead, Aaron humbled himself and annulled the pride that he suspected of having, in order not to be guilty of idolatry. In this way the sin of the golden calf (which stemmed from idolatry) would be forgiven.

We should certainly not say that Aaron, the holy one of Hashem, harbored pride, for it is the way of the tzaddikim to always look for faults within themselves. This is how they lead others to repentance. The holy Rabbi Elimelech Zatzal wrote elsewhere (Likutei Shoshana) about this: "It is written: 'I am black, yet beautiful' [Song of Songs 1:5]. On the verse, 'When a ruler sins' [Leviticus 4:22], the Sages have explained: 'Happy is the generation whose ruler has sinned.' We must say that it is impossible for the tzaddik, who is constantly immersed in great sanctity, to cleave to people in order to awaken them to completely repent and elevate their deeds. However the tzaddik who finds a fault in himself, one that he regrets and for which he reprimands himself because of the imperfection of his service, will thereby awaken others to repentance. Thus when the tzaddik ascends in holiness, he will elevate all of Israel with him. It is of him that the Sages have said: 'Happy is the generation whose ruler has sinned,' for he benefits the people by also elevating them towards sanctity."

The Sin of the Golden Calf and the Sale of Joseph

It is written, "Take a he-goat for a sin-offering and a calf and a sheep in their first year, unblemished, for a burnt-offering" (Leviticus 9:3).

The Sages say, "Why did Israel bring more offerings than Aaron? It was because of what He said to them: 'You have [sin] on your hands at the start, and you have [sin] on your hands at the end.' You sinned at the start, as it is written: 'They killed a he-goat' [Genesis 37:31], and you sinned at the end, as it is written: 'They have made themselves a molten calf' [Exodus 32:8]" (Torat Kohanim, Shemini 4).

Let us think about this: Why now, when they were atoning for the sin of the golden calf, did they also have to atone for the sale of Joseph?

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Sanctified Through Those Who are Close to Me

It is written, “The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his censer, and they put fire in them and placed incense upon them, and they offered strange fire before the L-RD, which He had not commanded them. A fire went out from before the L-RD and consumed them, and they died before the L-RD” (Leviticus 10:1-2).

Praiseworthy men usually break into tears during the reading of the verse, “After the death of Aaron’s two sons,” and they also shed tears over the passing of the tzaddikim. This is a segula for procuring atonement for a sin in order to prevent the death of one’s children. The important thing is that in so doing, we are careful to repent of our sins. The living should take it to heart (Ecclesiastes 7:2) that “if a flame falls among the cedars, what can the hyssop on the wall expect?” (Moed Katan 25b). That is, because strict justice struck these tzaddikim for such a light sin – since the Holy One, blessed be He, is very exacting with the tzaddikim, as it is written: “I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be gloried before the entire people” – then what can we expect? On the verse, “You are awesome, O G-d, from Your Sanctuaries” (Psalms 68:36), the Sages have explained: “Do not read mimikdashchecha [from Your Sanctuaries], but mimekudashchecha [from Your consecrated ones]. When the Holy One, blessed be He, executes judgment on His consecrated ones, He makes Himself feared, exalted, and praised” (Zevachim 115b). What will those who are filled with sin do? A person’s heart melts before the magnitude of his sins, which are too many to count. His guilt rises to the heavens, and he weeps over the death of the tzaddikim. He joins in the anguish of their father Aaron, Hashem’s holy one, because something like this has happened to him. He infuses his heart of stone with the fear of G-d, and he beseeches Hashem and repents. Hashem has pity on him and accepts his repentance, especially when it is by the merit of these tzaddikim (Mateh Ephraim, 619).

As it stands, Yom Kippur procures atonement because it is a time of mercy. The death of the tzaddikim is also a time of Divine mercy. G-d rejoices when the soul of a pure tzaddik comes closer to Him, and He redeems him (Moed Katan 25b). However this is only when it is similar to Yom Kippur, for the fear of Yom Kippur procures atonement when it is respected. Yet for those who ridicule Yom Kippur and treat it like a regular day, it does not procure atonement. Likewise if a person respects a tzaddik, his death will procure atonement, but if he ridicules the tzaddik in his heart, his death will not procure atonement.

– Meshech Chochma

The Midrash states that Joseph’s brothers were angry with him because they had seen through prophesy that he would give rise to Jeroboam the son of Nabat. In the future, Jeroboam would erect a golden calf that would lead the Children of Israel astray, and Joseph’s brothers wanted to prevent this. It follows that up until the sin of the golden calf, we could still explain the sin of selling Joseph. However once the Children of Israel made the golden calf, thereby proving that they themselves were idolaters, this justification for selling Joseph became invalid. Hence now that the Children of Israel were bringing an offering to atone for the sin of the golden calf, they also had to bring one for the sin of Joseph’s sale, which was more serious than the sin of the golden calf (Hagaot Maharid).

