



## The Path To Follow

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**GUARD YOUR TONGUE!**

### Praying and Asking

I heard from a gaon and tzadik of the preceding generation that whenever he had to speak to people regarding worldly affairs, he would secretly ask Hashem to protect him from Lashon Harah. In reality, this is explicitly mentioned in the Torah, as we find in the words of Jacob: "If G-d will be with me and protect me on this way that I am going" (Genesis 28:20). Here the Sages have explained that the word "way" alludes to Lashon Harah (Bereshith Rabba 70:4). In fact Jacob was going to the home of Laban, the master of deception, and therefore Jacob was afraid of learning from his ways. Hence he said "on this way" – meaning on the way to Laban. Yet when Jacob was staying in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eber, he did not have to fear this. People such as ourselves must ask Hashem for this all the time.

– Zachor LeMiriam

## THE DUTY TO ESTABLISH FENCES FOR OURSELVES

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

**I**t is written, "If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof so that you will not place blood in your house ki yipol hanofel [when the fallen falls]" (Deuteronomy 22:8). The commentators (see Rabbeinu Bechaye) have questioned why Scripture employs the redundant expression ki yipol hanofel, rather than simply stating pen yipol ("lest one falls"). We also need to understand what lesson we are to learn from this verse, since it is clear that anyone building a home should put a guardrail on his roof. Therefore what is the Torah telling us here that is new? We may say that the Torah is teaching that a person must establish fences for himself that resemble "guardrails," this being in order to distance himself from the material realm. In fact if a person does not limit himself in terms of materiality, but instead continues to allow himself unnecessary things, he will stumble in the service of Hashem. If he continues to do so, without changing, he is liable to completely fall and be unable to recover, in which case he will be regarded as being spiritually dead.

We sometimes see someone who takes a spiritual fall, and who thinks that it resulted from a sin he committed. Actually, we need to realize that a person does not necessarily stumble spiritually on account of sin, for it may have occurred because he was drawn to unnecessary desires. If he failed to repent, and instead continued in his path, he will constantly fall until he eventually dies spiritually.

We may base this concept on a statement of our Sages concerning the verse, "Upon the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the dead die" (Deuteronomy 17:6). The Sages questioned the expression "shall the dead die," which is a contradiction in terms. He is either dead – in which case he cannot be put to death – or he is alive – in which case he cannot be described as dead. The text should have stated "shall the living die." The Gemara explains the expression to mean that he is already regarded as being dead (Berachot 18b), and the Ba'al HaTurim wrote that even while alive, the wicked are called dead.

This means that when a person sins, he is immediately regarded as dead, especially when he harms the root of his soul, doing it such harm that it leaves him. He then becomes a person without a soul, comparable to an animal that also has no soul, as it is written: "Man has no preeminence over animal, for all is futile" (Ecclesiastes 3:19). When he is killed, his body is the only thing affected, for his soul is already dead.

This is what the expression ki yipol hanofel means: At first he sinned and harmed his soul, which caused it to flee (this is the first fall), and the second time his body died, which constitutes the second fall. Therefore to avoid such an unenviable fate, a person must establish fences for himself in order not to fall the first time, as it is written: "You shall safeguard My charge" (Leviticus 18:30). Here our Sages have said, "Make a keeping to

My keeping" (Yebamot 21a), and the Mishnah states, "Make a fence around the Torah" (Perkei Avoth 1:1). The Rambam explained that we must enact decrees that distance people from sin, which is why we have the duty to surround ourselves with Torah and mitzvot, lest we fall twice. Actually, a person who is no longer spiritually growing, but gets used to staying where he is, will conduct himself without any sense of spiritual yearning or desire. The result is that he will be fed up with everything. There is more. The Children of Israel must pay particular attention to easy mitzvot, for they are the children of the Holy One, blessed be He (Deuteronomy 14:1), as the verse states: "You alone did I know from among all the families of the earth. Therefore I will hold you to account for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). This means that since we are close to Hashem and stand before Him, He will demand an accounting from us for our sins, which are ours alone. As for the other peoples of the world, such transgressions are not accounted as a sin; only for us are they a sin.

In fact a person who is close to royalty must be absolutely pure, which is why we do not resemble the other peoples, for whom Hashem only demands an accounting of grave sins. Yet from us, He demands an accounting even for the lightest of sins, for transgressing mitzvot that a person tends to trample on, as King David said: "The iniquity of my heels surrounds me." (Psalms 49:6). Even those at his feet were considered by him as sin.

This is what the Torah is telling us by allusion with the words, "If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail." It means that a person who wants to spiritually build himself up must be extremely pure, as white as snow, without any stain or sin. He must always establish fences for himself that act as guardrails, and he must always strengthen these barriers.

For example, one who builds a beautiful home, yet neglects to put up a protective barrier, creates a danger for anyone who approaches the site, for he might be injured there. The same applies to man himself: If he is content on performing mitzvot only as the Torah commands him to, without establishing fences for them, he will not be prevented from falling, for he is considered as someone who has already fallen. Thus his second fall will result from his first, from the fact that he performed the mitzvah without protection. Since we have reached this point, let us add that even among the rest of the mitzvot, we must constantly be adding, adding in terms of fences and in terms of helping others, lest we reach the point at which we will fall. Take for example the mitzvah of tzedakah. We must not remain static in this mitzvah. Instead we should always be adding to it, constantly being in tune with the needs of others and proceeding accordingly. If a person acts as such, he will not sin in this area. Instead he will strengthen this trait and grow by adding to his good middot.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## The Deceased 'Tzaddik'

In this week's parsha we find a group of commandments that illustrate wisdom in regards to financial regulations: We must not withhold the wages of a worker; we must pay the worker his wages on the same day; we must not bend justice for the sake of the stranger or the orphan; we must not take a widow's garment as a pledge. Immediately afterwards, the Torah commands us to engage in a series of good deeds and tzeddakah: We must leave leket, shikcha, and peah for the poor, thereby teaching us that it is not enough just to pay attention to injustice and to avoid sin. We must also perform many acts of kindness and fulfill numerous mitzvot. It is also not enough to be a "good person," one who does not hurt others and claims to have faith in Hashem. One must also study Torah and actually perform mitzvot.

The book Avoteinu Sipru Lanu on the selichot cites an educational story told by the gaon Rabbi Yossef Sisso HaCohen Zatzal, the leader of the rabbis of Tunis: A great Rav found himself in a certain town, and he wanted to know just what kind of people lived there. He therefore asked someone he met on the street, "My son, what state is the observance of Torah and mitzvot in this town?" He replied, "Baruch Hashem, the residents here are G-d-fearing people. None of them murder or steal." The Rav said to him, "You have made me happy, my son. Yet do they excel in the performance of mitzvot, tzeddakah and chesed, kashrut and the observance of Shabbat and the holidays?" The man mumbled in confusion, "Why are you looking to blame us? Isn't it enough that we avoid sin and turn from evil with all our might?" The Rav then understood the state of the Jewish community in that town, and he thought about how best to open their eyes and make them understand that it wasn't enough just to avoid sin, that they also had to perform many mitzvot in as much detail as possible. He was still walking through town when he saw the carcass of a donkey by the side of the road. It was covered with a swarm of flies. He placed a black sheet over it and said to his servant, "Go through the streets and cry aloud that there is a met mitzvah in a certain alleyway, and that everyone should come out to accompany it. Announce that the Rav will be delivering a eulogy."

Shortly thereafter, all the Jews in town gathered together. The Rav climbed upon a large stone and said with a trembling voice, "The deceased...the deceased before us was unique, among the very best. Throughout his life, he never uttered a useless word, and needless to say he never spoke Lashon Harah, falsehood, or slander. Throughout his life he was immersed in a ta'anith dibur. The deceased was among those who are humiliated without responding in kind, who are shamed by others and do not reply. In terms of an austere lifestyle, there were few like him. He never ate meat, never slept in a bed, and was content with little. Although he suffered from cold, he wore few garments. He was the humblest of all creatures. Who will give us another like him?" All the people began to weep, and they said: "Who was he? We didn't realize that such a lofty tzaddik lived among us." The Rav descended from the stone and headed towards the black sheet covering the deceased. When he removed it, everyone stepped back before the sight of the dead donkey. They began to mutter, "This Rav is making fun of us!" He said to them, "This donkey excelled in every area that I mentioned, and yet it was still a donkey. Why? Because it did not fulfill the commandment to do good. It did not elevate itself in Torah, nor did it perform mitzvot or demonstrate kindness."

## A Pearl From the Rav

*It is written, "You shall surely send away the mother and take the young for yourself, so that it will be good for you and will prolong your days" (Deuteronomy 22:7).*

Our Sages have explained that mitzvot are not rewarded in this world, and when the verse states "so that it will be good for you," it means in the world that is entirely good. Similarly, the expression "will prolong your days" means in a world that is entirely long, meaning the World to Come (Kiddushin 39b).

The Sages recount that Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat, who was extremely poor, asked Hashem to improve his lot. Hashem told him that He would, but only by turning the world back to its very beginnings. Even in that case, however, it was still not certain that Rabbi Eleazar would be born in a time of sustenance, which is why he refused (Ta'anith 25a).

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks whether it was difficult for Hashem to have provided Rabbi Eleazar with a good living. He replies by saying that the reward for mitzvot is not given in this world, since Hashem rewards the tzaddikim in the World to Come. Even the rich Tannaim in Israel testified that they did not benefit in any way from this world. Thus Hashem told Rabbi Eleazar: "If I give you money, you will be delivered into the hands of the evil inclination, which will put you to the test. The world will therefore be destroyed for you, and you will have received your reward in this world," something that he did not accept. The name "Pedat" reveals that Hashem did not give him wealth because He wanted to rescue him (lifdot) from all trouble. He did not want him to fall into the trap of riches.

## Removing Evil

*It is written, "You shall remove the evil from your midst" (Deuteronomy 21:21).*

Rabbi Avraham Ragoler said that each time a person breaks his evil inclination, he fulfills the positive mitzvah to "remove the evil from your midst," which appears six times in the Torah. How do we break it? By constantly reflecting upon what is the right thing to do, by carefully weighing whether something stems from the good inclination or the evil inclination. If it comes from the evil inclination, a person should go against his desires, for in so doing he will fulfill the mitzvah to "remove the evil from your midst."

– MiShulchan Gavoha

## Rebuked for What?

*It is written, "Because they did not greet you with bread and with water...and because he hired Bilam the son of Beor against you" (Deuteronomy 23:5).*

Ammon and Moab are reprimanded for two things: (1) For not having come before the Children of Israel with bread and water, a failure to demonstrate basic social decency; and (2) for having hired Bilam the son of Beor to curse and harm the Children of Israel. This is surprising, for how could these murderers – those wanting to wipe out the entire Jewish people through Bilam, and who eventually made them sin and brought about a tremendous plague – be reprimanded for not having behaved according to the norms of social decency? Wasn't it enough that they were reprimanded on account of Bilam, such that they are also being reprimanded for a lack of basic decency? The answer is that both reprimands are really one. The main point is that "they did not greet you with bread and with water." If they try to justify themselves by saying that they did not have enough money to provide bread and water to an entire people, the story of Bilam proves such a claim to be false, for where did they get the money to hire Bilam to curse the Children of Israel and make them sin?

– The Maggid of Dubno

## The Guardian of Israel

*It is written, "So that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you" (Deuteronomy 23:15).*

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman explained this verse by citing the Chafetz



# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## Lighting the Tenth Candle

*It is written, "If a man has a wayward and rebellious son who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother" (Deuteronomy 21:18).*

The Talmud cites Rabbi Shimon as saying, "This never happened and never will happen. Why was the law written? So that you may study it and receive a reward" (Sanhedrin 71a). The commentators express surprise at this explanation, for why would the Torah describe an event that could never possibly occur? What reason would it have for doing so? Rabbeinu Bechaye replies that such is the wisdom of the Torah, for it teaches the greatness of the duty to love Hashem. In fact there is no love in the world that is greater than the love of a father and mother for their son. Yet when they see that their son is routinely transgressing Hashem's mitzvot, they must place their love for Hashem ahead of their love for their own son. In fact they must have their son stoned, as it were, before the Beit Din. We already learned this lesson from Abraham, who despite his ardent love for his only son, immediately went out and placed his love for Hashem ahead of his love for his only son by preparing to offer him as a sacrifice. The entire world therefore recognized the greatness of the duty to love Hashem, which we should place above all our other loves. For this, the Torah found it necessary to describe the case of the rebellious son, so that we may study the greatness of the duty to love Hashem, such that we would even bring our beloved children to be stoned. The Sages said in this regard: "Study and receive the reward of study." In the book *Sheal Avicha Veyagedcha* (part III, p.208), we find a story told by an old Russian rabbi: In a small town there were ten Jews who were stopped and given five days to think about choosing either conversion or death. On the fifth day, the Jews in town gathered in the synagogue to pray for the captured men, asking Hashem to give them the strength to prevail in this trial and to be ready to die for the sake of Heaven. They lit nine candles for nine of the ten prisoners. The tenth prisoner was an only child, and therefore they believed that his mother would be unable to tolerate his death. Yet a sound of wailing could be heard from the woman's section, the sound of the woman in question. She asked that a tenth candle be lit for her son as well. Some time later, a messenger arrived at the synagogue, and in his hand he carried a sack containing the severed heads of the Jews who had given their lives for Hashem. At that point the mother hurried to identify the remains, and she danced with joy upon discovering the head of her son.

## ESHET HAYIL

### Happiness

*It is written, "Her children arise and proclaim her happy; her husband extols her" (Proverbs 31:28).*

The incredible goal that every Jewish woman should yearn for is to be happy, to have a feeling of joy that fills her heart, soul, and home. The Matriarch Leah named one of her sons Asher, saying: "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me happy" (Genesis 30:13). Sometimes a person may feel happy, but this feeling quickly passes. Momentary happiness is fleeting. Yet when someone else shares our joy, this makes for a more stable, complete, and profound happiness, since "the daughters will call me happy." That is, even girls can recognize a happy woman, one whose joy is deeply rooted in her heart and in her home. Hence the word *osher* ("happiness") resembles the word *ishur* ("recognize"), for everyone must recognize her happiness, meaning that she is happy in life. What is complete happiness? It is when "her children arise and proclaim her happy" – when the children in her home arise and acknowledge the path on which their mother raised them. Such recognition is suitable for bringing about great joy in the heart of a mother and a Jewish woman.

– Shalom Reout

Chaim: Although Hashem is the guardian of Israel, is He paid for this? No! We do not pay Him to protect us, for He does so freely. Now when someone protects something for free, he can choose when to stop. This is what the Torah is warning us about by saying: "So that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you." This verse concerns modesty, teaching us that if the camp of Israel is not holy, Hashem will stop protecting the Jewish people. They will then be delivered into the hands of others once again.

– MiShulchan Gavoha

## The Intention to Fulfill

*It is written, "You shall not turn back to take it" (Deuteronomy 24:19).*

One day a group of great Torah scholars were sitting with Rabbi Zalman of Vilna. One of them arose and said, "In my youth I heard a scholar say that there is a mitzvah in the Torah which, the more one tries to fulfill it, the harder it becomes, until it is finally impossible to fulfill. It is precisely when we turn our attention from it that we can fulfill it. Many years have passed since I heard this, and I've become old and grey. Yet I still do not understand what he meant."

Rabbi Zalman said to him, "That scholar was completely right, for it is an explicit Tosefta in tractate Peah [chapter 2]: A sheaf was forgotten in the field of a pious man, and upon discovering it he said to his son: 'Go and bring a burnt-offering and a bull for a thank-offering.' His son replied, 'Father, why are you rejoicing over this mitzvah more than over any other Torah mitzvah?' The father said, 'For all the other mitzvot of the Torah, we fulfill them by putting an effort into doing so. However this mitzvah does not depend on us, and if we want to fulfill it, it will not present itself to us. The verse, "You shall not turn back to take it...so that the L-RD your G-d will bless you in all your handiwork" [Deuteronomy 24:19] blesses the person who fulfills it. Hence for someone who does not intend to fulfill it – and yet he manages to – Scripture accounts it to him as if he had fulfilled it. How much more does this apply to someone who intends to fulfill it and does!"

By this statement, explicitly found in the Tosefta on the mitzvah of *shikcha*, he meant to say that if we strive to fulfill it, we will be unable to. However when we turn our attention from it, we will merit to fulfill it.

– Toldot Adam

## Who is Great?

*It is written, "Forty lashes shall he give him" (Deuteronomy 25:3).*

Our Sages have said, "How dull-witted are those other people who stand up before a Torah scroll, but do not stand up before a great personage! For while in a Torah scroll forty lashes are prescribed, the rabbis came and reduced them by one" (Makkot 22b).

Rabbi Yechiel Meir of Ostrova was asked, "Did all their greatness lie in this?" He replied, "A great sage is none other than one who prevents a Jew from receiving one extra blow, thereby softening his punishment!"

– Ma'ayanot HaNetzach

## Overview of the Parsha

From Parshiot Re'eh and Shoftim, which deal with communal mitzvot for settling in Eretz Israel, Parsha Ki Teitzei moves on to social and individual mitzvot for daily life. The parsha begins with mitzvot pertaining to the family, the woman of beautiful form, the firstborn of the hated wife, and the rebellious son. It continues with various mitzvot showing the ways of righteousness that bestow honor upon man, especially the passage on the young virgin, stressing the attention that Hashem's community must pay to distancing itself from every indecent thing. The parsha ends by the commandments pertaining to justice in all areas of life, and by the prohibition against forgetting what Amalek did to us.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### The Tzaddik and Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto Zatsal

The tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his merit protect us all, produced a great number of signs and miracles in his life. One of the Rav's friends was paralyzed for a number of years, and he was childless as well. One day Rabbi Moshe Aharon went to pay him a visit. When he saw him in a wheelchair, he began to cry, for he wanted to bless him for a complete recovery. The man's wife approached the Rav and asked that she and her husband be blessed with children. Rabbi Moshe Aharon replied, "How can I bless you to have children, since your husband is paralyzed?" The woman replied, "May the Rav give us one blessing for children, and in that way he can save a second blessing. If we merit children, it will mean that my husband is no longer paralyzed." Thus Rabbi Moshe Aharon blessed the man to have children, and he was soon entirely healed. He later merited a son, at whose bris Rabbi Moshe Aharon was the Sandak.

Rabbi Moshe's blessings had great success in finding people mates. From his mouth he blessed people to find a suitable match, and his words were never uttered in vain. One day he traveled by car to see a certain man, and the driver asked him for a blessing that he should quickly find a suitable wife. Rabbi Moshe Aharon said to him, "Get out of the car, and under the wheels you will find a coin with your name on it. This will be a sign that you will quickly find a wife. The driver said that he couldn't get out of the car at that point, since they were in the middle of the highway. He would therefore stop when they reached a suitable place.

In fact when they reached their destination, the driver got out of the car and found a coin with his name engraved on it under the wheels. Not longer afterwards, the man found a wife. This is truly incredible, for how could a coin end up in that very place? Hashem's ways are mysterious. However the teaching that states, "The tzaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes" was fulfilled in Rabbi Moshe Aharon. His life and deeds are described in a forthcoming book entitled *Nifleotav Livnei Adam*. May his merit protect us and all Israel. Amen, may it be so.

## A TRUE STORY

### What of Hashem's Honor?

It is written, "He shall write her a bill of divorce" (Deuteronomy 24:1).

The gaon Reb Moshe Feinstein Zatzal once had to prepare a divorce for someone. He asked one of his students to act as an agent for the husband by bringing the get to his wife in the presence of two witnesses, in accordance with Jewish law. The wife, however, refused to accept the get. Upon learning of this, Reb Moshe immediately went with his student and both witnesses to see the woman, who lived in a rundown building in Manhattan. He climbed four flights of stairs to reach the woman's apartment, and when she opened the door her father began screaming at Reb Moshe for having deserted his daughter. Reb Moshe was adamant about being allowed to speak to her, and eventually the father gave in and allowed the group inside. Calmly and clearly, Reb Moshe explained to the woman the tragic error that she was making by refusing the get. He was eventually able to convince her, at which point he presented her with the get and then left. As they were making their way down the stairs, Reb Moshe's student said to him: "Forgive my surprise, but was it really proper for someone of your stature to lower yourself like this?" Reb Moshe replied forcefully: "What? In a situation such as this, I should be careful not to lower myself? What about the honor of Hashem? If this woman had found a new husband without first accepting the get, the honor of Hashem would have been desecrated! Could there be any greater shame than that?"

– Torat HaParasha

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

### Alexander the Great Bows Before Shimon HaTzaddik

The Samaritans demanded permission from Alexander the Great to destroy the Temple, and he gave it to them. This was announced to Shimon HaTzaddik. What did he do? He put on his priestly garments, robed himself in priestly garments, and took some of the nobles of Israel along with him carrying torches in their hands. They walked all through the night, some walking on one side and others on the other side, until sunrise. At sunrise Alexander said to the Samaritans, "Who are those men?" They answered, "Those are the Jews who rebelled against you." As he reached Antipatris, the sun having shone forth, they met. When Alexander saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he descended from his carriage and bowed before him. The Samaritans said to him, "A great king such as yourself would bow before this Jew?" He replied, "His image is what wins all my battles." He said to the Jews, "What have you come for?" They said, "Is it possible that star-worshippers could mislead you into destroying the Temple, where prayers are said for you and your kingdom?" He said to them, "Just who are these people?" They replied, "They are the Samaritans, who stand before you." He said, "They are delivered into your hand."

The Jews immediately took these Samaritans and punished them according to the full severity of the law. They perforated their heels, as must be done to those who incite people to idolatry (just as the serpent incited the woman, for the serpent's legs were cut off, since falsehood has no legs). In order for their punishment to be known by all, they tied them to the tails of their horses and dragged them over thorns and thistles until they reached Mount Gerizim, where the Jews destroyed their place of worship, as the Torah commands: "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations... worshipped their gods" (Deuteronomy 12:2). Hence they ploughed and planted the area with vetch, even as they had planned to do with the Temple of G-d. They made that day, the 25th day of Tevet, into a holiday. It is called "the day of Mount Gerizim," for the Samaritans' place of idolatry on Mount Gerizim was destroyed on that day.

– Adapted from Yoma 69a

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### Sing Out!

*It is written, "Sing out, O barren one, who has not given birth. Break into glad song and be jubilant" (Isaiah 54:1).*

A Sadducee said to Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir: "It is written: 'Sing out, O barren one, who has not given birth.' Is she to sing because she did not bear?" Beruriah replied, "Don't you realize that you should read the entire verse? You focused on just one part of the whole picture. Look at the end of the verse, where it is written: 'For the children of the desolate' – the children of Jerusalem, which was left desolate – 'will outnumber the children of the inhabited one.' " The discussion didn't end there, however, for the Sadducee asked her another question: "What is the meaning of, 'O barren one, who has not given birth'?" Beruriah replied, "Sing out, assembly of Israel, for she is like a barren woman in that she did not give birth to wicked children destined for Gehinnom." Now it wasn't by accident that this Sadducee spoke to Beruriah, for in his wickedness he wanted to arouse the painful memories of her two sons, who had died at an early age (see Midrash on Proverbs 31). Hence the Sadducee wanted to cause pain to Beruriah as a mother, pain that also affects the tzaddikim. According to him, such suffering was futile, for all their efforts were in vain and all the tzaddikim were like a barren woman to him. They were not like a normal childbearing woman, but as one who suffers through pregnancy and labor without reason. Hence Beruriah told him that her sons, holy and great children, were now in Gan Eden. As for the children of the Sadducee and those like him, even if they lived a long time, they would eventually inherit Gehinnom.

– Adapted from Berachot 10a