



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Yielding Before Others

The Chafetz Chaim said, "If people fulfill mitzvot in the most elaborate way possible, such as by spending their money on acquiring a superb etrog, an exquisite mezuzah, or the most beautiful pair of tefillin, then they should also spend their money in order to avoid disputes, Lashon Hara, and gossiping." By saying this, the Chafetz Chaim was criticizing people whose mouths are constantly complaining against others (even if such complaints are justified), and who allow themselves to hound others and embitter their lives. He repeated the pronouncement of the Midrash, namely that G-d is on the side of the pursued, even when the pursuer is a tzaddik and the pursued is an evildoer (Vayikra Rabba 27:5). Although the Chafetz Chaim placed greater value on time than on any other commodity, he would sometimes spend hours or even days making peace between people and solving disputes. He succeeded in his efforts, for even a heart as hard as rock would melt before admonishment that stems from faithful and sincere love.

THE JOY OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT: BEING INSCRIBED FOR A GOOD YEAR FILLED WITH BLESSINGS (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

In his book Kovetz Sichot, the great tzaddik Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel Zatzal said that every festival reflects a different way of serving G-d. There is the exodus from Egypt on Passover, the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, the mitzvah of the sukkah on Sukkot, and the fear and magnitude of the judgment on Rosh Hashanah. In fact in the U'Netaneh Tokef prayer we recite, "The angels quake with fear and trembling...for not even they are innocent in Your eyes!" This is because the day of judgment is founded upon the fact that it is an awe-inspiring day, one that we have good reason to fear. On the other hand, we read in the book of Nehemiah: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today [Rosh Hashanah] is sacred to our G-d. Do not be sad. The enjoyment of the L-RD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Hence the prophet is clearly stating that Rosh Hashanah is a day of joy and celebration. We therefore need to explain how this can be reconciled with the fear of the judgment, which is among the duties of the day.

To what can this be compared? It is like a person who has committed an offense against a great king, and who is constantly trying to meet the king in order to beg his forgiveness, for he can no longer tolerate the pain of having disobeyed the king's orders. As for the king, he has absolutely no desire to meet this person, and therefore he completely ignores him. Thus the person's sorrow grows every time he sees the king, especially since he realizes that the king is still supporting him and enabling him to live freely, despite not wanting to forgive his sin. Yet suddenly, the king summons him.

It is obvious that this person would be extremely happy and make a feast to celebrate the fact that the king has finally summoned him. He will be happy to finally explain himself, be it for better or worse, because he finds it difficult to live freely off the king. Despite fearing the outcome of the king's judgment, he is also consoled by the fact that, although he offended the king and irritated him by his deeds, the king has still not punished him. In fact he still continues to ensure his sustenance! Hence he prepares himself in terms of how to speak to the king and what supplications to offer him. In this way, there is still a good chance that he may be acquitted in a few days. We clearly understand the meaning of this story.

Although we have irritated the Creator of the world by our deeds on numerous occasions, and as a result we are far from Him, He still does not hide His face from us. In fact He acts with compassion towards us and enables the Jewish people to live by the merit of the Patriarchs, since we have sinned so greatly that even our prayers no longer bear fruit in Heaven. When He finally summons us in judgment, we must remember what Nehemiah said: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today is sacred to our G-d. Do not be sad. The enjoyment of the L-RD is your strength." Even if Rosh Hashanah is a terrible day of judgment in one respect – since nobody knows what the verdict will be – in another respect we must rejoice on this day, for the reality of things is that we are still alive at the end of the year, thank G-d, and Hashem has revealed a favorable countenance to us, even if it was hidden.

Hence on this day, when Hashem wants to meet us in judgment, it means that He has no desire to reject us. Who knows? Perhaps He will show us favor on the day of judgment! That is

why we must rejoice, which is not inconsistent with the fear of the day. When the Jewish people repent, they completely change, for the angels that were created by their sins no longer recognize those who created them. Therefore they completely leave them, no longer having anyone to accuse.

This is truly among the kindnesses of Hashem, Who confuses the Satan and the angels created by the sins we committed. Since we have repented and changed, we no longer have any reason to worry about accusers on the day of judgment. Even if we have committed sins, the angels no longer recognize us, and they no longer have anyone to accuse for these sins. We may say that when a person goes out to war against his enemy, he has no reason to worry about the sins he committed, since he is going to destroy Hashem's enemies, those who deny His existence. That is what will help a person to win, and by the merit of this devotion, Hashem will save him from the sins he committed.

