



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

The Vilna Gaon's Advice

The main way to merit the World to Come is by guarding one's tongue. This is worth more than the entire Torah and good deeds. Man must deprive himself until he dies, not by fasting or asceticism, but by controlling his mouth and desires. This is worth more than any amount of fasting and self-affliction. For every second that a man controls his tongue, he merits some of the hidden light that no angel or creature can imagine. This will atone for any sin and save one from Gehinnom. Woe to one who gives away his life for one word! On Shabbat and Yom Tov, do not speak at all about things that are not urgent, and be brief even with what is important, for Shabbat is very holy.

- Adapted from Iggeret HaGra

THE DEEDS OF THE FATHERS ARE A SIGN FOR THE CHILDREN (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may observe the way of the L-RD, to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19).

This verse seems to indicate that the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Abraham because he possessed the special characteristic of "command[ing] his children and his household after him." This is extraordinary, for Abraham was a great tzaddik and possessed many virtues, especially chesed. This goes without mentioning the fact that he overcame numerous trials and proclaimed Hashem's Name to every wayfarer (Sotah 10b). He humbled himself before G-d in saying, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

How can we say that, out of all these characteristics, the only one that mattered had not yet occurred? This refers to the fact that Abraham would teach his children and household the ways of Hashem, the result being that Hashem revealed that He would not destroy Sodom – doing so despite the fact that Abraham's son had not yet been born! How could this be more important than everything else Abraham had done? How could he have not merited this revelation on account of all his other good deeds?

From here we learn a very great principle in education. King Solomon said, "One who spares the rod hates his son" (Proverbs 13:24). He also said, "Do not withhold disciple from the youth. If you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You should strike him with the rod and you will rescue his soul from the grave" (ibid. 23:13-14). In the Midrash our Sages say, "Ordinarily, if a man's friend says to him: 'So-and-so hit your son,' he is ready to even deprive him of his livelihood. Why then: 'One who spares the rod hates his son'? To teach you that anyone who refrains from chastising his son causes him to fall into evil ways and thus comes to hate him" (Shemot Rabba 1:1).

The Holy One, blessed be He, knew that Abraham completely humbled himself before Him, and that he would do everything He commanded him. He told Abraham, "Leave you land and your birthplace," and he took his staff and bag, and he left. When his wife was stolen from him, he did not protest to G-d. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give him a real trial so he could receive a tremendous reward. In fact Hashem knew that Abraham's will was to spread His Name in the world and to teach his children to emulate him. Hashem therefore put Abraham to the test by means of his son, saying to him: "Take your son, your only one, whom you love" (Genesis 22:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "If I tell Abraham, 'Take you only son from his mother's bosom and place him on the altar as a burnt-offering to Me,' he will certainly obey. On account of My command, he will quell the love that he has in his heart for his son. He knows that nobody possesses more love than I, and he will place his son upon the altar."

This is why, among the ten trials that Abraham faced, none is described as a trial other than the one involving Isaac, as it is written: "And G-d tried Abraham" (Genesis 22:1). This is because Abraham did not sense the others as being trials, given that he was constantly performing G-d's will. When G-d told Abraham to offer his son as a burnt-offering, Abraham thought: "If I offer my son Isaac as a burnt-offering, and he dies as a result, how will I be able to teach my household the ways of Hashem? Because He commanded me, however, I will do so without arguing." Since he overcame this trial, G-d said to him: "Now I know that you fear G-d" (v.12).

Furthermore, Abraham was not afraid to carry out this order. He did not say, "How can I fulfill this mitzvah to slaughter my son and be so cruel to him? He will die before having lived even half his life!" Abraham knew that nobody is as merciful as Hashem, and that even if He tells a person, "Take your son and slaughter him," he must obey.

True Mercy

It is forbidden for a person to demonstrate more mercy than Hashem. Sometimes a person will get up in the morning and find his son sleeping. He may have mercy on him by not waking him up, thereby going off to synagogue and letting his son sleep in. The time for reciting Shema and the morning prayer will then come and go. This is not called mercy, but cruelty. Since he did not wake his son up, the time for reciting Shema and the morning prayer will have passed. If he had been "cruel" by waking up his son, he would have fulfilled several mitzvot.

