



The Path To Follow

KI-TEITZEI

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HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

RABBI DAVID HANANIA

PINTO CHLITA

11, rue du plateau

75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

Responsible of publication
Hanania Soussan

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Protecting the Ears

It is written, "You shall have a shovel in addition to your implements" (Deuteronomy 23:14).

The Gemara states, "Bar Kapharah said: 'Do not read aznecha [your implements], but rather aznecha [your ear]. [This means to say] that if a man hears something improper, he should plug his finger into his ear.' This is the same as what Rabbi Eleazar said: 'So that if a man hears an unworthy thing, he can plug his fingers into his ears.' A member of the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught, 'Why is the whole ear hard, and the earlobe soft? If a man hears an unworthy thing, he should bend the earlobe into it.' Our Sages have taught, 'A man should not let his ears hear idle things, for they are the first of the limbs to be burned'" (Ketubot 5ab).

– Chafetz Chaim

THE WAR AGAINST THE EVIL INCLINATION

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "When you go out to war against your enemies...and you take captives of him" (Deuteronomy 21:10). We must ask why the verse states, "captives of him" rather than "captives of them." The answer is that, as we know, it is speaking about the war against the evil inclination, which is man's greatest enemy. Hence we learn a very important lesson from this verse, namely that when a person wholeheartedly studies Torah, he will conquer the evil inclination and capture it. In fact not only will a person control what the evil inclination wanted to take from him, he will also take captives from it, a reference to the captives that the evil inclination imprisoned and took from others. This means that such a person will merit, and enable others to merit as well, being saved from the evil inclination and given the ability to conquer it. This is alluded to in the expression "captives of him." As we know, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that he himself could free the world from judgment, and people said that he was able to grant merit to a large number of people. This is the meaning of the term shivyo ("captives of him"), which is formed by the initials of Shimon bar Yochai. It means that by the power of his Torah, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was able to overcome his own evil inclination and also capture all the sins of the entire world from it, just as a person owns everything that is acquired by his slave. This was because the evil inclination became Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's slave, for he had taken the evil inclination as his captive. Therefore everything belonging to the evil inclination henceforth belonged to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the result being that he was able to bestow merit upon all the Children of Israel at the same time as himself.

Every Jew has additional strength because of this, for if he elevates himself in Torah and mitzvot, he can take from the evil inclination all the strength and everything that it took from others. Every Jew can earn merit for himself and grant merit to others so that they can also grow spiritually, conquer the evil inclination, and draw closer to Hashem. We still need to understand, however, how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai could grant merit to all Jews, since the Sages have said: "If a man says that the Holy One, blessed be He, is lax in the execution of justice, his life will be forfeited" (Bava Kama 50a). Therefore how can the Holy One, blessed be He, be so lenient and not ask for an accounting of Israel's sins because of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai? The explanation is the following: The main thing that prevents a person from repenting is the evil inclination, as the Sages have said: "Sovereign of the universe, it is known before You that our will is to do Your will. Yet what prevents us? It is the leaven in the dough" (Berachot 17a). As Rashi states, "The evil inclination in our heart causes it to rise." It follows that when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai placed the evil inclination under his control, it could no longer make anyone sin, and the Children of Israel could solely perform mitzvot and repent of all their prior sins. In that case the deliberate sins they had committed would become merits. Above all, if they observed Shabbat and the covenant of circumcision, they would be delivered. That is the main thing.

We find this alluded to in the expression "veshavita [and you take captives] of him," the term shavita being formed by the same letters as shabbat vai. Now the letters forming the term vai are the initials of the expression chayil bala vayekiyenu ("he swallowed wealth, but will disgorge it" [Job 20:15]), a sanctified term for circumcision. In other words, by these two things

the Children of Israel would be delivered and conquer the evil inclination, all by the merit of the man who loves Israel, and who bestows merit upon the entire Jewish people by the power of his Torah study. Yet before anything else, a person must know how to conquer the evil inclination, which is not an easy thing to do. Let us therefore look at what we need to learn for this.