Another explanation: The brothers justified Joseph’s sale by saying the Joseph had not reprimanded them directly when he suspected them of wrongdoing. Instead he went and reported it to their father, which they considered to be Lashon Harah. Yet when the Children of Israel killed Hur the son of Miriam because he reprimanded them for making the golden calf, they demonstrated that they could not accept a direct reprimand. Therefore this justification for selling Joseph was also invalid, since Joseph was afraid of reprimanding them directly and was forced to do so through their father.

We can therefore understand why the sin of Joseph’s sale was awakened by the sin of the golden calf, and why the Children of Israel now had to procure atonement for it (Meshech Chochma).

Standing Far Away

It is written, “The entire assembly approached and stood before the L-RD” (Leviticus 9:5).

Commenting on the verse, “The people saw and trembled, and they stood far away” (Exodus 20:15), Rabbi Moshe Almosnino Zatzal explained that one who takes a single step to distance himself from the Torah is already very far from it. Thus we read: “The people saw” – they reflected and realized; “and they stood far away” – that if they were standing apart, it meant that they were already far away. Along the same lines, here we can explain that one who desires to come closer to Hashem and serve Him must stand directly before Him. This is what constitutes “the entire assembly approached,” for at which point they already “stood before the L-RD.”

– Ateret Paz

Overview of the Parsha

The first part of Parsha Shemini ends with the sanctification of the Sanctuary by the offerings made on its inaugural day. The second part of the parsha deals with the sanctification of man and his purification in terms of obtaining meat for consumption. The beginning of the parsha describes the offerings made on the eighth day, up until the time that fire comes and consumes them on the altar. This represents the ideal relationship between Hashem and His people Israel. Immediately afterwards, a fire comes forth and devours Nadav and Avihu, who had brought a strange fire. Following this incident, their father is told that priests are not to enter the Sanctuary in a drunken state, and Moses asks the grieving priests why they had not eaten the offerings. The remainder of the parsha deals with the sanctity of man, who must purify himself with regards to his food, even if it is not offered on the altar, and the specifics of forbidden food.

ESHET HAYIL

A Mother’s Role in Education

The Passover Haggadah states, “One who does not know how to ask, at petach lo [make an opening for him].” Why is this expression written in the feminine? It deals with small children who cannot yet understand the Torah words of their father. Therefore their mother must infuse them with the fear of Heaven, all while taking care of them during mealtime, playtime, and free-time. It is her responsibility to protect them from exhibiting harmful behavior and to rid them of character flaws. She must also awaken a desire for Torah and mitzvot in them. These educational deeds on the part of the mother have a tremendous influence on the pure heart of a child. Hence a child who does not know how to ask questions, at petach lo – in the feminine – because this pertains to the mother. She must open the heart of a young child, who cannot yet understand the Torah. – Be’er Shemuel

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer – The Kaf HaChaim

The gaon Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer Zatzal, who was a descendant of the Men of the Great Assembly, studied in the yeshivot of Baghdad. He occupied a lofty spiritual level in the exile of Babylon, which flourished at the time. Because of his calm demeanor, his level-headedness and pleasantness, his refinement and humility, and his lofty character and fear of Heaven, which preceded his wisdom, he was able to elevate himself in the study of our holy Torah until he reached the level of rendering Halachic decisions. With his tremendous diligence, he began to secretly study Kabbalah, and in him was fulfilled the promise of wisdom to those who are discreet. He became increasingly wise, possessing in his mouth a Torah of truth. Indeed, the verse "Grant truth to Jacob" was fulfilled in him.

In the year 5664 he went to live in Eretz Israel, going to study in the Shoshanim LeDavid yeshiva. He lived in a small attic located near the Beit Midrash, and he purchased important books on Kabbalah and the revealed Torah, saving money on food with his last pennies. It was in this small attic that he spent the great majority of his days and years, immersed in the holy books that surrounded him. He was seated in the tent of Torah, and he recorded his Halachic opinions in his famous work entitled Kaf HaChaim. He would normally arise before midnight in order to be awake and immersed in his studies precisely during the middle of the night. He then would read tikkun chatzot with tears, moaning and lamenting the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel. He arose once again before dawn in order to study Kabbalah, and then he enwrapped himself in his tallit, donned his tefillin, and headed off to synagogue, where he prayed with the kavanot of the Arizal. He resembled an angel of G-d as he stood before the Aron Kodesh, shaking in his sanctity. When he recited a blessing over food, he paid great attention to saying it with concentration and enthusiasm, to the point that anyone who was fortunate enough to be around him at the time was amazed, for his blessings were uttered with tremendous clarity and sanctity.

Rabbi Yehudah Tzadkah said that there were two tzaddikim in the previous generation who watched their words so carefully that they said nothing superfluous during their lifetime. In fact their lips have never stopped moving since they passed away. These were the Chafetz Chaim and the Kaf HaChaim, the leaders of those who speak in the light of life.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Hashem's Name

It is written, "They arrived among the nations where they came, and they desecrated My holy Name when it was said of them: 'These are the people of the L-RD, but they have left His land!'" (Ezekiel 36:20).