We learn a very great thing from this week's parsha, namely that it was not the performance of another mitzvah that earned Abraham the revelation of Hashem's secrets. Rather, it was the performance of this mitzvah: Teaching his children and household the ways of Hashem, without showing more mercy to them than the Torah does. Concerning this, our Sages have said: "Whoever possesses the following three characteristics is of the disciples of our father Abraham... a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul" (Pirkei Avot 5:19). Nevertheless, Abraham did not have mercy on his own son! Therein lay Abraham's greatness, which justified Hashem's love for him. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that Abraham did not possess artificial mercy, He told him that He would destroy Sodom on account of its sins. Although Hashem knew that Abraham would pray for them, He still revealed everything to him because He knew that he would not pray out of false pity, but out of true mercy. It was therefore conceivable that they were worthy of being saved.

AT THE SOURCE

Some Advice

It is written, “The L-RD appeared to him in the plains of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1).

Rashi explained that Mamre was the one who advised Abraham to go through with his circumcision. Other commentators have questioned how this is possible. After all, Abraham was the first among believers, so how could he have asked for advice concerning an order from Hashem?

The book Ta’amei HaMinhagim states that Abraham was in doubt as to whether he should recite the blessing “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision” or “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to circumcise ourselves.” Mamre advised him to say “regarding circumcision,” according to what the Halachah advises.

The author of Brit Avraham provides us with another solution: The Mishnah on Shabbat deals with the question of carrying outside on Shabbat, stating: “Fodder [atza] that can fill the mouth of a camel.” Mamre gave Abraham some atza (etza – advice) so he could make a bandage for the circumcision in order for it to heal more quickly.

Put to the Test

It is written, “It happened after all these things that G-d tested Abraham” (Genesis 22:1).

The book Sheni Luchot HaBrit explains that from the Akeidah, a person must learn to give his life for the sanctification of Hashem’s Name. How much more should he be prepared to give up a limb or break a desire, such as by getting up early to pray and study Torah, or to forgo a pleasure, such as by forgoing a useless conversation and similar things! He must annul his will before the will of G-d.

A person must also realize that if he has been given the opportunity to commit a sin or perform a mitzvah, perhaps Hashem is putting him to the test. That is, will he commit a sin or perform a mitzvah? In the same way that Abraham was put to the test, it is clear that if a person realized that Hashem was putting him to the test, he would pay great attention to it. Hence when something happens to a person, he must always reflect upon it, for this is how Hashem proceeds: He sends something to a person in order to test him. Happy is the one who always has Hashem in mind.

Setting a Personal Example

It is written, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may observe the way of the L-RD, to do righteousness and justice” (Genesis 18:19).

The gaon Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka Zatzal said that Abraham was not content with simply asking others to do things. Before all else, he demanded these same things of himself, as one who “teaches well and does well.” True education towards children consists of setting a personal example. A father must be a living example of how to conduct oneself, so that his children will see and learn what they must do. This is not like people who demand that their children do things which they themselves ignore. In fact such behavior constitutes a negative example in a child’s education, for the nature of children is to imitate their parents, either for better or for worse. Hence Abraham was very careful, before all else, to personally accomplish what he demanded of others in his household. This is alluded to in the verse, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him.” First he will personally carry out the mitzvot of the Torah, and then he will command his children “after him.”

Why as Angels?

It is written, “The two angels came to Sodom in the evening” (Genesis 19:1).

This is surprising. When the angels went to see Abraham, why did they disguise themselves as men, and yet when they went to find Lot, they appeared to him as their true selves, as angels? The answer, says Rabbi Leib Sarah’s Zatzal, is that Abraham demonstrated great hospitality. He would normally greet everyone in the same way, even the simplest of people, whom he welcomed into his home with great honor. Such was not the case with Lot, and therefore if he had not seen angels before him, but ordinary men instead, he would not have let them into his house. Hence they revealed themselves to him as angels.

Controlling Matter

It is written, “Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey” (Genesis 22:3).

Rabbi Yitzchak ben Arema Zatzal wrote in Akeidat Yitzchak, “As Abraham controlled his desires and annulled the nature of matter, the Sages have said that he ‘saddled chamoro [his donkey].’ This means that he saddled (i.e., controlled) chomer (matter) and the evil inclination, for this allowed him to go ‘to the place of which G-d had told him’ (Genesis 22:3).”

