



The Path To Follow

SHOFTIM

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Like a Met Mitzvah

Because of our numerous sins, the transgression of Lashon Harah and slander is completely overlooked by many people. Therefore if someone constantly watches over what he says, in order not to transgress any of the laws pertaining to Lashon Harah and slander, it will earn him a tremendous reward. We are familiar with the statement found in Sefer Charedim, namely that a mitzvah which nobody seeks to perform is like a met mitzvah (a corpse that remains unburied). We must therefore seek out and perform a mitzvah that everyone else neglects, for such a mitzvah raises an accusation: "How bad am I, such that everybody ignores me!" We know just how important it is to occupy ourselves with a met mitzvah, for even a High Priest, a Nazir, and an individual on his way to bring a Passover offering or circumcise his son – people who must not render themselves impure by contact with a corpse, even that of a relative – must render themselves impure for a met mitzvah so that it does not continue to lie in disgrace. A mitzvah that nobody seeks to perform therefore has the same status.

BEGIN WITH YOURSELF (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates...and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment" (Deuteronomy 16:18). A judge and an officer have different roles to play. An officer ensures that law and order is maintained, and if he sees a person breaking the law, he brings him before a judge, who decides what should be done with him. From the above verse, however, we see that an officer also acts as a judge, for the verse states that "they shall judge the people with righteous judgment." This means that both judge and officer must judge righteously. How does an officer judge? He must not use different standards with people, meaning that he must not bring one person before the judge while closing his eyes to another. He must learn from the judge to be impartial towards everyone, not favoring one person over another.

The Torah begins with the plural ("judges and officers"), proceeds to the singular ("shall you appoint"), and then returns to the plural ("they shall judge the people"). This is because it is speaking to both the judge and the officer, who must realize that they also have a judge and an officer, namely Hashem, as it is written: "G-d is a righteous judge" (Psalms 7:12). This means that it is not enough for a city to have numerous judges and officers to ensure law and order, given that they themselves do not act properly and fail to remember that there is a judgment in Heaven. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Celestial Court sit in judgment over everyone, including the judge and officer themselves, for it is written: "Know what is above you: An eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book" (Pirkei Avoth 2:1). There are judges and officers above who look upon you so that you do not distort justice. Therefore if a judge does not conduct himself properly, he will be severely punished. This is the reason for the plural expression: Even above, there are judges to judge everyone, and if both judge and officer place judges and officers over themselves – not seeking special permissions, dispensations, or leniencies for themselves – they can then judge the people with righteousness.

This teaches us that even a tzaddik and a great Torah figure can err by not doing what is right, just as a judge who must ensure that officers are not afraid of criticizing him or showing him his error. As a result, a judge must act as an officer over himself, judging himself at the same time as he judges others. In this way he will be following the dictates of justice and not distorting it.

We find support for this idea among the Sages in the story of Rabbi Yanai, whose tree was overhanging public property. Another person, whose tree was also overhanging public property, was approached by people who asked him to cut his tree, for it was blocking their way. He brought his case before Rabbi Yanai, who said to him: "Leave and return tomorrow." During the night, Rabbi Yanai sent someone to cut his own tree. The next day the man returned and Rabbi Yanai said to him, "Go and cut your tree." The man replied, "But your tree is also overhanging public property!" Rabbi Yanai replied, "Go and look. If my tree has been cut, cut yours as well!" This is precisely what happened (see Bava Batra 60ab).

This is quite surprising! Did Rabbi Yanai not realize that his own tree was overhanging public property and preventing people from passing? Did he only realize that he should cut his own tree when this man came to see him? The answer is, as we mentioned earlier, that even a great man is liable to forget, and even a tzaddik may think that the branches of his own tree are helping people who use public property, insofar as providing them with shade. He will only cut it down when he realizes that nobody has brought up the subject with him because they are too embarrassed to do so. In fact he fulfills in himself the dictum, "Adorn yourself first, and then adorn others." Even if people are content on having the branches of the tzaddik provide them with shade, and even if they consider it to

be a blessing, nevertheless it is not right and it goes against Halachah. Even a tzaddik can err, and people may be afraid to point this out to him. Hence a judge must also act as an officer over himself, so that everyone learns to judge properly from his example. He must especially watch over himself, since everyone learns from his way of life. Officers also learn from him to judge righteously and not to use different standards when dealing with people. The officer must watch over himself in order not to harm others by his judgment. It is therefore written, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates," meaning that in all your actions, you must place judges and officers over yourself, for you wield the power of the law. Nobody can help you in this, for you must monitor yourself, even if you think that people benefit from your actions, as in the story of Rabbi Yanai. Even then you must realize that it is forbidden to act in this way with the public, for they learn how to conduct themselves from you. Everything must therefore be done in justice and righteousness.

