



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Greatness of Peace

A great and holy attribute results from controlling one's tongue, this being the attribute of peace. As we know, when a person guards his tongue, he distances himself from jealousy and everyone cherishes him and confides their secrets to him. No one speaks against such a person, which is a measure for measure response.

Great is peace, for it is one of the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it written: "He called Him 'L-RD, Shalom' " (Judges 6:24). In every place where peace is found, the fear of Heaven is found, and in every place where peace is absent, the fear of Heaven is also absent. G-d greatly values peace, as the Sages have said: "A fabrication was used in order to maintain peace between Abraham and Sarah. This is proved by what is written: 'Sarah laughed within herself, saying... "my master is old" ' [Genesis 18:12]. Yet [when G-d repeated this] to Abraham, He said: '[Sarah said:] 'I am old" ' [v.13]."

Shmirat HaLashon, Sha'ar
HaZechira 11

THE TZADDIK SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "The donkey saw the angel of the L-RD and crouched beneath Bilam. Bilam's anger flared, and he struck the donkey with the staff. ... [The donkey] said to Bilam, 'What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?' Bilam said to the donkey, 'Because you mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand, I would have killed you now!' The donkey said to Bilam, 'Am I not your donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been accustomed to doing such a thing to you?' He said, 'No.' Then the L-RD uncovered Bilam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the L-RD standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand. He bowed his head and prostrated himself on his face" (Numbers 22:27-31). We need to understand how a donkey could have seen an angel standing on the road, yet Bilam did not see it until Hashem opened his eyes. Is it not written, "The words of one who hears the sayings of G-d, knows the knowledge of the Supreme One, and who sees the vision of Sha-dai" (Numbers 24:16)? Here the Gemara asks, "He did not even know the mind of his animal, so how could he know the mind of the Most High?" (Berachot 7a). We also need to understand why G-d did not open the mouth of the donkey before Bilam's leg was pressed against a wall, prompting him to want to kill it.

We shall explain this according to a statement made by the Sages: "With the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see from one end of the world to the other. Yet as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion, and He saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them.... For whom did He reserve it? For the tzaddikim" (Chagigah 12a). From these words, we learn that if G-d's creations had not sinned, it would have been fair for them to see from one end of the world to other, all due to the great light that Hashem made at the beginning of Creation. However since He knew that they would become corrupt, only the tzaddikim are allowed to see from one end of the world to the other. In fact this light was never hidden from them. From whom was it hidden? Only from the wicked, for they sin and are not worthy of using this great light.

As a result, it is not surprising that the donkey saw the angel, for a donkey does not have an evil inclination and the primordial light was not hidden from it. Therefore it could see what no one else could. On the other hand, Bilam did not see it because he was an evildoer, a man who corrupted his ways, and furthermore he possessed no faith. Even when he saw, he did not understand what he was seeing and paid no attention to it. Yet when the Holy One, blessed be He, perceives that a person has no faith and sees nothing, He opens his eyes. How does G-d do this? It is by sending hardships upon a person, for it is through hardships that the soul of man awakens to repentance. Hence G-d sent hardships upon Bilam, for his leg was pressed against a wall and he suffered greatly as a result. Hashem finally opened the mouth of the donkey so Bilam could realize that these hardships were sent to him because he went to curse Israel. In any case, since Bilam was a great evildoer, he did not reflect upon this and still proceeded to curse them.

Generally speaking, whoever does not possess faith cannot perceive anything. The wicked Bilam, because he did not believe in Hashem, did not perceive things, and conversely the tzaddikim, because they do believe in Hashem – as it is written: "The tzaddik shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4) – can see from one end of the world to the other. We know that the tzaddikim were the eyes that saw everything occurring in the world. How many times did they save lives! How did they achieve this? It was by not becoming impure through sin. They believed in Hashem and were granted permission to use the great light that was made at the time of Creation.

A friend once told me that a Jew went to see my uncle, the tzaddik Rabbi Nissim Pinto Zatzal (the brother of my father Zatzal), who was living in Montreal. This Jew told my uncle that one of his enemies had informed the government that he did not pay his income tax, though he could not prove otherwise. Government workers came to see this Jew, going through his home and taking papers and documents with them. Needless to say, he was afraid of being punished. The tzaddik told him, "Tomorrow they will call your home and apologize for what they have done. In addition, they will return some money to you." The next day, government workers called him to apologize, saying: "We don't know why we sent people to your home yesterday, because it's clear that you don't owe us any money. In addition, we noticed that you paid more than what you owed, and we're going to reimburse you." I heard another incredible story about my uncle: One day as he was at home speaking with one of his friends, he suddenly stopped and said: "Someone is going to arrive and give me a great deal of money," and he mentioned a certain amount. My uncle continued: "As soon as that person leaves, someone else who needs that very same amount – not more or less – will arrive, and I'll take out the money brought to me by the first person and give it to the second." A few hours later, someone came to see my uncle with a certain amount of money and asked for a blessing. My uncle blessed him, and he left. They counted the money, and discovered that it was exactly the amount that my uncle had mentioned. As soon as this man left, a woman arrived in tears and said: "Rabbi, my daughter is getting married tomorrow, but I don't have enough money to cover all the expenses!" My uncle asked her how much she needed, and she mentioned the very same amount that the first person had brought. My uncle then took out the money and gave it to her, and she left happy. What characterizes those who have not sinned – those who live by faith and who fear sin – is that they see what no other eye can see, since others sin but they do not. Hence the Sages have said: "The verse states, 'All the people saw the voices and the flames' [Exodus 20:15]. It is normally impossible to see voices. Yet here, just as they saw flames, likewise they saw voices. Why did the Children of Israel merit seeing voices in a supernatural way? It is because they possessed faith, as it is written: 'The people believed' [ibid. 4:31] and, 'They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant' [ibid. 14:31]" (Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai).

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Hidden Things

It is written, “This is the decree of the Torah” (Numbers 19:2). Rashi states, “I have decreed it. You have no right to challenge it.”

The Maggid of Dubno offers a parable to help explain this: A skillful matchmaker suggested a match that seemed, at first glance, to be impossible. The rav of a certain town had a marvelous son who had reached adulthood, and in the same town was a miserable and troublesome man whose work was despised and his character vulgar. Even the simplest of people kept their distance on account of his tremendous coarseness. This man, however, had a precious daughter who was completely unlike her father. She possessed every virtue, both in character traits and her fear of G-d, and it was clear to everyone that she was worthy of a ben Torah.

Yet what could a matchmaker hope to accomplish with such a potential father-in-law? Especially not with the son of the local rav, an impossible match that could hardly be contemplated!

As we said, there was a skilled matchmaker in town, and he was bold. In fact he tried to do the impossible. With his sharp senses, he understood that there was something to discuss here. He addressed the rav and laid out his suggestion. The rav was a man of character, pure in his middot, and there was only one goal before his eyes: To obtain the best possible wife for his son, a G-d-fearing woman. When the rav heard that these requirements would be completely satisfied by the matchmaker’s suggestion, he did not hesitate to agree, regardless of what people might say. The match was made, and the marriage took place.

One fine day, the girl’s father noticed that the rav did not speak with him often, nor did he tell him about the questions brought to him at the Beit Din. Without waiting, he went to the rav’s home and asked him what this meant. He asked the rav why he was treating him in this way, and where were the bonds of friendship that should exist among in-laws.

The rav replied, “You’re even asking questions like this? A man such as yourself should realize that the question isn’t why I’m not friends with you. Rather, it’s how we could have become in-laws in the first place! As for why we don’t speak, this isn’t even a question, for what could we possibly talk about?”

The lesson here, writes the Maggid of Dubno in Ohel Yaakov, is that the Holy One, blessed be He, established a connection with frail creatures made of flesh and blood, and He gave them a marvelous Torah. When a Jew reads G-d’s Torah and finds hidden things in it, he is filled with astonishment, for how could Hashem not have explained all His words clearly, instead of through hints? Why did Hashem not explain each issue until it was perfectly clear?

The answer to this question comes from Hashem: A person is mistaken about himself! He thinks that the match and connection that the Holy One, blessed be He, established with him was fitting for both parties. Hence an objection is raised: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not show him things so clearly that he would understand everything? In reality, such is not the case. In fact it is the very opposite, for the glory of Hashem resides in what is

hidden. Indeed, the fact that Hashem has any connection with man is what should seem mysterious to him!

A Pearl from the Rav:

The Vision of the End of Days

It is written, “Edom said to him, ‘You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you’ ” (Numbers 20:18).