While I was in Jerusalem with my teacher, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, he told me that before sitting down to study, the author of Ketzot HaChoshen would repent to such a degree that he would cry. He would say to himself, "Perhaps the verse, 'G-d says to the wicked: What right do you have to declare My statutes?' [Psalms 50:16] is about me?" We learn something amazing from this, which is that this great tzaddik prepared for learning Torah by completely annulling himself. Unfortunately, today we see people who prepare themselves for studying Torah in a completely different way: They smoke a few cigarettes, drink a cup of coffee, chat a bit with their friends, and only then do they "accept" to sit down and study. We must realize that this is not the way to prepare ourselves for learning Torah. Instead we must learn from the way of the Ketzot HaChoshen. This kind of preparation is essential for being successful in learning Torah, for it is only through the right kind of preparation that we can conquer the evil inclination when studying, thereby avoiding pride, a love for honor, and jealousy. If we want to merit the light of the Torah, we must conduct ourselves with humility. As we know, the evil inclination often enters the Beit Midrash with a person as his good friend, sitting next to him and wanting to study with him. Yet when it comes time to study, it infuses him with foreign thoughts and tries to make him sin.

As a result, before studying Torah, a person must shed tears and say to the evil inclination: "Evidoor! What right do you have to recite Hashem's statutes? Why have you followed me here to study Torah, for the Beit Midrash, the yeshiva, isn't your place! Why are you sitting here and bothering me?"

When a person acts in this way, exerting all his strength to prepare himself for learning Torah without any foreign thoughts, he will succeed, as the Sages state: "If he says, 'I have labored and found,' you may believe him" (Megillah 6b). It is in this way that we can conquer the evil inclination, as King David said: "One thing have I asked of the L-RD, that I will seek after: That I might dwell in the house of the L-RD...to behold the beauty of the L-RD and to contemplate in His Temple" (Psalms 27:4).

We know the classic question: Why did David first have a single and unique request, but then asked for several things? He asked to dwell, to behold, and to contemplate! We may explain this by saying that King David asked for a single thing: For the evil inclination not to disturb him as he studied Torah and performed mitzvot. In that case he could automatically obtain all the things he desired. However if the evil inclination were to disturb him, he would achieve nothing, since it would enter the Beit Midrash with him. This was King David's method for preparing to study Torah: He asked Hashem for the evil inclination not to disturb him. Every person must learn from King David and ask Hashem for the same thing. He will then be able to enslave the evil inclination and succeed in his Torah study, which will earn merit both for himself and the entire Jewish people.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Hashem's Table

It is written, "This son of ours is wayward and rebellious. He does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard" (Deuteronomy 21:20).

The Torah specifies the characteristics of the rebellious son who is to be sentenced to death: He does not listen, and he gives himself over to gluttony and drunkenness, these two things being the same. Neither his father nor his mother, who saw to his education, know better than he does! Perhaps they know what he has to do, but they certainly do not understand what he wants to do. This week's parsha teaches us that such a son has no chance of a better future. Due to what he will become, it is better if he dies in his youth. All people are known by their deeds, states Orchot Tzaddikim (Sha'ar Lashon Harah). How so? If you see someone who is constantly gorging on food and alcohol, know that he is a glutton and a drunk. A person who has the proper attitude towards food will not turn eating into an event. The book Menorat HaMaor (vol. II, ch. 1) explains this in greater detail: "The tzaddik eats in order to live" – he eats little, just enough to live and serve Hashem. However the evildoer does not act in this way; he eats for bodily pleasure and to fill his stomach. Those who seek to quench their desires will do so with permitted things today, and with forbidden things tomorrow. When they cannot obtain what they want, they will steal it from others. It is in this regard that the Torah commands the father to have his son sentenced to death when he sees that he is a glutton and a drunk. The Torah states, "You shall eat before the L-RD your G-d...the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil...so that you may learn to fear the L-RD your G-d always" (Deuteronomy 14:23). This demonstrates that eating the second tithe in holiness leads to the fear of Heaven. That is why a rebellious son was never condemned in Jerusalem. There was a great deal of second tithes in Jerusalem, and anyone who ate a large amount of it could not become a rebellious son, since eating it would certainly lead him to the fear of Heaven. Eating the second tithe could constitute a repetition of the proper way of eating at all times, for it was not only the second tithe that people ate at the table of Hashem, for every table belongs to Hashem, being very elevated.

When You Build a New House

It is written, "When you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house ki yipol hanofel [when the fallen falls]" (Deuteronomy 22:8).

