

ALL PRIDE IS ABHORRENT TO HASHEM

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The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Written Lashon Harah

Sins related to speech, such as Lashon Harah, flattery, slander, lying and the like can be committed by speaking or by writing. Whoever transmits defamatory information or derogatory remarks in personal letters, books, newspapers, or leaflets has committed Lashon Harah. Therefore before sending a letter, check to see that it doesn't contain Lashon Harah!

Similarly, a person who receives a letter cannot show it to others if his intention is to belittle its writer. Even if he doesn't say a single bad word about its writer – yet knows that those who read it will form a negative impression of him – he has committed Lashon Harah by way of allusion, which is no different than overt Lashon Harah. For example, if a letter contains faulty logic or is filled with spelling errors, yet a person shows it to people in order to ridicule its writer, it is Lashon Harah. This applies even if the writer is not present.

It is written, “It will be when you enter the land that the L-RD your G-d gives you...you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground...and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the L-RD your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there. You shall come to the priest who will be in those days...and the priest shall take the basket from your hand” (Deuteronomy 26:1-4).

We know just how powerful the evil inclination is, being able to infuse a person's heart with pride to as to chase him from this world. As the Sages have said, “Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world” (Perkei Avoth 4:21). As such, not only will a person lose this world, but also the World to Come, for Hashem detests the proud, as it is written: “Every haughty person is an abomination to the L-RD” (Proverbs 16:5).

Although he was a heroic warrior, King David did not become proud. In fact he considered himself to be nothing, as he wrote: “I am a worm and not a man, the scorn of humanity, despised of people” (Psalms 22:7). Because he fully realized that his achievements stemmed from Hashem, he fought against the evil inclination as it tried to convince him to take advantage of the honor that Hashem gave him. In fact King David put all his abilities and strength into increasing the glory of Hashem.

When the Children of Israel were about to enter the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8) – “a land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will lack nothing there” (Deuteronomy 8:9) – Hashem was concerned that wealth would lead the people to pride and cause them to forget Him. As we are told, “Yeshurun became fat and kicked – you became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and it deserted G-d its Maker” (ibid. 32:15). This is why Hashem reminded them not to forget that they had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years, and that everything given to them in the land of Israel was not due to their merit. Rather, it was due to the merit of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs who served Hashem with devotion and in complete self-annulment. In other words: It was to them that the land belonged, not to you. Thus you have no reason to grow proud, especially since the gift of the land is based on Torah study and mitzvot performance. If you fail in this regard, Hashem will reclaim the land and exile you from it.

In the expression ki tavo (“when you enter” – Deuteronomy 26:1), the word tavo has a numerical value of 403. Of this amount, 400 corresponds to the years of oppression they endured, as it is written: “Your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own...and they will oppress them 400 years” (Genesis 15:13), while 3 corresponds to the three Patriarchs, to whom Hashem promised the land of Israel after the exile of Egypt.

This is why Hashem commanded that the first-fruit be brought to the Temple and that people declare, “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt... The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and they placed hard work upon us” (Deuteronomy 26:5-6). In

this way they would never forget their past, when they were slaves in Egypt. They would also never forget the fact that they inherited the land due to the merit of the holy Patriarchs, an inheritance that is based on Torah study and mitzvot performance. Therefore what they had was a gift.

Hence they went to the Temple with their baskets in hand to thank Hashem for all the good He did for them. They gave thanks to Him for having led them to the land of their forefathers, as it is written: “The L-RD took us out of Egypt with a strong hand... He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruit of the ground that You have given me” (vv.8-10). Since they thanked Hashem for all His kindnesses to them, they did not have erroneous thoughts such as, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.”

This is some of the advice that the holy Torah gives man in order to prevent a spirit of pride from making its way into a person and causing him to lose his life. In general, when a person becomes wealthy and his thoughts focus on his business, he begins to study less Torah – and the wealthier he becomes, the less he studies! If he strays from the Torah, pride will certainly occupy the space created by the diminishment of his study, and in this way he is liable to have wicked thoughts.

