



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

The Dust of Lashon Harah

There are many things that are forbidden on account of the "dust" of Lashon Harah. For example, if someone tells his friend how another person was asked questions about him, and that person said, "Don't ask me such questions. I don't want to say what happened," or similar things in such a way that others can deduce that something is not right, this constitutes *avak* (the "dust" of) Lashon Harah.

Likewise when we compliment someone in front of his friend and his friend gets upset with him, if this situation is likely to cause him problems, then our compliment constitutes the "dust" of Lashon Harah. It seems to me, therefore, that we must not compliment Reuven in front of his business partner Shimon (or compliment a woman in front of her husband, or a man in front of his wife) by saying that Reuven helped us with a loan or a gift, or that he gave a suitable raise to an employee, or anything similar to this. This is because such statements are likely to arouse Shimon's anger against Reuven, who may suffer a loss or become embroiled in a dispute as a result.

- Chafetz Chaim

THE MEANING OF ISAAC'S LOVE FOR ESAU

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, and he summoned Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Behold, now I am old. I know not the day of my death. Now take, if you please, your weapons – your sword and your bow – and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die'" (Genesis 27:1-4).

Previous to this, the Torah states: "Isaac loved Esau, for game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (ibid. 25:28). This is difficult to understand, for what reason does "for game was in his mouth" constitute? The Midrash takes this to mean, "Choice meat and choice wine were reserved for his [Isaac's] mouth" (Bereshith Rabba 63:10). How surprising a reason is this! Is it possible to say that our father Isaac, who was sanctified by a great degree of holiness, loved Esau more than Jacob (who studied Torah) because of the delicious meals that he brought him?! It is also surprising to read what Isaac said to Esau, namely: "Make me delicacies as I love." Can anyone possibly think that our father Isaac had a desire for fine-tasting food? If that is the case, his love for his son is surprising indeed, for he loved him so much that he went looking for him in order to bless him with the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, and that nations would bow before him. Why would Isaac bless Esau more than Jacob, an upright man who dwelled in the tents of Torah, and who was more worthy of a blessing than him? True, Isaac did not suspect Esau of having committed unseemly deeds. However he still knew that one of his sons was immersed in Torah, while the other was always outside. Therefore was Jacob, who studied Torah, no more worthy of a blessing than Esau, who was always outside and brought his father tasty meals?

Speak with Him

We may explain this by saying that Isaac knew that Esau committed wicked deeds, but he could not severely reprimand him and ask him to act like Jacob and study Torah. In fact if Isaac had said to him, "My son, look at how badly you are behaving, at how unseemly your deeds are! I beg of you, enter the Beit Midrash and study Torah like your younger brother Jacob," Esau would not have listened. This is because he was fundamentally evil, as Midrash Tanhuma states: "Esau committed all the sins that the Holy One, blessed be He, detests." This is why Isaac could not ask Esau to study Torah, for he certainly would not have listened to him. In fact the Sages have said, "As one is commanded to say that which will be obeyed, likewise one is commanded not to say that which will not be obeyed" (Yebamot 65b).

What did our father Isaac do? He demonstrated tremendous love for Esau in order to tell him, "My son, I also love hunting, just like you. Please, make me some delicacies as I love!" When Esau heard this, he began to listen to what his father had to say. Since the words of Isaac entered Esau's ears, he began to chat with him, saying: "My son, pay close attention not to eat forbidden meat. Slaughter animals according to Halachah and salt meat according to Halachah. Then bring it to me, for I love good food." In this way,

he wanted to educate and accustom Esau to performing mitzvot, for if he paid attention to this mitzvah, he would eventually pay attention to other mitzvot. And if he were to pay attention to mitzvot, he would end up studying Torah. Isaac began with small things, telling himself: "I will give Esau a small, easy mitzvah to perform, and in the end he will pay attention to all the mitzvot." As the Sages say, "If you take hold of too large a thing, you may lose your hold. However if you take hold of a smaller thing, you will retain your hold" (Yoma 80a).