We need to understand why it is written "when the fallen falls," rather than "lest one falls." Why is 'fall' mentioned twice? This is speaking about the spiritual life of man. As a result, a person who does not put a guardrail on his roof – meaning that he does not put up fences around himself to be protected from excess, but continues to rejoice in it – has in retrospect already fallen once. If he continues along this path, he will regrettably fall a second time and never get up.

A person must always be careful to spiritually elevate himself, not to fall from his level. If he is not adding to his virtues, it means that he has already grown accustomed to his situation and it will become a routine for him. In fact he will no longer pay any attention to his Torah observance, as Rashi says on the verse: "Vehaya eikev [And it

will be, when you hearken]." Rashi states that this is speaking about the easy mitzvot that a person tends to trample upon with his heels. When a person performs mitzvot with devotion and joy (vehaya being an expression of joy), it will add to his Torah observance, for otherwise he will perform mitzvot without desire, without intention, and without love or enthusiasm. If he observes the Torah in joy, he will not be doing it out of habit, something that is called adding to the mitzvah. Thus the Torah states: "If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof" – if you establish limits and fences for yourself, and if you perform mitzvot in joy, this is called adding, and you will not fall. If a person constructs a new home only, meaning that he only observes the mitzvot that the Torah commands – without reinforcing them – the mitzvot will not protect him from falling. He will then be considered as having fallen once, and his end will be bitter.

The Importance of the Days of Youth

It is written, "When a man has a wayward and rebellious son" (Deuteronomy 21:18).

This passage on the rebellious son is connected to the previous passage concerning the firstborn. Just as the importance of the firstborn stems from that fact that he is the first son, likewise the first years of a man's life have a tremendous impact on the rest of his years, and their influence is felt throughout his entire life. If we see that a person is a glutton during the first months of early adulthood, when he can be punished (the period which the rebellious son deals with), it is a clear sign that he will end up becoming a glutton for the rest of his life and eventually become liable to death. The Torah has therefore said that it is better for him to die innocent than to die guilty. From here we must learn that a person should pay attention, above all, to the first days following the Bar Mitzvah, to the first hours of the year, and to the first hours of the day, ensuring that they are good and upright, for the beginning has a tremendous influence on everything that follows.

– Shem MiShemuel

The Inner Aspect of Education

It is written, "When a man has a wayward and rebellious son" (Deuteronomy 21:18).

Our Sages have said that the entire premise behind the passage on the beautiful captive is that she will end up giving birth to a rebellious son. In fact the education of an innocent child must produce a good result, but only when we pay no attention to superficial concerns. We must focus solely on substance – on the inner aspect of things – not on where we study, but on what we study. A school may be spacious and nice, with pleasant and courteous teachers, but if it lacks the inner spirit of Torah and Judaism, it cannot produce an upright son; he will be rebellious. If we gaze upon the beautiful captive because of her appearance, without taking into consideration that she is a foreigner, it means that we are placing form over substance, and therefore she will give birth to a rebellious son.

– Even HaEzel

The Mitzvah of Working on Our Middot

It is written, "You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road and hide yourself from them. You shall surely stand them up with him" (Deuteronomy 22:4).

The Gemara teaches that if a person finds himself in a situation where he can either a friend unload his donkey or help an enemy

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Remembering Miriam

It is written in the Torah, “Remember what the L-RD your G-d did to Miriam” (Deuteronomy 24:9).

According to the Ramban, it is a positive mitzvah to remember the punishment incurred for speaking Lashon Harah. There are two sources for the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah. One is, “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people” (Leviticus 19:16) and the other is, “Remember what the L-RD your G-d did to Miriam.” In reality, we learn two different aspects of the prohibition from these verses, the first being the prohibition against causing harm or pain to others by speaking Lashon Harah. The second is the prohibition against unfavorably judging the deeds of others. These laws have their origins in these two verses. Suppose that by gossiping, we let Shimon know what Levi said about him, and in turn this information harms Reuven. Even if we did not deliberately seek to disparage others, given that we did not speak to Shimon in order to harm Reuven, we still awaken strict justice by doing so. On the other hand, the story of Miriam does not, on the face of it, mention any harm or pain caused to Moses, since the Torah immediately states: “The man Moses was exceedingly humble” (Numbers 12:3). This tells us that he was not affected by Miriam’s words. In fact she had no intention of harming him, as the Sifrei states: “If Miriam, who had no intention other than his good...” However the basis of the prohibition pertaining to Miriam was that she did not favorably judge Moses’ deeds.

The Chafetz Chaim wrote in klal 3, note 7: “Know that even if Lashon Harah has not harmed anyone, and even if we imagine that in principle nothing bad will happen to the subject because of what we have said about him, it is still forbidden to speak ill of him.” In Beer Mayim Chaim (footnotes to Chafetz Chaim), he explains that the Torah does not want a single Jew to speak ill of another. He brings a proof from a statement found in Sha’arei Teshuvah: There are two consequences of speaking Lashon Harah: The harm and shame caused to others, and the choice of judging others in a bad light and rejoicing in their misfortune. Therefore even when we do not harm or shame others, the second element still exists, and it is forbidden to unfavorably judge others by speaking ill of them.

– From Pahad Yitzchak

EISHET CHAYIL

Hospitality

Children are the fruit and reward in this world for the mitzvah of hospitality, for whoever is careful to demonstrate hospitality will merit children. We find that a Shunamite woman welcomed Elisha to her home and provided him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp. She was a wise woman, as it is written: “A great woman” (II Kings 4:8). This means that she was an important woman, and everything she said was spoken with wisdom and in the proper order. She mentioned a bed before a table because a person returning from a journey is tired, and he wants to rest more than he wants to eat. Hence a bed is mentioned first, followed by a table and a chair, and finally a lamp, for we light a lamp when the sun sets. Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov, “If a man entertains a Torah scholar in his house and lets him enjoy his possessions, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had sacrificed the daily burnt-offering” (Berachot 10b). Because the Shunamite woman exhibited this virtue, she was rewarded with a child, a boy who grew up to become the prophet Habakkuk.

– Rabbeinu Bechaye, Kad HaKemach

load his donkey, he should help load the donkey of his enemy “in order to subdue his evil inclination” (Bava Metzia 32b). Here the Gemara explains that one might think that relieving a suffering animal is a Torah mitzvah, and therefore helping unload the donkey of a friend is the preferable thing to do. Nevertheless, helping load the donkey of an enemy “in order to subdue his evil inclination” is preferable. This is surprising, for how is it possible to transgress a Torah mitzvah concerning the suffering of an animal simply to subdue one’s evil inclination? The answer is that the goal of subduing one’s evil inclination improves a person’s middot, making him a better person for the future.

This is because a person who gets used to following his instincts, such as by not helping an enemy load his donkey, is liable to commit numerous other sins and veer off the right path. However for future considerations alone, perhaps a Torah mitzvah should not be pushed back, since pushing it back is representative of a certain attitude, whereas the future is simply a possibility – especially since the future does not depend on this deed alone, but on numerous other factors and deeds. We must perforce say that even if it is possible that the reason is to distance ourselves from sin, subduing the evil inclination constitutes a mitzvah in and of itself. In fact it is such an important mitzvah that it pushes aside another Torah mitzvah.

– Rabbi Aharon Kotler

Implant Compassion in Our Hearts

It is written, “So that it will be good for you and you will prolong your days” (Deuteronomy 22:7).

The Ramban explains the reason behind the mitzvah of sending the mother bird away: “We should not have a cruel heart and be uncompassionate.” Nevertheless, our Sages include the compassionate among those “whose life is not a life” (Pesachim 113b), for the compassionate are always suffering on account of the problems of others, though they have no way to save them. Hence their lives become bitter and short. The Torah therefore says that a person who fulfills the mitzvah of sending away a mother bird, and thus becomes among the compassionate, should not fear that his life will be filled with anguish. The verse therefore states: “It will be good for you” – you will be able to save the unfortunate; “and you will prolong your days” – being compassionate will not longer shorten your life, and your days will be prolonged.

– Ketav Sofer

Overview of the Parsha

From Parshiot Re’eh and Shoftim, which deal with mitzvot for the community when dwelling in Eretz Israel, Parsha Ki Teitzei moves on to social and individual mitzvot for daily life. The parsha begins with mitzvot pertaining to the family, the woman of beautiful appearance, the firstborn of the hated wife, and the rebellious son. It continues with various mitzvot showing the ways of righteousness that bestow honor upon man, animal, and vegetable life. We read about the laws concerning the young virgin, and the fact that Hashem’s community must protect itself from every indecent thing. The parsha ends by the orders pertaining to justice in all areas of life, and by commanding us not to forget about Amalek.