



The Path To Follow BESHALACH

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Harmful Compliments

It seems to me that one should not give compliments to Reuven in the presence of Shimon his business partner (or to a woman in the presence of her husband, or to a man in the presence of his wife) by saying that he has helped out with a loan, pays good wages, or other things of a similar nature.

In fact by saying such things, one arouses resentment in the heart of Shimon against his business partner Reuven. Sometimes this may cause Reuven harm (or it may lead to an argument between husband and wife), the assertion being that he is wasting money without reason.

– Chafetz Chaim

THE TORAH PROTECTS MAN FROM THE FORCES OF IMPURITY (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for G-d said: ‘Lest perhaps the people reconsider when they see war, and they return to Egypt.’ So G-d turned the people toward the way of the desert to the Sea of Reeds” (Exodus 13:17-18).

Since it is written, “Lest perhaps the people reconsider when they see war, and they return to Egypt,” we learn that G-d only guided the Children of Israel by the longer route, through the desert, lest they consider returning to Egypt upon seeing war in the land of the Philistines. This is surprising. Were the Children of Israel not more afraid of entering the desert with their women and children than facing the prospects of war? After all, the desert is described as “that great and terrible wilderness where there were venomous serpents, scorpions and drought, where there was no water” (Deuteronomy 8:15).

If we say that war is even worse than trying to live in the desert, can we not also say that G-d could have prevented a war with the Philistines? In fact we read: “If you shall say in your heart, ‘These nations are more numerous than I. How will I be able to drive them out?’ Do not fear them! You shall remember what the L-RD your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt. ... No man will be able to stand before you, until you have destroyed them” (Deuteronomy 7:17-24). In that case, the Children of Israel would have been left alone, and G-d would not have been obligated to lead them through the desert.

Miracles for Free

The Sages have said, “The effect of Israel’s acceptance of the Torah would be that no nation or tongue could prevail against them” (Avodah Zarah 5a). Until the Children of Israel accepted the Torah on Sinai, however, they did not merit a miracle to be performed on their behalf, and for their enemies not to prevail against them. Thus had G-d led them by way of the land of the Philistines, the latter would have provoked and attacked them, as commonly occurs in the world. At that point, however, they would not have yet had the merit of the Torah to protect them before their enemies.

In that case, how were the Children of Israel rescued from Pharaoh and his servants when they pursued them? It is said that the Children of Israel merited being rescued from Pharaoh at the sea only because of faith, as we read further on: “They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant” (Exodus 14:31). How did they achieve this faith? It was by G-d leading them through the desert, as our Sages have taught: “And they did so [Exodus 14:4]. What did they do? They said, ‘Whether we want to or not, we can only act upon the word of the son of Amram’” (Mechilta, Beshalach 1). Since they had achieved this faith, they were able to be saved from Pharaoh and his army, and the sea split before them. Although strict justice protested, “These and those are uncircumcised; these and those grow sidelocks; those and these wear garments of linen and wool,” they were still saved because they had faith. The Sages also taught (Mechilta, *ibid.* 6)

that the Children of Israel were saved from Egypt only as a reward for their faith, as it is written: “The people believed” (Exodus 4:31).

We now see that the only reason G-d led the Children of Israel through the desert was so they would believe in Him and be worthy of being rescued from Pharaoh. He also wanted to teach them that as long as a person does not take the yoke of the Torah upon himself, he will not be protected from the forces of impurity, nor from his enemies. Although Hashem could have performed a miracle by preventing their enemies from attacking them, He did not want to do it for free.

Regarding a man for whom a miracle had been performed, the Sages of the Talmud said: “How lowly was this man, that the nature of Creation was changed on his account!” (Shabbat 53b). Accusers could have said, “By what merit was a miracle performed for the Children of Israel and the laws of nature changed on their account?” We find an allusion to this in the parsha: “G-d did not nacham [lead] them by way of the land of the Philistines” (Exodus 13:17). The term nacham is formed by the same letters as chinam (“free”), meaning that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to lead them through the land of the Philistines because that would have necessitated performing a miracle for the Children of Israel for free, something that G-d did not want.

Only If They Study Torah

When did the Holy One, blessed be He, perform miracles for the Children of Israel? It was when they took upon themselves the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, as we read elsewhere: “No man shall be able to stand up against you until you have destroyed them” (Deuteronomy 7:24). This promise was only given on condition that they study Torah and perform mitzvot, as it is written: “If you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them” (*ibid.* 7:12). Elsewhere on the same subject we read: “For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to love the L-RD your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him, the L-RD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will drive out greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place where the sole of your foot will tread will be yours – from the desert and the Lebanon, from the river, the Euphrates River, until the Western Sea – shall be your boundary. No man shall be able to stand up against you. The L-RD your G-d will set your terror and your fear on the entire face of the earth where you will tread, as He spoke to you” (*ibid.* 11:22-25).

We may say that the Children of Israel were not worthy of seeing the downfall of their enemies before taking the yoke of the Torah and the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven upon themselves. As long as they had not received the Torah, they could not do so. Hashem therefore had to lead them through the desert, for it was better to exhaust them by taking them through the desert than to perform a miracle that could have aroused accusations against them.

AT THE SOURCE

What Ails You?

It is written, “He made the sea dry land, and the waters split” (Exodus 14:21).

To what can this be compared? It is like a human king who had two gardens, one inside the other. He sold the inner garden, and yet when the buyer came to visit it, the guard did not allow him in. The buyer said to him, “In the name of the king, let me in,” but the guard refused to listen. The buyer then showed him the royal seal, but he did not accept it, until finally the king himself appeared. When the guard saw the king coming, he started to flee. The buyer said to him, “All day long I told you to let me in on authority of the king, but you refused. Yet now you’re fleeing?” The guard replied, “It’s not before you that I’m fleeing, but before the king!”

Similarly, Moses came and stood before the sea. He ordered it to split “in the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He,” but it refused. Moses showed it his staff, but still it refused. It was only when Hashem Himself appeared that the sea fled, as it is written: “The sea saw and fled” (Psalms 114:3).

Moses said to it, “All day long I told you to split on authority of the Holy One, blessed be He, and you refused. Yet now, ‘What ails you, O sea, that you flee?’ [v. 5].” It replied, “It is not before you, son of Amram, but before the Master of all the earth” (Yalkut Shimoni).

What Ezekiel Never Saw

“This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him” (Exodus 15:2).

The commentators express great surprise at the words of the Sages in the Mechilta: “What a maidservant saw by the sea, the prophet Ezekiel never saw, as it is written: ‘This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him.’ ”

The book Peninim Yekarim gives a wonderful explanation for this statement by citing Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin on the teachings of the Sages (Bikkurim 1:4) that a convert brings bikkurim (first fruit), but does not recite the accompanying text, for he cannot say “...which the L-RD swore to our fathers to give to us” (Deuteronomy 26:3). It follows that a slave or a maidservant is also exempt from reading the text that accompanies the bringing of bikkurim.

Our Sages had trouble understanding the change of language in the verse, “This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him; the G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him.” Why does it begin with the expression “my G-d,” and end with the expression “the G-d of my father”? For this reason, the Sages explained that the beginning of the verse was said by the maidservants, who could not say “the G-d of my father,” while the end of the verse was said by all the Children of Israel.

Since the beginning of the verse indicates that it was the maidservants who uttered it, pointing to G-d as they said, “This is my G-d,” the Sages explained: “What a maidservant saw by the sea, the prophet Ezekiel never saw.”

Why the Red Heifer?

It is written, “There He gave them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them” (Exodus 15:25).

Rashi explains, “There He gave them. In Marah, He gave them some sections of the Torah so that they would busy themselves with them, namely the Sabbath, the red heifer, and the laws of jurisprudence.” What are the laws concerning the red heifer doing here? We can understand the laws of Shabbat being here, since they already observed Shabbat while in Egypt, and therefore they had to know its laws. They even had to know the laws of jurisprudence, since they had tremendous wealth after obtaining the spoils by the sea. As for the laws of the red heifer, however, why did they have to learn them now?

The book Toldot Yaakov explains that they needed the laws of the red heifer precisely at that time, so that in the future they would not be surprised by the idea of purification by means of a red heifer, which renders the pure impure and the impure pure, a seemingly impossible thing.

Thus when they were in Marah and could not drink its waters because of their bitterness, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to place a piece of wood (which by its very nature is bitter) into the water, and it would sweeten it. Hashem thereby introduced them to the idea of the bitter becoming sweet. Hence in the future they would not argue about the red heifer, which renders the pure impure and the impure pure.

The Pot of Meat

It is written, “As we sat by the pot of meat, when we ate our fill of bread” (Exodus 16:3).

Why does the verse state, “As we sat by the pot of meat”? Why not just say, “When we ate our fill of bread”?

In his book Ma’assei Hashem, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi Zatzal explains that the verse is discussing a certain dish that the Egyptians have been eating to the present day.

This dish is made from light dough that is put into a special plate, which in turn is placed above a boiling pot of meat. At the bottom of this plate are holes, through which steam from the meat pot is absorbed by the dough.

This explains the expression, “As we sat by the pot of meat, when we ate our fill of bread.” That is, they ate their fill of bread that was cooked because of a pot of meat.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA PROFITING FROM A MIRACLE

It is written, “The L-RD spoke to Moses: ‘Behold, I shall rain down for you bread from heaven. Let the people go out and pick each day’s portion on its day so I can test them, whether they will follow My Torah or not’ ” (Exodus 16:4).

With regards to the miracle of the manna, which fell from heaven for the Children of Israel, the Gemara states: “ ‘Man did eat the bread of the mighty’ [Psalms 78:25], i.e., bread that the ministering angels eat. This was the interpretation of Rabbi Akiva. When these words were reported to Rabbi Ishmael, he said to them: ‘[It means] bread that was absorbed by the 248 evarim’ ” (Yoma 75b).

The Midrash has much to say about the great miracle of the manna. Rabbi Abba said, “They were even spared the utterance of their wish, for G-d fulfilled their thoughts while still in their heart, and they tasted their heart’s desire” (Shemot Rabba 25:3). The Midrash also states that when the sun arose, the manna melted and began to flow like a river, and the nations of the world came to drink from it. However it was very bitter in their mouths, though it tasted like honey for the Children of Israel. What did the nations of the world do? They made a deer drink it, and they ate the deer and tasted a little of the manna and proclaimed, “Happy is the people whose lot is thus!”

The Gemara teaches: “A man should never stand in a dangerous place and declare, ‘A miracle will be done for me.’ Perhaps a miracle will not be done for him. Yet if a miracle is done for him, his merits will then be diminished” (Taanith 20b). The Gemara goes on to recount the story of a man who gave to charity all the money that he had set aside for his daughter’s trousseau, with the exception of a single zuz. With that zuz, he purchased some wheat that he stored in his granary. At that point a miracle occurred, for his granary became filled with wheat. When his daughter saw this, she told her father: “Come and see what your Friend has done for you.” Her father replied, “I take an oath that it shall be like devoted property to you, and you shall have no more right to share in it than any poor person in Israel” (Taanith 24a). Rashi explains that because this wheat resulted from a miracle, the man did not want his daughter to profit from it, for he did not want her merits diminished as a result.

The Gemara recounts another story regarding this subject, the story of Rabbi Hanania ben Dosa, a very poor man who prayed for sustenance. A miracle then took place, for he was given a table leg made of solid gold. His wife then dreamed that in the World to Come, all the tzaddikim were eating on gold tables having three legs, while her husband was eating on a table having only two legs. Rabbi Hanania ben Dosa asked for Heaven to have mercy on him by taking back the gold table leg, for he did not want to profit from a miracle.

In light of all this, the commentators ask how the Children of Israel could have profited from the manna for 40 years in the desert, since no miracle could have been greater.

Nullified Little by Little

In his book Yair Ozen, the Chida states that the prohibition against profiting from a miracle is only a manifestation of extreme piety. In

terms of the manna, since the Holy One, blessed be He, performed this miracle so the Children of Israel could eat, there was no reason to say that they should not profit from it. After all, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not produce deceptive miracles. Hence the wife of the prophet Obadiah had the right to use oil provided to her by Elisha’s miracle. In the book Yad David on tractate Taanith, it is stated that with regards to most people, there is no reason to say that their merit is diminished if they profit from a miracle. Hence it is permissible for them to profit from one. It also follows from Sha’arei Teshuvah (Orach Chaim 187:3) that although we can understand from Berachot that there is no reason to ask Hashem to perform a miracle, we may still say: “Let Him make us” – in the plural. (Note: This is why the Rema states that if one forgets to recite Al HaNisim during Birkat Hamazon, and he has finished Birkat HaAretz, he can add it during HaRachaman by saying: “May the Merciful One perform miracles and wonders for us, just like You did for our ancestors in those days, at this time...”)

Rabbi Chaim Chizkiya Medini, the Sdei Chemed, explains this in another way. He cites Rav Yoskovitz Zatzal in the name of the Maharshak by stating that for a miracle, we say “this is nullified little by little.” Hence it seems that a miracle first emerges within a mixture, never by itself. It is therefore nullified among the mixture and we can profit from it. With regards to Elisha, since the extra oil that Obadiah’s wife received was mixed among the oil that initially existed (impossible to distinguish from among the mixture), she was allowed to use it.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA A TEACHING OF THE GAON AND TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

The Essence of Teshuvah

For what reason did G-d punish Pharaoh only at the sea, not in Egypt? It seems that Pharaoh drew all his energy from the letters Yam Moshe Elo-kim, and since he wanted to exalt himself by this Name and believed that he could transform the holiness of the Name into something impure, he said: “Mi [Who] is the L-RD, that I should obey Him?” (Exodus 5:2). G-d punished Pharaoh in the very same way that he wanted to sin, making him pay at the sea (yam). When Pharaoh was punished, he thought of repentance and said: “Mi [Who] is like You among the gods, O L-RD?” (Exodus 15:11). The term mi is formed by the same letters as yam, meaning that once Hashem punished Pharaoh, he recognized the power of Hashem. With the same expression that he had used to sin, Pharaoh repented and Hashem saved him from among the dead.

Since Pharaoh repented, G-d did not kill him. Pharaoh proceeded to go to all the nations of the world and told them of His nature. Hence it is written, “For this have I let you endure, in order to show you My strength so that My Name may be declared throughout the world” (Exodus 9:16).

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER
RABBI YAAKOV YEHOSHUA FALK
THE AUTHOR OF PNEI YEHOSHUA

“If G-d is with me and brings me out from this place in peace, if He builds a place for me where I can have many students, I will not leave the walls of the Beit Midrash where I study Gemara and the commentators, and I will record my own commentaries in a book in order to enlighten the eyes of students and spread the Torah in Israel.”

Such was the fervent prayer of the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk Zatzal, the author of Pnei Yehoshua, while he lay trapped in the ruins of the yeshiva where he was studying, when the building was overrun by fire and crumbled around him. Thirty-six people lost their lives in the ruins of the building, including Rabbi Yehoshua's wife and only daughter.

Before the Rav could finish his prayer, a light shined before him. He looked and saw among the rubble a path that had opened up, one through which he could escape. He took that path and made it to the street, safe and sound. Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua thanked Hashem for His great kindness to him. He then fulfilled the vow that he had made while trapped in the rubble: He devoted all his energy to studying and teaching, and he recorded his Halachic commentaries in book that carries his name, Pnei Yehoshua. His book made waves among Torah scholars, for it proved that he was a man with exceptional clarity of thought. Since first released, his book has been reprinted many times, and to this day those who study Torah take great delight in his explanations and extraordinary learning methods.

Like an Angel

Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk was born on Kislev 28 in Krakow, Poland. He was the grandson of Rabbi Yehoshua Charif (the author of Meginei Shlomo on Rashi and Responsa Pnei Yehoshua). After the destruction of his house, Rabbi Yehoshua left the city and traveled to Lvov, where he was welcomed as the city's Rav. He then became the Rav of Tarlov and Liska, but later returned to Lvov and succeeded the Chacham Tzvi as Rav. Numerous students flocked to his yeshiva, whose fame spread far and wide. Following a quarrel concerning Shabtai Tzvi, Rabbi Yehoshua left Lvov and was appointed as the Rav of several cities, including Berlin and Frankfurt. He later moved to Warsaw, where he lived thanks to the business of his second wife, an active and learned woman who understood the Torah commentaries of her husband. The Chida, who was a guest of the “Pnei Yehoshua” (as Rabbi Yehoshua was known), wrote: “I was able to look upon the face of the Shechinah for several days. He was like an angel of G-d, and he gave me the book Pnei Yehoshua as a gift.”

Finally, Rabbi Yehoshua went to live in the town of Offenbach, where he passed away on Shevat 14 at the age of 76. News of his passing led to great mourning by the Jewish people. Rabbi Yehoshua was buried in Frankfurt, where he had previously served as Rav, and although he requested that no eulogies be made at his funeral, the Noda B'Yehuda spoke of him with great emotion. In fact the tzaddik Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik of Lomarna wrote of him, “From Yehoshua [bin Nun] to Yehoshua, none was like Yehoshua.”

A TRUE STORY
HIS MERCIES NEVER END

It is written, “They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant” (Exodus 14:31).

The young Michael Hazout, the son of Mr. Avraham Hazout (the leader of Lyon's Jewish community), was involved in a car accident in Eretz Israel. His cousin was killed in the same accident, and he was so seriously injured that he was at death's door.

Mr. Avraham Hazout received a telephone call telling him to come to Eretz Israel right away. He came in tears to see our teacher the Rav Shlita, who was then in Eretz Israel (it was the late summer) for the Hilloula of his father the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto Zatzal. With tears streaming from his eyes, Mr. Hazout implored the Rav for help. “Please, pray for the life of my son! He's my only son – I have no children but him – and if he dies, who will say Kaddish for me?”

The Rav Shlita was very moved, and he told Mr. Hazout: “By the merit of my holy ancestors, the Holy One, blessed be He, will help your son make a complete recovery. You will continue to be the leader of our community. You will bring him to the Lyon yeshiva, and he will open the Ark.” The blessing of the Rav and his promise were relayed to the doctor in charge of Michael Hazout. Yet when he observed Michael's condition, unconscious with his life teetering on the edge, he turned to the father and said: “If your son survives and makes a complete recovery, I'll believe that the world has a Creator, because in my opinion there's no chance of that happening.”

As it says, “Hashem's kindness has never ceased, nor has His mercy ended” (Lamentations 3:22). Michael Hazout regained consciousness, though he was still paralyzed in both legs, having lost the ability to move them. For a long time, his father spoke to the Rav Shlita and said to him: “Does the Rav remember that he promised that my son would get up and open the Ark at the yeshiva? But he's still paralyzed!”

“Bring your son to the yeshiva. We will pray for him next to the Ark,” the Rav Shlita told the anguished father. Thus Michael Hazout was brought to the yeshiva in a wheelchair. At that point, everyone saw a great miracle taking place before their very eyes: As soon as Michael entered the yeshiva's hall, he got up on his feet, approached the Ark, and opened it.

The Rav Shlita later said that he was certain that he was not responsible for this miracle. Rather, it was the man's great faith that had helped him, as it is written: “He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him. He will hear their cry and save them” (Psalms 145:19). All depends on the fear of Heaven, on having faith and trusting the Holy One, blessed be He.