



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Can We Believe the Story?

You do not always have to disbelieve Lashon Harah. If you can interpret the facts of the Lashon Harah so that the implications are not negative, you may assume that the facts are true. But you must assume an interpretation that finds some merit for the subject of the tale.

Before she could be stopped, Rachel told Yocheved that Devorah ate an unkosher product. Yocheved finds it hard to believe that Rachel has entirely fabricated a false accusation. But if Yocheved believes the story, she will be guilty of believing Rachel's Lashon Harah. Yocheved is permitted to assume that Devorah actually ate the unkosher product, but she must feel certain that it was not a deliberate sin. Someone must have mistakenly assured Devorah that the product was kosher.

– Guard Your Tongue, pp.82-83

THE WORLD ENDURES BY THE MERIT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

When the Children of Israel made the golden calf, Hashem told Moses: “Go, descend, for your people... have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7). Here Rashi cites the Sages in stating, “Descend from your high position. I gave you this high position only for their sake” (see Berachot 32a). At that moment Moses grew so weak that he could no longer speak.

On the other hand, when Hashem told Moses, “And now, leave Me alone. Let My anger flare up against them, and I will destroy them and I will make you a great nation” (Exodus 32:10), Moses vigorously objected. Here the Sages have said, “This teaches that Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a man who seizes his fellow by his garment, and said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the universe, I will not let You go until You forgive and pardon them’ ” (Berachot 32a).

From here we see the greatness of Moses. He wholehearted agreed to descend from his greatness once Hashem told him to. In fact the spiritual heights that Moses attained by entering Heaven was due solely to the merit of the Children of Israel, enabling him to bring the Torah down for them. Yet now that they had sinned, there was no longer anything for Moses to do in Heaven. However when Hashem said to Moses, “I will make you a great nation,” he completely disagreed. Here Moses realized that Hashem wanted to elevate him again, but he could not agree because he knew that he was not the main thing, for that distinction belonged to the Jewish people. Since Hashem told him, “Leave Me alone,” it meant that hidden within justice was mercy, as the Sages have said: “When [G-d] said, ‘Leave Me alone... and I will destroy them,’ Moses said to himself: ‘This depends on me’ ” (Berachot 32a). Hence Moses grabbed Hashem “by His garment.”

In reality, we may ask how Moses could have dared to grab Hashem by His garment, for G-d a devouring fire. Furthermore, is it possible to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, even has a garment? This only makes sense for a being of flesh and blood, not for Hashem.

We shall attempt to explain. Hashem's garment is the Torah, which He dons and covers Himself with, and which constitutes His eternal delight, as it is written: “I was then His nursling. I was then His delight every day, rejoicing before Him always” (Proverbs 8:30). The Holy One, blessed be He, studies the Torah and continually finds new explanations in it, for the Torah is the formula and blueprint for all of Creation. Furthermore, in sacred texts we read that the Torah is called the garment of the Holy One, blessed be He (Zohar III, Tzav 28a).

Hence this is what the Sages meant when they said that Moses grabbed hold of Hashem's garment. It signifies that he grabbed Hashem by the holy Torah and His middot. That is, Moses told Hashem that if He destroyed the Children of Israel, Creation would no longer have a reason to exist, for who would study the holy Torah?

Our Sages have said that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, corresponding to the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people. If they were to disappear, what would become of the Torah? Moses also said that if the Jewish people were to disappear, over whom would Hashem reign in order to demonstrate His middot? In fact no king exists without a people, and without a people the kingdom of Hashem could not exist, for the Jewish people would not be there to declare Him King.

We may give a deeper explanation for why Moses implored Hashem not to destroy the Children of Israel. Moses said to Hashem: If You eliminate all the tribes that already exist, You will not be able to sustain the people that You propose to create from me. The entire Torah is formed by Hashem's Names, and it is composed entirely of the letters of the Children of Israel. Therefore it contains allusions to all the names of the Children of Israel – past, present, and future. Therefore how can You destroy the Children of Israel, since the new people that will emerge from me are not contained in the Torah? The Torah cannot be changed in any way, and Hashem's Names and those of the Children of Israel are already contained in it. If they are destroyed, how can a new people emerging from me endure before You, since they have no letters within the Torah and are not found in it? Since it cannot endure before You at the time of Your anger, You must allow the Children of Israel to live, for they are already found in the Torah.

This is what is meant by Moses grabbing hold of Hashem by the garment of the Torah. Here we many also raise an objection, for the Torah is made of fire, as it is written: “From His right a fiery law” (Deuteronomy 33:2). Therefore how can the Torah be actually held?

