



The Path To Follow

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HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of
RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA
11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS

Tel: +331 42 08 25 40

Fax +331 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Lashon Harah and Motzei Shem Rah

It is forbidden to speak ill of others, whether what we say is true or not. If it is true, such speech is termed Lashon Harah. If it is not true, the speaker is called Motzei Shem Rah, and his sin is much more serious.

It is very important to underline that derogatory comments about others that are true constitute Lashon Harah. People usually think that Lashon Harah consists of inventing lies about someone, and that true derogatory statements are permitted. In fact the most common response that people give when they are reprimanded for speaking Lashon Harah is, "But it's true!" This is a grave mistake, for our Sages say that it is precisely the truthfulness of such comments that make them Lashon Harah.

– Netzor LeShoncha

JACOB AND ESAU: LOOKING AT THE WORLD IN DIFFERENT WAYS (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "And the children struggled together within her, and she said: 'If so, why am I thus?' And she went to inquire of the L-RD" (Genesis 25:22). Rashi cites the Midrash (Bereshith Rabba 63:6) in equating the expression vayitrotzatzu ("and they struggled") with the term ratza ("to run"), meaning: "When she passed the doorway of idolatry, Esau would run and struggle to come out."

The Gemara cites Rabbi Simlai as saying, "What does an embryo resemble when it is in its mother's bowels? Folded writing tablets. Its hands rest on its two temples respectively, its two elbows on its two legs and its two heels against its buttocks. Its head lies between its knees...a light burns above its head and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other, as it is said: 'Then His lamp shined over my head, and by His light I walked through darkness' [Job 29:3]. Do not be astonished at this, for a person sleeping here might see a dream [elsewhere]. There is no time in which a man enjoys greater happiness than in those days, for it is said, 'If only I could be as in the months of old, as in the days when G-d watched over me' [Job 29:2]. Now which are the days that make up months, but do not make up years? The months of pregnancy...for it is said, 'He taught me and said unto me: Let My words sustain your heart. Observe My commandments and live' [Proverbs 4:4].... As soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth, and causes it to forget the entire Torah" (Niddah 30b).

We need to understand this. Let us suppose that Esau wanted to leave his mother's womb as she walked past places of idolatry, since he had no desire to stay where he was and learn Torah from an angel, for all he dreamed of was reaching a place of idolatry. It therefore makes sense that he tried to leave each time he felt close to a place of idolatry, since that is what he desired from the time he was in his mother's womb.

As for Jacob, why did he try to leave each time that Rebecca walked past places of Torah study? Why was he not content on staying in his mother's womb, since it was there that an angel taught him the entire Torah? Could there be a greater joy than that? Furthermore, when he would leave his mother's womb, the angel would strike his mouth and make him forget everything that he learned. Therefore what did he have to gain by trying to leave the womb near places of Torah study and prayer, since it meant forgetting all the Torah that the angel had taught him? If we consider whether it was better for him to have remained in his mother's womb or to have left it for houses of study, there is no doubt that it was better for him to stay in the womb as long as possible in order to benefit from the incredible opportunity of learning the entire Torah from an angel. Therefore why did Jacob try to leave? The answer is that he and Esau had a dispute over the way of looking at the world, over its purpose and the best way to benefit from it. The Midrash states, "When Jacob and Esau were in their mother's womb, Jacob said to Esau: 'My brother, we are two and before us there are two worlds: This world and the World to Come. This world contains food and drink, business, marriage, and bringing forth sons and daughters. However the World to Come is not like this. If you want, you can take this world and I will take the World to Come, as it is written; "Sell me this day your birthright" [Genesis 25:31], just as we agree to here in the womb.' At that point Esau took his part in this world and Jacob took his part in the World to Come. As Jacob was returning from living with Laban, and Esau saw Jacob's sons,

servants and maidservants, he said to him: 'My brother, did you not tell me that you would take the World to Come? Where did all this wealth come from? Are you using this world as I am?' Jacob replied, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, gave me these possessions to use in this world,' as it is written: 'The children whom G-d has graciously given your servant' [Genesis 33:5]" (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zutah 19).

Thus Jacob and Esau had completely different ways of seeing things. Esau saw before him two distinct worlds – this world and the World to Come – and to him this world was meant for pleasure, for eating and drinking, getting married and having boys and girls, whereas the World to Come was a world of spirituality. When Esau was asked to choose between both worlds, he chose the world of pleasure, meaning this world. Hence he did not need his birthright, for it conferred spiritual benefits that he did not want. He sought only pleasure. Therefore he said, "Of what use is a birthright to me?" (Genesis 25:32).

As for Jacob, he saw both worlds as one. This world is a passageway designed to prepare a person for the World to Come. Hence as soon as Jacob entered this world, he chose the World to Come, meaning that he considered this world not as an end in itself – not as a place in which a person should seek as much pleasure as possible – but as a preparation for the World to Come, which is spiritual.

When Esau encountered Jacob and his family after many years, and when he noticed that Jacob also had sons, daughters, servants and maidservants, he was surprised: "My brother, did you not tell me that you would take the World to Come? Where did all this wealth come from? Are you using this world as I am?" However Jacob replied, "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave me these possessions to use in this world." In other words: "It is true that I also have sons, daughters, and wealth, but my goal is not simply to enjoy these things, for Hashem gave me them to use in this world. They are the means by which I can serve Hashem and merit life in the World to Come!" Now, since we have seen that Jacob viewed this world as only a means for meriting life in the World to Come, we can fully understand why he wanted to leave his mother's womb to such an extent that he struggled to emerge each time she walked by houses of Torah study and prayer. Earlier, we asked why Jacob did not want to benefit from learning the entire Torah from an angel, and the answer is that he knew that a person comes into this world only to achieve merit for life in the World to Come. How do we achieve such merit? Is it by being taught Torah from an angel, without any effort on our part? Since such learning is not difficult in any way, it does not deserve a reward. It is a gift from Heaven, so why should it be rewarded? As we read: "Man is born for toil" (Job 5:7) – "for toiling in the study of Torah" (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua 6). The essence of Torah study and mitzvot performance lies in the effort and work that we put into them. When we confront trials and challenges and emerge victorious, we merit a reward in the World to Come. This is why Jacob was eager to leave his mother's womb for houses of study, where he was to invest his efforts and confront the difficult hardships that surrounded him. By emerging victorious, he would merit the great reward that is reserved for the righteous in a world that is entirely good, namely the World to Come.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Greatness of Every Jew

It is written, “He smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him and said, ‘See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which the L-RD has blessed’ ” (Genesis 27:27).

In the Midrash the Sages said: “This refers to men such as Yosef Meshita and Yakum of Tzererot. Yosef Meshita: When our enemies desired to enter the Temple mount, they said: ‘Let one of them [the Jews] enter first.’ They said to him [Yosef]: ‘Enter, and whatever you bring out is yours.’ So he went in and brought out a golden lamp. They said to him: ‘It is not fitting for a common person to use this, but go in again and what you bring out will be yours.’ However he refused. Rabbi Pinchas said: They offered him three years’ taxes, but he still refused. ‘Is it not enough that I have angered my G-d once,’ he exclaimed, ‘that I should anger Him again!’ What did they do to him? They put him into a carpenter’s vice and sawed him apart as he cried out, ‘Woe, woe that I angered my Creator!’

“Yakum of Tzererot was the nephew of Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer of Tzereda. Riding on a horse, he went before the beam on which he [Rabbi Yossi] was to be hanged and taunted him: ‘See the horse on which my master has let me ride, and the horse upon which your Master has made you ride.’ ‘If it is so with those who anger Him, how much more with those who do His will,’ he replied. ‘Has any man done His will more than you?’ he jeered. ‘If it is thus with those who do His will, how much more with those who anger Him,’ he retorted. This pierced him like the poison of a snake, and he went and subjected himself to the four modes of execution inflicted by the Beit Din: Stoning, burning, decapitation, and strangulation. What did he do? He took a post and planted it in the earth, raised a wall of stones around it and tied a cord to it. He made a fire in front of it and fixed a sword in the middle [of the post]. He hanged himself on the post, the cord was burnt through and he was strangled. The sword caught him, while the wall [of stones] fell upon him and he was burned. Yossi ben Yoezer of Tzereda fell into a daze and saw his [Yakum’s] bier flying in the air. He said, ‘He made it into the Garden of Eden before me by a little’ ” (Bereshith Rabba 65:22).

In his holiness, Isaac smelled the fragrance of Jacob’s inner essence. He sensed that even traitors among his descendants would preserve this fragrant odor. They would never be completely cut-off from the thread that connects them to Jacob. Yosef Meshita entered the Temple only once, for he was not prepared to enter it again and irritate the Creator, regardless of the reward. What happened? He entered the Temple just once, yet that was enough to rekindle a sacred spark in his heart, a spark that became a great fire, even though he experienced unbearable suffering. His flesh was sawed off, and yet he cried: “Woe, woe that I angered my Creator!” Similarly, who would have thought that a Jewish heart was still beating inside a man as evil Yakum of Tzererot? Yet a few words of rebuke uttered by a holy and sanctified mouth ignited a spark that was barely flickering in his heart.

– Rav Kahaneman

A Pearl From the Rav:

Jacob and Esau: A Good Heart and a Bad Heart

It is written, “Esau said to Jacob, ‘Pour into me now some of that very red stuff, for I am exhausted’ ” (Genesis 25:30).

Why was Esau so tired? The Sages say that he killed, stole, and had forbidden relations on that day. Yet here he came and saw Jacob cooking some lentils with his own hands. He saw Jacob preparing a meal all by himself, so why should he not ask his brother to do him a favor and ease his hunger? Instead of that, however, Esau made a forceful demand, as if everything was rightfully his: “Pour into me now some of that very red stuff.” The Sages interpreted this to mean, “I will open my mouth, and you will pour it in – as when we learned: You must not stuff a camel or force food upon it, but you may put food into its mouth” (Bereshith Rabba 63:12). It was as if everything was his and everyone was at his service. Others may have prepared a meal, but he demanded to have some of it – and not only that, but to have others feed it to him as well! This demonstrates the wicked heart that Esau possessed. He deceived his own father with his words, and he hunted, stole, killed, and raped, whereas Jacob has a heart that was completely good and focused on kindness. His name testifies to his nature, for Yaakov has the same numerical value as baal lev tov (one with a good heart), as well as hu igmelecha kol tov (he will do the utmost good). Such was Jacob’s nature. The fact that he did not want to give Esau some food unless he first sold him his birthright was because he realized just how wicked Esau was. Jacob was therefore afraid that his descendants would be exiled by Esau’s descendants, who would inherit the serious defects of their forefather. Hence Jacob wanted to weaken him by taking his birthright, for it was a holy thing, and we know that impurity exists only where there is some holiness from which it can draw its power. Jacob therefore wanted to take this holiness away from Esau, thereby diminishing his wickedness.

Honoring One’s Father to the Very End

It is written, “These are the generations of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac” (Genesis 25:19).

The Ramban cites Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra as saying that “begot” means “to bring up and raise,” as in the expression: “[They] were raised on Joseph’s knees” (Genesis 50:23). It is also similar to the expression, “In pain shall you bring forth children” (ibid. 3:16), which our Sages have understood as a reference to difficulty in raising children. We should add that the first generations were better than our own, for in our time we see that children, even when they are still young, no longer obey their parents. Such was not the case with the first generations, for the words of their fathers were sacred to them. They listened to their father’s admonitions not only when they were young, but also when they were adults. Even when they became independent, married, and the fathers of their own families, they still considered themselves as children with regards to their parents, and they obeyed their elderly fathers as if they were still young and dependent on them. Thus it is written: “These are the generations of Isaac,” for even when Isaac himself had descendants, the fact still remained that “Abraham begot” – he raised – “Isaac,” as if he were still a child.