Later in the parsha, the passage on the mitzvah of the king appears: "It shall be that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah" (Deuteronomy 17:18). The king must have two Torah scrolls, as the Sages have said: One that is placed in his treasury, and the other that accompanies him outside. Great Torah figures have raised an objection here, for why does the king need two Torah scrolls? It is clear that he should always have one with him, and when he returns to his palace he can place it in his treasury!

It seems that an explanation can be found in the verse itself: "Vehaya [It shall be] that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom." As we know, the Sages have said that the term vehaya denotes joy, and it is formed by the same letters as Hashem's Name. This means that as the king sits upon his throne, he must rejoice in the fact that everyone obeys him and does his will. Yet at the heart of this joy, the king must know Hashem and keep Him in mind, meaning that Hashem is seated even higher on His Celestial Throne, judging him and examining how he judges his people.

This is why the king needs two Torah scrolls, one that accompanies him outside, since he is a king who goes out to his people, and another to remind him that he is the son of Hashem, Who watches him. This scroll is placed in the king's treasury in order to remind him that Hashem sees everything, even what is done within his treasury. The king needs it in order to sense that Hashem expects him to dispense justice in righteousness, just like a judge, as well as to wipe out the descendants of Amalek, build the Temple (as the Sages have said), and deliver the oppressed from their oppressors. The second Torah scroll, found in the king's treasury, alludes to self-annulment before Hashem. It alludes to the fact that the Torah is found within him, as King David said: "Your Torah is in my innards" (Psalms 40:9). This is meant to prevent him from thinking that, since he is the king, he is exempt from learning Torah. These Torah scrolls are alluded to several times in the verse, for the term mishneh (two) is used, as the Sages have pointed out. The verse also states "hazot [this] Torah," and the Torah is called zot, as it is written: "Vezot haTorah [And this is the Torah] that Moses placed before the Children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 4:44). This constitutes a lesson for the king himself, teaching him the proper way to act.

It also constitutes a life lesson and teaching for all Jews. Each person is a king in his own right, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has made him a king over creation. The Sages have said, "All the Children of Israel are sons of the King." Each person must therefore put an effort into learning Torah until it becomes part of his innards, to which the treasury alludes. When a person goes out to attend to his business and returns, or when he goes out to perform a mitzvah and returns, he must also study Torah. This is vehaya, an expression of joy, for it is a great joy before Hashem and for the person seated on the throne of his kingdom to conquer his desires and constantly place Hashem before him.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Pride and Majesty Belong to Hashem

It is written, “So that his heart does not become haughty over his brothers” (Deuteronomy 17:20).

The Ramban states, “Here in the Torah a prohibition against conceit is alluded to, for Scripture prohibited even the king from indulging in conceit and haughtiness of heart, and how much more for other people who are not of such merit.” In speaking about the king, how could anyone say: “So that his heart does not become haughty over his brothers”? How can he be king, rule over his people, and yet feel equal to everyone? How could this be, and why? The king is clearly above everyone!

The Ramban answers this by stating, “Conceit is a reprehensible character trait, and it is loathsome to G-d even in a king. To G-d alone belong greatness and exaltation, and to Him alone belongs praise, and in Him may man glory.” Majesty and power are only borrowed by man, for greatness and exaltation belong to Hashem. He is the One Who makes kings, and majesty belongs to Him. He impoverishes the rich, brings them down to the abyss, elevates the humble to the heavens, and lowers the proud to the ground. It is impossible to believe in this and be proud. Pride is a vile trait. It testifies to an absence of faith in the fact that everything is but temporarily borrowed, as if a feeling of independence could exist. The proud, say the Sages, push against the feet of the Shechinah, for they proclaim that they do not need the Shechinah. If they were not infused with this feeling, they would not exhibit pride.