In regards to the judgment itself, however, we do have something to fear. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, knows what a person has done throughout the year, and we see that in this decisive moment it may happen that he "loses his entire world in an instant." This may happen because, instead of remaining in this world to disturb the Children of Israel, the Satan will decide to ascend on high to accuse them, knowing that below there are already many accusers that were created through sin.

Yet it is precisely when the Satan thinks that he has already won the war against Israel and his joy is at its height, that he experiences a great fall. This happens because at that very instant, the Children of Israel sound the Shofar in fear and trembling, and they repent. They are no longer recognizable at that point. Therefore on Rosh Hashanah we can eat and drink, and also wear white clothing, for Hashem's enjoyment is our strength because the Satan is supplanted. We alone are considered as children by the Holy One, blessed be He, for we have repented. Here we truly see the goodness of Hashem, because the sins that we have committed are either transmitted to the nations of the world or are transformed into merits when we repent. All this occurs according to the will of Hashem, Who decides where these sins will go and how they will be transformed. As for us, we will merit a good year that is filled with blessings because we have repented. This is what we should always have in mind, repenting and strengthening ourselves in the service of Hashem. In this way we will receive the true blessing of a good and sweet year, and we will be inscribed and immediately sealed for a good life and peace. Amen, may it be so.

The Pinto Associations

around the world, along with Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, send you their best wishes for an exceptional new year 5770.

Shana Tova!

May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.



MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

What Would a Good Driver Do?

It is written, "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin.... Before Whom you are destined to give an accounting [liten din ve'cheshbon]" (Pirkei Avoth 3:1).

What is meant by din and what is meant by cheshbon?

The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Zeev Soloveitchik Zatzal of Brisk explained, "Din is the act committed by a person, and cheshbon is the situation and circumstances in which he found himself, and on account of which he felt obligated to act as he did."

The Rav concretized this idea with a true story: In a certain town there was an old wagon driver who had been practicing his profession for many years. One day, a new wagon driver came into town, a young man who began to compete with the old driver.

The old driver met the young driver and said to him, "You have come to unfairly compete against me, for according to the law you must leave this place. Nevertheless I'm ready to relinquish my rights, and I'll let you work as a wagon driver in our town...but only under one condition: I want to verify that you're a competent driver. If you pass a test, I'll let you remain in town. Otherwise you'll have to leave." Upon agreeing to terms, the old driver began to question his younger counterpart: "What should a driver do if he is traveling with a carriage that is filled with passengers and the carriage suddenly gets bogged down in the mud and the horses can't pull it out?" The young driver replied, "He should ask the passengers to remove their luggage from the carriage to lighten the load, in which case the horses may be able to pull it out."

The old driver asked, "And what would happen if, even after doing this, the horses were still unable to pull the carriage from the mud?" The young driver replied, "Then I would ask the passengers to get off as well, in order to make it much lighter."

The old driver continued, "And if the carriage still didn't move?"

The young driver replied, "Then I would ask the passengers to push the carriage from behind, for then they might be able to dislodge it from the mud."

The old driver continued, "And if the carriage still wouldn't move?"
"Then I wouldn't know what to do."

The old driver said to him, "You've failed the test. According to our agreement, you have to leave town."

The young driver replied, "I'll comply with our agreement and leave town, as I promised. But first, tell me what you would have done in a similar case." The old driver replied, "My friend, the situation is so hopeless that there's no way to dislodge the carriage from the mud. However an experienced driver would never have gotten so hopelessly stuck in the mud to begin with!"

– Mashal Avoth 3:1

A Pearl From the Rav: Replying with Intention

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita states: "On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we pray at great length and ask for many things, and people respond by saying 'Amen' in a loud voice. I feel that everyone should think about what he is saying 'Amen' to. If we say, 'Open for us the gates of light, the gates of Torah, the gates of prayer, the gates of repentance...' then we must think about these things and have the intention of wanting them. We must truly want the Holy One, blessed be He, to open all these gates for us, and we must be ready to be a vessel to receive them. In fact if we have no intention of receiving them, then we are wasting our breath by saying 'Amen,' which is a holy

word. If we tarnish it for nothing, we become an object of ridicule and contempt. Hence when listening to prayer, we must pay special attention to replying 'Amen' with intention. In that case, the Holy One, blessed be He, will spread an abundance of good upon us."