Today, because of our many sins, the Temple has not yet been rebuilt. However the place where a tzaddik is found is like the Temple, and the tzaddik is like the High Priest who officiates within. When we bring a gift to the tzaddik and we see how he serves Hashem, a completely selfless act, our hearts break and we repent. We then become completely different people and learn how to serve Hashem from the tzaddik. It is like bringing first-fruit to the Temple, as the Sages have said: “One who brings a gift to a scholar, it is as if he had offered first-fruit” (Ketubot 105b).

From here we learn that if a poor person becomes rich, he must remember that he was once poor. He must remember that it was only through Hashem's compassion and the merit of the holy Patriarchs that he was given this free gift. He has no reason to grow proud, for just as Hashem made him wealthy, so too can He reclaim this wealth if he does not conduct himself properly.

As a result of the Creator's goodness to man, the evil inclination tries to make him feel that he has been successful because of his tremendous intelligence, or that he has attained a lofty position because he was lucky. By constantly staying close to the tzaddik in order to be guided along the right path, a person will never grow proud, and all his days will be lived in humility. Hashem abhors the proud, and it is only a person who is small in his own eyes that Hashem draws near.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Barriers to Protect the Tongue

It is written, “Cursed is he who strikes his fellow secretly” (Deuteronomy 27:24).

Rashi explains: “Who strikes his fellow secretly. This refers to Lashon Harah.” The Yid Hakodesh (Holy Jew) of Pshischa once ordered Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa to go on a journey. Where to, and for what reason? The Rav did not explain, and the student did not insist. He took some chassidim with him, got ready to leave, and climbed into a carriage and took to the road. As the hours passed, they began to get hungry. Therefore they stopped in a village and made their way to an inn. Rabbi Bunim was given a room and the chassidim got ready to order a meal. They spoke to the innkeeper and asked him for a dairy meal.

“I’m very sorry,” said the innkeeper, “I only prepared meat dishes.” The chassidim then began to verify every detail of the shechita of the meal, including the kashrut of the animal and other such things.

At that point they heard a voice speaking to them: “Chassidim, chassidim!” They looked around until they discovered a Jew dressed in tattered clothing sitting by the furnace. He reprimanded them by saying, “Chassidim, chassidim! You are carefully examining what you put into your mouth, yet concerning what comes out of your mouth – the words that you utter – have you no questions?”

Rabbi Bunim was surprised by the significance of what he heard. A Jew pays great attention to what he puts into his mouth, yet he neglects the words that emerge from it, the prohibition of which is much more serious than a questionable piece of meat!

Thank G-d, people pay attention to what they put into their mouths. They look for the best kosher labels, and when they go into a grocery store to buy something, they examine it thoroughly. Yet do they ask themselves the same kind of questions concerning what leaves their mouths? Do they ask themselves whether what they are saying is permitted or forbidden by Halachah? Do they ever think about what the Sages have said, namely that Hashem placed barriers around each of our bodily members. These include the eyelid for the eye, which prevents us from looking at forbidden things, and the earlobe to prevent us from hearing forbidden things. The same applies to all our bodily members. However the Creator made two barriers for the tongue, the teeth and the lips, for extreme measures must be taken to guard it.

Although it is easy to do a great deal of damage by saying certain things, how much time does it take to repair that damage? Therefore let us pay great attention to what emerges from our mouth, at least as much as we do to what enters it!

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “Vehaya [And it will be] when you enter the land” (Deuteronomy 26:1).

As we know, the expression vehaya denotes joy. In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita explains that when a person arrives in Eretz Israel, he rejoices in all the good it contains. He works the land by sowing and harvesting, and he benefits from an abundance of blessing. Yet at that point he is liable to grow proud, thinking that his abilities are what brought this about. He will then forget Hashem, Who gave him his strength and abilities. This is why the Torah commands us to bring the first-fruit – precisely that which a person’s land produced after so much work on his part, and that which he especially desires – offering them to the Creator and yielding before Him. In this way he will overcome his desires, spiritually elevate himself, and connect to Hashem.