There is another reason contained in the words of the Ramban: “In Him may man glory, as the matter is explained by King Solomon: ‘Every haughty heart is an abomination to the L-RD’ [Proverbs 16:5]. It is further written, ‘But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me’ [Jeremiah 9:23].” A person whose central concern is understanding and knowing Hashem will therefore have no reason to feel superior in another area, not even in royalty, for everything is secondary to knowing G-d. Hence a king must also ensure that “his heart does not become haughty over his brothers.” In fact it is forbidden for majesty to occupy such an important place that it justifies pride. It is forbidden because it is in contradiction to all the foundations of faith. We must not forget that everything is secondary with regards to the essential requirement of understanding and knowing Hashem. We are allowed to appreciate and be jealous of this alone. Everything else, regardless of what it may be, is borrowed – temporary and secondary – and whoever crowns it with a halo or desires and hopes for it is sinking into error and missing the goal.

– Sha’arei Torah

A Pearl From the Rav: You Shall Judge Righteously

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

We may say that here, by mentioning judges and officers together, the Torah is alluding to the fact that we must ensure that officers are exactly like judges, insofar as they must act with righteousness and justice. We must appoint officers and fear the judges, and officers themselves must be like judges and carry out their tasks in righteousness. In fact it is with regards to both judges and officers that we read “they shall judge.” The phrase “you appoint in all your gates” – written in the singular – means that each Jew must listen to their orders, and each Jew must help officers and judges. If someone is punished, we must sense that everyone is punished. In this way judges and officers will help one another, for then everyone will be careful not to raise accusations among Jews and to ensuring that there is no need to go to court. Further on in the parsha we read, “All the people shall hear and fear, and they shall no longer sin intentionally” (Deuteronomy 17:13). In fact it sometimes happens that an unintentional sin is simply a disguise

for an intentional sin. In other words, someone knows that he has sinned intentionally, but passes it off as an unintentional sin. Here we are warned not to entertain thoughts of sinning intentionally.

Faith in the Sages

It is written, “You shall not turn from the word they tell you, to the right or to the left” (Deuteronomy 17:11).

Rashi states, “Even if this judge tells you that right is left, and that left is right. How much more if he tells you that right is right and left is left!”

The simple meaning of Rashi’s statement is the following: Even if you think that they are telling you that right is left and left is right, even then you must obey them. How much more should you obey them when you have erred in this matter, and they are telling you that right is right and left is left! The words of the Sages always correspond to the truth, and you only think that the opposite is true. Your intelligence is far from that of the Torah, making you think that they are mistaken.

– According to the Ramban

A Powerful Realization

It is written, “All the people shall hear and fear, and they shall no longer sin intentionally” (Deuteronomy 17:13).

Let us examine just what power lies within the solitary warning: “All the people shall hear and fear, and they shall no longer sin intentionally.” The Sages say that a Sanhedrin that sentenced a man to death once in 70 years was called “a murderous tribunal.” It was therefore rare for someone to be sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin, and the Torah says that this was enough to put the fear of sin into people. Since there were not many people sentenced to death, just one every 70 years or more, it must follow that a single death sentence issued by the Sanhedrin had the power to restrain people for many years. This is the practical meaning of, “All the people shall hear and fear, and they shall no longer sin intentionally.”

Therefore such an event, the sentencing of a person to death, must lead to a realization that arouses fear among the entire people. In our time, we are witnesses to the fact that the blood of numerous thousands of Jews has been spilled. Just how greatly should this awaken us from our serene life, and just how powerful an effect should this have to awaken us! However our hearts have turned into stone, to the point that we have failed to realize how much we must tremble and fear.

– Rabbi Aharon Baksht

A King – For What?

It is written, “You shall surely set over yourself a king whom the L-RD your G-d shall choose; from among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself. You cannot place over yourself a foreigner, who is not your brother” (Deuteronomy 17:15).

What is the difference between a king in Israel and a king among the nations? Among the nations of the world, the entire reason for a king is to represent the people and lead them in war. Yet for the Children of Israel, who must trust in Hashem to save them, such a reason is unimportant. When leaders guide the people in the path of the Torah, Hashem’s providence saves them from their enemies. The exclusive goal of having a king in Israel is actually to affirm the role of the Torah.

