

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Threatening a Person's Livelihood

If by speaking Lashon Harah or by spreading gossip we humiliate another person and cause him to lose his livelihood - such as by maliciously saying that he is dishonest, or that he is unable to perform a certain job and the like - we are also transgressing a positive mitzvah, as it is written: "Stranger or resident, that he may live with you" (Leviticus 25:35) and, "That your brother may live with you" (v.36). This is a commandment to support him. for he belongs to Israel. We must give him a grant or a loan, go into business with him, or find him a job so he can get back on his feet and not need to depend on others. That being said, how much more are we commanded not to make him lose his livelihood!

BETWEEN MAN AND HIS FELLOWMAN (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

Moses spoke to all Israel" (Deuteronomy 1:1), Rashi cites the Sages in explaining that all the names given in this passage are places where Israel angered Hashem. Moses mentions them by allusion, however, in order not to shame the people.

In his book Pituchei Chotam, the tzaddik Rabbi Yaakov Abutzteira states that Moses wanted to warn the Children of Israel about this by alluding to the Torah and observance of mitzvot, which required great holiness on their part. The "words" – which are words of Torah – must be protected from useless remarks. The term bamidbar ("in the desert") evokes deibur ("speech"). The term ba'arav ("in the plain") alludes to the evil inclination and the desires that are arev (pleasing) to man. Yet we must be pleasing to Hashem alone, as it is written: "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the L-RD" (Malachi 3:4). Furthermore, the word arava is formed from the terms rah ba ("evil in him"), for the desires of the evil inclination are completely evil. As for the expression mol suf ("opposite suf"), Moses explained that a person must consider the sof (end), Hashem Who is aware of the end of all people, as it is written: "Declaring the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). This means that we must raise everything towards greater holiness in order to draw closer to Hashem, His mitzvot, and His Torah.

Moses asks, "Eicha [How] can I alone bear your weight, your burden, and your strife?" (Deuteronomy 1:12). The prophet Jeremiah, at the time of the destruction of the first Temple, also employed the term eicha as he exclaimed: "Eicha [How] she sits alone, the city that was full of people" (Lamentations 1:1). There seems to be a connection between these two verses. In fact the main reason why the Shechinah abode in the Temple was to dwell among the Children of Israel. How could it dwell among them? Only by the people learning Torah and cleaving to Hashem, for in this way there would be an awakening on high that would radiate upon the Jewish people. Yet if they faltered, then automatically there would no longer be the Shechinah to receive abundance and transmit it to the Children of Israel. There would no longer be a need to rebuild the Temple, for it would not receive divine influence. This is the primary reason for the Temple's destruction and the exile.

The remedy for such destruction is when we build synagogues and houses of study for Torah and prayer, in which case we are building the Temple, as it is said: "I have been for them a small Temple" (Ezekiel 11:16). This refers to synagogues and houses of study (Megillah 29a). When the second Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai asked: "Give me Yavneh and its Sages" (Gittin 56b). As Rashi explains: Do not destroy it or kill its Sages, for the Jewish people will be renewed even after the destruction by the Sages who survive. Through the construction of yeshivot, the community of Israel will be rebuilt.

This is what Moses meant by saying, "How can I alone...." In other words: How can I be connected and attached to the

the verse, "These are the words that Holy One, blessed be He, without your will? You, the Children of Israel, are responsible for one another (Sanhedrin 27b, Shevuot 39a). It is difficult for each individual to fulfill all 613 mitzvot, for there are some mitzvot that apply only to the priests, and some that only apply to the Levites. It is only through mutual responsibility that everyone together can fulfill all the mitzvot, just as we say "in the name of all Israel" before performing a mitzvah. Thus Moses said: I cannot exist alone, but only through your Torah study and observance of mitzvot, since it is Hashem's will for everyone to be united. By performing mitzvot "in the name of all Israel," they can all be observed. Above all, Moses told the Children of Israel: Pay attention to your relationship with your fellowman, as it is written: "Judge righteously between a man and his brother and the stranger" (Deuteronomy 1:16).