You Shall Put It in a Basket

It is written, “You shall put it in a basket” (Deuteronomy 26:2).

The Ohr HaChaim Hakodesh wrote, “You shall put it in a basket alludes to the fact that all the activities we enjoy must adhere to the words of the Sages, as it is written: ‘According to the Torah that they will teach you’ [Deuteronomy 17:11]. The Torah and its laws were explained by the Sages in the 60 tractates of the Talmud,

60 being the numerical value of the word tene [basket]. Without this, even if we perform all the mitzvot in the world, it will serve no purpose.”

However He Is

It is written, “You shall come to the priest who will be in those days” (Deuteronomy 26:3).

Rashi explains: “You have only the priest in your days, however he is.”

The gaon Rabbi Meir Shapira (the Rosh Yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin) was once staying with the Chafetz Chaim for Shabbat. After Shacharit, both of them sat down at a table prepared for Kiddush. They refreshed themselves with wine and cake, after which Rabbi Meir asked his host to relate some words of Torah. The Chafetz Chaim said that because he wasn’t feeling well, he could not fulfill this request.

Rabbi Meir replied, “It is written in Parsha Ki Tavo, ‘You shall come to the cohen [priest] who will be in those days,’ and Rashi says: ‘You have only the cohen in your days, however he is.’ ”

This clever remark by Rabbi Meir made a great impression on the Chafetz Chaim, who as we know was a Cohen. Because of his weakness on that morning, he spoke words of Torah along with Aggadah and Mussar, a great joy for all who heard!

This Place

It is written, “He brought us to this place [Rashi: the Temple] and He gave us this land” (Deuteronomy 26:9).

The commentators ask why this verse was not written in the opposite order, for they first came into the land and then the Temple was built!

It would seem that Eretz Israel’s primary importance stems from the fact that the Temple is found there. Hence the verse first states, “He brought us to this place.”

Rejoicing in the Performance of Mitzvot

It is written, “Because you did not serve the L-RD your G-d with gladness and goodness of heart” (Deuteronomy 28:47).

The joy that we experience when we perform mitzvot and love G-d, Who gave them to us, is a lofty way of serving Him. Whoever does not experience such joy deserves to be shunned, as it is written: “Because you did not serve the L-RD your G-d with gladness and goodness of heart...you will serve your enemies, whom the L-RD will send against you, in hunger and in thirst, in nakedness and without anything” (vv.47-48).

– Rambam, End of Hilchot Lulav

I Have Not Forgotten

It is written, “I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten” (Deuteronomy 26:13).

The Midrash states that a person’s harvest will be eaten by mice if he does not give his tithes. We also find in the Gemara that consuming food from which a mouse has eaten makes a person forget what he studied.

The Arvei Nachal states, “We therefore recite, ‘I have not transgressed any of Your commandments’ – for I have given my tithes according to Halachah, and therefore mice did not eat of my harvest. Hence ‘I have not forgotten’ what I studied.”

–Torat HaParasha

Rejoicing in All That is Good

It is written, “[You shall say] ‘And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruit of the ground that You have given me, O L-RD.’ ...You shall rejoice in all the good that the L-RD your G-d has given you and your household – you and the Levite and the sojourner who is in your midst” (Deuteronomy 26:10-11).

What is the meaning of the expression, “You shall rejoice in all the good”? What good is being discussed here? The Ohr HaChaim Hakodesh said that “good” always refers to the Torah, as it is written: ‘I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah’ [Proverbs 4:2].” If people only knew and sensed the

sweetness and pleasantness of the Torah, they would pursue it like madmen. All the gold and silver in the world would be meaningless in their eyes, for the Torah holds all the good of the world.

The Rav of Ponevezh cites an incident, described in tractate Megillah, in which an angel appeared to Joshua during the conquest of Jericho and reprimanded him for negligence in nightly Torah study and a failure to bring the regular afternoon sacrifice (Megillah 3a). Joshua wanted to find out for which of the two sins he was being held accountable, so he asked: "Are you for us [lanu] or for our enemies?" (Joshua 5:13). Tosaphot link the word lanu to the verse, "The Torah that Moses commanded for us [lanu]" (Deuteronomy 33:4). In other words, Joshua was asking the angel: "Have you come on account of a negligence in nightly Torah study?" The angel replied by saying, "Now [ata] have I come" (Joshua 5:14), which Tosaphot link to the verse: "Now [ata] write this song" (Deuteronomy 31:19), a reference to the Torah. The Ponevezher Rav asks why the angel used such an obscure reference, rather than explicitly telling Joshua, "I have come because of your failure to study Torah." Furthermore, the Ponevezher Rav asks what exactly was the criticism leveled at Joshua and the people, for they were presently in the middle of a war, and it is impossible to study Torah while engaged in battle. The Rav of Ponevezh answers: "If the Torah is a yoke or duty that we must fulfill and be done with, then this reprimand cannot be justified. However if the Torah is a song and represents all that is sweet in the world, then is it really impossible to sing while fighting?" This is what the angel told Joshua: You are asking a question concerning a commandment? You are inquiring about the Torah that was commanded to you? For a command I would not have come. Instead, I have now come for "this song."

Overview of the Parsha

The final mitzvot contained in the book of Deuteronomy relate to speech, similar to the mitzvot of hekdesch at the end of the book of Leviticus, and vows and oaths at the end of the book of Numbers. Here we have first-fruit and tithes that contain verbal declarations before Hashem. It is said that these declarations stress the relationship between G-d and His chosen people. Afterwards, the Children of Israel receive the order to immortalize the Torah by engraving it upon stones that they would later erect, by reciting blessings and curses when they would cross the Jordan, and by the words of the covenant in the plains of Moab, which stressed the importance of the Torah, the object of the covenant.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Synagogue in Minsk, a Synagogue in Israel

There was a righteous woman living in Minsk named Bluma Weilenkin. In her time the Sha'agat Aryeh served as the Rosh Yeshiva in Minsk, and Bluma provided him with food and supported him financially. She even built a special Beit Midrash for him, which until the Second World War was known as Beit Midrash Bluma. This Beit Midrash was transformed into a yeshiva by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, and it too was supported by the righteous Bluma.

The Sha'agat Aryeh is said to have given Bluma the blessing that she would merit to build a synagogue in Minsk and a similar one in the Holy Land. Many years passed, however, and Bluma was approaching the age of 80. Yearning to ascend to the Holy Land for the blessing of the tzaddik to be fulfilled, she went to Rabbi Chaim and asked him if she should go or not.

Rabbi Chaim said to her, "Since you have the blessing of the Sha'agat Aryeh in your pocket, why are you rushing things? Who knows just how long you'll live afterwards? In any case, he promised that you would build a Beit Midrash in Eretz Israel, so better to wait and see how things turn out." Thus Bluma listened to Rabbi Chaim and stayed in Minsk. It was only many years later, as she approached a very advanced age, that she left for the Holy Land and built a synagogue according to the blessing of the Sha'agat Aryeh. As soon as it was built, the righteous Bluma rendered her pure soul to the Creator.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

So Many Virtues

It is written, "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land" (Deuteronomy 26:2).

The mitzvah of bringing the first-fruit alludes to a tremendous number of virtues. The first is generosity, for the first-fruit were given to the priests, teaching that we must not only worry about ourselves, but remember the poor and needy as well. The second is to put the evil inclination in its place, for when a person went into his field and saw the first figs of the season emerging, he would remember that he was forbidden to benefit from such sweet fruit. Instead he was to attach a string to them to signal that they must be brought to the Temple. In this way people learned to control their desires. The third virtue is humility, for a person who brought his basket of first-fruit to the Temple would take it upon his shoulder. Even the king brought them in this way, thereby demonstrating that we must not boast over our success. Instead we must realize and acknowledge that "the earth and all it contains is the L-RD's" (Psalms 24:1). The fourth virtue occurs when we read the passage on the first-fruit, for we recall times of scarcity during times of abundance, which is an excellent way not to succumb to pride. Finally, by doing all these things we are demonstrating that everything comes from Hashem, which constitutes a fifth virtue (Me'am Loez).

How were the first-fruit brought? As a rule, they were not brought by single individuals. Rather, all the people of the cities belonging to a district assembled in the county town. There they slept in open places so as to minimize the chances of their first-fruit becoming spiritually unclean. At dawn their leader would say, "Arise and let us go up to Zion, to the L-RD our G-d" (Jeremiah 31:5). An ox, its horns covered in gold and a wreath of olive branches placed on its head, walked before them to announce that the first-fruit consisted of the seven species for which Eretz Israel is praised. A flute played during the entire procession as people exclaimed, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the L-RD'" (Psalms 122:1). When the procession arrived outside Jerusalem, emissaries were sent to announce their arrival to the residents of the city. The baskets containing the first-fruit were then decorated, with fresh fruit being placed before dried fruit, at which point the Temple officials emerged from Jerusalem to greet them. If many arrived, many would come out to greet them, and if few arrived, few would come out to greet them.

All the workmen of Jerusalem stood before them and announced, "Our brothers from such-and-such a place, peace be upon your arrival!" They would then march through Jerusalem led by a flute-player, until they came to the Temple mount.

At the Temple mount, each person placed his basket upon his shoulder and said, "Praise the L-rd! Praise G-d in His sanctuary" (Psalms 150:1), until they arrived at the courtyard. Once there, they sang: "Praise the L-rd! I will praise the L-RD with my entire heart" (Rambam, Hilchot Bikkurim 4:16-17).

Happy are those whose eyes saw this. May we merit, speedily and in our days, to bring our first-fruit to the Temple when Mashiach arrives. Amen!

A TRUE STORY

A Simple and Upright Jew

Because of our sins, we no longer have the mitzvah of bringing first-fruit since the Temple has been destroyed. However if we take a mitzvah and perform it wholeheartedly, we have the ability to bring great satisfaction to the Creator, as if we were actually bringing first-fruit. The following story illustrates this concept.

During the time of the holy Arizal, there lived a man who was simple and upright. When he heard of the importance of the showbread in the Temple, he became very excited and planned on putting 12 loaves of bread in the holy ark every Friday, which is exactly what he did. After the man returned home, the Shamash of the synagogue discovered these loaves (since nobody had taken them) and brought them home.

When the man came to synagogue and saw that the loaves were no longer there, he thought that Hashem had accepted them. He therefore continued to bring 12 loaves of bread to synagogue every week.

One day the Rav happened to be in synagogue when he brought his loaves. When the Rav asked him what he was doing, the man said that he was replacing the bread that had ascended to Heaven. The Rav scolded the man and said, "It's impossible for them to ascend to Heaven!" He then told him to stop bringing his bread to synagogue.

The Arizal, who through Ruach Hakodesh knew what had happened, revealed to the Rav that a decree had been issued against him in Heaven because he prohibited this Jew from bringing his bread to synagogue. The Arizal told him that since the destruction of the Temple, nothing had brought Hashem as much satisfaction as when this Jew innocently brought his bread to synagogue every week.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

How Beautiful Are Your Steps

Rabbi Berekiyah said: Those two mountains of the world, Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Joshua, explained [the verse], "How beautiful are your steps" [Song of Songs 7:2]: How beautiful were your [festival] seasons, barring the way to all trouble! Once a man forgot to lock his house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found a serpent entwined in the rings of his door. On another occasion a man forgot to bring his chickens into the house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found some cats torn to pieces in front of them. On another occasion a man forgot to bring a stack of wheat into the house when he went up to the festival, and when he returned he found it guarded by lions. Rabbi Pinchas said: It is related that there were two wealthy brothers in Ashkelon who had some evil-disposed Gentile neighbors, and they said: "When these Jews go up to pray in Jerusalem, we will go into their houses and ransack them." When the time came, they went up, but G-d appointed two angels in their likeness to go in and out of their houses. When they returned from Jerusalem they shared what they had brought back with them among their neighbors. They said to them: "Where have you been?" They replied, "In Jerusalem." "When did you go up?" "On such and such a day." "And when did you return?" "On such a day." They said: "Blessed be the G-d of the Jews, whom You did not forsake and who did not forsake You. We thought to ourselves, 'When will these men go up to Jerusalem so we may go and ransack their houses?' But their G-d sent angels resembling them who went in and out of their houses, because they trusted in Him," to fulfill what is said: "How beautiful are your steps."

—Shir Hashirim Rabba 7:3

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yehuda Loew – The Maharal of Prague

The Maharal of Prague was born in the city of Posen on the first night of Passover. The son of Rabbi Betzalel of Worms, the Maharal of Prague took it upon himself to save Jews from the anti-Semitic schemes of Gentiles. Even his own birth saved Jews from a plot, for the maidservant in his father's home was about to summon a midwife for his birth, when she saw a Gentile running from their courtyard. This Gentile had planned to put a dead body there, but fled when he saw the maidservant. Thus the residents of the community and the surrounding areas were saved from a cruel plot hatched against them on the first night of Passover. According to a well-known source, the Maharal created a Golem from clay in order to defend Jews from various plots. We know of his conflict with Thaddeus, the wicked priest of Prague, and the fact that the Maharal caused his death. At first the Maharal served as the Rav and Av Beit Din of Nickelsburg. He later returned to Prague, and from there to Posen, the city of his birth, where he remained as Rav for many years. The Maharal eventually returned to Prague, whose name he carries to the present day as "the Maharal of Prague."

The Maharal was opposed to the method of pilpul in learning Torah, for he said: "Why multiply pilpulum before having drawn from sources in the Talmud? Study everything first, and then discuss things." He also fought against new customs and taught his disciples to stand by customs that had existed for generations. The Maharal's numerous works deal with Jewish thought and philosophy, an inalienable heritage of the Jewish people to the present day. He lived a long time, almost 85 years, and left this world on Elul 18, 5369. He is buried in the Prague cemetery, where we also find the Altneu Shul, in whose attic the Golem is said to be hidden.

Arise and Spread the Light!

It is written, "Arise! Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the L-RD shines upon you. For behold, darkness may cover the earth and a thick cloud the kingdoms, yet upon you the L-RD will shine and His glory will be seen upon you. Nations will walk by your light" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

We can understand this passage with a parable: As a man was walking outside at night, he lost something extremely important to him. Yet because it was dark, he had no way of finding it. He therefore decided to remain there and wait until the sun came up before searching again.

It happened that another person lost a precious jewel on the same night and in the same place! Since he also couldn't find his lost item, he decided to wait there until morning. Thus he rested beneath a tree and fell asleep.

In the meantime, his father came looking for him with a lantern. When he found him asleep under a tree, he tried to wake him up, but without success. After unsuccessfully trying to wake him up several times, his father left. Some time later, the man began to tremble with cold and lamented his bitter fate.

When the first man heard him, he said: "What are you complaining about? Had you woken up, there would have been light for you and me, and we would have both come out ahead. Your father came here with a lantern and tried to wake you up several times, but you didn't want to get up."

The moral of the story is that Hashem often tries to wake us from our spiritual slumber. If we had roused ourselves to repentance, not only would there have been light for ourselves, but for everyone else as well. This is the meaning of, "Arise! Shine" – arise from your sleep and shine for others. "Your light has come," for Hashem often tried to bring you light, and "the glory of the L-RD shines upon you." If you get up, you will also enlighten others. "For behold, darkness may cover the earth" – for the nations – "yet upon you the L-RD will shine and His glory will be seen upon you." And if you had arisen, "Nations will walk by your light" would have also been fulfilled.