– Ateret Paz

Two Opposites

It is written, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (Genesis 27:22).

The Midrash states, “When the voice of Jacob rings out in synagogues, Esau is powerless” (Bereshith Rabba 65:20). It is true that the above verse speaks of both things: The voice of Jacob and the hands of Esau. However the Midrash is saying that when we see Isaac exclaiming with surprise, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau. How can both things be possible?” we learn that these two concepts are not compatible, for they are opposites. That is, if “the voice is the voice of Jacob,” then it is impossible for the hands to be the hands of Esau.

– Avnei Ezel

The Present as Opposed to the Future

It is written, “Esau said, ‘Behold, I am going to die. Of what use is this birthright to me?’ ” (Genesis 25:32).

Commenting on verse 34, the Ramban explains why Esau sold his birthright to Jacob: “ ‘For there is no desire in fools’ [Ecclesiastes 5:3], except to eat and drink and to fulfill their momentary desire, not giving a care for tomorrow.” In fact fools do not consider the future, for all they have before their eyes is today, and they are focused on eating, drinking, and enjoying life. The wise man sees the future, a sight that protects his eyes. However the fool has no protection and is blinded by the present, wanting what it has to offer now. When the present does not have what the fool desires, it is the end of the world for him. King Solomon teaches us that one who reflects upon the future is wise, for he said: “A wise son harvests in the summer” (Proverbs 10:5). When Pharaoh had a puzzling dream whose solution involved collecting harvests for seven years, he immediately looked for an “intelligent and wise man.” What extraordinary wisdom was there in saving for seven years so as to help people survive a lengthy famine? The disciples of Novardok would say, “Just how wise are those who make provisions for themselves for the long road that awaits them after 120 years?”

– Zahav HaAretz

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha recounts the main events in the life of Isaac, from the birth of his sons until their departure from home. The parsha recounts the birth and early years of Rebecca’s twin boys. It also describes Isaac’s departure to Gerar during a famine, where he digs wells and enters into a pact with Abimelech. At the age of 40, Esau marries women who are displeasing to Isaac and Rebecca. We also read that in his old age, Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau, and afterwards Jacob is ordered by his parents to go and find a wife from Laban’s family. By Isaac’s blessing, Jacob inherits the land in which he lives, the land that had been given to Abraham.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Deceptive Tactics of the Evil Inclination

It is written, “Why do you ask me my name?” (Genesis 32:30).

Someone was running through the streets holding an object in his hand. Since people thought that it was something of great importance, they were curious as to its identity. The person in question showed everyone his clenched fist and said, “Guess what I’m holding.” This question raised people’s suspicions that he was holding something very important, something that each person needed for himself. Hence they all ran after him, hoping to grab this apparently precious object.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov used this analogy to explain the tactics of the evil inclination. Its deception lies in not revealing what it holds in hand. This concealment leads people to think that what it possesses is the very thing they need, which is why so many people run after the evil inclination and yield to it. Yet when it opens its hand, everyone sees that there is nothing inside.

We may use this analogy to explain the phrase, “Why do you ask me my name?” The power of the evil inclination exists for as long as it remains hidden, for as long as it does not reveal its name. If we were to ask about its name, and if it were to reveal its secrets and nature, its power would immediately diminish. Hence it remains in constant hiding.

We may use another analogy to explain this concept. During the night, a man saw beautifully colored pictures on a wall, as well as sparkling decorations and a host of lights. Since he had difficulty seeing these things in the dark, he took a flashlight and approached the wall in order to get a better look. Yet to his great astonishment, as soon as he directed his flashlight onto it, all the decorations and drawings disappeared, and the lights that covered the wall were outshined by his flashlight. Rabbi Yehudah Leib Chasman explained this analogy in the following way: The desires of this world are only deceptive fantasies that lead people into error. As long as people walk in darkness, they rejoice in their imaginary pleasures. Yet when the light of reason is cast upon them, they clearly see that they are nothing but lies, having no tangible sustenance. They realize that it was their imaginations that made them err up to now. Deep inside, a person senses that his desires are futile, having no basis in reality. Yet he is blinded when his desires attack him, which is why he sees his desires in a pleasant light. However once he has indulged his desires and has gone from fantasy to reality, his intellect enables him to see the bitter reality of things, and he becomes filled with regret.

ESHET HAYIL

Excessive Spending

The Gemara states, “The entire sustenance of man is fixed for him from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, except expenditures for Shabbat, expenditures for festivals, and expenditures for the instruction of his children in the Torah” (Beitzah 16a). Rashi explains: “One should be careful not to spend excessively, for he will not be given more than was fixed for him.” Due to our many sins, numerous people transgress this principle by not being careful with regards to spending on household items. This bad habit leads a person to eventually steal and experience shame. Women are of fragile temperament (Shabbat 33b), and they do not anticipate the future. Happy is the woman who strives not to get sidetracked and who wisely calculates the expenses of her household according to its size, not more.

– Biur Halachah 529

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yosef Yadid Halevi

In his youth, the great gaon Rabbi Yosef Yadid Halevi Zatzal served as a teacher's assistant for his father Rabbi Mordechai. He lived in such tremendous poverty that even when he grew older, his father did not have enough money to hire a tutor to teach him Gemara and the Poskim. Each day after he finished working with his father's young students, he would go to synagogue. There he opened the holy ark and wept before the Sefer Torah, imploring Hashem to allow him to study Gemara and the Poskim. The gaon Rabbi Shaul Katzin once noticed that the young Yosef Yadid always went to synagogue alone, and he wanted to see what he did there. He therefore followed him, and he saw him standing before the ark weeping and imploring Hashem for help. When he finished, Rabbi Shaul approached and asked him why he was crying. The boy answered that he wanted to learn Gemara and the Poskim, but that his father did not have the money for it. He therefore spent his time with young children, without progressing in Torah at all. Rav Shaul told him that he had nothing to worry about, for if he really had a burning desire to study Torah, he would try and help him.

That is precisely what he did. He spoke with a few G-d-fearing ba'alei batim and generous individuals, asking them to financially support the boy. From then on, the young Yosef began studying Gemara and the Poskim, eventually becoming very great in Torah. In fact after he began teaching, he became the person to whom everyone turned. He taught our teacher Rabbi Ezra Attiya, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, who in turn educated numerous disciples who became great in Torah and the fear of Heaven. All this happened on account of the tzaddik Rabbi Yosef Yadid Halevi, whose merits stemmed from Rabbi Shaul Katzin, without whose help Rabbi Yosef would not have studied or become great in Torah. Instead he would have continued in his former job, and no one would have benefited from his light. – Pri LaTzaddik

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Good on the Inside

It is written: "You say, 'How have You loved us?' Was Esau not the brother of Jacob – the word of the L-RD – yet I loved Jacob and I hated Esau" (Malachi 1:2-3).

Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz Zatzal said that the Jewish people are not always in a good state, for regrettably there are some who do not study Torah and observe mitzvot, either out of ignorance or habit, and it is difficult for them to change. Nevertheless, even when Jews are in such a lowly state that they are unworthy of G-d's love, when compared to Esau they are perfectly righteous and deserving of His love. Actually, the nations are evil and corrupt by their very nature, whereas the Jewish people are good and righteous inside. Even if their exterior is sometimes tarnished with evil, this only occurs when they mix among non-Jews and learn from their ways. As the community of Israel says, "Do not gaze upon me because I am dark, for the sun has scorched me. My mother's children were angry with me" (Song of Songs 1:6). Rashi explains: "Do not look upon me disdainfully, for my blackness and my ugliness are not from my mother's womb, but from tanning by the sun, for that blackness can easily be whitened by staying in the shade. ... These are the Egyptians among whom I grew up, and they went up with me in the mixed multitude. They were incensed against me with their enticement and their seduction until they made me...and there the sun tanned me and I became blackened. That is, they made me a worshipper of alien gods, but my own vineyard, which I had from my forefathers, I did not keep."