Why is the expression “I come out” written in the future tense? We must say that the King of Edom told the Children of Israel, “You shall not pass through me” because he knew that if they did, they would conquer his impurity and that in him the verse would now be fulfilled: “Saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the L-RD’s” (Obadiah 1:21). If they had passed through him, it would have meant that they would subjugate Edom’s forces of impurity. The King of Edom therefore said to them: I must again come out with the sword against you in the future. The exile of Edom still awaits you. It will be the last exile, and it will be very long, ending only when the Redeemer comes to Zion and saviors arrive to judge the Mount of Esau. Yet now is not that time.

In Parallel

It is written, “The priest shall wash his clothes” (Numbers 19:7).

Although the red heifer purified those who were impure, it rendered people who were pure, those who occupied themselves with it, impure. In fact the red heifer came to atone for the sin of the golden calf, and according to what the Sages have said – namely that the generation of the desert did not merit sinning in this way, but did so only in order to point out the way to repentance for the generations to come (Avodah Zarah 4b) – we find that the generation itself was punished and that, as a result, a remedy was created for future generations. Hence even the red heifer itself, which atoned for the sin of the golden calf, constitutes a remedy for those who need purification and an impurity for those who occupy themselves with it.

– The Sermons of the Chatam Sofer

May My Soul be Like Dust to All

It is written, “Lest I come out with the sword against you” (Numbers 20:18).

Rashi cites Edom as saying to Israel, “You pride yourselves with the ‘voice’ that your father bequeathed to you.” Great is the prayer of a Jew, but only when he does not instantly grow proud of his prayer. If there is the slightest trace of pride in him during prayer, it is not at all a prayer. If “you are proud of the voice” – if prayer leads you to pride – “I [will] come out,” in which case Esau will gather his strength and come out to meet you. However if your prayer is pure, the wicked Esau will be powerless against Israel, for if “the voice is the voice of Jacob,” the hands are not the hands of Esau.

– Rabbi Tzvi of Ziditchov

The Torah is Acquired Through Humility

It is written, “From the desert to Mattanah” (Numbers 21:18).

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Purity of the Body Alludes to the Purity of the Soul

A person who touches a dead body becomes impure for seven days. If he does not purify himself on the third day, then he does not become pure on the seventh. This week's parsha deals with the laws of impurity and purity, laws that are described as chukim, decrees that are beyond human comprehension. We have no idea as to why a dead body is called impure, nor do we understand the nature of impurity. Likewise we do not understand how immersion in a mikveh can purify, nor do we understand the nature of purity. Although we do not comprehend the underlying meaning of these things, we can still learn something from the laws of impurity and purity in the practical realm of daily life. We should be interested in clearly understanding what the Rambam wrote about immersion in a mikveh. Although he begins by stating that we cannot understand everything pertaining to impurity and purity, he adds that there is a great lesson to learn from the laws of impurity and ritual immersion. This is what he writes at the conclusion of the laws on the mikveh:

"It is clear and obvious that impurities and purities are Scriptural decrees, not matters that the human mind could have determined, and that they are included in the chukim. Similarly, immersing from impurity is part of the chukim, for the impurity is not mud or excrement that may be removed with water. Rather, it is a Scriptural decree and the matter depends upon the intentions of one's heart. Therefore the Sages say, 'One who immerses himself without the intention of doing so, it is as if he has not immersed.' Nevertheless, in this matter there is a hint that just as one who focuses on becoming purified is purified upon immersion, even though there is no physical change in his body, likewise one who directs his heart to become purified from the impurities of the soul, which are thoughts of iniquity and evil dispositions, as soon as he decides in his heart to distance himself from them and he brings himself into the waters of enlightenment, he becomes pure, as it states: 'I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be cleansed' [Ezekiel 36:25]. In His great mercy, may Hashem purify us of all transgression and sin. Amen." It is fitting to reflect upon these words.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Mother's Duty to Pray

A mother has a duty to pray for her child. Such a prayer has no fixed wording, but simply provides an opportunity for her to pray from the bottom of her heart, something that every mother should do with her own words. Each woman should formulate her own words in response to her needs at that particular time. There is a general formula that was transmitted from the Chazon Ish, a prayer to be recited in the blessing Shomea Tefillah and during candle lighting for Shabbat: "May it be Your will, Hashem my G-d and G-d of my fathers, to have mercy on my son [name], and for You to transform his heart to love and fear Your Name, and that he diligently studies Your holy Torah. Keep him far from everything that can prevent him from studying Your holy Torah with diligence, and lead him to Your holy Torah, for You hear prayer."