The answer is that a person is not burned by the Torah when he studies it. On the contrary, the Torah warms him. Although the Torah is fire, as it is written: “My word is like fire, the word of the L-RD” (Jeremiah 23:29), it will not burn a person as long as he studies it, for it is an elixir of life. In fact when he studies Torah, it elevates him and makes him great. Even the fire of Gehinnom does not affect him in that case, as it is said concerning Moses: “When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shined” (Exodus 34:30), for its light did not burn him.

Hence Moses could grab hold of Hashem by the garment of the Torah without being burned. Indeed, Moses had already studied the entire Torah during the forty days that he was on Mount Sinai, and he was not burned by it. Thus Moses wanted to speak to Hashem in favor of the Children of Israel, saying that all of Creation endured by their merit and therefore they could not be destroyed. However this only applies when they study Torah and practice mitzvot. It is only then that the world endures by their merit. This is why everyone must strengthen themselves in Torah study and mitzvot observance, for only in this way can the world endure at all times.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

When I Wanted, You Did Not Want

It is written, “[Moses] said, ‘Please, show me Your glory.’ ... [G-d] said, ‘You will not be able to see My face’” (Exodus 33:18-20).

We learn from Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “When I wanted, you did not want [to see My face at the burning bush]. Now that you want, I do not want” (Berachot 7a). The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor Zatzal of Kovno was preparing one of his books for publishing. He had to proofread the text to ensure that it contained no mistakes, and afterwards he planned on going to a printer to have it published, which as we know costs a great deal of money. However he had faith that Hashem would help him to spread the Torah through his books, and as it turned out, in the middle of his work he heard someone knocking at his door. The gaon of the generation got up and answered it, and standing there was a wealthy member of the community. He said to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, “I would like to help spread the Torah of the Rav. I want to help with the costs of publishing your book.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan had known this man for a long time, which is why he said to him in an authoritarian tone: “When I was a young man, I studied at a yeshiva located in a small town where you lived. The shoes that I wore had holes in them, and the frost and rain froze my feet. Given your standing and financial abilities, people approached you and asked that you buy me a new pair of shoes. However you refused, and I fell ill as a result. I was bedridden for several weeks, and I lost precious time in learning Torah. If you had purchased those shoes, you would have had a share in my Torah learning of those weeks. Yet you failed to take advantage of that opportunity, and now that my books are ready for publishing, you will not be given the merit of sharing in my Torah. You passed up your opportunity.”

The deeper significance of Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan’s response can be seen by what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses. As the gaon Rabbi Shmuel Rozowski Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, explained: “If Heaven gives a person an opportunity, the possibility to elevate himself to a higher level, yet he does not take advantage of this opportunity – even if it is because he does not feel worthy of such a level, as was the case with Moses at the burning bush – it will nevertheless be removed from him, and even if he desires and seeks it later on, he will no longer merit that opportunity!” Life offers everyone moments when he is shown the light. During such times he is given special help from Heaven to ascend to higher levels of Torah and the fear of Heaven, and he realizes that these moments are ripe for getting closer to Hashem.

He must seize such opportunities and take full advantage of them. If he looks down upon them – even if he feels unworthy because of his many sins – he may lose the gift that he has been offered, and if he looks for it in the future, he may no longer find it.

A person must therefore seize the moment. He must take on another Torah class and especially strengthen his observance of mitzvot, for in this way he will merit to see the glory of Hashem.

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states that after the sin of the golden calf, Moses asked Hashem: “Please, show me Your glory” (Exodus 33:18). Our Sages have explained this to mean that Hashem showed Moses the knot of His tefillin. Why did Moses ask for this? It was because he saw that it was the opportune time, for Hashem had just pardoned the sin of the golden calf. Hence Moses wanted to learn directly from Hashem, not an intermediary, how to cleave to Him and avoid sin, which is only possible through the revelation of the Shechinah. In fact if the Children of Israel had not sinned with the golden

calf, they would have grown to increasingly higher spiritual levels, until they would have learned exceedingly lofty things. Yet because of this sin, the Shechinah departed and the evil inclination made its way back into them. Moses therefore asked Hashem to show him His glory once again, after He forgave them, for in this way the Children of Israel would always cleave to Him and never sin.

Hashem answered Moses: Now it is already too late, “for no man can see My face and live” (Exodus 33:20). Man cannot see My light during his lifetime, but only after his death, and only if he served Me during his entire life.