> Is this just a supplement to the Torah? The responsibility between man and his fellowman is what decides whether Hashem will be our G-d and make His Shechinah dwell among us! Without mutual responsibility and Torah observance, there can be no Shechinah in the Temple to radiate upon the Children of Israel.

> According to this, we can understand the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "How she sits alone, the city that was full of people" - how is it possible that Jerusalem, the city that was so populated, now sits alone and the crown has fallen from its head? How could the Shechinah have left this city that was so full of people, and to which all eyes turned? The main reason can be found in the verse itself: "She sits alone" - there was no unity among them, no mutual responsibility, which is why it was destroyed.

> Thus on one hand, Moses was warning the Children of Israel: If you want to grow spiritually, it does not depend on the tzaddik of the generation, but on the will of the people and the entire people's mutual sense of responsibility. The tzaddik can help spread Hashem's influence, but a person must still be a vessel that can receive abundance. Otherwise the tzaddik will sit alone, there will be no mutual responsibility, nor any good influence. The tzaddik will then be unable to elevate himself or the people with him.

> We must interpret the remainder of the passage in our parsha as an allusion: "The L-RD our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying" (Deuteronomy 1:6) - Hashem became our G-d because of Horev, because of Mount Sinai. What did He say to us? "Rav lachem [Enough of your] circling this mountain" (ibid. 2:3) – this mountain has become your Ray, your guide to humility and self-effacement before Hashem. We then have, "Turn yourselves around and journey" (ibid. 1:7), which means that we must always be free to study Torah and perform mitzvot. That is when we can journey. That is when we can continue in Torah and go from strength to strength. It is when we attain humility as did this mountain, Mount Sinai, which lowered itself before Hashem and acted with humility.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

How Can I Carry You?

It is written, "How can I alone bear your weight, your burden, and your strife?" (Deuteronomy 1:12). This is like a matron who had had three groomsmen: One beheld her in her happiness, a second beheld her in her infidelity, and a third beheld her in her disgrace. Similarly, Moses beheld Israel in their happiness and exclaimed, "Eicha [How] can I alone bear?" Isaiah beheld them in their infidelity and said, "Eicha [Alas], the faithful city has become a harlot!" Jeremiah beheld them in their disgrace and said, "Eicha [Alas], she sits alone, the city that was full of people" (Yalkut Shimoni).

There has never been an ordinary time among the Children of Israel. When they were happy, their success was greater than anyone could imagine: "The L-RD your G-d has multiplied you, and behold, today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven" (Deuteronomy 1:10). Even Moses, the faithful servant, asked: "How can I alone bear?" Eicha ("how"), not only expresses a question, but a sense of astonishment, as in: "How is it possible?"

When Israel's spiritual slide began, once again their sins were not ordinary. Instead, a dramatic shift from one extreme to the other took place: "The faithful city has become a harlot!" Hence Isaiah used the term eicha ("alas"). The Children of Israel are like this, for when they descend, they descend to the very bottom. Thus the faithful city where justice lived became an abode for murderers, since there is no middle ground with this people. Likewise when they ascend, they ascend to the very heavens.

Thus when disaster strikes, it too makes no concessions until the very end. The Maharal states that Jeremiah saw Israel in her disgrace, when she was stuck with calamities the likes of which no other people had experienced. Sin was the reason why such completely uncommon disasters came upon them, which is why Jeremiah said: "Eicha [Alas], she sits alone, the city that was full of people."

When the Jewish people become transfixed on sin, their slide into complete immorality is inevitable. It is impossible to sin while still retaining the characteristics of the Jewish people, for as Rashi states: "As soon as a person departs from the Torah, he goes and cleaves to idolatry" (Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:16). This is why the end of the process is complete abandon: "Eicha [Alas], the faithful city has become a harlot!"

It is also why its punishment is so severe, for this change clearly highlights the fact that it is impossible for the Jewish people to continue existing as a people while still sinning so gravely.

Returning to the source must also be complete, leaving no room for the middle ground. Thus we read, "The son of David will come only in a generation that is either completely righteous or completely wicked" (Sanhedrin 98a). The Chafetz Chaim explains that those who are righteous will be completely righteous, for one who clings to the Tree of Life with devotion, despite the difficulty of the times and the terrible hardships he experiences, is completely righteous. As Jeremiah said, "Bring us back to You, O L-RD, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21).

A Pearl From the Rav: The Gravity of Dissension

It is written, "Hazeroth and Di-Zahav" (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Rashi explains that Hazeroth represents Korach's rebellion and Di-Zahav represents the golden calf. Now the book Gan Raveh, citing the Derush MiShemuel, asks why the verse mentions Hazeroth (Korach) before Di-Zahav (the golden calf), since the Children of Israel made the golden calf before Korach's rebellion.

This seems to be teaching us that dissension is worse than idolatry, for dissension leads to Lashon Harah and the worst possible sins. The Sages say that the generation of Achav, despite having idol-worships among them and failing to study Torah, was victorious in war because they did not speak Lashon Harah. As for the generation of David, they were defeated in war because people spoke Lashon Harah (Vayikra Rabba 26:2). Furthermore, Lashon Harah is as serious as the three gravest sins (Arachin 15b). In fact the Sages (Bamidbar Rabba 18:12) have said that the term machloket (dissension) is an acronym for makkah (striking), charon (fury), likui (failure), kelalah (curse), and to'evah (abomination). Hence Moses placed the dissension of Korach before the sin of the golden calf, for dissension is worse than idolatry.

Reprimanding Through Allusion

It is written, "That Moses spoke to all Israel" (Deuteronomy 1:1).

This teaches us that they were all capable of accepting reprimand (Yalkut). Moses mentioned sin here only by way of allusion, listing the places where the Children of Israel had sinned. To understand a reprimand by way of allusion, one must first be able to accept a reprimand. As for a man devoid of understanding, he must be given a reprimand on a platter, with his sins explicitly listed because an allusion is insufficient.

Since Moses reprimanded the Children of Israel solely through allusion, it means that they were all capable of accepting reprimand and understanding it in this way.

- Divrei Sha'arei Chaim

An Allusion is Sufficient for the Wise

It is written, "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan and Hazeroth and Di-Zahav" (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Rashi states, "Since these are words of rebuke, he lists here all the places where they angered the Omnipresent. Hence it makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead just alludes to them out of respect for Israel."

What does respect for Israel have to do with this passage? Is it not fitting for someone to issue a reprimand in light of his listener's ability to understand it? If he is too concise, his reprimand will not be understood; he must instead detail all the sins in question and explain them. If he can be understood with a slight hint, there is no reason to go further. What does any of this have to do with respect for Israel?

The answer is that it is normal for people to remember an important event in life, and a slight hint is all they need to recall it. Such is not the case, however, when an event is of minor importance, for then it is chased from a person's mind. It is only by mentioning numerous details about the event that it can be recalled. For the generation of the desert, the generation of knowledge, every sin they committed was a terrible event in their minds, and they constantly dwelled upon them. Therefore a slight hint was all they needed in a reprimand in order to understand the issue at hand.

This is why Rashi states, "Hence it makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead just alludes to them out of respect for Israel." They did not have to be told in detail about their sins in order to be reprimanded, for if they had needed such details, it would have been to their shame. It would have meant that they considered their sins as being minor and unimportant, things that they had chased from their minds. Yet now that only a slight hint was needed in order to reprimand them, it was to their honor, for it meant that they understood the gravity of the deeds in question.

- Rabbi Yosef Leib Nandik

An Inheritance in the Land

It is written, "The rest of Gilead and the entire Bashan...I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh...called the land of Rephaim" (Deuteronomy 3:13).

The Mishnah explains, "Rabbi Yossi the Galilean says: 'One may not bring [bikkurim] from across the Jordan, since it is not a land flowing with milk and honey'" (Bikkurim 1:10). We find another reason for this in the Yerushalmi: "Thus it is written, 'that You gave me' [Deuteronomy 26:10], not that I took it on my own." This means that the tribes of Reuben and Gad did not receive an inheritance in the land. Instead they took it for themselves after speaking with Moses. Hence bikkurim are not brought from their territories. It is for this reason, the Yerushalmi states, that this law does not apply to the territories of Reuben and Gad. As for the territory of the half-tribe of Manasseh, which they did not take by themselves, bikkurim are brought from there (just as they are in Eretz Israel) despite the fact that it is beyond the Jordan. This discrepancy needs to be explained.

Concerning the verse, "That also was considered the land of the Rephaim. The Rephaim lived there in former times" (Deuteronomy 2:20), Rashi states: "It is not the one I gave to Abraham." This means that the territory of the half-tribe of Manasseh differs from that of the other tribes beyond the Jordan, for the latter was "not the one I gave to Abraham." whereas the former was.

This is what the Yerushalmi means by saying that the half-tribe of Manasseh did not take their territory on their own. It means that the land they took had been included in Hashem's covenant with Abraham, which is why it was equal to Eretz Israel. Hence bikkurim could also be brought from there. Such was not the case with the territories of Reuben and Gad, which were not part of Hashem's covenant with Abraham. Hence bikkurim could not be brought from there.

- Rabbi Raphael Shapira of Volozhin

Overview of the Parsha

In the book of Deuteronomy, which is called "Mishneh Torah," Moses explains the entire Torah to the Children of Israel as a preparation for entering the land of Israel. Just as the book of Numbers describes Hashem's encamping and journeying around the Sanctuary (corresponding to the book of Exodus, where Hashem prepares the Sanctuary), the book of Deuteronomy organizes the life of the chosen man as he returns to his land, the land of Canaan, as the people of Israel. This corresponds to the book of Genesis, which describes man's creation and his connection to the earth, up until the formation of the family from which this people would emerge.

Parsha Devarim begins as Moses reviews the events of the people's journey from Horev to Kadesh. He recalls the appointing of the leaders to judge the people, and he continues with the event that made them stay in the desert for so long, namely the rebellion of those who had gone to explore the land. Moses then begins reviewing the last part of their journey, after their departure from Kadesh, as they went around Mount Seir and skirted its borders. He mentions Moab and Ammon, whose ability to join the Jewish people is curtailed. From here Moses returns to the events that took place at the end of their journey, when they began to inherit territories because of their wars with Sihon and Og.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Complete Obedience

It is written, "Choose wise and understanding men, known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you" (Deuteronomy 1:13).

The Midrash states, "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi stated: Moses said to Israel: 'If you do not obey the judges, then sin will be upon your heads.' This may be illustrated as follows: The tail of a serpent said to the head, 'How much longer will you go first? Let me go first.' The head replied, 'Go.' The tail came to a pool of water and dragged the head into it. It came to a fire and pulled [the head into it]. It came to thorns and dragged it among them' (Devarim Rabba 1:10).

In the book Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Rabbi Dessler Zatzal writes: "A lack of self-effacement before our teachers is the cause of all sin and the beginning of all destruction. Every merit is worthless compared to the root of all things, which is faith in the Sages."

The Chafetz Chaim writes in Shem Olam, "We know that at the end of the exile, when a fierce war will take place between holiness and impurity, impurity will launch its terrifying arrows. Now sometimes an arrow strikes the hand, and sometimes the foot. Sometimes it disfigures a person, striking the mouth or the head or the heart, and nobody leaves the battlefield intact. There are only refugees, the remnant that Hashem calls and who are true heroes. They are the ones who possess the Torah and on whom Hashem's kingdom rests in this world. In fact all who study Torah must understand their value, for our religion rests on them. Just as the Levites were called "the guardians of the guard of holiness," for they were responsible for protecting the honor of Hashem's Sanctuary, the place of the Ark of the Covenant, in order to prevent foreigners from defiling it or acting scornfully, likewise in our time Hashem's religion rests on the talmidei chachamim of the generation. They are the ones who are called "the guardians of the guard of holiness." They are the ones on whom the perseveration of Hashem's Ark – our holy Torah – depends so that foreigners do not render it impure.