– Iggerot Chazon Ish, Vol. 1, 74

A person who wants to retain the Torah that he learns must act pleasantly with people and not grow proud of his Torah. Rabbi Mattena said, "What is the sense of the Scriptural text: 'From the desert to Mattanah'? If a man allows himself to be treated as a desert, on which everybody treads, his study will be retained by him. Otherwise it will not" (Eruvin 54a). The Gemara also states, "Rabbi Eleazar said: What is the sense of the Scriptural text: 'Chains around your neck' [Proverbs 1:9]? If a man trains himself to be like a chain that hangs loosely around the neck, which is sometimes exposed and sometimes concealed, his learning will be retained by him. Otherwise it will not. Rabbi Eleazar further stated: What is the sense of the Scriptural text: 'His cheeks are like a bed of spices' [Song of Songs 5:13]? If a man allows himself to be treated as a bed upon which everybody treads, and as spices with which everybody perfumes himself, his learning will be retained. Otherwise it will not."

– Menorat HaMaor, 251

A Prayer that is Accepted

It is written, "Moab was greatly afraid of the people, for they were numerous, and Moab was distressed because of the Children of Israel" (Numbers 22:3).

In his book *Torat Haim*, Rabbeinu Haim HaCohen Zatzal of Bavel cites the holy Zohar in explaining that the expression "the people" refers to simple folk and the mixed multitude. This is because the word *am* ("people") evokes coals that are *omemot* ("dying") or are extinguished.

There are two ways that a prayer is heard and accepted. The first is when a prayer is recited by a great number of people, for the Holy One, blessed be He, does not reject it. The second is when it is the prayer of a *tzaddik*, whose merits are numerous, for his request will be granted in Heaven much like a son crying out to his father.

Moab was afraid of both kinds of prayer. He feared the people, the simplest among the Children of Israel, "for they were numerous" – a reference to the prayer of the many. Furthermore, "Moab was distressed because of the Children of Israel" – a reference to the *tzaddikim* and lofty individuals, those called "Israel," whose prayer is heard and whose will is done by Hashem, for He makes their enemies fall before them.

Why Prevent Bilam from Cursing?

It is written, "You shall not go with them" (Numbers 22:12).

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra Zatzal asks why the Creator had to reveal Himself to the wicked Bilam and prevent him from going to curse Israel. Why did He place obstacles in Bilam's path and force him to bless them? Is Hashem not all powerful? He certainly could have prevented his curses from taking effect! The answer is that the Creator knew that Bilam was thinking about making Israel sin with the daughters of Midian, and that as a result His anger would be stirred by their sin and an epidemic would break out among them. Therefore Hashem did not want Bilam's curses to be linked to this epidemic.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

To Walk Humbly With G-d

It is written, "The remnant of Jacob" (Micah 5:6).

A person must fulfill his duties without seeking anything for himself, as the Sages have said: "Be like servants who serve their master without the intention of receiving a reward" (Pirkei Avot 1:3). It is said that the Vilna Gaon purchased an extremely expensive etrog. However since he purchased it at a time when there were no other etrogim to buy, the merchant who sold it to the Vilna Gaon did so only on condition that the reward for the mitzvah would go to him. Upon hearing this, the Vilna Gaon experienced tremendous joy. His students asked him to explain this, and the Vilna Gaon said that for his entire life he was worried about this Mishnah ("Be like servants who serve their master without the intention of receiving a reward"), for since we know that every mitzvah entails a reward, how could he fulfill these words? Now that he had an opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah without a reward, how could he not be overjoyed?

The prophet stated, "He has told you, O man, what is good. What does the L-RD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d?" (Micah 6:8). Regarding things that are done in public, there is a great danger that one might see a personal profit to be had. It is difficult to dance at a large wedding before people, or to give a eulogy before a large crowd, without benefiting even just a little from this honor. Here too the Torah demands that a person must "walk humbly."

In his immense wisdom, King Solomon said: "I saw that all labor, and every skill in work, comes from a man's jealousy of his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind" (Ecclesiastes 4:4). The Sages have explained that this refers to mitzvot, meaning that by nature a person observes the entire Torah and all the mitzvot in order to satisfy his jealous feelings. The wisest of all men called this "vanity and striving after wind." Just as a kind act that we do out of personal interest is called a sin, likewise even a person who takes it upon himself to do something out of self-interest, everything will be taken from him, and he will be left with nothing but "vanity."

– Ma'ayan HaShavua

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, the son of Rabbi Shemuel "the Castilian," was a great poet of sacred songs, from which we know a number of marvelous piyutim. He wrote Sefer HaKuzari, which is based upon the writings of Rabbi Yitzchak HaSangari. Rabbi Yitzchak established the foundations of this book in the year 4500, at the start of the period of the Geonim. Four hundred years later, Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi came and composed this book in Arabic. After him, a Hebrew translation was made by two scholars: First by Rabbi Yehudah bar Yitzchak ben Kardaniel, and then by Rabbi Yehudah bar Shaul ibn Tibbon of Spain (who also translated the book Chovot HaLevavot). The author of Sefer Yuchassin wrote that Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi and Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra were sons of two sisters. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi was 50 years old when he left for Eretz Israel. Long ago, old men told me that Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra was the son-in-law of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, that Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi did not have sons, but only a daughter, and that he was very wealthy and had given her in marriage to Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra.

In Shalshet HaKabbalah, the author states that he heard from a certain old man that when Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, he tore his garments and walked barefoot in order to fulfill the statement: "For your servants have cherished her stones and favored her dust" (Psalms 102:15). He also uttered a lamentation that he had composed: "O Zion, will you not ask about your exiles, the whereabouts of your friends, those who seek your welfare, the remnant of your flock?" An Arab became enraged when he saw this display of religious fervor, and he charged at Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi with his horse, crushing him to death. – Sefer Koreh HaDorot

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Better That I Should Suffer Humiliation

The Sages have said that we do not add a month to the year unless an assembly has been convened by the Nassi on the day before for this express purpose. Rabban Gamliel once said to the Sages, "Send me seven scholars early in the morning to the upper chamber to add a month to the year." When Rabban Gamliel arrived the next day, he found not seven, but eight scholars. He asked, "Who is the one who came without permission? Let him leave." At that point Shemuel HaKatan got up and said, "I was the one who came without permission. My objective was not to join in the adding of the month. Instead, I felt the need to learn the practical application of the law." Rabban Gamliel then said, "Sit down, my son, sit down. You are worthy of adding a month to all years, but it is a decision of the rabbis that it should be done only by those who have been specially appointed for the task." In reality, Shemuel Hakatan had been summoned to this meeting. Yet in order to prevent the uninvited scholar from being humiliated, Shemuel HaKatan said that he had come without permission (from Sanhedrin 11a).

The Jerusalem Talmud's version of this story adds, "Torah insights abounded during the entire day, and it was only on the following day that a month was added, so as not to shame the one who had come without permission" (Sanhedrin 1:2).

Why was Rabban Gamliel not afraid of shaming a Torah scholar in public? It was because it was a well-known law that a month cannot be added to the year without an assembly being convened for this express purpose. Hence it was obvious that an uninvited scholar had to leave, meaning that he was the one who brought shame upon himself. Out of compassion, however, Shemuel HaKatan wanted to spare him this shame (HaMidrash Kahalacha).

A similar incident occurred when Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi was giving a lecture and noticed the smell of garlic. He said, "Whoever ate garlic should leave!" His disciple Rabbi Chiya arose and left, and then all the other disciples arose and left. The next day Rabbi Shimon, the son of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, approached Rabbi Chiya and said to him, "Was it you who annoyed my father yesterday?" Rabbi Chiya replied, "Heaven forbid that such a thing should happen in Israel" (Sanhedrin 11a).

A TRUE STORY

Taking an Account

Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the Alter of Novardok, established a personal method for spreading Torah and Mussar. He would say, "I never asked myself if I could do something or not. Instead, I asked myself if it should be done or not." Hence he sometimes had to break down walls in order to reach his goal, and he obviously encountered obstacles that he had to overcome. His dynamic strength also pushed him to be aggressive and bold, not hesitating to respond in a stormy way. Whenever he saw an injustice or oppression, he reacted with vehemence. Nevertheless, we must underline that Rabbi Yosef Yoizel worked on all his middot and completely controlled his instincts. In fact he trained himself in such a way that his anger was completely superficial. Whenever he became enraged, he was laughing inside. His students said that from time to time he would interrupt his fiery words in order to check that the mitzvah of reprimanding had not transformed itself into actual anger. He would sometimes ask his students later on if he had not exaggerated in his reaction, or if he had done less than necessary. Generally speaking, he would end up reconciling with his adversaries, and not only that, but he cleaved to them with loyal bonds of friendship.