How will a person be able to see this light after death? Hashem gave Moses some advice by showing him the knot of His tefillin. This means that when a person attaches his heart (i.e., the tefillin of the arm) and his mind (i.e., the tefillin of the head) to Hashem in order to serve Him, he will be able to subdue his 248 limbs and 365 sinews before Hashem. In that case he will merit to perceive and cleave to Hashem in life. In addition, because he annulled his entire being before Hashem in life, he will also see Him after he dies.

The Count of the Children of Israel

It is written, “Ki tisa et rosh bnei Israel [When you take the count of the Children of Israel] according to their numbers, venatnu [then they shall give]” (Exodus 30:11).

The first letters in the expression tisa et rosh bnei (tav-aleph-resh-beth) have a numerical value of 603, an allusion to the Children of Israel, who numbered 603,000. The words bnei Israel also have a combined numerical value of 603, another allusion to this number. The term venatnu (“and they shall give”) is a palindrome in Hebrew, alluding to the fact that whatever a person gives to tzedakah will return to him, and he will lose nothing as a result.

– Ba’al HaTurim

The Wise is to His Right

It is written, “On the seventh day He rested and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17).

One Shabbat afternoon the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin came into the yeshiva’s main hall and found a group of students spending their time chatting. Rabbi Chaim approached them and said, “Instead of chatting, you would do better by sleeping. In that way you would fulfill what is represented by the initials of Shabbat: Sheina BeShabbat Ta’anug [to sleep on Shabbat is a joy].” One of the boys replied, “Rabbi, I can find another way to interpret the initials of Shabbat: Sicha BeShabbat Ta’anug [to chat on Shabbat is a joy].” Rabbi Chaim instantly shot back, “The wisest of men said of you, ‘The heart of the wise is to his right [the wise man reads the letter as shin – with the point on the right – sheina], but the heart of the fool is to his left [the fool reads the letter as sin – with the point on the left – sicha].’”

Acting as Both Accuser and Defender

It is written, “Oh, this people have committed a grievous sin” (Exodus 32:31).

The Midrash states that when the angels of destruction saw that Moses was accusing Israel, they said: “We now have no reason to accuse them as well, for as long as he accuses them, they will fall by his hand” (Shemot Rabba 47:9). Moses therefore took the place of an accuser and voiced the Satan’s complaint. The difference between the Satan and Moses, however, was that Moses beseeched Hashem with tears and in distress.

Let us explain this with a parable: Reb Noah wanted to make a beautiful suit for his son. He therefore took some money and purchased some fine material, which he gave to a tailor. The tailor then fashioned a beautiful suit and brought it to Reb Noah, who was delighted to see the new suit on his son.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

A Sign Between Me and You

It is written, “And you, speak to the Children of Israel, saying: ‘Truly My Sabbaths shall you keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies you’ ” (Exodus 31:13).

In a certain neighborhood there was a store whose owner was known to be refined and gracious, a man who treated his clients as members of his own family. Everyone admired him and went to him for their purchases. Every morning for several years this man stood by the door of his store, above which was a bright sign that advertised his business. One day people were surprised to see that the store was closed. Although rumors began to spread, people were consoled by the fact that the bright sign remained. It seemed that the owner had to leave for some time, but would soon return. However as the days passed, the sign began to lose its familiar shine and started to fade. At that point rumors began to increase. Nevertheless some people still believed that as long as the sign remained, there was a chance that the owner would return. As more days passed, however, the sign not only lost its shine, but its nails began to rust and fall out! Eventually the sign itself fell to the ground and nothing was left hanging. At that point there was absolutely no doubt that the owner had abandoned his store.

The Sages tell us, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: I have a precious gift in My treasure house called Shabbat, and I desire to give it to Israel. Go and tell them” (Shabbat 10b). Shabbat is a sanctified gift from the King, and it is so precious to Him that He made it into a sign between Himself and us. As long as the store is open and the sign remains, it means that the owner is still there. That is, as long as a Jew observes Shabbat, the store remains open. It means that Shabbat – which is the sign – testifies to a Jew’s Torah observance as surely as two witnesses ever could. Even if we see the doors of the store closed one day, and even if people have already started to whisper that it has closed, this is still not certain as long as the sign remains in place. A Jew who continues to observe Shabbat testifies that “we are His people and the flock of His pasture” (Psalms 100:3). However if we see that the sign has started to fade, until one day it eventually falls to the ground, it definitely means that the owner has abandoned his store. It means that a Jew has abandoned his connection to Judaism, for Shabbat is “a sign between Me and you.” It is a sign between ourselves and the Creator, testifying to the fact that we are His people and the flock of His pasture.

Reb Noah’s son went outside in his new suit and met some of his friends. The youngsters then began to play games and Reb Noah’s son completely forgot about the suit he was wearing. In fact he fell into the mud and dirtied himself from head to toe. Now imagine that the boy were to return to his father in tears and say, “Father, I didn’t fall on purpose. Look at what happened to my suit!” When his father sees the tears in his eyes, he will immediately feel sorry for him and say, “Don’t worry my son. We’ll clean your suit and there won’t be a speck of dirt on it.”

On the other hand, if someone else were to come to the boy’s father and say, “You should know that your son went to play in the mud while wearing his new suit, and he completely ruined it,” we can imagine how angry his father would be with him. This is what Moses tried to prevent. When he saw that the Satan was ready to accuse the Children of Israel, he got up as an “accuser” and began to complain with bitter tears: “Oh, this people have committed a grievous sin.” Moses acted in this way in order for Hashem to forgive the sin of the golden calf and not punish the Children of Israel.

– The Maggid of Dubno

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Ki Tisa continues with the instructions regarding all the necessary preparations for the Sanctuary and the sacred service. It also describes the collection of the half-shekel from each person counted in the census, money to be allocated to the sacred service. The Children of Israel also receive the commandment to make the basin for ritual washings, as well as to prepare the oil and incense for anointing. Betzalel is put in charge of the work, and the people are reminded to observe Shabbat.

When Moses delays in coming down from the mountain, the Children of Israel seek to concretize their connection to Hashem by means of a golden calf, not by the Sanctuary. It is after this incident that Hashem states, “I will not ascend among you,” though He later reveals Himself to Moses as he is standing in a cleft among the rocks, for Moses had “found favor in My eyes.” Hashem gives Moses a second pair of tablets to replace the pair he had broken, and He establishes a covenant by giving the people laws pertaining to social life, with the parsha going on to speak of the radiance of Moses’ face.

EISHET CHAYIL

he Sanctity of the Mother

The sanctity and success of children depend on the mother, meaning on her own sanctity and attention to mitzvot, which greatly affects the souls of her children. We find an example of this with Kimchit, of whom the Sages have said: “Kimchit had seven sons, and all of them served in the office of the High Priesthood” (Vayikra Rabba 20:11). When the Sages asked her what she had done to merit this, she said: “The beams of my house have never beheld the hair of my head.” In fact she was extremely careful never to reveal her hair at any time. Even when she washed her hair, other women held a sheet overhead to prevent her hair from being exposed to the beams of her house. Thus by the merit of her modesty, Kimchit had seven sons who served as High Priest.

Concerning Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania, it is written: “Happy is she who bore him” (Perkei Avoth 2:9). It was because of his mother that Rabbi Yehoshua became one of the greatest Sages of Israel, for she brought his crib to the Beit Midrash so he could hear the words of our holy Torah from the earliest possible age.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein – The Author of Aruch HaShulchan

The gaon Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein Zatzal was a great Poskim, among the Torah geniuses of his generation. The brother-in-law, and later the father-in-law of the Netziv of Volozhin, Rabbi Yechiel Michael first served as the Rav of the chassidic town of Novozivkov, where he wrote his first book. Entitled Ohr LaYesharim, the book deals with Rabbeinu Tam's Sefer Hayashar, and it received approbations from Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin and the Tzemach Tzedek (Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch). It was welcomed with great acclaim throughout the Diaspora.

Rabbi Yechiel Michael later became the Rav of Novardok, the name by which he was known for the rest of his life. He did not venture out into the city streets, but instead remained enclosed in a room in the Beit Din, where he was brought every Halachic question and problem from residents in town and people around the country. It was during this time that he wrote his great work on the Shulchan Aruch, entitled Aruch Shulchan, which served as a guide for rabbis who wanted to become judges and Poskim. His teaching to welcome Shabbat during the daytime is famous. At first the residents of Novardok did not accept his decision, but later they returned to study with him and comply with it. On this subject people would say, "When everyone is singing Lecha Dodi, people are already sleeping in Novardok."

Rabbi Yechiel Michael knew whenever someone in town was ill, and on the eve of Yom Kippur he would always send him a message not to fast "by order of the Rav." He was respected by members of the community and by the civil authorities, which responded favorably to his requests. Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein passed away on Adar 22, 5668.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Answer Me...Answer Me!

It is written, "At the time of Mincha, Elijah the prophet approached and said, 'L-RD, G-d of Abraham... Answer me, O L-RD, answer me'" (I Kings 18:36-37).

The Sages say, "A man should always take special care about Mincha, since even Elijah was only favorably heard when offering his Mincha, for it is said: 'At the time of Mincha'" (Berachot 6b). The Vilna Gaon asks how we know that Elijah was only answered because it was Mincha. Perhaps the incident recorded in the text just happened to occur at the time of Mincha, and it could have occurred just as well during Shacharit or Arvit?

The Vilna Gaon says that we know that acts of sorcery begin around the time of Mincha, which is why Elijah had to pray: "Answer me, O L-RD, answer me." The Gemara explains Elijah's prayer as follows: "'Answer me' – that fire may descend from heaven," and 'answer me' – that they may not say it is the work of sorcery" (ibid.).

Elsewhere we read that a person must not ask the Holy One, blessed be He, for two things at the same time (Ta'anith 8b). Therefore how are we to understand Elijah's two requests ("answer me, O L-RD, answer me")? The answer is that he certainly knew that his prayer would not be answered outside of Mincha. This is what the Sages taught us, that the power of Mincha is enormous, since even Elijah was only answered during this prayer. How do we know this? The Gemara ends by noting that it was at Mincha that Elijah prayed, "Answer me, O L-RD, answer me" – once for fire to come down from heaven, and another time so people wouldn't say that it was the work of sorcery. If Elijah could have recited this prayer during Shacharit, he certainly would have done so, and only one request would have sufficed because sorcery is not practiced at that time. This proves that Mincha is the most effective of all prayers, to the point that Elijah waited for Mincha in order to pray. (Peninim MiShulchan HaGra)

A TRUE STORY

Eglei Tal

It is written, "The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath" (Exodus 31:16).

Rabbeinu Avraham of Sochatchov Zatzal, the author of Eglei Tal (one of the most important works on the laws of Shabbat) wrote: "I have seen Shabbat being desecrated only once, but if I would have had the misfortune of seeing it again, I would not have been able to write my book."

What happened is the following: On his doctor's orders, Rabbeinu Avraham went to stay at a health spa in Carlsbad. On the first Shabbat after his arrival, while he was walking in the street, he noticed a man standing by the entrance of his store with a cigarette in his mouth. The Rav looked at the sign above the store and saw, written in Roman letters, the name "Avraham." He approached the man and asked, "Are you the owner of this store?" The man said that he was. Rabbeinu Avraham then asked, "And is your name Avraham?" to which the answer was again yes. Upon hearing this, Rabbeinu Avraham could not contain himself, and he exclaimed in utter shock: "A Jew by the name of Avraham who desecrates Shabbat in public?" He then slapped the man in the face! The man called the police, but the local rav explained to the officers that this Jew was a great Torah scholar who was known around the world, a man who was deeply grieved to see the holy Sabbath being desecrated. The police understood and let him go with a symbolic fine. Although he had protested, Rabbeinu Avraham was certain that this incident could damage his ability to give in-depth explanations for the Halachot of Shabbat.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Table Manners

One day Rabbi Akiva was invited to somebody's home for a meal. On his host's table were pieces of bread and a dish containing some food. The host took a piece of bread and used it support the dish, for it had been leaning to one side. Rabbi Akiva quickly took that piece of bread and ate it.

Surprised by this, Rabbi Akiva's host asked: "Rabbi, are there no other pieces of bread on the table?" Rabbi Akiva replied, "I thought that a slight hint would suffice, and that I wouldn't have to explain. If one does not eat a piece of bread, but instead uses it to support a dish, he thereby shows his contempt for it."

On another occasion, Rabbi Akiva and his disciple Ben Azzai were invited to someone's home. The host wanted to give Rabbi Akiva a glass of wine, and so he poured some into a glass, tasted it to ensure that it was good, and handed it to him. Rabbi Akiva, however, did not take it. Instead he said, "Please, drink the wine yourself." The host did not hesitate to drink from this glass, for he considered it an honor. He then poured another glass of wine for Rabbi Akiva, and this time he also tasted it before handing it to him. Once again Rabbi Akiva said, "Please, drink the wine yourself."

The host was baffled. Why didn't Rabbi Akiva want to drink his wine? Ben Azzai whispered to him, "How long will you continue to give Rabbi Akiva glasses from which you drank? Don't you realize that we don't give a glass from which we drank to someone else? Some people are disgusted by this, and they would rather die before drinking something that another person tasted. And if they are so ashamed that they drink it despite the fact that it disgusts them, it can be dangerous to their health." Needless to say, the host never repeated the same mistake again.

– Adapted from Derech Eretz, ch.9