Isaac therefore told Esau, "If you bring me game that has been slaughtered and salted, I will bless you before my death. Know, however, that if you bring me forbidden meat, I will not bless you." As the Midrash states, "Your sword [telyecha]. He said to him, 'See, the blessings are suspended [teluyot]'" (Bereshith Rabba 65:13). He did this only so as to draw Esau towards Torah and mitzvot.

On the other hand, Isaac did not need to demonstrate his love for Jacob, even though he loved him dearly, for Jacob was already dwelling in the tents of Torah all day long. Hence Isaac did not demonstrate, outwardly, his great love for him, as he did for Esau. Thus it is written, "One who spares his rod hates his child, but he who loves him disciplines him" (Proverbs 13:24). Since Esau had veered from the path, his father wanted to bring him back to it, and he demonstrated affection for him by pretending to be interested in game, in order to accustom him to performing mitzvot.

This is why Isaac commanded Esau to bring him delicious meals of game, so he would have to put an effort and focus all his energy into slaughtering the animal, checking and salting the meat in order to kasher it so his father could eat it. In reality, there was already game and livestock at Isaac's home, as we see in Rebecca's instructions to Jacob: "Go now to the flock and take for me from there two good kids of the goats" (Genesis 27:9).

Nevertheless, Isaac thought: "Since Esau will put an effort into performing mitzvot, for he will have to go into the field and bring me some game, and since he will have to slaughter and kasher the meat, his soul will cleave to Torah and mitzvot." Isaac's sole intention was to infuse a love for Hashem into Esau's heart by way of mitzvot that were easy for him to perform, even promising to bless him if he did so. Isaac acted in this way because he hoped that by performing easy mitzvot out of self-interest, Esau would eventually perform greater mitzvot for non-selfish reasons, for this is how we proceed: "For out of [doing good] with an ulterior motive, there comes [doing good] for its own sake" (Pesachim 50b).

The governing principle here is that a person cannot move from a low level to a very high level in just one step. If he tries to do so, his change will not last. Whoever desires to ascend to a higher level in the service of Hashem must do so gradually until he reaches a high level. Hence Isaac did not command Esau to study Torah, for it constituted too high a level for him. However hunting, which Esau loved, was employed by Isaac for the sake of motivating Esau to perform a mitzvah, since he had to slaughter an animal and ensure that its meat was kosher according to Halachah.

AT THE SOURCE

Forty Years

It is written, "Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebecca" (Genesis 25:20).

The reason why Isaac did not get married before the age of 40, writes the gaon Rabbi Shimon HaCohen Zatzal, is because he had the same view as the person who said, "If one has to study Torah and to marry a wife, he should first study and then marry" (Kiddushin 29b). This is because a person who marries first will be unable to study, since he will have to earn a living to support his family.

The Gemara states, "It may take a person 40 years to understand the mind of his teacher" (Avodah Zarah 5b). This is why Isaac did not marry before the age of 40, since he studied Torah with Abraham. Scripture alludes to this by saying, "Abraham begot Isaac" (Genesis 25:19), which recalls what our Sages have said: "Whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellowman, Scripture regards it as if he had begotten him" (see Rashi on Numbers 3:1). How much more is this true when he is teaching his own son!

Like a Poor Person

It is written, "They quarreled about that also, and he called it Sitnah" (Genesis 26:21).

In Pnei David, the Chida writes: "We know that when a poor person has set his heart on something and another person comes and takes it, he is called wicked." Rashi believes that this is the case for something that is at the disposition of everyone or for something we have found: If someone has put it aside and another person comes and takes it, he is called wicked. The Ran states that this only pertains to a "poor person" who looks for something. As for a wealthy person who puts something aside, if someone comes and takes it from him, he is not called wicked, since the wealthy person already has what he needs.

Concerning the first well that Isaac dug, the shepherds of Gerar said that Isaac was "wealthy," whereas they were poor and in need of water. Hence Isaac was no longer considered "a poor person [who] has set his heart on something and another person comes and takes it." Yet when Isaac dug the second well, the shepherds of Gerar already had enough water for themselves, and yet they still came and argued with him! This was baseless hatred on their part, which is why Isaac called the second well Sitnah ("hatred").