According to this explanation, we may understand the passage as follows: “When you come into the land...and you will say, ‘I will set a king over myself, like all the nations’” (v.14) – meaning a king who can lead you in war – then we are told, “You shall surely set over yourself a king whom the L-RD your G-d shall choose.” It is precisely the chosen one of Hashem that you must choose, for Israel’s king is not like the kings of the nations. Hence the verse also states, “From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself” – although a foreigner may also be very gifted when it comes to waging war, “you cannot place over yourself a foreigner, who is not your brother.” This is because the primary reason for this selection

is the observance of Torah and mitzvot. It is for this reason that the verse specifies “you shall set,” not “you shall elevate” or “you shall appoint.” It is tassim (“you shall set”), a term that evokes sam (“strong drink”), for the mitzvah of selecting a king is such that, if those asking for a king are doing so for the sake of Heaven, in order to strongly establish the Torah among the people, then their king will be like an elixir of peace (sam chaim) for them. In the opposite case, if their intention is only for their king to lead them in war, then he will become a tyrant for them.

– Rabbi Eliezer Shulevitz

Not in Chronological Order

It is written, “Who is the man who has built a new house...planted a vineyard...betrothed a woman?” (Deuteronomy 20:5-7).

The Rambam states, “It is the way of sensible people to obtain a job that will support them, then to buy a house and then to get married, for it is written: ‘Who is the man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? ... Who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? ... Who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her?’” (Hilchot Deot 5:11). This is extremely surprising, since the Torah states “house” before “vineyard”! How can the Rambam therefore use this passage to prove that one should first seek a livelihood and only then build a house?

The Chatam Sofer explained this perfectly by saying, “When the Torah states, ‘Who is the man who has planted a vineyard and has not redeemed it,’ it means that the time has come to redeem it, but he has not yet done so. Now the time for the firstfruit is four years after the planting of a vine, as the verse states: ‘In the fourth year, all its fruit shall be holy for giving praise to the L-RD’ [Leviticus 19:24]. Therefore even though a house is mentioned first, in reality a vine must first be planted because four years have already passed since then, and now is the time to redeem it.”

– From the Responsa of the Chatam Sofer

The Power of a Leader

It is written, “The shoulder, the cheeks, and the maw” (Deuteronomy 18:3).

This means that the Kohen who ministers before the people, resolving disputes and examining lesions in order to teach Hashem’s ways to the people, must possess these three traits in order to lead the people in the path of Torah and the fear of Heaven. The first trait is a strong and outstretched arm, which he needs to lead Hashem’s wars against would-be destroyers in times of need. This is the “shoulder,” which corresponds to: “[Pinchas] took a spear in his hand” (Numbers 25:7). The second trait is the gift of speech – “honey and milk are under your tongue” (Song of Songs 4:11) – which he needs to attract people with his words, for life depends on the tongue. This includes knowing how to pray for the needs of the Jewish people, this being “the cheeks,” corresponding to: “Pinchas arose and prayed” (Psalms 106:30). The third trait is for him to be completely righteous. He must not think one thing and do another, which corresponds to the “maw” that the Kohen receives.

– Ateret Paz

Overview of the Parsha

Following Parsha Re’eh, which deals with the mitzvot pertaining to entering Eretz Israel and the foundations of Hashem’s Temple, Parsha Shoftim deals with the laws regulating public life. The parsha begins with the concept of justice and the nomination of judges, and it continues with the concept of the king and the mitzvot that are specific to him. It then deals with the Kohanim and their inheritance and role in the service of Hashem. The Torah warns against a perversion of justice and mentions the subject of spilled blood and cities of refuge. It also deals with valid testimony in judgment, waging war against enemies, the choice of soldiers and their preparation, and the warnings given before going into battle. It finally discusses the heifer whose neck is broken in order to atone for the shedding of innocent blood.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Inside and Outside

It is written, “When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah.... It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life so that he learns to fear the L-RD his G-d” (Deuteronomy 17:18).

The Sages say that the king had to write for himself two Torah scrolls, one that accompanied him outside and hung from his arm like an amulet, and a second scroll that was deposited in his treasury (Sanhedrin 21b). Rabbi Eliezer Shulevitz Zatzal, the Mashgiach of the Lomza yeshiva, explains this law from a deep prospective: The king of Israel, in the power of his role, is obligated to demonstrate authority and command respect and awe. The Talmud contains a long list of laws that are meant to safeguard the respect and awe of the king. In fact the Rambam states, “We show great honor to the king, and awe and fear of the king are instilled in every person, as it is written: ‘You shall set a king over yourself’ [Deuteronomy 17:15], i.e., that his awe should be ‘over’ you. No one may ride on his horse, sit upon his throne, or use his scepter, his crown, or any of his personal belongings. When he leads the people, the king is forbidden to appear small in his own eyes. He must demonstrate power, authority, and steadfastness” (Hilchot Melachim 2). Such behavior, however, must be guided by the Torah so that the king’s role does not become one of domination. The king must not feel that he is the only figure of importance on account of the glory that he enjoys. This is why the king attaches an amulet-like Torah scroll to his arm, which accompanies him outside. As such, he is always close to the Torah as he attends to his affairs. This Torah scroll is a light for his feet, one that guides him in all his ways.