His Throne is Founded on Righteousness and Justice

The commentators have explained the verse, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; love and truth go before You" (Psalms 89:15) with a parable: A man loaned 1,000 gold pieces to his friend, but after a certain time the borrower denied the whole affair. The lender begged and implored his friend to pay him back, but the borrower continued to assert that he had nothing to repay. The lender then begged his friend to pay him back half the amount, but the borrower began scorning him and refused to repay him a penny. The lender then brought him to court, where the borrower was forced to present himself with a lawyer. After both parties presented their arguments, and after questions and answers were heard, as well as documents and witness testimony, the borrower was found guilty. When it came time to carry out the decision of the court, however, the borrower said that he was ready to repay half the amount that he owed, just as the lender had proposed. The lender then said to him, "You fool, before the court's decision I would have accepted being repaid half of what you owed me. But now you have to pay me the full amount, including court costs and lawyer fees." All this applies to man. As for Hashem, even after the judgment He is inclined to be appeased and abolish our debt without repayment if we repent. Thus it is written, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; love and truth go before You."

The Books of the Living and the Dead

In the Mishnah our Sages say that the books of the living and the dead are opened before G-d on Rosh Hashanah (Rosh Hashanah 32b).

We need to understand what the dead will be judged for. After all, they are dead and have already received their reward or punishment! The commentators respond by saying that this means they are judged according to what they have left behind. If the dead have left behind offspring (or disciples) who are upright and G-d-fearing, then even if they have already been dead for many years, their account is still opened and the deeds of their offspring are examined. If these offspring are righteous, their father is raised to a higher level in the world that is entirely good. However if they left behind offspring who fail to walk in the ways of the Torah, they are lowered from one level to another. Hence even many years after their passing, the dead are judged in Heaven according to what they left behind.

– Drashot LaMoadim

What Does the Satan Fear?

The Sages say, "Why do we sound a tekiah and teruah while sitting, and again sound a tekiah and teruah while standing? It is in order to confuse the Satan" (Rosh Hashanah 16ab).

Here Rashi states, "To prevent him from accusing. When the Children of Israel love mitzvot, his words will be abolished." It seems likely, however, that when the Satan sees that Jews love mitzvot, and that all his work and efforts are in jeopardy, he will become so bitter that he will raise even more accusations against them! The Sages have said that when a person repents through love, his deliberate sins are transformed into merits (Yoma 86b). Therefore when the Satan sees that Jews are repenting, that they "love mitzvot" and perform them out of love, he immediately stops accusing them and no longer presents their sins in detail. This is because the Satan is afraid that the sins he presents will be regarded as merits.

– Birkat Chaim

Understand Us!

Rabbi Bunim explains the meaning of the statement “to confuse the Satan.” It means that we want to influence the Satan by teaching him something from his own conduct. We therefore say to him, “Look, your very own thoughts are confused because of a minor thing like the tekiot. In fact you cannot speak and no longer know what to do. Yet what about Jews, for they are constantly immersed in troubling thoughts, inundated with misfortune and worries! How can you still claim that they are not acting properly or as they should?”

– Birkat Chaim

Inscribe Us For Life!

When a person promises to give someone a gift, if he is known to keep his word, then his promise will suffice. It is enough just to remind the person of his promise. However what happens when obstacles arise? In that case, we cannot be sure that he will give the gift that he promised. From the viewpoint of the giver, there is certainly a desire to give, but there are also obstacles that prevent him from doing so. A document must therefore be drawn up, one which states that problems have no reason to prevent him from fulfilling his promise, since it represents an absolute commitment. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev said, “Remember us for life, O King Who desires life” – You are our G-d, our King, Who wants us to live, and we only need to remind You of it: Remember us for life! Yet what are we to do if there are accusers that prevent this from happening? We then ask, “Inscribe us in the book of life” – inscribe us in this book “for You, O G-d [Elokim] of life” to the degree that obstacles arise, when the attribute of strict justice (Elokim) reigns. Give this to us in writing, for then accusers will be unable to disturb us!

– Derashot LaMoadim

A Servant's Rights

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, like his friend Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, would usually defend the Jewish people, especially during the Days of Awe, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. One Rosh Hashanah, before the sounding of the Shofar, he turned to Heaven and exclaimed: “Master of the universe! In the song ‘To the G-d Who Judges,’ we say: ‘To Him Who acquires His servants in judgment, show mercy on the day of judgment.’ As for me, Elimelech the son of Eliezer Lippa, I allow myself to remind You, Master of all the worlds, what Your Sages, our Sages, have said: ‘Whoever acquires a Hebrew slave, it is as if he has acquired a master for himself’ [Kiddushin 20a]. This is because in regards to his slave, the master is obligated to fulfill the verse ‘for it is good for him with you’ [Deuteronomy 15:16] in terms of food and drink. Now since You have acquired the entire Hebrew people as servants – as You Yourself have written in Your Torah: ‘For they are My servants’ [Leviticus 25:42] – You are now obligated, according to the law, to have mercy on Your people during the day of judgment. You must give Your servants food and drink, and You must see to all their needs in order to fulfill ‘for it is good for him with you.’”