Business Success

It is written, "They dug another well, but they quarreled about that also, and he called it Sitnah" (Genesis 26:21).

From this verse, Rabbi Aharon Yosef Baktch Zatzal (a disciple of the Alter of Kelm) concluded that when a person does not see any blessing from his business, it is a sign from Heaven that he should not pursue it. This is the conclusion that comes from a lack of success in business.

Yet in the passage concerning the disputes between the shepherds of Gerar and Isaac's servants over the wells that Isaac had dug, the Torah teaches us that even if a person does not succeed in business or experience blessing in his endeavors, he should still not lose hope. It is not a Heavenly sign or proof that he is not worthy of succeeding in business. Instead, it may be Hashem's will to try him once or twice, at which point he will experience blessing and success.

Two Separate Reasons

It is written, "Jacob listened to his father and to his mother" (Genesis 28:7).

Why the seemingly redundant "to...and to"? Would it not have been sufficient for the Torah to state: "Jacob listened to his father and mother"?

The book Nishmat Chaim, written by Rav Asher Hadad, explains that by going to Padan Aram, Jacob certainly did the will of both his father and mother. Yet each had different reasons for sending him there: His mother wanted to save him from the wrath of Esau, and his father wanted him to find a wife.

Hence the verse states that Jacob listened to both his father and mother, for each of them had a separate reason for sending him to Padan Aram.

By Allusion

Without Reciting a Blessing

It is written, "He ate and drank and arose and left" (Genesis 25:34).

Immediately after eating and drinking, Esau arose and left, without saying a blessing. This is how "Esau despised the birthright [bechorah]." He did not say a blessing (beracha) on the food he had just eaten.

In the very next verse we read, "There was a famine in the land" (Genesis 36:1). This alludes to what the Sages in the Gemara have said: "To enjoy this world without a blessing is like robbing the Holy One, blessed be He" (Berachot 35b), for in this way he diminishes abundance in the world.

– Etz HaChaim

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

He Who Greet His Friend Before Praying, His Greeting is Not a Greeting

It is written, "They awoke early in the morning and swore to one another. Then Isaac saw them off and they departed from him in peace. And it was on that very day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, and they said to him, 'We have found water!'" (Genesis 26:31-32).

We need to explain why this passage uses the term vayehi ("and it was"), since the Gemara states: "Wherever we find the term vayehi in Scripture, it indicates trouble" (Megillah 10b). What trouble is described by this passage? After all, they found water on that day! Furthermore, why does it state: "They departed from him beshalom [in peace]"? The expression beshalom does not indicate something good, for the Gemara states: "When a man departs from his fellow, he should not say to him lech beshalom [go in peace], but lech leshalom [go to peace]" (Berachot 64a).

The Sages have said, "Abraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says: 'Abraham arose early in the morning to the place where he stood' [Genesis 19:27], and 'standing' means only prayer" (Berachot 26b).

The passage in question states, "They awoke early in the morning and swore to one another." These evildoers, when they arose in the morning, did not get up to pray as Abraham and Isaac did. Instead they arose to attend to their vain pursuits, as Rabbi Nechunia ben Hakaneh said: "I give thanks to You, L-RD my G-d, that You have set my portion with those who sit in the Beth Hamidrash, and You have not set my portion with those who sit in [street] corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk" (Berachot 28b).

When Isaac saw that Abimelech and his followers were getting up but not paying homage to their Creator, and also that they immediately left him in peace before praying, he was upset by it, for the Sages have said: "If one greets his fellow before he has said his prayers, it is as if he has made him a high place, as it says: 'Withdraw from man, who has breath in his nostrils, for with what is he deemed worthy?' [Isaiah 2:22]" (Berachot 14a). How can a person show consideration for man, yet not for G-d?

This is why the passage does not state, "They departed from him leshalom," but rather beshalom. This teaches us that a person who greets his friend before having prayed, his greeting is not considered a true greeting. How much more does it not contain any sign of blessing! In fact it is almost a curse, for such a person is showing consideration for his friend, but not for Hashem.

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI CHAIM SHEMUEL LOPIAN

The great gaon Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal was born in the month of Adar in the year 5666. His father was the great gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal, known as “the Mashgiach.” A remarkable story is told concerning Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s name.

Before he was born, his father had a son by the name of Shemuel. This child did not live long, dying while still very young. Rabbi Eliyahu then had another son, to whom he gave the name Chaim in addition to the name of his departed son Shemuel. He was therefore called Shemuel Chaim. Unfortunately, this child also died at a young age. Rabbi Eliyahu then found in the writings of the Vilna Gaon that an additional name should come before the original name. In his great faith in the Sages, Rabbi Eliyahu attributed the brief lifespan of his son to the fact that he did not follow the words of the Vilna Gaon. With great courage, he did not hesitate to name his third son “Chaim Shemuel,” in accordance with the Vilna Gaon.

In his youth, Rabbi Chaim Shemuel studied with his father in the Ohr Torah yeshiva in Kelm. He then went to study in the yeshivot of Slabodka and Telz, where he states that he observed the recommendation of the Chatam Sofer Zatzal, meaning that he would sleep for eight hours and then study Torah for 40 hours. He connected this teaching to the verse yashanti az yanuach li (“I would have slept, I would have rested” – Job 3:13), the term az has a numerical value of eight, and the term li has a numerical value of 40. Rabbi Eliyahu had tremendous respect for his son, known as a great talmid chacham who possessed extraordinary wisdom and prodigious understanding in all fields of Talmud, to the point that he would rise to his full height in his son’s presence. When people expressed surprise at seeing him rise before his son, Rabbi Eliyahu replied that he was not rising for his son, but rather for the honor of the Torah.

Rabbi Chaim Shemuel was loved by people without exception, being on good terms with everyone. From his youth, he was known for helping others honorably and discreetly. He also fled from disputes, and was very reserved even with regards to matters of great importance.

To avoid being drafted into the Lithuanian Army, he left for England in 5689. Settling in Gateshead, he was asked to become the Rosh Yeshiva of Netzach Israel, which was being established in Sunderland. It was there that he taught numerous students who brightened the skies of Europe by means of their Torah and wisdom.

Among Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s numerous disciples was our Rav, the author of Pahad David, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita. We can see Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s respect for the Rav by his praise for Pahad David. Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal said, “His books are appealing. I read Bereshith almost every day, and I’ve received immense pleasure from it.” In 5751, Rabbi Chaim Shemuel gave our Rav his book Ravcha Shemateta with the following dedication: “To my former student from the Sunderland yeshiva, the pious Rav, Rabbi David Pinto, who teaches a pure Torah and fear of Heaven to multitudes in France.”

In his eulogy for Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, our Rav recounted that one student went to see Rabbi Chaim Shemuel and told him that he wanted to leave the Sunderland yeshiva, since he had difficulty concentrating and memorizing Gemara. Rabbi Chaim

Shemuel asked him, “Do you know Shemoneh Esrei by heart?” The student replied, “Of course.” Rabbi Chaim Shemuel then said to him, “One who knows Shemoneh Esrei by heart can also learn a page of Gemara by heart. A person can take the same abilities that he uses to recall his prayer in order to review a page of Gemara.”

It is astonishing to note that all Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s students and admirers have said the same thing about him: Each time that he wanted to consult a certain page in the Gemara, he would always open it up to the exact page he wanted, without having to look for it. Concerning his sheer ability to focus, our Rav often recounts that when Rabbi Chaim Shemuel traveled by bus from the yeshiva to his home in Gateshead, he would “forget” to get off at his stop, and he would return to the Sunderland yeshiva!

When Rabbi Chaim Shemuel was a young avrech, he published his commentary Ravcha Shemateta on the book Shav Shemateta, which was written by the author of Ketzot HaChoshen. This commentary has become indispensable in the yeshiva world. Rabbi Chaim Shemuel said that it took a great deal of effort to write. For example, during the long winter nights when his daughters were young, he would attach a string to the stroller in order to rock his crying child with one hand, while writing his Torah commentaries with the other. Our Rav also said the following: “Once when I went to see him in his modest apartment, he admitted to me that he suffered from all kinds of aches and pains. Yet he simply added, ‘Thank G-d, I feel no pain when I’m immersed in Torah study. But as soon as I stop studying to eat or do something, my pain immediately returns.’”

In 5739, Rabbi Chaim Shemuel went to live in the Holy Land, where he was asked to lead the Aliyot Eliyahu kollel and give classes to the avrechim who studied there. Just by his presence, he already served as a living example of proper conduct. His students said that he reviewed the Daf Yomi five times each day in order to fulfill the teaching, “Happy is he who comes here in full possession of his learning” (Bava Batra 10b).

We shall conclude with an extraordinary story that was told by one of his neighbors in Jerusalem. When a son was born to this neighbor, Rabbi Chaim Shemuel knocked at his door early in the morning to congratulate him. He then told the man, “I am already old, and I can no longer help you. But to go to the grocery store and buy some bread and milk, that I can do. Tell me how much you need.”

The father of the newborn was confused, and he tried to politely refuse Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s offer by telling him that he didn’t need anything. Rabbi Chaim Shemuel was adamant, however, saying: “You have many children, and it’s difficult for you to go to the grocery store.” Rabbi Chaim Shemuel left only once he was completely convinced that his help was not needed.

On Kislev 6, 5759, as he was preparing to put on his tefillin, Rabbi Chaim Shemuel’s heart suddenly stopped, and his soul ascended to Heaven. May his memory be blessed.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

WHEN DOES LINEAGE MATTER?

It is written, “Isaac entreated the L-RD in front of his wife, for she was barren” (Genesis 25:21).

In the Gemara, our Sages have noted that this verse does not state that Isaac implored Hashem el ishto (“for his wife”), but rather lenochach ishto (literally, “in front of his wife”). This teaches us, say the Sages, that they were both incapable of having children (Yebamot 64a).

That being the case, the Gemara states that Hashem should have “allowed Himself to be entreated by them,” not “by him.” The Gemara replies: “The prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man is not like the prayer of a righteous man the son of a wicked man.” It then cites the words of Rabbi Yitzchak: “Why were our ancestors barren? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, longs to hear the prayer of the righteous.”

The appointment of chazanim and ba’alei tefillah who come from a particular family has often been at the center of Halachic questions addressed to the great men of Israel. Some believe that it is better to appoint men who come from a great and pure family, while others prefer the opposite, as we shall now briefly explain.

In his responsa, the Maharshah cites the Rosh’s comments on the custom of appointing a person from the most ignoble family as a shaliach tzibur. This seems to imply a certain degree of disrespect for the mitzvah, as if this profession is not good enough for the noblest figures of Israel, but is simply a profession like any other. This mitzvah should not be regarded as a simple job, the argument goes, but as a crown! In response to this, the Rosh states that the nobility of one’s family does not take into account the character of the chazan himself. If a chazan is not upright, what does his lineage matter? However if he comes from a non-Jewish family, but is a tzaddik, then it is good to bring near those who are far, as it is written: “Peace, peace to those who are far and to those who are near” (Isaiah 57:19).

The Maharshah responds to this by stating: “We must answer the words of the Rav. We find in the words of our Sages, ‘He answered him’ – him and not her – for the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man is not like the prayer of a righteous man the son of a wicked man. Yet we must say that the only difference in the prayer of the son of a righteous man pertains to his personal prayers, for that is where the merit of his ancestors will help him. As for one who prays for the community and is without sin, he is even more precious to G-d, for he has abandoned the ways of his ancestors in order to follow the ways of Hashem. For him as well, peace to him who is far and to him who is near, to him who is from a family that was far and has come close, and especially for a ba’al teshuvah himself, who recognizes his sins and wants to repent, for of him it is said: ‘Peace to him who is far and to him who is near.’”