The king has another Torah scroll that is meant for his most profound sentiments. The soul of Israel’s king is found in his treasury. Hashem commands him to ensure that his heart is humble and empty. He must be merciful towards small and great alike, respecting the very smallest, and he must conduct himself with extreme humility. He must bear their burdens, their complaints, and their anger like one who bears a child.

The concrete example of these two Torah scrolls helped our teacher King David, who became as pliant as a worm when learning Torah. When he went out to battle, however, he became as hard as a lance (Moed Katan 16b). Such was the effect of these two Torah scrolls, being subject to the commandment: “It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life so that he learns to fear the L-RD his G-d.”

EISHET CHAYIL

With Perfect Faith

The perfect faith that characterizes women demonstrates itself in all its power during trying times. Rabbeinu Yosef Ya’avetz, among the exiles of Spain, described the greatness of the perfect faith of Jewish women, who were put to the test during the horrifying days of the expulsion from Spain. He wrote, “During the exile from Spain, because of our numerous and grave sins, most of those who boasted of their wisdom converted during those bitter days. As for the women and the uneducated, they delivered their possessions and bodies for the sanctification of their Creator’s Name. The women of Spain led their husbands in dying for the sanctification of Hashem’s Name, and men who had boasted of their wisdom converted, a blow from which we can never recover.”

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

Arise, O Jerusalem

It is written, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger...who says to Zion, ‘Your G-d reigns!’ ” (Isaiah 52:7).

During the time of the gaon Rabbi Zalman Shpitzer Zatzal, the Rav of Vienna, members of the community wanted to modify the prayer rites by removing certain blessings from the Shemoneh Esrei. These blessings were founded upon our future deliverance: “Sound the Shofar,” “Return to Jerusalem Your city,” and “The scion of David.” The reason for these changes is that they wanted to appear to the other nations as citizens who were repatriated and devoted to their new country with all their heart and soul. They did not want to appear as citizens who thought of Eretz Israel or the construction of the Temple, for they were well-off in their new country. Rabbi Zalman admonished them for such proposed changes, warning that if they printed new prayer books that removed all references to Eretz Israel and the construction of the Temple, he would resign from his position. And that is precisely what he did. On the meaning of the verse, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalms 122:6), he said that we must always pray for Jerusalem, even when “there is peace within your wall, serenity within your palaces” (v.7), even when we are dwelling in Austria under the shadow of the Austrian king, a generous king like Francis Joseph. Why so? Because we must pray for our Jewish brothers who are living in Russia and who endure cruel decrees. Thus it is written, “For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I shall speak of peace in your midst” (v.8). Even if all Jews were dwelling in peace and tranquilly among the nations of the world, we would still have to pray for Jerusalem, since “for the sake of the House of the L-RD, I will request good for you” (v.9). We must ask for the Temple to be rebuilt quickly and in our time. This is impossible in a foreign land, for it can only happen in Jerusalem, the holy city that is our glory.

– Beit Israel

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Moshe Forhand – Among the Great Rabbis of Hungary

The gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Forhand Zatzal served his Creator every day from before sunrise. As soon as the sun rose, he would pray and recite psalms with great enthusiasm. His prayers were also characterized by great enthusiasm, and every day he would spread out his heart before Hashem with tremendous emotion as tears flowed from his eyes. He poured out his soul in prayer, the sound of which moved everyone in synagogue. Especially in times of hardship, he roared like a lion during his prayers and supplications for the Jewish people in their suffering. The pages of his book of Psalms testified to this, for they were all inundated with the tears that he shed for each and every person who came to him in the bitterness of their heart.