Not You

It is written, “Abraham said: ‘G-d will see for Himself the lamb’” (Genesis 22:8).

The initials of the words Elokim yireh lo (“G-d will see for Himself”) form the word ayil (“ram”). The letters of the term haseh (“the lamb”) form the initials of the expression hanivra hu sheyikarev (“the one that was created is the one that will be sacrificed”).

This alludes to the ram that was created during the six days of Creation. In other words, “It will be sacrificed as a burnt-offering, not you my son.”

– Shufraya D’Yosef

Loosen Your Belt

It is written, “I will fetch a morsel of bread, that you may sustain yourselves” (Genesis 18:5).

The words vaekcha phat lechem (“I will fetch a morsel of bread”) are formed by the initials of vehater ezorcha kodem chatikhat ha motzi, pen tavo lidei choli meayim (“loosen your belt before eating bread, lest you have an intestinal illness”).

– Kaf HaChaim

Veal Tongue

It is written, “He said, ‘Hurry! Three seahs of fine flour – knead and make cakes....’ And he took a calf, tender and good” (Genesis 18:6-7).

The last letters in the expression shlosh seim kemach (“three seahs of flour”) form the words sameach (“happy”), for Abraham was happy to do the will of his Creator.

The word kemach (“flour”) has the same numerical value as pesach, for that day was Passover. The expression rach vatov (“tender and good”) has the same numerical value as bechardal (“with mustard”), for as the Sages have said, Abraham served them veal tongue with mustard (Bava Metzia 86b).

– Nachal Kedumim

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI YESHUA ATTIYA

Commemorated this week is the yahrtzeit of the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Yeshua Attiya Zatzal, who was constantly attached to the study of Torah with tremendous devotion.

Rabbi Yeshua was born in Aleppo to Rabbi Yitzchak Attiya Zatzal, who came from a family of noble lineage. On his mother's side, he descended from the Leviton family, which produced Torah giants. At a very young age, Rabbi Yeshua was sent to the Porat Yosef yeshiva in the old city of Jerusalem, where he made great strides in his studies, learning with tremendous diligence both day and night. In fact he cleaved to this attribute with his entire being. He studied the Gemara and Poskim with great concentration and amazing precision, employing a remarkable method of learning that he had received and inherited from his spiritual teachers, the leaders of the Porat Yosef yeshiva at the time, the gaon Rabbi Yosef Ades Zatzal and the gaon Rabbi Ezra Attiya Zatzal, who was his relative.

Rabbi Yeshua became known for his phenomenal memory. He possessed an understanding and recollection of many difficult Talmudic discussions "as if he had them in his pocket." This included Midrash and Aggadah, as well as the "minor tractates" that are not often studied. There was nothing, small or great – not a single drop in the ocean of the Torah – that he did not learn. In addition to the immense knowledge that he acquired, Rabbi Yeshua possessed a kind of "Torah curiosity" that pushed him to expand his circle of understanding in Halachah. During Shevat in the year 5698, Rabbi Yeshua presented himself at the age of 24 (young for an avrech in our time) to receive smicha as a dayan before his teacher, the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Ezra Zatzal, who wrote in the smicha: "He presented himself before me to be examined, and he correctly answered everything by heart and an incredible degree of scholarship, without mentioning his diligence in study, his fear of sin that precedes his wisdom, and his wonderful character traits." The gaon Rabbi Yaakov Meir Zatzal, the head of the rabbis in Eretz Israel and the Rishon LeTzion, added his signature to the document. Rabbi Ben Tzion Mordechai Hazan Zatzal also signed on behalf of the leaders of the Porat Yosef yeshiva.

In a notebook found among Rabbi Yeshua's writings, it is stated that during his final 27 years on earth, he merited to complete the Talmud almost eight times. However the gaon Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka Zatzal and the gaon Rabbi Ben Tzion Aba Shaoul Zatzal stated that in reality, he completed the Talmud about 50 times during that time! In fact Rabbi Yeshua would usually review his studies about six times, including 15 minutes before the end of learning at noon and at night, before going to bed, at the end of the week, and upon completing a tractate.