As for the Bach, he believes that it is good to appoint a shaliach tzibur who is the son of a righteous man, for the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man is not the same as the prayer of a righteous man the son of a wicked man. The Turei Zahav complains that on the contrary, we must try to draw close those who are not from a good family. Those who are far, we must draw closer to the Shechinah, for G-d desires the heart above all, and the prayer of such a man will be heard even more than the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man.

The Measure of Good is Even Greater

The book Torah Temimah cites a story in the Gemara concerning Rabbi Eliezer, who as a shaliach tzibur prayed for rain but was not answered. However when Rabbi Akiva prayed as the shaliach tzibur, rain did fall. Hence the Sages questioned the honor of Rabbi Eliezer, since his prayer was not answered. A celestial voice was then heard to say, “This man [Rabbi Akiva] was answered not because he is greater than the other man, but because he is ever forbearing and the other is not” (Taaniith 25b).

Now we know that Rabbi Akiva was the son of converts, and therefore in comparison to him Rabbi Eliezer was “a righteous man the son of a righteous

man.” Nevertheless, Rabbi Akiva’s prayer was answered because he was more forbearing. The Torah Temimah concludes that a person who possesses very good middot, even if he is a righteous man the son of a wicked man, still deserves to be chosen over a righteous man the son of a righteous man who has inferior character traits.

The Old is More Difficult to Remember Than the New

In his book Michtav Me-Eliyahu, the gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler mentions a statement made by the Alter of Kelm, who said that a righteous man the son of a wicked man is preferable, the proof coming from a saying of the Sages: “Let Obadiah, who lived with two wicked people [Jezebel and Ahab], and yet did not learn from their deeds, come and prophesy against the wicked Esau, who lived with two righteous people [Isaac and Rebecca], and yet did not learn from their good deeds” (Sanhedrin 39b). This means that one who has been educated in a bad environment and has become a tzaddik is preferable to others. Therefore why did Hashem answer Isaac and not Rebecca, who as we know was “a rose among thorns”?

The Alter of Kelm explains that in the Gemara we read, “It is harder to remember something old than to commit to memory something new” (Yoma 29a). This is because when a man begins to study something new, he realizes that he does not understand it, which is why he puts an effort into learning it until he fully grasps its meaning. Such is not the case for older things, which a person believes he already knows. In reality, he has already forgotten its deeper meaning. Therefore one who puts an effort into plumbing the depths of “something old” is greater.

As such, we can understand the greatness of “a righteous man the son of a righteous man.” Our father Abraham found a world of people who sinned, who worshipped statues. Since he realized that they were wrong, he began to look for the truth on his own. He thought a great deal about it and found what he needed.

However our father Isaac already had, laid out before him, the path of his father Abraham. For him, this was “something old,” and yet he put a great deal of effort into understanding Hashem’s Torah in his service and fear of Heaven. In fact for Isaac, these were comparable to “something new.” The effort that he exerted in constantly seeking the truth was equal to that of someone who was born in a bad environment, and he yearned to establish in himself the fortified walls of faith like a man who discovers something new. This is because Isaac knew that by doing so, his faith in Hashem and fear of Heaven would maintain itself in him.

The Alter of Kelm gives us an example: Imagine a non-Jew who begins to realize the truth of Israel’s faith, and who recognizes all the errors and falsehood in which he was raised. He decides to leave it all and convert. Over the course of time, it is possible that he will commit various sins after he has become Jewish, and he may sometimes find himself incapable of resisting even the smallest trial. The explanation for this lies in the fact that initially, when he was a non-Jew and saw the evil that surrounded him on all sides, he experienced such a powerful spiritual awakening that he radically changed his life. Yet later on, when he was already accustomed to his new Jewish life, the awakening that he initially experienced was lacking, which is why he became incapable of overcoming even a simple trial.

Hence a righteous man the son of a righteous man who has become righteous in the depths of his soul and who is not content with his habits is preferable to someone who is content with his habits and does not renew himself in the fear of Heaven and performance of mitzvot. In fact Hashem yearns to hear the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man who renews himself in “something old,” in things that he is familiar with.