The Sermons of the Maggid of Kelm

The Maggid of Kelm had several sermons that he completely memorized and repeated often. One day someone who committed numerous transgressions wanted to annoy him, and so he asked: “Rabbi, why do you often repeat the same sermon and tell us the same words of Mussar?” The Maggid of Kelm said to him, “And you, don’t you often repeat the same transgression?”

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Inscribe Us for a Good Life

During the Ten Days of Repentance and the Days of Awe, we ask for several additional things in the Shemoneh Esrei. We first ask, “Remember us for life, O King Who desires life.” We then ask, after the blessing of Modim: “Inscribe all the children of Your covenant for a good life.” Finally we ask, after the blessing of Sim Shalom: “And in the book of life, blessing, peace and prosperity....”

We need to understand why we keep on requesting more things as we pray. We can explain this according to the Midrash, which states: “Rabbi Shimon said, ‘What consummate masters Israel are in knowing how to obtain the favor of their Creator!’ Rabbi Yudan said, ‘They are like those Cutheans who are clever at obtaining alms. One of them goes to a woman and says: ‘Have you an onion that you can give me?’ When she gives him an onion, he says to her: ‘Can an onion be eaten without bread?’ When she gives him [bread], he says: ‘Can one eat without drinking?’ By means of this device, he obtains both food and drink’” (Vayikra Rabba 5:8). Hence in prayer we first ask, “Remember us for life, O King Who desires life” (without saying “a good life”). Next we ask, “Inscribe us for a good life,” and finally we ask: “And in the book of life, blessing, peace and prosperity....”

During the days when we recite Selichot, we say before the Holy One, blessed be He: “The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. Have mercy on Your work.” The commentators explain this by comparing it to a wealthy man who raises the orphaned son of his deceased brother. When the boy grows up, his wealthy uncle suggests several shidduchim. A close relative of the orphan says to his wealthy uncle, “Why are you looking for a shidduch for your nephew, since you have a daughter who has reached the age of marriage? Take the son of your brother as a son-in-law!” The wealthy man listened to this advice, and his nephew married his daughter. After the wedding, the thought that he was now the son-in-law of a rich man went to his head, and therefore he grew arrogant. In fact he even began to beat his wife. She then told her father what was happening, and he became extremely angry with the young man and brought him to court so he could grant his wife a divorce. At that point the young man began to weep and said to his wealthy father-in-law, “You’re right in wanting to protect your beloved daughter. You’re her father, and you should have mercy on her and protect her honor. But please remember me, and don’t forget that I’m not a stranger to you. You’re my uncle, my own flesh and blood, and you should also have mercy on me. If you drive me out of your house today, where will I go, and what will become of me?” This is what we say before the Holy One, blessed be He: True, “the soul is Yours” – You should certainly avenge the daughter of the living G-d, which was assaulted by the body and its ugly deeds. However “the body is Your creation” – You are also close to the body, and it is fitting for You to have mercy on it as well, so that it is not scorned.

– Ohel Yaakov, Parsha Vayakhel, Beyeriot HaOleh

A TRUE STORY

Confusing the Satan

A terrible incident occurred in Spain after the expulsion of the Jews. A certain number of Jews converted to Christianity under duress, and among them was a man by the name of Don Fernando Agolar, the leader of the Barcelona royal orchestra. Come the month of Elul, with the day of judgment approaching, he felt a strong desire to hear the sounds of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and many of his brothers also yearned for this mitzvah. What did he do? He issued a public announcement that on a certain day (which happened to be Rosh Hashanah), he would give a concert in which his orchestra would play various wind instruments with melodies from different peoples. Many Morannos attended the concert in order to listen to the Shofar, and their desires were fulfilled. Various melodies, as interpreted by non-Jews, were played, including the sounds of the Shofar – the tekiot, terumot, and shevarim – all in accordance with the mitzvah of the day, and all played and directed by Don Agolar himself. None of the priests in attendance noticed what was happening. Someone said, “No one was able to confuse the Satan with his tekiot as well as Don Agolar did in his time. All the representatives of the Satan were there, the clergy and inquisitors, all listening without suspecting a thing.”