EISHET CHAYIL

True Jewels

Rabbi Hershel Luria, a young Slonim chassid who lived in Tiberias, yearned to travel to Slonim in Lithuania in order to see his Rebbe, the author of Divrei Shemuel, and learn from his ways. However he was unable to afford the trip because he was very poor. Despite their difficulties, his wife wanted to help him, and therefore she sold her jewels and gave the proceeds to her husband so he could fulfill his heartfelt desire.

The young averch therefore traveled to see his Rebbe, a trip that was neither short not easy. He did not tell the Rebbe how he had managed to pay for the trip, though other chassidim recounted the story involving the sale of his wife's jewels.

The Rebbe was amazed when he heard this, and he blessed the chassid that by this merit, he and his wife would have children who themselves would be jewels. Rabbi Hershel merited the fulfillment of this blessing, and his sons brightened the firmament of Eretz Israel by their Torah and service of Hashem.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

Ox and Donkey

It is written, "The ox knows its master, and the donkey its master's trough" (Isaiah 1:3).

The Yerushalmi recounts the story of a Jew who sold his cow to a non-Jew. The cow refused to work on Shabbat, despite the severe blows that it received from the non-Jew. Finally the Jew whispered into the cow's ear, "You don't belong to me anymore. You now belong to a non-Jew, and you have to work as much as he wants." At that point the cow immediately began plowing. When the non-Jew saw this, he converted. From then on, he was known as Yochanan "ben Torta" (literally "son of the ox").

Similar to this story is the account that the Sages give regarding Eliyahu HaNavi's ox, which he gave to the prophets of Baal so they could sacrifice it upon their altar on Mount Carmel. This ox, however, absolutely refused to be slaughtered for an idol, until finally Eliyahu told it that its sacrifice would sanctify Hashem's Name. At that point it agreed and went to be sacrificed.

Likewise it is said that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey refused to eat fodder that had not been tithed.

This can all be found in the verse, "The ox knows its master, and the donkey its master's trough." The ox knows its master – there are oxen that know their master, such as the ox that did not want to be sacrificed to an idol, or the cow of Rabbi Yochanan ben Torta, which did not want to work on Shabbat. The donkey its master's trough – there is a donkey that knows the trough of its master and refuses to eat fodder that has not been tithed, such as the donkey of Rabbi Yochanan Pinchas ben Yair. Thus Hashem says: As for you, My people, you are even lower than ox and donkey, for "Israel does not know, My people do not comprehend" (Isaiah 1:3).

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

The saintly Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and the great Maggid of Mezritch, was among the fathers of Chassidut, being the founder of the Chernobyl dynasty. Rabbi Menachem Nachum was born in Garinsk, Volhynia in 5490 to the tzaddik Rabbi Tzvi, the son of Rabbi Nachum Gaon and the grandson of the hidden tzaddik Rabbi Adam Baal Shem.

While still a child, he lost his father and mother. He was therefore raised by his uncle (his father's brother) Rabbi Nachum, a prosperous man who was both a talmid chacham and a kabbalist, and who was born only after the death of his father. Rabbi Nachum Gaon.

The story is told of a man who arrived in Chernobyl one Sukkot evening, but did not have enough time to go out and greet the holy Rabbi Nachum. Before sunrise, he went to see Rabbi Nachum and found him awake, kissing an etrog and impatiently waiting for sunrise in order to recite a blessing upon it. He then understood the greatness of his love for the mitzvah, like someone whose only son had gone away and had now returned. Rabbi Menachem Nachum could not contain himself as he took his etrog and held it in one hand and then the other, committed and yearning to carry out the mitzvah of his Creator. Rabbi Moshe Tzvi of Savaran said, "In the home of the holy Rabbi Nachum, a great candle burned on the evening of Shabbat so he could study even after midnight. One day, Rabbi Nachum left his home and the candle went out. A non-Jew who was there saw what had happened, and he relit the candle. When Rabbi Nachum returned, he groped about like someone who was walking in the dark, even bumping his head against a wall. He asked those living in his home, 'Why is it so dark in the house? Why did someone extinguish the candle?' He was told. 'The candle is burning and there's light in the house!' He replied, 'Is it possible that a transgression was committed with it, such that I can't see its light?" People then checked, and they realized that he was right."

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Incredible Patience and its Reward

Rabbi Pereda had a student with learning difficulties, and Rabbi Pereda had to teach him a lesson 400 times before he could grasp it. On a certain day, having been requested to attend to a religious matter, he taught him as usual, but the student could not grasp the subject. Rabbi Pereda asked him, "Why don't you understand as you do on other days?" The student answered, "From the time you were told that you had a religious matter to attend to, I couldn't concentrate, for I was constantly thinking that you would leave at any instant." Rabbi Pereda did not leave, and he said: "Pay attention to me, and we will start again from the beginning." He therefore taught him 400 times more, until he finally grasped the subject. A Heavenly voice went out and asked Rabbi Pereda, "Do you prefer 400 years added to your life, or that you and your generation will be privileged to have a share in the World to Come." That I and my generation will be privileged to have a share in the World to Come." The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Give him both."

- From Eruvin 54b

Following in the Footsteps of Hillel

A Persian came to Rav and said to him, "Teach me the Torah." He said to him, "Say aleph." The man remarked, "Who says that this is aleph? There may be others who say that it is not!" "Say beit," to which he remarked, "Who says that this is beit?" Rav rebuked him and drove him out in anger. He went to Shemuel and said to him, "Teach me the Torah." He told him, "Say aleph." The man remarked, "Who says that this is aleph?" "Say beit," to which he remarked, "Who said this is beit?" Shemuel took hold of his ear and the man exclaimed, "My ear! My ear!" Shemuel asked him, "Who said that this is your ear?" He answered, "Everybody knows that this is my ear." Shemuel retorted, "Likewise everybody knows that this is aleph and this is beit." Immediately the Persian was silenced and accepted the lesson. Hence, "Patience is better than pride" (Ecclesiastes 7:8) – better is the patience that Shemuel displayed with the Persian than the impatience that Rav showed. Otherwise the Persian might have returned to his idolatry.

- From Kohelet Rabba 7:16

A TRUE STORY

No Favoritism in Judgment

Reb Zimmel Epstein and Reb Kuppel Halperin were two wealthy business partners. Among their business ventures, they had large government contracts that included the construction of a vast highway between Moscow and Warsaw. In fact their tremendous wealth and financial status earned them the visit of government ministers. At one point these two businessmen had a disagreement among themselves, and they decided to present their case to the Rav of Bialystok. Thus they traveled by carriage to the Beit Din, and upon entering the court they saw that the Rav had lowered his tallit over his eyes. He asked, "Are the litigants here?" He was told, "Yes." He asked, "Who is the plaintiff?" Reb Zimmel said, "Me." He responded, "Who is 'me'?" He said, 'Me, Reb Zimmel Epstein." The Rav answered, "Zimmel, speak!" Reb Zimmel then presented his arguments. The Rav then asked, "Who is the defendant?" Reb Kuppel replied, "Me, Reb Kuppel Halperin." The Rav said, "Kuppel, what is your response?" The two were shocked. Not only were they not shown any respect (respect that they were used to receiving), but even the title of Reb wasn't used! When they finished presenting their arguments, the Rav said: "This is the din. Do you accept it?"

When they agreed to the din, the Rav of Bialystok removed the tallit covering his eyes and warmly welcomed them. When they wanted to give him money for the psak, he refused to accept it, saying that he had never taken money for a psak, not even for a difficult case.

They were curious as to the Rav's behavior, and so he explained: "I did not greet you with your titles in order to fulfill the directive found in the Mishnah: 'When the litigants stand before you, regard them both as guilty' [Pirkei Avoth I:8]. I did not look at you in the face because of what we learn from the verse, 'These things too are for the wise, showing favoritism [lit. 'to see the face'] in judgment is not good' [Proverbs 24:23]."

- Lulei Toratcha