A Partner in Creation

On Tammuz 5, 5718, Rabbi Yeshua Attiya became a dayan on

the rabbinic court of Haifa, where he worked for eight years, and then on the rabbinic court of Jerusalem. He had a great influence on all the courts where he served as a dayan, for he acted as "a judge of truth who renders decisions of truth, who becomes a partner of the Holy One, blessed be He, in Creation and makes the Shechinah rest upon Israel."

After Rabbi Yeshua's death, the secretary of the Jerusalem court, Rabbi Raphael Ades Shlita, described a certain number of his habits and character traits, which he had seen with his own eyes when he worked with him. This is what he said:

"Rabbi Yeshua was meticulous with regards to the time he spent in court, apparently due to his fear of stealing time. When he appeared in court, a book was already placed before him. He had a special place in his drawer for a pen, and when the time came to sign a decree, he would sign with one hand while holding a book from which he studied in the other.

"He made use of the time in which the litigants and their lawyers repeated what they had already said in court. He never had conversations with other dayananim that did not deal with issues in court. His decisions were magnificently constructed, and several people who were present at a dispute in which he participated have indicated that the atmosphere in the room was relaxed."

The teaching of our Sages that "this world is like a corridor" was never considered by Rabbi Yeshua as simply a beautiful expression. In his soul, he felt that he was truly living in a temporary dwelling. As a result, he never purchased an individual apartment, for there is no reason to purchase things of permanence in a corridor. He was always properly attired, yet his garments were plain and simple. To the compliment of a student who saw him in a new suit, he replied that his old suit was perfect for him. Nevertheless, he yielded to the pressures and demands of his family, and it was for their sake that he would purchase new garments for himself.

Rabbi Yeshua gave a number of Torah courses that were attended by multitudes of residents in Jerusalem, for they wanted to benefit from his Torah and his wisdom. The admonishments that he issued came from a saddened heart that was overflowing with love. Rabbi Yeshua was able to fulfill the teaching, "Whoever possesses the fear of Heaven, his words are heard."

On Cheshvan 19, 5748 the "first stage" of his life (as Rabbi Yeshua Attiya Zatzal wrote in his manuscripts) came to an end. In accordance with his will, his sons established a yeshiva near his grave in order to spread his Torah, a yeshiva that carries the name Sha'arei Yeshua.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA - THE MITZVAH OF VISITING THE SICK

It is written, “The L-RD appeared to him in the plains of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1).

Our Sages have said, “What is the meaning of the text: ‘You shall walk after the L-RD your G-d’ [Deuteronomy 13:5]? Is it possible, then, for a human being to walk after the Shechinah? Has it not been said, ‘The L-RD your G-d is a devouring fire’ [ibid. 4:24]? However this means to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick...so you should also visit the sick” (Sotah 14a).

One of Rabbi Akiva’s disciples fell sick, and the Sages did not visit him. Thus Rabbi Akiva himself went to visit him, and because they swept and sprinkled the ground before him, he recovered. “My master,” said the disciple, “you have revived me!” Rabbi Akiva went out and taught, “He who does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood” (Nedarim 40a). Rav said, “He who visits the sick will be delivered from the punishments of Gehinnom” (ibid.). The Rishonim were divided as to whether the mitzvah of visiting the sick comes from the Torah or is a teaching of the Sages.

The author of Halachot Gedolot and several other Rishonim view it as a positive mitzvah. The Rambam writes, “It is a positive mitzvah of rabbinic origin to visit the sick. It is among the kindnesses that one does with one’s body, one for which there is no precise limit” (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Evel 14:1).

In his book Ahavat Chesed, the Chafetz Chaim Zatzal cites several laws concerning visiting the sick: “Now the mitzvah of visiting the sick has no fixed measure or limitation. ... The mitzvah is to be performed even several times a day, unless this becomes burdensome to the patient. Relatives and close friends come as soon as he takes ill; casual acquaintances wait until the third day so as not to spoil his chances of recovery. If the patient is seriously ill, all come to him without waiting. If he lies on the ground, the visitor is not allowed to sit on a bench, since the Shechinah stands at the head of the sick. If the patient is in bed, this is permissible.

“The Shulchan Aruch rules further that visits are not paid to a person suffering from an intestinal illness, so as not to put the sufferer to shame; nor to those with eye or head ailments, since speaking disturbs them. The same applies in all similar cases. Hence the visitor does not enter their room, but remains in the corridor and inquires as to whether the patient needs anything. He perceives their suffering and prays for G-d’s mercy. One should not neglect to invoke Divine compassion on every sick person he visits....