Rabbi Moshe Forhand led his community with strength and dignity for 32 years, all equally good, in the city of Makava, guiding it in the ways of Torah and the fear of Heaven. He witnessed the city where he dwelled experience peace and glory, and he also saw it experience tremendous suffering, that of the entire community as the Holocaust shattered the Jewish world. He saw the entire exile before him like a fire. When terrible rumors from afar began to spread about the disasters befalling the Jewish people, he finished the entire book of Psalms early one morning with torrents of tears flowing from his eyes and cries coming from his heart. He instituted a regular minyan in his town's synagogue to recite the book of Psalms every day.

One day in his house, he said with an emotional voice: “The moment has come for me to return home.” Those who heard it were surprised. He then repeated this phrase, adding that he was leaving for his community and would defend it as best he could before the Celestial court. He would go and ask for mercy so that his descendants and the members of his community would be saved. On Thursday, Sivan 17 5704, Rabbi Moshe Forhand rendered his soul to his Creator in holiness and purity.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch

Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch was sitting in the Beit Midrash learning Torah. His face resembled the sun and the ministering angels, for he had never lifted his eyes upon a woman in his entire life. One day the Satan came and was jealous of him. The Satan said, “Is it possible that a man like this has never sinned?” He said before the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the universe, Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch – what is he before You?” He replied, “He is perfectly righteous.” The Satan said, “Allow me to tempt him.” Hashem replied, “You cannot defeat him.” He said, “Nevertheless, allow me!” Hence the Satan came to Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch in the form of a woman, one more beautiful than anyone since Naaman the sister of Tuval Cain, over whom the ministering angels erred, as it is written: “The sons of G-d saw the daughters of man” (Genesis 6:2). The Satan stood before Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch, who turned his face the other way. He stood to his left, and he turned to the right. He stood to his right, and he turned to the left. He then began standing all around him, until finally Rabbi Mattia ben Cheresch thought: “I’m afraid that the evil inclination will overcome me and I will sin.” What did this tzaddik do? He summoned a student and said, “Bring me a flame and some nails.” He brought him some burning nails, which Mattia ben Cheresch used to gouge out his own eyes. When the Satan saw this, he was stunned and fell backwards. At the same time, Hashem summoned the angel Raphael and said, “Go heal Mattia ben Cheresch.” The angel stood before Mattia ben Cheresch, who asked: “Who are you?” He replied, “I am Raphael. Hashem has sent me to heal you.” He said, “Leave me be. What is done is done.” The angel returned to Hashem and said, “Master of the universe, this is what Mattia told me.” Hashem replied, “Tell him that I will ensure that the evil inclination will never control him.” The angel then healed him. From here the Sages say that a man who never looks upon a woman, especially the wife of his fellow, will never be overcome by the evil inclination. – Yalkut Shimoni, Vayechi 161

A TRUE STORY

Judges and Officers

The Sages have said, “A man should always be eager to run to see the kings of Israel, and not only to see the kings of Israel, but also to see the kings of the Gentiles. In this way, if he is worthy, he may be able to distinguish between the kings of Israel and the kings of the Gentiles” (Berachot 9b).

Rabbi Tzvi Mikhal Shapira lived in Jerusalem about 100 years ago. He was an upright and pious man, and during his entire life he was careful never to venture outside the walls of Jerusalem. Each night he would walk from his home in the Batei Mahaseh neighborhood to the Kotel in order recite Tikkun Chatzot, a moving prayer that could be heard from afar. In 5658, German Emperor Guillaume II traveled to Israel. All the residents of Jerusalem were excited as they awaited his arrival in the city, and the community's rabbis and leaders decided to welcome the emperor and recite the blessing of Shenatan Mikevodo l'vasar vadam (“Who has given of His glory to flesh and blood”). Rabbi Tzvi Mikhal Shapira was uncertain about what he should do for the emperor's arrival on the following day. Should he proceed according to the din and venture outside the walls of Jerusalem to say the blessing for kings, or did this mitzvah not apply to him, since he had never gone outside its walls? That night, Rabbi Tzvi Mikhal went to the Kotel as usual, but he tripped and fell on the way, injuring his right leg. Several of those accompanying him to the Kotel rushed to his aid. Yet to their great surprise, they saw him smiling. In fact there was even a look of contentment on his face! “Rabbi Tzvi Mikhal!” they exclaimed as he showed them his injured leg. “Why are you rejoicing?” With great concentration, he replied: “Blessed be Hashem! I no longer have any doubts as to whether I should go outside the city walls tomorrow morning.”