We must draw a new lesson from this in regards to the desecration of Hashem's Name, which is the worst of all sins. Scripture complains about the Children of Israel because of the sins that they committed while living in their own land, which earned them the punishment of exile, as it is written: "That the land should not vomit you out when you defile it" (Leviticus 18:28). Now, as they found themselves exiled among the nations, people were pointing to them and saying, "These are the people of the L-RD, but they have left His land!" The Name of Heaven was therefore desecrated on account of them. Hence we learn that when a person sins – besides the fact that his sin was contrary to G-d's will, and as a result he will certainly be punished – he should worry first and foremost about the desecration of Hashem's Name that resulted from his sin. Because he will be punished for his sin, whoever sees him will be surprised and say, "This is one of Hashem's people, and he is being punished!" He will have therefore caused, as a result of his sin, a desecration of Hashem's Name. Whose heart will not tremble and shake upon seeing all this, even more so if a talmid chacham (who is among Hashem's army) were to sin, especially in something that constitutes a desecration of Hashem's Name! The Sages have said, "One who studies Scripture and Mishnah, and who serves talmidei chachamim, but does not deal honestly in business or speak with moderation, if he draws misfortune to himself because he fails to repent, he will have desecrated Hashem's Name." He will be even more shaken when standing before the Throne of Justice in the World of Truth. He will be shown how he engaged in extremely grave instances of desecrating Hashem's Name, not because he did so explicitly, but because he hesitated to repent and was punished for it. Let him be punished in the World to Come for the very punishment that he received in this world! Eternal pain will be added to him on account of temporary pain, and eternal misfortune on account of temporary misfortune. Woe to us on the day of judgment, woe to us on the day of rebuke! – Ohr Yafeh

A TRUE STORY

Forsaking His Own Honor

On the verse, "Moses heard and he approved" (Leviticus 10:20), the Sages explain that Moses admitted: "I heard it and forgot" (Zebachim 101a).

A question was addressed to the rabbi of a small community. However he forgot what the Shach wrote on the issue, and he rendered a decision that did not conform to the Halachah. In this community there was a group of people who were opposed to the rabbi, and now they caught him committing a flagrant error. What did they do? They sent a telegram to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Zatzal in Kovno, asking him for his opinion on the issue. He immediately sent them back a response that went against the words of the Shach, just as their own rabbi had done! He sent them the letter knowing that they would receive it on the following day. However a few hours after sending it, he sent them a telegram in which he explained that he had made a mistake in his decision, for he subsequently found that the Shach mentioned this issue and took the opposite viewpoint. He therefore yielded before the Shach's view, meaning that when they would receive his letter, they should realize that his opinion differed from what it stated.

Why did Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan do this? He obviously knew from the outset what the Shach had written on the issue, which is why he was shocked by the fact that he was asked such a simple question in the telegram he received. In his immense wisdom, he understood that the local rabbi had apparently erred in his decision, and that his opponents were setting a trap for him. He therefore decided to shut their mouths, showing them that even the greatest Posek of the generation was liable to forget a statement made by the Shach. Therefore how much more was a rabbi from a small town likely to do so! Hence he forsook the honor of his Torah and pretended that he himself had made a mistake!

– Shimusha Shel Torah

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

A Pitcher Full of Water

The holy Tanna Rabbi Akiva was once imprisoned because of his "transgressions" against the Romans, meaning because he learned and taught the Torah in public. One of Rabbi Akiva's disciples was attending to him in prison. Every day, Rabbi Yehoshua would bring him some food and a pitcher of water for drinking and performing netilat yadayim. One day he was met by a prison guard as he was carrying the pitcher full of water. "Why are you bringing so much water?" he exclaimed. "Is your rabbi able to drink so much? Oh, I know! You're planning on using the water to wet the floor beneath the wall, making it easier to dig a tunnel by which your rabbi can escape! No, that won't happen!" In his anger, the prison guard took the pitcher and spilled half of its contents to the ground. He then gave it back to Rabbi Yehoshua and let him through. In the meantime, Rabbi Akiva was getting weaker, for he was old and in need of food and water. When Rabbi Yehoshua finally made it to his cell, Rabbi Akiva asked him in a weak voice, "Why did you make me wait so long? I have no strength to fast!" Rabbi Yehoshua felt bad and said, "It wasn't my fault. One of the guards stopped me and checked what was in the pitcher. He then poured half of the water to the ground."

"Give me some water to wash my hands," Rabbi Akiva said, as he stretched out his hand towards the pitcher. Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "Rabbi, there's barely enough water to drink here! There won't be enough to wash your hands as well!"

"What can I do?" Rabbi Akiva replied. "The wisest of the Sages have decreed that we must wash our hands, and I will not eat without doing so, even if I have to die of hunger as a result!" Rabbi Akiva therefore refused to eat. When the prison guards saw this, they allowed Rabbi Yehoshua to bring him a pitcher full of water.

– Ma'asehem Shel Tzaddikim on Eruvin 21b