



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Even if Completely True

It is forbidden to gossip, even if it is completely true and contains no trace of falsehood. It is forbidden even if the person in question is not present, and even if we are certain that we would say the same thing in that person's presence. How much more is it forbidden if we have the audacity to tell an individual, in this person's presence, that he said or did something against him, for this is a much graver sin. It is forbidden because, first of all, we thereby stir up strong feelings of hatred in the individual in question, who will now accept what we say as being completely true, thinking to himself: "If it wasn't completely true, he wouldn't have the audacity to say it in front of that person." We also transgress several explicit Torah prohibitions in this way, leading the other two parties to transgress them as well.

HOW TO MERIT THE CROWN OF TORAH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.' But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter that you have taken my husband? And now you also want to take my son's mandrakes?' Rachel said, 'Therefore he shall lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes.' Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, 'You must come to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.' So he lay with her that night. G-d listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son" (Genesis 30:14-17).

Rashi explains: "In the days of the wheat harvest – to praise the [progenitors of] the tribes. It was harvest time, and he did not stretch out his hand upon stolen property, to bring wheat or barley, but only upon an ownerless thing about which no one cares."

This is surprising. Since Reuven found mandrakes in the field, which belonged to everyone, why did Rachel ask Leah to give her some? She could have gone out into the field and gathered some herself, just as Reuven had done. At the very least, Rachel could have gone to purchase them at the market!

If we say that these mandrakes were more important to her than the presence of the tzaddik by her side, which she relinquished, why did Leah refuse to give her these mandrakes before Rachel said, "He shall lie with you tonight"?

A Lesson for the Generations

We may explain this according to the words of our Sages: "Whoever does not make himself like a desert, which is open to all, cannot acquire the Torah" (Tanhuma, Yashan Bamidbar 6). This is why Rachel wanted to profit from these mandrakes, since they belonged to no single person. It was in order to teach the generations to come that a person cannot merit the crown of Torah or produce the holy tribes of G-d unless he devotes himself entirely to that cause, to the exclusion of all else. Hence Rachel did not go to the market to buy mandrakes, for she wanted to merit something that belonged to everyone. Perhaps if she had gone to where Reuven had found them, she would not have found any more, which is why she asked Leah to give her some.

We note that such behavior was the norm for this tzaddek, namely to annul herself for the sake of Heaven, something that she did her entire life. In fact when Laban replaced her with Leah, Rachel completely annulled herself and gave Leah the signs she needed so as not to be humiliated (Megillah 13b). Rachel did not say, "I won't give my sister the signs that the tzaddik gave me." Since Rachel was afraid that her sister would be humiliated, she annulled herself and give her these signs, without wondering what would become of her when her sister married the tzaddik.

This is why Rachel merited for even the children of Leah to be considered as hers, as it is written: "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:14). By her merit, the Children of Israel who went into exile among the nations would return from there, as it is written: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work shall be rewarded – the word of the L-RD – and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future – the word of the L-RD – and your children will return to their border" (vv. 15-16). If Rachel had not given these signs to Leah, she would not have married Jacob, and all the tribes would have descended from Rachel.

Hence they were all considered as hers, and they were all saved by her merit.

Therefore whoever says that Rachel disdained her husband Jacob is mistaken. She had no intention of disdaining the presence of the tzaddik, exchanging it for the mandrakes that she wanted. She simply wanted to benefit from what belonged to everyone, something that she had done throughout her life. Her children would thereby learn to do the same, and Hashem would answer her prayers by opening her womb.

True, the Sages have said: "Because she [Rachel] treated the tzaddik so slightly, she was not buried with him" (Bereshith Rabba 72:3). However since all she wanted was to completely annul herself for Hashem, she relinquished the presence of the tzaddik. Hashem therefore arranged things such that Rachel was buried on the road, her grave being a public monument, available to everyone. This was not a punishment, but rather the opposite, for even her burial place reflected her lifelong desire to help everyone, a desire that was fulfilled.

The Duty to Make an Effort

The proof that this was not a punishment in any way comes from the words of the Midrash: "Rachel was buried according to the will of Hashem, Who knew that the Temple would be destroyed, that her children would go into exile, that they would take this road and pray by the grave of Rachel, and that she would intercede for them, and He heard her prayer" (Pesikta Rabbati 3).

Therefore this was not a punishment in any way. Furthermore, Hashem himself told Jacob not to bury her in Hebron, but along the road, in a place that everyone passes, because her wish was to help everyone in this world. Hence she would be available to everyone after her death as well, and the Children of Israel could pray by her grave when they went into exile. What the holy Patriarchs were not able to obtain through their prayer, Rachel was able to obtain through hers, as the Midrash says.

Given that this was not a punishment, we may ask why the Sages said that she was not buried with the tzaddik because she slighted him.

The answer is that they did not mean that she actually slighted the tzaddik. Everyone is responsible for making an effort to achieve everything that is incumbent upon him (Midrash Tehillim 23:3). A person does not have the right to rely on a miracle and do nothing. Rachel, however, did not make any effort other than to rely on the mandrakes. This is what prompted the Sages to say that Rachel, with regards to her level of holiness, "treated the tzaddik so slightly." In reality, Rachel did not demonstrate an attitude of indifference towards him.

We now understand why Leah did not initially want to give the mandrakes to Rachel. She knew that Rachel was only asking for these mandrakes in order to awaken Divine mercy. She therefore told Rachel, "My sister, listen to me. Leave these mandrakes alone. If you are relying on their mystical value, you are like someone who has no bread to eat and yet does not leave his home. When asked why he does not go out to look for food, he will say: 'I don't need to earn a living, for the Holy One, blessed be He, will certainly not forget me, and He will send me bread.' Even if this person waits all day for bread, it will not come to him. Why? Because he makes no effort to get it on his own."

Leah continued addressing Rachel, saying: "You must also do something. Share the tent of the tzaddik." Rachel replied, "I don't want to, but I want these mandrakes and prayer." When Leah saw that Rachel was insistent, she gave her the mandrakes.

AT THE SOURCE

Twelve Stones Become One

It is written, “He took from the stones of that place, and he placed them under his head” (Genesis 28:10).

What are these 12 stones, which are described as “the stones of that place”?

Rabbeinu Bechaye answers this question by stating: “The very same 12 stones that Jacob took were the stones of the altar upon which Abraham bound his only son Isaac in order to carry out Hashem’s will.”

Jacob took 12 stones as an allusion to the 12 tribes that would emerge from him, and they all became a single stone. Thus we read further on, “He took the stone that he had put under his head” (Genesis 28:18). This alludes to the fact that they would become one people, as it is written: “Who is like Your people, like Israel, one nation on earth” (II Samuel 7:23).

Justifying and Defending

It is written, “Behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending upon it” (Genesis 28:12).

Rabbi Yehudah Berdugo Zatzal of Meknes notes that this verse should have been written to reflect the movement of angels, namely that they first descend and then they ascend. Why does the verse adopt the reverse order: “ascending and descending”?

In his book *Mayim Amukim*, he explains the statement made by our Sages, namely: “He who fulfills one mitzvah acquires one defender for himself” (Pirkei Avoth 4:11). This defender, a good angel, ascends to justify the person. It then descends to defend the one who performed the mitzvah. Hence the verse rightly states that the angels were “ascending and descending,” for that is the correct order: They first ascend to justify, and then they descend to defend.

Returning in Peace

It is written, “And [if] I return beshalom [in peace] to my father’s house” (Genesis 28:21).

This is surprising, for how could Jacob have used the expression beshalom? After all, the Gemara teaches us that one who takes leave of the dead should say lech beshalom (“go in peace”), while one who takes leave of the living should say lech leshalom (“go to peace”) (Berachot 64a). Hence Jacob should have said, “And [if] I return leshalom [to peace] to my father’s house.”

The book *Kohelet Yitzchak* states that the difference between beshalom and leshalom is that leshalom demonstrates that we have not stopped growing in shalom, which is shelemut (perfection). Such is not the case for the expression beshalom, which designates the perfection that we actually possess. Hence when a person takes leave of the dead, those who can no longer add to their perfection, he should say lech beshalom. However when taking leave of the living, this expression is liable to be interpreted as a curse.

Jacob, who was on his way to the home of the idolatrous Laban, was afraid of not being able to protect himself from Laban’s evil influence. He thought, “I only hope that I can return beshalom [in peace] – not to have descended a level in spirituality – and for nothing to be lacking in my Torah and purity.” Jacob did not expect to add perfection to his holiness there, which is why he used the expression beshalom.

Seven Years, Not Six

It is written, “I will work for you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter” (Genesis 29:18).

“Seven years,” not six, so Laban could not claim that Jacob was like a “Hebrew servant” in his home, who according to Halachah must work for six years and be released in the seventh for nothing. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him children, both his wife and the children she bears belong to his master, and he alone will leave.

In his book *Nahar Shalom*, Rabbi Shalom HaCohen Zatzal of Tunis states that this is why Jacob was afraid of telling Laban that he would work for him for six years. Doing so would have led to Jacob being considered a Hebrew servant, in which case his wife and children would belong to Laban. Because Jacob wanted to work in exchange for Rachel his youngest daughter, he decided to work for seven years, since Laban would not have accepted less.

By Allusion

The Place

It is written, “He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took from the stones of that place...and lay down in that place” (Genesis 28:11).

The word “place” is repeated three times in this verse, an allusion to the three festivals which the descendants of Jacob would celebrate when ascending to that place. In fact the Sages have said that he slept on Mount Moriah, which is where the Temple stood.

– Ba’al HaTurim

A Ladder

It is written, “He dreamed, and behold: A ladder was set up on earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven” (Genesis 28:12).

The word sulam (“ladder”) has the same numerical value as kol (“voice”), alluding to the fact that the voice of the righteous in prayer is a ladder upon which angels can ascend. It is also written concerning Manoah, the father of Samson, that an angel ascended in the flame of his offering. Now prayer replaces offerings, and therefore when someone prays with concentration, his ladder is complete. His prayers can then use it to ascend to Heaven.

– Ba’al HaTurim

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI MATITYAHU GARJI

Among the extraordinary personalities who have illuminated the Jewish firmament of Afghanistan, the gaon Rabbi Matityahu Garji Zatzal shined with exceptional brilliance. He served as a Rav and Posek, teaching Torah and leading the Jewish community in the Afghan city of Herat.

Rabbi Matityahu Garji was born to the tzaddik Rabbi Mordechai Garji Zatzal, an important figure in the Iranian city of Mashad. He served as a Chazan and directed the community as well. Rabbi Matityahu Garji received his primary Torah education in the great Beit Midrash, which wealthy individuals in the community had established for young men who wanted to study Torah. There he climbed the rungs of Torah and the fear of Heaven as he began to blossom and become a true gaon. While still young, he received smicha that authorized him to take Halachic decisions for the community. His sharp mind and deep integrity impressed all the scholars who saw him. He was particularly well-respected by rabbis who occupied important positions.

Despite his youth and tremendous humility, Rabbi Matityahu Garji took it upon himself to carry out numerous tasks in order to strengthen the foundations of Torah in the community. Since he was aware of the importance of his mission, he exerted every ounce of effort to watch over what was occurring in his community so that righteousness and justice would reign. When the situation called for it, he could also punish and criticize reprehensible deeds, even if they were committed by worthless individuals.

In the everyday life of the Jewish community and its activities, individuals both small and great asked Rabbi Matityahu for advice. He was the one who oversaw all the affairs of the community. Naturally, the secular authorities and leaders of the city also recognized the spiritual authority of Jewish scholars and their system of justice based on truth and peace, and they sought their advice in matters of justice.

The elders of the community recounted an amazing incident that occurred to Rabbi Matityahu Garji, one that they witnessed with their very own eyes. It testified to the greatness of their venerated Rav and the power of his faith and confidence in Hashem. The story is as follows:

At the beginning of the festival of Sukkot, the leaders of the Jewish community hired a servant of a local non-Jew. They instructed him to go into the villages of the surrounding region and distribute whatever Jews needed for the four species.

This servant went to carry out his task, but to everyone's surprise he failed to return. He did not return on the day he was sent, nor on the day after that, nor on the day after that! The local Jews thought that he had been captured by bandits on the road, or that some disaster had befallen him.

His master lost hope of ever seeing him again, and he addressed the leaders of the Jewish community. He requested compensation from them, an enormous amount in fact, which the community obviously did not have.

The refusal of the community to compensate the man for the loss of his servant led him to threaten to bring them to court if they did not compensate him in full before a certain date. The community leaders, for their part, wanted to offer him a compromise so he would lessen his exorbitant demands. Yet in order to do so, they needed the approval of

Rabbi Matityahu Garji, their great Rav. He would have to support them and approve their plan for a compromise between the two parties.

To the surprise of all the community leaders, however, Rabbi Matityahu rejected their proposal. In fact he did not even say why he was completely against it. They explained the gravity of the situation to him, for they were liable to be brought to court, and a great deal of harm could be inflicted upon the Jewish community as a result of such a serious allegation. Nevertheless, Rabbi Matityahu remained firm in his refusal, telling them simply: "Hashem will have mercy."

On the day of the court hearing, all the leaders of the community went to see the governor, with Rabbi Matityahu at their head. With obvious confidence in G-d, he repeated the words: "Hashem will have mercy."

When everyone was in court, the governor ordered the prosecutor to present his case. He approached the bench and began to describe what had happened to the plaintiff's slave, whom the leaders of the Jewish community had hired to go into the surrounding villages and furnish the members of the Jewish community with what they needed for their religious holiday. Since this slave had disappeared while under their supervision, the plaintiff was demanding financial compensation from them.

When the prosecutor finished presenting his case, the governor asked him to recount the details a second time in full. The prosecutor then repeated his words, saying that a certain slave had been hired by the leaders of the Jewish community, etc.

When he finished presenting his case for the second time, the governor ordered him to recount it a third time, much to everyone's amazement. The prosecutor was then forced to tell the judge that a certain slave, so-and-so, had been hired by the Jewish community.... This time, however, when he uttered the word "slave," the governor became enraged: "What did you say? A slave? Can a Muslim be a slave? How dare you call a Muslim a slave?!"

In his fury the governor ordered the prosecutor, now covered in shame, to be removed from his presence, for in his insolence he had dared to call a Muslim a slave. As for the leaders of the community, who were stunned by this incredible spectacle, the judge let them go in peace.

It was then that they understood the deep meaning of the words, "Hashem will have mercy," words that their Rav had uttered during the entire time. They understood that these words encompassed an entire world. They contained the pure judgment of a man of Torah, and a proof that is only revealed to those who grow in faith in G-d and who yield before Him in complete truth.

At the end of his life, Rabbi Matityahu was able to fulfill his lifelong desire to settle in Eretz Israel, in the holy city of Jerusalem. There too, he was very involved in a life of Torah, all while investing a tremendous effort into the education of Jewish children in Torah and mitzvot. This goes without mentioning the tremendous work that he did in terms of tzedakah and deeds of kindness within the community.

Rabbi Matityahu Garji's incredible life came to an end on Kislev 14, 5670. May his memory be blessed.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

HOW COULD JACOB MARRY TWO SISTERS?

With regards to Jacob marrying both Rachel and Leah, the Rishonim have explained, each in his own particular way, how Jacob could have done this, since it is contrary to the Torah prohibition against marrying two sisters. (It is also a question that was asked concerning Amram, who married his aunt Jochebed, as well as on other issues.)

In his book Parshat Derachim, Rabbi Yehudah Rozenes Zatzal delves into this issue at great length, citing the words of the Rishonim and Acharonim, who have studied the problem.

The basic explanation is provided by the Ramban, who writes that the Patriarchs fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given. However they did so only in Eretz Israel, not in a foreign land, “for the mitzvot are the ordinances of the G-d of the land.”

In another place, the Ramban indicates that Rachel died in Eretz Israel, “and Hashem alone directs what happens, and arranged for Rachel to be buried along the road, at the entrance of Eretz Israel.” By her merit, she did not die in a foreign land, and by Jacob’s merit, he did not remain married to two sisters in Eretz Israel, since Rachel was the sister whom he was forbidden to marry.

Furthermore, the Gemara states: “The Holy One, blessed be He, will make a great banquet for the tzaddikim on the day He manifests His love to the seed of Isaac. Once they finish eating and drinking, the cup of grace will be offered to our father Abraham for him to say grace, but he will answer them: ‘I cannot say grace, for Ishmael issued from me.’ ... Jacob will be told, ‘Take it and say grace.’ He will reply, ‘I cannot say grace, for I married two sisters during their lifetimes, whereas the Torah was destined to forbid them to me’ ” (Pesachim 119b). We may therefore infer that according to Jacob, he was only somewhat to blame for having married two sisters outside of Eretz Israel!

In addressing this issue, the book Nimukei Shemuel states that although Jacob did not commit a sin in this way – since there will be tzaddikim at this banquet who were not married according to the laws of the Torah – they will be more worthy than him to recite grace. The proof is that Joshua will also refuse to say grace because “I was not privileged to have a son” (Pesachim ibid.), which is not a sin. What everyone is trying to say is that only a man who is completely upright will be worthy of saying grace.

A Convert is Like A Newborn Baby

The Re'em, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi Zatzal, follows another line of thought. Before the giving of the Torah, the Patriarchs observed the entire Torah, but each of them had to take the Torah upon himself as a convert does. Now we know that “a convert is like a newborn baby.” When Jacob married two sisters, he certainly converted them before getting married. Since they were converted, they were no longer considered as sisters, and therefore Jacob was not forbidden to marry them both.

(In line with this reasoning, the Chatam Sofer Zatzal explains why Jacob consulted his wives before fleeing from the house of

Laban upon Hashem’s command. Since Jacob had received such a command, why did he have to consult his wives? The answer is that he wanted to tell them about the prohibition against marrying two sisters in Eretz Israel. They responded by saying, “Have we still a share and an inheritance in our father’s house?” In other words: “A convert is like a newborn baby,” and therefore you have the right to keep both of us in the land of Canaan.)

A Temporary Measure

On the other hand, in Ohr HaChaim the holy Rabbi Chaim ben Attar states that before the giving of the Torah, the Patriarchs were only obligated to keep the seven commandments of the bnei Noah. However the Patriarchs received a reward for every mitzvah that they took upon themselves to observe, without being punished for those which they did not observe.

Nevertheless, the Rav underlines that in situations where the Patriarchs saw a possible benefit (such as when Jacob married two sisters), they would forsake the reward that they would have received for observing a mitzvah, and they were not punished for failing to observe it. Jacob followed Hashem’s command; he did not transgress the prohibition against marrying two sisters. It was like a temporary measure enacted by a prophet.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

When Does a Person Improve His Ways?

It is written, “It is in my power to do you harm.... Why did you steal my gods?” (Genesis 31:29-30).

Previous to this we read, “G-d came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, ‘Beware lest you speak with Jacob either good or bad’ ” (v.24). That being said, how could Laban have disobeyed Hashem’s words and spoken badly to Jacob by saying that he could harm him? In fact Laban spoke with him harshly, saying: “Why did you steal my gods?” From here we learn that whoever fails to work on improving his ways, even if Hashem Himself were to appear to him and say “change,” he would not do so. When does a person change? It is when he works on himself. Therefore Laban learned nothing from Jacob during all the time that he lived with him. In fact Laban became more obstinate, for he did not try to break his nature, nor did he work on himself. Although he feared Hashem, this fear did not help him, for he said to Jacob: “It is in my power to do you harm.”

Although Laban did not do so, G-d told him: “Beware lest you speak with Jacob either good or bad,” for his fear was not truly deep-seated, but rather transitory.

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto