



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Watching What We Say

We must be careful to avoid the question, "What did so-and-so say about me?" If somebody asks us this question, we must do all we can to answer without lying, all while avoiding gossip. For example, we can mention some of the person's words while omitting those which speak ill of the one who raised the question. If we feel that the listener will not accept our answer, however, it is permitted to lie for the sake of peace. Nevertheless, we must never swear to a lie, even if the other person will experience a tremendous loss by our refusal to swear. Suppose that Levi did something to Shimon, and Shimon asks Reuven: "Who did this to me?" Even if Reuven believes that Shimon suspects him (Reuven) of being responsible, Reuven is still forbidden to say that Levi was behind it. Even if Reuven personally saw Levi doing it, he must still tell Shimon: "I wasn't the one who did it."

– Chafetz Chaim

MAN WAS CREATED ONLY TO OVERCOME TRIALS

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years; the years of Sarah's life. Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (Genesis 23:1-2). Our Sages said, "From where did he come? ... In fact he came from Mount Moriah, Sarah having died of grief. Therefore the account of Isaac's binding comes close to the passage, 'The life of Sarah was' " (Bereshith Rabba 58:5). This is difficult to understand, for is this how Hashem rewards a tzaddik who overcomes a trial? Instead of returning to his wife Sarah and telling her that he was able to overcome this trial, and that their son Isaac had raised himself to an extremely high level, he returned to find his wife dead. Is this the kind of reward that Hashem gives to tzaddikim in this world?

We can understand this passage by keeping in mind that every mention of death in Scripture is preceded by a description of old age or illness. Old age is mentioned with regards to Abraham: "Abraham was old, advanced in days" (Genesis 24:1), which is later followed by, "Abraham expired and died at a good old age" (ibid. 25:8). Old age and illness are mentioned with regards to Isaac: "It came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see" (ibid. 27:1), as well as death: "Isaac expired and died" (ibid. 35:29). Concerning Jacob it is said, "Israel's eyes were heavy with age, and he was not able to see" (ibid. 48:10), as well as: "The days of Israel drew near to die" (ibid. 47:29). This is followed by the account of his illness: "Behold, your father is sick" (ibid. 48:1), and finally his death: "Jacob finished to command his sons, he gathered his feet into the bed and expired, and he was gathered to his people" (ibid. 49:33). The same occurs with King David, for illness, old age, and death are mentioned with regards to him as well. Thus we read: "King David was old, advanced in years" (I Kings 1:1), as well as "King David's days drew near to die" (ibid. 2:1), and finally "David lay with his forefathers" (ibid. 2:10). Concerning our Matriarch Sarah, however, death is mentioned but illness and old age are not. There must be a reason for this.

Why is neither illness nor old age mentioned with regards to Sarah, as they are with the other figures mentioned above? From here we see the greatness of Abraham, who did not protest against Hashem's actions, since our Sages state: "Abraham said, 'I will not move from this place [Mount Moriah] until You swear to me that You will never again put me to any test! For had I, Heaven forbid, not obeyed You, You would have destroyed everything that I had worked for all my life!' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By your life! So it shall be!'" (Bamidbar Rabba 17:2). Yet as soon as Abraham returned from the trial on Mount Moriah, he endured another horrendous trial: His wife died from grief, for she was not ill and old age had not affected her. Although the Holy One, blessed be He, had sworn to Abraham that He would no longer put him to the test, He sent him this one! Abraham would have been justified in protesting, "Master of the universe, what happened to the oath that You swore to me on Mount Moriah, the oath never to test me again?" However Abraham did not object; he accepted this trial with love.

Furthermore, even when Abraham wept over the death of Sarah, he did not weep excessively because he did not want to make it appear that he was rebelling against Hashem's decision. Hence the letter caph in the word *velivkotah* ("and to weep for her") is smaller than usual, teaching us that he only wept a little (see Baal HaTurim). Even with his tears, this tzaddik was careful not to appear as if he were complaining against Hashem, even though He did promise never to try him again.

This is why the Torah mentions neither illness nor old age prior to describing Sarah's death. From here we see that the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Abraham the trial of his wife's death despite His promise. Why? It is because He wanted to proclaim to all the generations that a person cannot ask Him never to send him trials, given that man was placed in this world only to be put to the test, to overcome trials, and to receive the reward for doing so in the World to Come.

True, our Sages in the Gemara say that a person should never put himself in a situation where he will be tested, as King David of Israel did and failed (Sanhedrin 107a). What kind of trial does this refer to? It refers to one that a person brings upon himself. On the other hand, when it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who sends him a trial, He does so in order to prepare him for life in the World to Come. This is the meaning of what we say in our morning blessings: "Do not bring us...into temptation or scorn." We ask Hashem not to send us a trial that will be followed by shame. Hashem understands a person's heart and knows if he can overcome a trial or not. He therefore sends a trial upon a person only when He knows that he can overcome it, as it is written: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal imperiously with His creatures" (Avodah Zarah 3a). Thus if a person experiences a trial and does not overcome it, it is a great shame for him. It is for this reason that we ask Hashem to only send us trials that we can actually overcome. All this concerns the trials that Hashem sends to a person. However when it is the person who brings trials upon himself, he does not know if he will be able to overcome them. It is therefore forbidden for him to do so. The underlying principle here is that a person cannot elevate himself unless he overcomes the trials that Hashem sends him. Hence the Sages have said, "The tzaddikim are greater than the ministering angels" (Sanhedrin 93a), for concerning the tzaddikim who overcome trials it is said: "Although the tzaddik may fall seven times, he will arise" (Proverbs 24:16), whereas ministering angels never experience trials. Furthermore, the Mishnah states: "With ten trials was our father Abraham tested, and he withstood them all" (Pirkei Avoth 5:3). Despite the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Abraham an additional trial by the sudden death of his wife Sarah – even though He had promised never to send him trials again – her death is not counted among the ten with which Abraham was tested. This is because the only reason she died is to teach us that a person must not ask G-d to never test him.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Your Rod and Your Staff Will Comfort Me

Rashi states, “The years of Sarah’s life [Genesis 23:1]. They were all equally good.”

The author of Yeshuat Moshe reveals the constructive lesson that is hidden within these words. In general, people who endure adversity see the days of their life as unequal, being composed of two parts: One part consists of the time at the heart of their trial, when they have a feeling of deep despair. This consists of the lowest points in life, when we do not know what is going to happen or where we are headed. That is when adversity seems bitter and cruel. Yet with time, we learn to see how everything is for the good, and even if we never actually feel that everything is for the good, we are at least capable of perceiving Hashem’s loving and compassionate hand during our bitter trials. As King David said, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff will comfort me” (Psalms 23:4). Sarah was called Iskah because she could see things [saketah] by means of Divine inspiration. She had a vision of holiness, a vision of truth. She could see beforehand, not only by looking back, but also ahead, to the very heart of the tremendous trial of being childless. Hence all her years were “equally good.” There was no difference between the years at the heart of her trial and the years which she could lack upon with satisfaction and tranquility. They were all equally good, and she always perceived that “only goodness and kindness will pursue me all the days of my life.”

The Talmud recounts that whenever the Tanna Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was asked to pray for the sick, he would put his head between his knees and pray. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev explains that Rabbi Yochanan’s head reached the highest heavens. He saw what no one else could, and where he fixed his gaze, he saw the truth, namely how everything is for the good. Everything that the Merciful One does is for the good. In light of such insight, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was unable to pray for a Jew’s adversity to subside, for he knew that this adversity only seemed evil, and that it was really for his own good. Hence in praying he had to lower his head, as it were, between his knees – towards this world, in its present state – where we view adversity as being evil and bitter. It was from this vantage point that he could utter a sincere prayer for the broken heart of the one who stood before him. We too, with our limited perception of things, often look back to see goodness and kindness, though we hope that trials never come upon us. Therefore we always pray, “Show us, O L-RD, Your goodness” – I beg You, spread Your kindnesses over us in such a way that we perceive the good in them, even with our limited sight.

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Life of Sarah

It is written, “The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years; the years of Sarah’s life” (Genesis 23:1).

Rashi states that all of Sarah’s years were equally good. It is necessary to interpret the verse in this way, for otherwise it is difficult to understand why the Torah states “the years of Sarah’s life,” given that it starts off by saying, “The life of Sarah.”

We may say that this contains an allusion to the fact that everyone must establish two paths for himself in life: A material path and a spiritual path. When a person deals with one, he does not deal with

the other, as it is written concerning the festivals: “One verse says, ‘A solemn assembly to the L-RD your G-d’ [Deuteronomy 16:8], whereas another verse says, ‘There shall be a solemn assembly to you’ [Numbers 29:35]. ... Rabbi Yehoshua holds, ‘Divide it: Half to G-d and half to yourselves’” (Pesachim 68b). When a person occupies himself with materiality, he rejoices in the festivals, and when he occupies himself with spirituality, he studies Torah and deals with other things. However if he mixes both, he will succeed in neither one nor the other.

King Solomon said, “There is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and the Gemara asserts: “At first Israel were like hens picking in the dunghill, until Moses came and fixed for them a definite mealtime” (Yoma 75b). A person should be careful not to mix both things, for everything has a time that is specifically assigned to it, as it is written: “The times for prayer and Torah [study] are distinct from each other” (Shabbat 10a).

The Trial of Abundance and the Trial of Suffering

It is written, “The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years; the years of Sarah’s life” (Genesis 23:1).

Rashi explains: “The years of Sarah’s life. They were all equally good.” All the years and experiences that she lived through had a good influence on her. Sometimes an over abundance of things makes us forget our Creator, as it is written: “Yeshurun grew fat and kicked” (Deuteronomy 32:15). Other times, excessive suffering leads us to forsake Hashem and His Torah. As for Sarah, she overcame both the trial of abundance and the trial of suffering, since all the years of her life had an equally good influence on her.

– Megeg Yosef

An Upside-Down World

It is written, “To his servant, the elder of his household, who controlled all that was his” (Genesis 24:2).

In general, when a person is ready to lend money to someone, he first checks his honesty and ability to repay. It is only then, when he has no further doubts, that he lends him money. Yet in Jewish life, when a person purchases kosher meat, tefillin, or any other sacred object, he does not pay so much attention to the matter and trusts just about anyone. Yet this was not how Abraham proceeded. Although Eliezer was “the elder of his household, who controlled all that was his” – the person to whom he completely entrusted all his possessions and wealth – Abraham did not fully trust him when it came to matters of Jewish life. When it came to finding a suitable wife for his son Isaac, he no longer trusted Eliezer’s simple word, demanding instead that Eliezer take a serious oath, as it is written: “Now place your hand under my thigh...” (Genesis 24:2).

– Yalkut HaDrush

Compliments Can Also be Harmful

It is written, “You shall go and take a wife for my son, for Isaac” (Genesis 24:4).

When Eliezer arrived in Haran, he told Rebecca’s family that Abraham had instructed him to “take a wife for my son” (v.38), omitting the words “for Isaac.”

We may explain this by means of a parable: A very wealthy man wanted to marry off his daughter to the son of a great Torah scholar, and to that end he was prepared to offer a very large dowry. Someone approached the wealthy man and said, “You want to give so much money for the son of a great Torah scholar? I’ll find you someone who is a great Torah scholar in his own right!” The wealthy man refused.

“I don’t want my daughter to be a rebbetzin,” he said, “because I don’t want her to suffer and not enjoy life!”

The same applies here, for Abraham told Eliezer to find a wife “for my son, for Isaac,” meaning that he was to stress that Abraham’s son was a great tzaddik in his own right. Yet when Eliezer arrived in Haran and saw just what kind of people he was dealing with, he was hesitant to praise Isaac excessively. He was afraid of saying that Isaac was a great tzaddik, lest they refuse the proposal. Therefore he only praised Abraham, without mentioning the young man himself.

– Otzar HaPeninim

The Essence of a Mitzvah

It is written, “She [Rebecca] filled her pitcher and came up, and the servant ran to meet her” (Genesis 24:16-17).

Rashi explains: “Because he saw that the water had risen toward her.”

The Ramban states that this explanation is derived from the fact that here the text states that “she filled,” whereas in getting water for the camels, the text says that “she drew” (v.20). This explanation remains difficult to understand, however, for why didn’t the water also rise to meet her when she filled her pitcher for the camels?

The answer is that the essence of a mitzvah lies in a person’s desire to do the Creator’s will. When Rebecca first came to draw water, she only wanted water for herself. Hence the water rose to meet her, meaning that she did not have to draw it. Yet afterwards, when she went to fill her pitcher again, she did so to fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality, and Heaven wanted her to fulfill all aspects of the mitzvah on her own. Hence the water did not rise to meet her, for a person’s effort in fulfilling a mitzvah is extremely important in Hashem’s eyes.

– Kedushat Levi

Nothing Can be Done Against Hashem

It is written, “They said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go’ ” (Genesis 24:58).

Here Rashi comments: “I will go. Of my own accord, even if you do not want.”

How was it proper for Rebecca to speak to her parents like this? Did it not demonstrate a certain degree of insolence and lack of modesty on her part?

What Rebecca was really saying was the following: You saw that my father Bethuel died because he did not want me to leave [see Rashi on v.55]. Therefore I’m obligated to leave, even if you don’t want me to, for Heaven is forcing you to agree. It’s therefore best if you don’t prevent me from leaving.

– Be’er Mayim Chaim

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha describes the end of Abraham’s era, from the death of Sarah and the marriage of Isaac until Abraham’s death. When Sarah died in the land of Canaan, Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah as a gravesite. In his advanced years, Abraham made his servant Eliezer swear to journey to his homeland. He returned with Rebecca, who would become Isaac’s wife. Isaac then went to live in the Negev. Abraham married Keturah and sent the sons of his concubines to the land of the east, after which he lived a good long life. At the end of Abraham’s era, the Torah speaks of the generations of Ishmael and the places where his descendants dwelled, after which it continues with the generations of Isaac.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Eulogies

It is written, “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her” (Genesis 23:2).

It is a great mitzvah to give a fitting eulogy for the dead. This mitzvah consists of raising one’s voice to recount things about the deceased that break the heart, thereby causing many tears to be shed for him. Whoever sheds tears over the death of the righteous, the Holy One, blessed be He, counts them and lays them up in His storehouse. Whoever demonstrates idleness in giving a eulogy for a Torah scholar will not live long, and he deserves to be buried alive. The departed knows and can hear a eulogy as in a dream, and he is aware of everything that is said about him until he is lowered into the grave. Just as eulogies are made for men, so too should they be made for women, equal to those of men and Torah scholars (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 344; Chochmat Adam 155).

The Sages tell us that Rav said to Rabbi Shemuel bar Shilat, “Be fervent in my funeral eulogy, for I will be standing there” (Shabbat 153a). This is difficult to understand, for why must the deceased be there? Is it because he is still interested, in the world above, about what people say about him in this sorrowful world? The book Pahad David explains that in the world above, man is free from performing mitzvot, for mitzvot can only be performed in this world. In fact there is no evil inclination in the other world, nor is there the opportunity to perform Torah mitzvot, since they are given to man in order to protect him against the evil inclination. As it is written, “I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote” (Kiddushin 30b).

Hence when a tzaddik leaves this world and arrives in the world above, he is still accustomed to performing mitzvot and learning Torah. There he misses Torah, wearing tefillin, observing Shabbat, and washing his hands. In fact he finds it difficult to live without mitzvot. Naturally, the world above is entirely good, but the tzaddik is used to the pleasure he experienced in fulfilling mitzvot. What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He consoles the soul of the tzaddik by allowing him to hear his funeral eulogy. He then derives enjoyment from what is said of him, for he thinks: “I’ve done all that!” Since he is no longer allowed the pleasure of performing mitzvot, at least he is allowed the pleasure of hearing that he performed them.

ESHET HAYIL

She Will be Praised

When Abraham eulogized Sarah and wanted to praise her virtues, he spoke of the sacrifice of Isaac that took place on Mount Moriah. If she raised such a son, who was ready to give up his life with joy, we can understand just how great her own virtues were. Thus the Midrash asks: “Where did he come from?” (Bereshith Rabba 58:5). At what point in her life did Abraham begin to give his eulogy, and which deed did he focus on in particular? The answer is: “From Mount Moriah” – from the events that took place on Mount Moriah – that was the subject of his eulogy. Here was a woman who raised a son that was willing to stretch out his neck to be slaughtered for His Name with love.

– HaDrash VeHaIyun

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yichya Alsheich

Heshvan 21 marks the passing of the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Yichya Halevi Zatzal, the son of Rabbi Nethanel Alsheich Zatzal.

Born on Tammuz 13, 5675 to the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Nethanel Alsheich Zatzal, Rabbi Yichya was among the great Torah figures of his generation. He was a member of one of the most important groups in Yemen, the Halevi Alsheich family, from which rabbis and great Torah scholars emerged. He lost his father when he was about six years old, and his grandfather and maternal uncles took care of him. From childhood he demonstrated an extraordinary mind and a phenomenal memory. In his youth he studied with the greatest rabbis of Yemen, who could tell, even then, that he would become a great light for the Jews of Yemen.

In concert with his phenomenal memory, Rabbi Yichya also demonstrated great diligence in Torah study, often learning throughout the night in the ezrat nashim (woman's section) of the Alsheich synagogue. In 5709 he settled in the Holy Land, where he devoted himself to the holiness of the camp and the purity of education.

He continued to study Torah in Eretz Israel with tremendous love and devotion. All the customs and traditions of Yemen were stored in his mind, without mentioning the deep and vast knowledge he possessed in every field of Torah. Despite Rabbi Yichya's remarkable humility, great Torah figures recognized his stature and addressed their questions to him concerning the Gemara and commentators. He amazed everyone with his memory and total mastery of Torah.

Rabbi Yichya possessed complete self-control, and his modesty and simple way of life were proverbial. He humbled himself tremendously, practicing generosity with the entire Jewish community by means of his Torah, his advice, and his blessings.

Rabbi Yichya conducted his entire life with holiness and purity, paying great attention to protecting all his senses. He was grieved at the misfortunes of the Jewish people, and he wholeheartedly prayed for them. He poured out his heart before his Creator with an exquisite voice, and many gathered around just to listen to his voice and extraordinary melodies. He merited for Heaven to answer his prayers, and thousands of people were delivered because of him. He was greatly honored at his passing, as thousands joined his funeral procession on foot from his home all the way to Har HaMenuchoth, where he was buried next to the Chida.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Wisdom of Jewish Children

The Midrash states: "An Athenian came to Jerusalem, where he met a child to whom he gave money, saying: 'Go and bring me something of which I can eat my fill and have something left over to take on my journey.' He went and brought him salt. The man said to him, 'Did I tell you to bring me salt?' He answered, 'But did you not tell me to go and bring you something of which you can eat your fill and leave some over to take on your journey? By your life, in this you have something of which you can eat your fill and leave something over to take on your journey'" (Kohelet Rabba 1:7).

The Midrash also states: "An Athenian came to Jerusalem, where he met a child to whom he gave some money, saying: 'Bring me eggs and cheese.' On his return the man said to him, 'Show me which cheese is from a white goat and which from a black goat.' He replied, 'You're a grown man, so show me which egg is from a white hen and which is from a black'" (Kohelet Rabba 1:9).

Rabbi Yehoshua was walking through town when he came across a child who had a covered dish in his hand. He asked him, "My son, what do you have in this dish?" The boy replied politely to Rabbi Yehoshua: "Rabbi, if my mother wanted you to know what it contained, she wouldn't have covered it." At that point Rabbi Yehoshua said, "Never in my life has anyone had the last word with me, other than this child, to fulfill what is said: 'She that was great among the nations' [Lamentations 1:1] – great in wisdom" (Kohelet Rabba 1:19).

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania said, "I was once on a journey when I noticed a little boy sitting at a crossroads. I asked him, 'By which road do we go to town?' He replied, 'This one is short and long, while that one is long and short.' I proceeded along the 'short and long' road. When I approached the town, I discovered that it was hedged in by gardens and orchards. Turning back to him, I said: 'My son, did you not tell me that this road was short?' He replied, 'And did I not also tell you: "and long"?' I kissed him on his head and said to him, 'Happy are you, O Israel. All of you are wise, both young and old'" (Eruvin 53b).

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Why Have You Done This?

It is written, "All his days his father had never atzavo [saddened him] by saying, 'Why have you done this?' Moreover, he was very handsome and was born after Absalom" (I Kings 1:6).

In reality the text should have stated, "All his days his father had never he'atzivo [made him sad]," using the Hiphil conjugation in Hebrew rather than the Pa'al (also called Kal), which is the active voice.

This can be compared to the son of greatly respected and honored figure, who misbehaved and played games. His father reprimanded him several times, but to no avail. His teachers also tried to teach him otherwise, explaining that he had to return to the right path and act properly, but nothing sunk in. Each time that his father heard about the tricks his son was up to, he became red with shame and didn't know what to do, so much did this upset him. One day a man was walking in the street when he saw the son of this honored figure lying in a garbage bin, with only his head sticking out. He had apparently gotten inside to look for some things for himself. The man could not contain his emotions, and suddenly a reprimand escaped his lips: "You took all your father's honor and threw it into the garbage!" Strangely enough, these words raised an emotional storm in the heart of the son, who suddenly understood just how much shame his behavior had brought to his father. Influenced by these words, he decided to change, and in the end he mended his ways. It sometimes happens that the most intense lesson for a son to learn is realizing that his actions have brought tremendous shame and humiliation to his respected father. Thus by the mitzvah of honoring one's father, a person refrains from doing reprehensible things.

Therefore the verse is telling us: "All his days [the fact that King David was] his father had never saddened him" – Adonijah was never concerned that his father, the great King David of Israel, was an important figure – "by [Adonijah's conscience] saying, 'Why have you done this?' " This fact never made Adonijah feel remorse, which could have restrained his actions by raising the question: "Why have you done this?" However he paid absolutely no attention to it.

A TRUE STORY

He Height of Insolence

It is written, "Abraham rose up and bowed himself to the people of the land, to the children of Heth" (Genesis 23:7).

A tremendous bond of friendship existed between two great Torah figures: Rabbi Akiva Eiger (the Rav of Posen) and Rabbi Yaakov (the Rav of Lissa and author of Netivot HaMishpat). They would correspond with one another and discuss words of Torah with great affection. One day as they were walking along the street and chatting about Torah matters, as they normally did, they passed some young men who were sitting on a bench. Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa noticed that these youngsters had seen them, but failed to rise in their honor. He said to Rabbi Akiva Eiger, "Here we see with our own eyes what the Sages said about the time preceding the arrival of Mashiach: Insolence will increase and the young will shame the old. In fact we are old men, yet these youngsters felt no need to honor our gray hairs." Rabbi Akiva Eiger replied, "Although it is true that this comprises insolence, know that we are still far from the degree of insolence that the text is referring to. This was not the only thing that the Sages meant when they said that at the end of our exile, as it reaches its height, insolence will also reach its height. The day will come when we will be sitting on a bench and youngsters will wait for us, the aged, to give them our seats! They will pound their fists in anger and say, 'See how insolence has reached its height! Look at how these old men refuse to stand up before us!'"

– Shimusha Shel Torah