This is what the prophet Malachi is saying here: "You say, 'How have You loved us?'" – if you ask why Hashem loved us despite the fact that our deeds made us unworthy of such love, Hashem replies: "Was Esau not the brother of Jacob." In other words: When I see the deeds of the other brother, Esau, then "I loved Jacob and I hated Esau." Although you may very well be grievous sinners, Esau is a thousand times worse, to the point that I love you compared to him – Ahavat Yonatan

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

It is Your Life and the Length of Your Days

The wicked [Roman] government once issued a decree forbidding Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva publicly gathering people together and occupying himself with Torah. He said to him, "Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?" He replied, "I will explain this to you with a parable. A fox was once walking by a river, and he saw fish swimming from one place to another. He said to them, 'From what are you fleeing?' They replied, 'From the nets cast for us by men.' He said to them, 'Would you like to come up on dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors?' They replied: 'Are you the one they call the cleverest of animals? You are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!' So it is with us. ... If we go and neglect it, how much worse off will we be!" It is related that soon afterwards, Rabbi Akiva was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus ben Yehudah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him, "Pappus, who brought you here?" He replied, "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that you have been seized for busying yourself with Torah! Alas for Pappus, who was seized for busying himself with idle things!"

When Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the Shema, and as they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of Heaven. His disciples said to him, "Our teacher, even to this point?" He said to them, "All my days I have been troubled by this verse, 'with all your soul,' [which I interpret as] 'even if He takes your soul.' I said, 'When will I have the opportunity of fulfilling this?' Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it?" He prolonged the word echad until he died while saying it. A Heavenly voice went forth and proclaimed: "Happy are you, Akiva, that your soul has departed with the word echad...you are destined for the life of the World to Come." – Berachot 61b

A TRUE STORY

A Warm and Loving Home for Children

It is written, "Isaac loved Esau" (Genesis 25:28). The book Siftei Cohen states that Isaac was fully aware of Esau's true nature, but he drew him closer and wanted to bless him in order to prevent him from becoming completely evil.

A certain Rosh Yeshiva was faced with the problem of a boy who suffered from a difficult and excessively strict relationship with his parents. The Rosh Yeshiva spoke to the parents, but they believed that their method was good for the boy's education. He said to them, "It may be that you are correct, that this is the right way. However it is also possible that you are mistaken, that your way is wrong. Therefore let us listen to what the Torah says." He then went with them to see Rav Shach Zatzal.

Upon hearing the story, Rav Shach let out a sigh and said: "The holy Torah has given parents a double role: Parenting and teaching. This double role is somewhat contradictory, for parents radiate affection, 'as a father is merciful to his children' [Psalms 103:13]. As for teachers, it is said: 'Cast bile among the students' [Ketubot 103b], for the fear of one's teacher should be as the fear of Heaven. All this applied to former times, however, before we began placing our children in the hands of teachers. Since that time, parenting and teaching have become separated. A father now appoints a teacher, and later a Rosh Yeshiva, as his representative to educate his child in Torah. Therefore a father has only one role left, to lavish his child with love!"

At that point Rav Shach turned to the boy's parents and said, "In the home, spread as much love as you can upon your child, and join him in everything possible. Buy him what he needs, and prepare the right kind of food for him. The yeshiva will educate him and the Mashgiach will watch over him. The home should radiate warmth, for otherwise he may try to find it elsewhere." – Lulei Toratcha