“The sick should not be visited during the first three hours of the day, for then their condition seems somewhat improved; the visitor will not feel the urgency of praying for them. Nor should they be visited in the last three hours, for then their condition becomes worse, and the visitor will despair of their recovery. Now if one is in a hurry to proceed on a journey, and can only come at these times, it would be better for him to visit the patient then, rather than not to come at all, since his visit may result in some benefit, like tidying up the room and so on, as the Gemara mentions in the case involving Rabbi Akiva.

“One may pray for the sick in any language he wishes, since he is addressing his words directly to the Shechinah, which is at the side of the patient. When not in the patient’s presence, however, he should use Hebrew only, since angels have to bear his prayers aloft, and they understand no other language. His petition should include the patient among the rest of the sick of Israel. He should say, ‘May the All-present have mercy upon you among the sick ones of Israel.’ For Shabbat the formula is, ‘It is Shabbat, and it is forbidden to cry out. But the cure will come speedily, and His mercies are many. Have a peaceful Shabbat’ ” (Ahavat Chesed, part 3, ch. 3).

Leading the Sick to Repentance

In the glosses to the book Yesh Nocholim, the following passage from the Zohar is cited: “One who watches over the sick and tries to lead him to repentance is a defending angel. He saves him from strict justice, delivers

him from death, and redeems him from the abyss. He will bring him back to life, and of him it is said: ‘Happy is he who contemplates the poor’ [Psalm 41:2].”

In the book Geshet HaChaim, Rabbi Yechiel Tucuzinsky reports that the mitzvah of visiting the sick is accomplished with both body and soul. With the body we strive to help the sick, and with the soul we pray for him. Whoever visits the sick without praying for him has not fulfilled this mitzvah. The book Ma’avar Yabok (42:14) states that this mitzvah is termed bikur cholim because the objective is for the patient to clearly (yivaker) say what he needs, and for us to encourage him to evaluate (levaker) his deeds and thoughts.

In Orchot Chaim the Rosh wrote: “My son, be careful to visit the sick, for one who visits them lessens their illness. We must then put an effort into returning with him towards his Creator. We must pray for him and then leave. We must not be a burden to him by staying too long, for the burden of his illness is enough. When you visit the sick, enter with joy and a good countenance. Speak with him joyfully, for his eyes and heart cleave to those who visit him.”

We must be careful not to openly mention the sick person’s sins, such as by telling him: “You’re sick because of such and such.” By doing so, we weaken him in the eyes of Heaven. Therefore, wrote the Peleh Yoetz under the heading Sanegoria, we must be very careful not to raise accusations against a woman giving birth or against a Jewish soldier.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Leaving the Shechinah in Order to Honor Hashem

It is written, “He lifted his eyes and saw. And behold, three men were standing over him. He saw and ran towards them from the entrance of the tent, and he bowed toward the ground. He said, “My L-rd, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass away from Your servant’ ” (Genesis 18:2-3).

Here our Sages have said that hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Shechinah (Shabbat 127a).

This is difficult to understand, for how did Abraham know that hospitality to wayfarers was more important than welcoming the Shechinah? Furthermore, he left G-d in order to welcome these wayfarers, even though they appeared to him as Arabs. Abraham therefore realized that they would bring idolatry into his home, since Arabs worshiped the dust of their feet (Bava Metzia 86b).

To what can this be compared?

It is like a king who loved to eat fish. This king and his servant were once walking by a river, when his servant saw a large fish swimming near the surface of the water. The servant was told, “Leave the king and go catch that fish!”

Although he left the king to catch the fish, he did so in order to honor the king, who will be grateful to him. Likewise Abraham converted people and distanced them from idolatry. He did this by giving his guests something to eat and drink, and once they were finished and wanted to bless him, Abraham would say to them: “Is it I who gave you to eat? It was the G-d of the universe Who gave it to you. Thank, glorify, and bless Him Who created the world!”

This is why Abraham was not afraid to leave the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, in order to run after wayfarers, for he knew that Hashem would be delighted if they were to cleave to the Shechinah. Thus for Abraham, leaving the Shechinah was a way of honoring Hashem.

– From the Teachings of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto