



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Why Did You Help Him?

We must be very careful, if we have asked someone to help us and he says that he cannot, not to say to him: "Why did you help so-and-so? He himself told me that you helped him!"

It often happens that if we respond in this way, we will arouse resentment in the heart of the person we are speaking to, resentment towards so-and-so for having said things that he should have kept secret.

– Chafetz Chaim

THE POWER OF THE TZADDIKIM'S VISION

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "The entire people saw the thunder and the flames" (Exodus 20:15). In the Midrash our Sages say, "They saw what was audible and heard what was visual. They saw fire emanating from the mouth of G-d and writing upon the tablets" (Mechilta 9). This requires an explanation. Let us think about this for a moment: People can only see material things, things that are tangible. Can one see something that is not tangible, such as a voice? Therefore how could the Children of Israel have "seen" the voice that emanated from the mouth of G-d?

Our Sages have said in the Aggadah, "[From] the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see from one end of the world to the other. Yet as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion, and He saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: 'Light is withheld from the wicked' [Job 38:15]. For whom did He reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come, as it is said: 'And G-d saw the light, that it was good' [Genesis 1:4], and 'good' means only the righteous, for it is said: 'Tell the righteous that he is good' [Isaiah 3:10]" (Chagigah 12a).

Hence we learn that before the evil inclination entered the first man, he rejoiced in this great light that no other creature could use before a future time. With this light he could see from one end of the world to the other, for he possessed supernatural vision. Yet when he sinned and the evil inclination entered him, this light was hidden away. His eyes were closed and he could no longer see what was before him. His vision was no greater than that of any other animal.

Likewise the Baal Shem Tov stated (see Genesis 29) that if created beings had not sinned, they could have seen through walls. Since they sinned, however, their vision was diminished. The righteous, who have not sinned, can see from one end of the world to the other by means of Ruach HaKodesh, for they are connected to the Shechinah.

Even the Wicked See

Know that the righteous see more than an animal can see, for with regards to Abraham it is written: "He saw the place from afar" (Genesis 22:4). Our Sages have explained that Abraham asked Isaac, "Do you see what I see?" He replied, "I see a cloud resting on the top of a beautiful and magnificent mountain." Abraham then asked those who accompanied them, "Do you see anything?" They replied, "We see only the desert." Abraham said to them, "Stay here with the donkey," for just as a donkey perceives nothing, they could not perceive anything. They were like a donkey, and so it was fitting for them to stay with the donkey (Tanhuma, Vayeira 23).

Furthermore, wherever the revelation of the Shechinah occurs, even the wicked see it. Our Sages have said, "The people of Mata Mehasia are hard-hearted, for they see the glory of the Torah twice a year, and yet none of them has ever converted" (Berachot 17b). Tosaphot state that a column of fire descended over them from heaven when the people gathered during Elul and Adar. Yet when this left no impression on them and nobody converted, the Sages concluded that they were hard-hearted.

Let us say that it was in this way that the Children of Israel saw the voice that emerged from the mouth of G-d and wrote upon the tablets. Nothing can compare to that event, which they

witnessed because they were attached to the Shechinah and far from sin, for the evil inclination had been removed from their heart. Their impurity had vanished, and therefore they were able to see things that the eyes of others could not see. They even saw things that were not tangible.

I Have Opened Your Eyes

Why did G-d show the Children of Israel something supernatural? It was in order for them to understand the power of the voice. Likewise the Mishnah teaches, "The world endures only for the sake of the breath of schoolchildren" (Shabbat 119b). Our Sages have also said in the Midrash, "Lashon Harah is graver than idolatry. When the Children of Israel sinned in the desert and made the golden calf, the decree came against them only when they sinned with their mouths, as it is written: 'The L-RD heard the voice of your words' [Deuteronomy 1:34], and it is said: 'As I live, says the L-RD, as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you' [Numbers 14:28]" (Midrash Tehillim 39).

It is also written, "My heritage was to Me like a lion in the forest; she cried out against Me, so I hated her" (Jeremiah 12:8). Was there hatred in her voice? There was love in her voice, as it is written: "Let Me hear your voice" (Song of Songs 2:14)! In fact there was both love and hatred in her voice, and so we may say: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

G-d therefore said to the Children of Israel: "Just as I have used My voice for words of Torah, you should use your voice to study Torah. If you use your voice to speak words of Torah, good. Otherwise I will hate your voice. Also, if you perform good deeds and distance yourselves from sin, I will open your eyes and you will see more than the animals. However if you commit evil deeds, your vision will not be superior to that of animals."

Since the Children of Israel committed the sin of the golden calf and harmed their voice, their vision returned to what it had been at first. How can we say that they harmed their voice? From the passage, "When Joshua heard the voice of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses: 'There is a voice like war in the camp.' He said, 'It is not the voice of those who shout for mastery, nor is it the voice of those who cry for being overcome. It is the voice of those who sing that I hear'" (Exodus 32:17-18). Since they had used their voice for other things, their vision was seized and safeguarded for tzaddikim in the future.

Furthermore, every tzaddik who cleaves to the Shechinah can use this light even in this world. Hence Moses asked G-d, after the sin of the golden calf, "Show me, please, Your glory" (Exodus 33:18). G-d agreed and said to him, "You shall see My back, but My face may not be seen" (v.23). The Torah also says of Moses, "The L-RD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow" (v.11). This verse is really out of place here, and it was only written for us not to mistakenly think: Just as our vision has been removed, the vision of Moses was also removed. Hence the verse states that Hashem "would speak to Moses face to face." Furthermore, Moses wanted to see the Shechinah, which he did, whereas the people did not see it.

AT THE SOURCE

Two Deliverances

It is written, “Blessed be the L-RD, Who has delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh; Who has delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt” (Exodus 18:10).

Why is the expression “Who has delivered” used twice?

In Responsa Halachot Ketanot, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Haguiz Zatzal replies that two deliverances occurred: The first was for Moses and Aaron at the outset of their mission, so that the Egyptians would not harm them, nor would Pharaoh when they came before him. The second was for the people, so that the Egyptians – who maintained them – would not harm them.

With regards to Moses and Aaron we read: “Who has delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.” Yet with regards to the Children of Israel we simply read: “Who has delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt.” This is because Moses and Aaron received special deliverance from Pharaoh when they came before him as Hashem’s emissaries. Such was not the case for the Children of Israel, and therefore they were only delivered in a general way “from under the hand of Egypt.”

Listen Now, Listen Later

It is written, “And now, if you indeed listen to Me” (Exodus 19:5).

With regards to the redundant expression shamoah tishmeu (“if you indeed listen”), the saintly Rabbi Chaim ben Attar wrote that this contains an allusion, telling us that if a person begins listening to the Torah, he will want to listen even more.

It is as if the verse were saying: “If you listen now, I promise that you will listen in the future” – on your own, when you have tasted it. As the verse says, “Taste and see that the L-RD is good” (Psalms 34:9).

Remember

It is written, “Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it” (Exodus 20:8).

Concerning the recollection mentioned in this verse, Abrabanel explains that man naturally wants to forget the laws of Shabbat. During the week, he is busy with various kinds of work that are forbidden on Shabbat, and habit will certainly lead him to forget Shabbat. Hence the verse finds the need to awaken the power of recollection so that he remembers the Sabbath day and abstains from work.

In his book Ben Ish Hai, Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad Zatzal wrote that in regards to this verse, if we ask why there are more warnings given for the mitzvah of Shabbat than for other mitzvot, the answer is because: “Six days you shall work and do all your work” (Exodus 20:9). All work is permitted during the weekday, “But the seventh day is a Sabbath of the L-RD your G-d” (V.10). This is why we must remember it so often.

By Allusion

Over and Above

It is written: Ha’ma’aseh asher ya’asun (“The deeds that they shall do” – Exodus 18:20).

The expression asher ya’asun designates the act of doing more than what is expressly required.

The phrase ha’ma’aseh asher ya’asun has the same numerical value as hikaness lifnim mishurat hadin (doing more than what is expressly required).

– Birkat Peretz

Seven Words, Twenty-Eight Letters

It is written, “G-d spoke all these words, saying...” (Exodus 20:1).

This verse comprises seven words and twenty-eight letters, the same as the first verse in the book of Genesis. It is also the same as the response given in Kaddish following Amen: Yehei shemei rabba mevarach l’alam u’lealmei almaya.

This reinforces a teaching of the Sages: “Whoever responds ‘Amen’ with all his strength, it is as if he was the partner of the Holy One, blessed be He, in Creation and the giving of the Torah.”

– The Rosh

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

Sweeter than Honey

King David said, “They are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold; and sweeter than honey and drippings from the combs” (Psalms 19:11). Why does David compare the words of the holy Torah to honey, and why does he say that they are sweeter than honey?

The explanation is that a person cannot eat a great deal of honey, for its sweetness is such that he ends up getting sickened by it. He therefore eats a little and leaves the rest.

Such is not the case with words of Torah, for the more we partake of them, the sweeter they become. The Mishnah cites Ben Bag Bag as saying, “Go over it and over it, for everything is in it. Look deeply into it, grow old and grey over it, and do not stir from it” (Pirkei Avot 5:21). The Torah is not like honey, the sweetness of which makes people sick. Although a person may study the holy Torah every day of his life, he will never be sickened by it. Instead, the more he studies it, the tastier it will be to him. As the Sages have said, “The more that one studies them [words of Torah], the more relish he finds in them” (Eruvin 54b).

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

YOU SHALL NOT COVET

It is written, “You shall not covet your fellow’s house, you shall not covet your fellow’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your fellows” (Exodus 20:14).

The foundation for this mitzvah, states Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 38), is that evil thoughts push people to commit follies in abundance. Once a person has decided to take something that he covets from someone, he will pay heed to nothing else. If the owner does not wish to sell it to him, he will take it by force. If the owner resists, it is possible that he may even kill him for it, as was the case with Naboth, who was killed because Achav coveted his vineyard.

The Rishonim differ in their views on the nature of the prohibition against coveting. For the Rambam, if we forcefully take something that belongs to another person without paying for it, or if we pay for it, be it with the owner’s consent or not, we have transgressed: “You shall not covet.” Thus he writes in the laws on theft: “All who covet his slave or maidservant or his house or the belongings of his fellow, or anything that he is able to buy from him, and he inflicts himself through wickedness and pleads persistently until he takes it from him – even though he gives a great deal of money – this is a violation of a negative commandment, as it says: ‘You shall not covet’ ” (Rambam, Hilchot Gezeilah 1:9).

On the other hand, the Ravad believes that it is only when a person takes something by force that he has transgressed, “You shall not covet.” If he takes something from someone who willingly let him have it, then he has not transgressed this prohibition. According to both the Rambam and the Ravad, a person who covets does not commit a transgression until he has taken the object he covets. According to the Rambam, the prohibition of “You shall not covet” in question here, and the prohibition of “You shall not desire” that is found in Parsha Va’etchanan – “You shall not covet your fellow’s wife, you shall not desire your fellow’s house, his field, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, nor anything else that belongs to your fellow” (Deuteronomy 5:18) – are two different prohibitions. “Coveting” occurs when we insist on having what belongs to another person, and we acquire it from him, whereas “desire” is only in the heart. As the Sages have said, “Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom” (Bava Batra 21a), meaning that a person is permitted to covet Torah and mitzvot. Such jealousy and coveting are allowed, and they lead to a reward. Rabbeinu Bechaye wrote that permitted coveting includes coveting another person’s daughter for the purposes of marrying his own son. This is because the prohibition against coveting only applies to the goods of others, their servant and maidservant, who can leave only upon their master’s order. Yet with regards to their son or daughter, who have the choice of going where they want, the prohibition does not apply to them.

An Intelligent Man Neither Covets Nor Desires

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra uses a parable to explain the prohibition of “You shall not covet.”

He states, “It comes as a surprise to many that one can demand of a person not to covet a particular item. Let me give a simple parable: A simple villager will not fall in love with a princess, for he realizes that marriage between them would be unattainable, and the villager does not want to go out of his mind, like someone who dreams of having wings and being able to fly. A man is not interested in marrying his own mother, no matter how beautiful she is, simply because that is how he has been educated from childhood. Likewise a person must realize that what belongs to others is forbidden to him....”

Thus every intelligent man must realize that we do not obtain a beautiful woman or money because of our wisdom or knowledge, but only because of what G-d has given to us. This is why an intelligent man does not covet or desire. He knows that Hashem has prohibited him from having the wife of another man, and she is loftier in his eyes than a princess in the eyes of a simple villager. Hence he will rejoice over his lot, and he will not covet or desire something that is not his. The Sages have said, “Life, children, and sustenance depend not on merit, but mazal” (Moed Katan 28a). This is why an intelligent man will not desire or covet; he has faith that his Creator will nourish him and give him what is good in His eyes.

A Beautiful Explanation

In his commentary on Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zatzal (known as the “Beit HaLevi”), states that this is a beautiful explanation. He compares the repugnance of transgressing the prohibition on coveting to a situation that everyone can relate to: Imagine a person standing on a frozen river, and having a desire for something – each person according to his own nature – on the other side. The evil inclination is burning within him like a fire, and so he runs along the ice to reach the object of his desire. However if his foot were to slip and he was about to fall, at that point his desire would vanish, replaced by the fear of falling through the ice. In fact the Creator has implanted this natural response in everyone, meaning that even a slight fear can completely erase the power of desire and coveting.

The Rav states, “As a result, since the Torah has warned us with the prohibition, ‘You shall not covet,’ thus forbidding us to covet, if a person is afraid of this prohibition – even to a small extent, like the fear of falling – he will not covet at all.”

These remarks are worthy of the man who made them, as the Chazon Ish states in regards to this explanation. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik had a fear of Hashem that constantly hovered over him; it is truly what he felt, exactly as he wrote in his book.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI DAVID HALEVI SEGAL

THE AUTHOR OF TUREI ZAHAV

Rabbi David Halevi Segal Zatzal (known as the Taz on account of his book Turei Zahav on the Shulchan Aruch) was born in Ludmir to Rabbi Shemuel, a great Torah scholar as well as a wealthy and generous man. In his youth, Rabbi David was known for his extremely sharp mind and extraordinary diligence in Torah study. Even before reaching the age of 12, he left for the city of Brisk in Lithuania to attend the yeshiva of Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (the author of Beit Chadash, who was known as the Bach). Amazed by the youngster, Rabbi Sirkis took him as his son-in-law.

In this regard, it is said that the Bach promised his son-in-law that he would see to his sustenance and provide him with meat every day. One day he was given intestines instead of meat, and Rabbi David summoned his father-in-law to a din Torah as a result, arguing that "intestines are not worthy of being called meat." The court ruled in favor of the Bach, stating that intestines can also be considered meat.

The Chazon Ish explained this incident: Of course, it is impossible to think that the Taz simply had a desire for meat. However the Taz studied with tremendous diligence, to the point of exhaustion, and on that day he had eaten intestines rather than meat. As a result, he had learned less Torah than he normally would, and so he feared that this would arouse an accusation in Heaven against his father-in-law, who by his actions may have caused a diminishment in Torah study. Hence the Taz summoned him to a din Torah, clearly aware that the court would rule in favor of his father-in-law...and what is decreed below is also decreed above.

In 5378, Rabbi David was appointed as the Rav of Potlitsa, a very small town in Galicia, where he lived in tremendous poverty. When the Bach paid a visit to his son-in-law and saw his daughter, he realized the great distress that their poverty was causing them, and he was very saddened by it. Arriving in Krakow, where he served as Rav, he wrote to his son-in-law: "When I was in your home, I saw your poverty and was very saddened by it, for you cannot study in peace. However I hope that Hashem will give you better conditions and send you a gift."

The Old Tallit will Testify for Me

The book Avnei Shoham recounts a story that is recorded in the ledger of the Lvov community. An evil spirit entered the daughter of a certain wealthy man, who proceeded to ask the Taz to do something for her. He wanted him to come and see his daughter and to pray for her, for that would certainly heal her. After numerous supplications, the Taz accepted, and when he arrived at the door, she screamed "come in," and then turned her head away. The Taz asked her why she was looking away, and she said that the wicked cannot look at the righteous. She also said, "Know that in Heaven, you are known as rabbeinu, the gaon and author of Turei Zahav." The Taz replied, "If it is true that I hold some importance in Heaven, I decree that you will be healed, for today I have explained marvelous Halachic teachings in the Tur; I have attained the truth of the Torah, and by that merit you will be healed." From then on, she was very happy. This wealthy man, whose daughter had been healed, wanted to give the Taz a gift, but he refused to accept it. The wealthy man then went to buy him a beautiful tallit, but he refused to take it, saying: "You see that I am old and I will soon pass away. My old tallit will be able to testify that I never allowed a foreign thought into my head as I prayed. I therefore have no desire to change my old tallit for a new one!"

The Boy Was Healed at that Very Instant

In the book Ruach Chaim on Pirkei Avoth (1:1), Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin cites an amazing story that testifies to the greatness of the Taz: "It is said that a woman screamed to our teacher the Turei Zahav: 'Lord, help! My son is about to die!' He replied, 'Am I in the place of G-d?' She answered, 'I'm crying out to the Torah of my lord, for the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Torah are one.' He said, 'I will do this for you: The words of Torah that I am now studying with my student, I give them to you as a gift for your son. Perhaps he will live by their merit, for it is written: 'So that your days may be lengthened.' At that very instant the boy was healed."

During the Tach V'Tat (pogroms of 5408-5409), the Taz was the Rosh Yeshiva of Ostrog, the city of the Maharsha. However out of fear of the cruel Chmielnicki and his band of murderers, he left for Ulik, which was surrounded by fortified walls. The Cossacks reached that city as well, but suddenly left without warning. Rabbi Eliezer, the father-in-law of Rabbi Raphael of Hamburg, described what he was told in a dream: "I have defended this city for my servant David."

The illusion is clear: For the merit of Rabbi David Halevi Segal and his Torah, the city had been saved.

He suffered greatly during the years of pogroms. His two sons were killed in 5424, but he accepted Heaven's decision with love, writing: "In my youth, I lived with my family in Krakow, and my Beit Midrash was located above the synagogue. I was severely punished by the death of my two sons, which I attribute to that reason" (Taz, Drach Chaim 10:151).

With the publication of his book Turei Zahav on various parts of the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi David Halevi Segal became famous throughout the Jewish world. The Pnei Yehoshua wrote of him, "The Halachah follows his view in most cases: we walk in his light, and he is greater than the Acharonim, the first among the Rishonim. None is greater." Inscribed on his gravestone are the words: "Buried here on Shevat 26, 5427 is the light of the exile, the author of Turei Zahav, who merited in his lifetime for the Halachah to be decided according to his opinion. His teaching is perfect and pure."

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson, the Rav of Lemberg and author of Shoel U'Meishiv, recounted that about 200 years after the passing of the Taz, the government ordered the cemetery in which he was buried to be relocated. When they came to move the remains of the Taz, his body was found whole and his clothes intact, for the worms had not touched them.

A TRUE STORY

ON THE BACK OF THE LION

Rabbi Yaakov Bensabbat, the disciple of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, acquired the name "Bensabbat" following an amazing incident.

He was once on a journey with a caravan of Jews, who were riding on donkeys. As Shabbat was about to start, Rabbi Yaakov turned to his companions and said: "Shabbat will soon begin, and we cannot ride on Shabbat. We must stop here in the forest until tomorrow night. We can then continue on our journey."

However his traveling companions refused to listen, saying: "This place is dangerous! We have to continue moving because of the wild animals here." Hence the group journeyed on, leaving Rabbi Yaakov behind and all alone.

Rabbi Yaakov, who was infused with powerful faith, took some stones and laid them in a circle around him. He tied his donkey to a tree, lit two candles for Shabbat, and began to pray. He then raised his eyes and saw a large lion before him, its mouth open! (As we know, lions roamed the Moroccan wilderness some 200 years ago). Rabbi Yaakov was afraid, and so he raised his hands to heaven and beseeched Hashem to save him from the lion. At that point an old man suddenly appeared to him and said, "Do not fear!"

Rabbi Yaakov continued to pray, and then he ate the Shabbat meal with a content heart. During all this time, the lion was standing outside the circle of stones, carefully watching him.

At the end of Shabbat, Rabbi Yaakov saddled his donkey and prepared to continue his journey. However the lion suddenly approached and lowered its back, as if to say: Climb up on me.

Rabbi Yaakov understood and climbed upon the lion's back. He put all his things upon the lion, which he proceeded to ride at great speed. It took the lion only a few minutes to bring him to town, which was quite a distance from the forest.

The residents of town were terrified when they saw Rabbi Yaakov, for they thought that he had desecrated Shabbat by leaving on his journey before Shabbat had ended. However he recounted everything that had happened to him since parting ways with the caravan on the eve of Shabbat, and how he rode upon the back of the king of the animals. This incredible story quickly became the focus of conversation in town. Everyone believed Rabbi Yaakov's account, for the other members of the caravan had continued their journey on Shabbat and were killed by lions, with only Rabbi Yaakov surviving. He was therefore telling the truth.

From that day on, people began to call Rabbi Yaakov "Ben Shabbat." This was because of the miracle performed on the account of observing Shabbat, a miracle that protected him from lions. May the Holy One, blessed be He, also perform miracles and wonders for us!