– Sefer HaToda'ah, Vol I

THE DEEDS OF OUR FATHERS

You Will Not be Singed

Mar Ukva had a poor neighbor, a man into whose door socket he would throw four zuzim every day. One day this poor man thought, “I will go and see who does me this kindness.” Mar Ukva stayed late at the Beit Midrash one day, and his wife came to get him. When the poor man saw them near his door ready to place money there, he went after them. However they ran from him and fled into a furnace from which the ashes had just been swept. Mar Ukva's feet were burning, and his wife said to him: “Put your feet on mine,” for her feet were not burned. Mar Ukva was very troubled by the fact that his wife was apparently more righteous than him, since her feet were not burned. She said to him, “My merit is greater than yours because I am usually at home, and when the poor come to me for help, I give them bread, meat, and salt, which they benefit from right away. They don't have to go and purchase what they need. You, however, give money to the poor, and they have to go out and purchase what they need to eat. They don't benefit from it right away” (adapted from Ketubot 67b).

The Holy One, blessed be He, performed a miracle for Mar Ukva's wife by not letting her feet get burned, a miracle that was measure for measure. This is among the promises that Hashem made to the Children of Israel for the future, as it is written: “When you pass through water, I will be with you; through rivers, they will not wash you away. When you walk through fire, you will not be singed, and no flame will burn you” (Isaiah 43:2). This prophecy was fulfilled before its time. Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, hasten the day of joy? It is because Mar Ukva's wife hastened the joy of the poor. Why did Mar Ukva and his wife run away from the poor man? It was in order not to shame him, since it is better for a person to throw himself into a burning furnace than to shame his neighbor in public.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

Hashem Closed her Womb

“There was a man from Ramathaim” (I Samuel 1:1).

The haftarah for the first day of Rosh Hashanah speaks of Hanna, who was barren, and to whom Hashem gave a son.

The Gemara cites Rabbi Yitzchak as saying, “Why were our Patriarchs barren? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, longs to hear the prayer of the tzaddikim” (Yebamot 64a).

We may raise the question of the need for prayer, since the Holy One, blessed be He, gives a tzaddik all that he needs even without him having to ask, as it is written: “Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24). We also need to understand something else. The Holy One, blessed be He, knows what a person needs and can grant it to him even without prayer, especially if he needs to be healed or saved from a difficult situation. Now since G-d is filled with compassion and can show mercy even without prayer, what need is there for a person to pray? The answer is that the Holy One, blessed be He, indeed knows the needs of the tzaddikim, and He grants the basis of their request even before they ask. However the actual granting of their request awaits their realization that they need something. This is what occurred with Adam and rain, for Hashem did not create the laws regulating rain only after Adam prayed for rain. Such laws are part of nature, and they were established at the creation of the world. However rain did not actually fall until Adam prayed for it. When a person does something that leads to the fulfillment of his desires, he is much more cognizant of it and grateful to the Creator for having giving it to him. As for things that a person receives without having to ask, he becomes accustomed to them and does not think about them.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Avraham Danzig – The Author of Chayei Adam

The gaon Rabbi Avraham Danzig Zatzal of Vilna was both a Torah genius and a sage in the ways of the world. He was born to Rabbi Yechiel in 5508 and studied Torah with the author of Noda B'Yehuda and the gaon Rabbi Yosef Lieberman, the Av Beit Din of Prague, who gave him smicha at the age of 18 and lavished him with praises. Rabbi Avraham settled in Vilna, where he earned a living by working in commerce. He did not work in the rabbinate because he did not want to use the Torah in order to serve his own interests. However in his later years, as the wheel of fortune turned and he lost all his money, he gave in to the pressing demands of the people and assumed a rabbinical position. It was also at this time that he wrote his books Chayei Adam and Chochmat Adam, which were welcomed throughout the Diaspora and are studied to this day. Thanks to him, many people know what path to take because they followed his decisions. Besides his books, Rabbi Avraham is also known for the Tefillah Zakah (“pure prayer”) that he composed, which today is read in numerous communities on the night of Yom Kippur before Kol Nidrei.

Before his passing, Rabbi Avraham begged people not to give exaggerated eulogies at his funeral, which is a great sin to the deceased. He also requested that excessive praises not be inscribed on his gravestone. Rather, it should simply indicate that his primary deeds were done in faithfulness, and that to his knowledge he had never financially wronged anyone. On Tishri 4, 5581, Rabbi Avraham's soul ascended to Heaven, and inscribed on his gravestone were the words: “Here lies Rabbi Avraham ben Rabbi Yechiel, the author of the books Chayei Adam and Chochmat Adam, who in his lifetime chose this as his final resting place. He died on Tuesday, Tishri 4. May his soul be bound in the light of life.”