



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Completely Useless

A person who disparages someone who is regarded by members of the community as being great in Torah, saying that he is not as great as they think, or that his Torah understanding is not as extensive, thereby lowers this individual in their eyes.

This is obviously included in the prohibition against speaking Lashon Hara, even if what a person says is true. This is because his words serve no practical purpose, being meant only to harm the individual in question. Sometimes such words can cause pain or actual harm to the individual. By saying such things, the honor of the Torah and the practice of mitzvah are also lowered in the eyes of the community, who had considered this individual to have been great in Torah.

THE DEEDS OF THE FATHERS ARE A SIGN FOR THE CHILDREN

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Gemara states, "Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: 'Why was our father Abraham punished and his children doomed to Egyptian servitude for 210 years? Because he pressed scholars into his service, as it is written: "He armed his dedicated servants born in his own house" [Genesis 14:14]. Shemuel said, 'Because he went too far in testing the attributes of the L-RD, as it is written: "How shall I know that I will inherit it?" [ibid. 15:8]. Rabbi Yochanan said, 'Because he prevented men from entering beneath the wings of the Shechinah, as it is written: "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself" [ibid. 14:21]' " (Nedarim 32a).

The book *Be'er Mechokek* asks how the Children of Israel could have been punished for the sins of Abraham, since the Torah states: "Fathers shall not be put to death for children, nor shall children be put to death for fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

We also need to understand the statement that Abraham's sin lay in the fact that he pressed Torah scholars into battle. It was the Holy One, blessed be He, who personally helped Abraham in battle, as the Aggadah states: "Shem, [Noah's] eldest son, said to Eliezer: 'When the kings of the east and the west attacked you, what did you do?' He replied, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, took Abraham and placed him at His right hand, and they threw dust which turned to swords, and chaff which turned to arrows'" (Sanhedrin 108b).

The Sages have also said, "Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah differed. One maintained: 'This means that Abraham threw dust at them, and it turned to swords; stubble, and it turned to arrows.' Yet the other argued: 'It is not written, "He makes dust," but "He makes them as the dust" – they threw swords at Abraham, and it turned to dust; arrows, and it turned to stubble' " (Bereshith Rabba 43:3). Therefore how could anyone even think that the Holy One, blessed be He, would have helped Abraham and performed miracles for him if a trace of sin had been involved?

Furthermore, from where did Rabbi Eleazar learn that the Children of Israel were punished because Abraham had pressed Torah scholars into service, since the Name of Hashem was eventually sanctified? As the king of Sodom said to Abraham, "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself" (Genesis 14:21). Abraham replied that he could not take this money, for the Holy One, blessed be He, saw to all his needs. Abraham also told him, "I have lifted up my hand to the L-RD, the most high G-d, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a sandal strap. I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' " (v.22-23). Here Abraham informed the king of Sodom that he had no love for gold or silver. As the Ben Ish Hai asks on the verse, "Abram was very heavy in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Genesis 13:2), what does "very heavy" mean? It means that silver and gold were a burden to him, and only Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds were easy for him.

Here we learn that in any case, Hashem's Name was sanctified by the fact that Abraham sent his disciples into battle. Therefore where did Rabbi Eleazar learn that doing so was a sin?

We may explain this according to what is mentioned earlier: "I will make your seed as the dust of the earth" (v.16). Why does He say "as the dust of the earth," rather than "as the sand of the sea" or "as the stars of the heavens"? The explanation is the following:

Abraham was being told that just as he overcame adversity, his descendants would overcome adversity without transgressing. Even if their enemies would say to them, "Give up your faith or we will kill you," they would be willing to die rather than to deny their faith. Likewise Abraham overcame adversity by the humility he possessed, and he became like dust. As Abraham himself said, "I am dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27), for dust does not grow proud, since everyone steps on it.

Such was the characteristic of Abraham, as the Mishnah tells us: "The

disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul" (Pirkei Avoth 5:19). Therefore the great characteristic of the Jewish people is humility and self-effacement before G-d – just as Abraham effaced himself before Him like dust – with the result being that they can overcome their adversities.

This is a great principle: There is no obstacle that a person cannot overcome if he possesses humility and the ability to yield, for he does everything that G-d decrees without ever questioning a thing. This is why G-d told Abraham, "I will make your seed as the dust of the earth," meaning that the Jewish people would be as humble as him, and by this characteristic they would merit to overcome adversity. This was why Abraham was later punished for preventing his disciples from studying Torah by sending them into battle. In fact Abraham knew that he would not die in battle, and that the kings he was facing could not defeat him, since G-d had already made him the promise, when he left Haran, of *lech lecha*, which has a numerical value of 100 (Baal HaTurim). This was a way of telling him that he had 100 more years to live, and therefore he had no right to take his disciples away from their Torah study.

Although he diverted them to perform a mitzvah, G-d had promised him that he would not fall in battle. He could have therefore waged war by himself, without turning his students away from the Torah. Furthermore, as our Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Abraham a sign that everything that happened to him would also happen to his descendants" (Tanhuma, Lech Lecha 9). That being the case, by turning his students away from the Torah, Abraham's descendants would have learned to neglect the study of Torah from his example. Hence he was punished, though not because he committed a sin; after all, he diverted them to perform a mitzvah, without mentioning the fact that Hashem had helped him in battle.

We must say that this was not an actual sin – but a teaching for all the generations to come – that they must not do the same, but instead they must constantly be engaged in the study of Torah. They cannot interrupt their learning as long as there is no urgent need. In fact the Sages say, "Schoolchildren may not be made to neglect [Torah study], even for the building of the Temple" (Shabbat 119b). In this case, since Abraham could have gone into battle alone, he should not have diverted his disciples from the Beit Midrash.

Sages, Be Careful With Your Words

We should not be surprised that Abraham was punished for something that did not entail a sin. In fact a similar teaching is given in the Mishnah: "Sages, be careful with your words, for you may incur the penalty of exile and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who follow you there will drink and die, and consequently the Name of Heaven will be desecrated" (Pirkei Avoth 1:11). Along the same lines, the Gemara states that the disciples of Hillel believed that one may recite Shema while standing, sitting, reclining, walking on the road, or at work. The disciples of Shammai believed that in the morning one must recite Shema while standing, and in the evening while sitting. Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah were once eating together, with Rabbi Yishmael reclining and Rabbi Eleazar standing upright. When the time came to recite Shema, Rabbi Eleazar reclined and Rabbi Yishmael stood upright. Rabbi Eleazar said to Rabbi Yishmael, "Brother Yishmael, I will tell you a parable. To what can this situation be compared? It is like a man to whom people say, 'You have a fine beard,' and he replies, 'I will cut it off just to spite you.' So too with you: As long as I was upright, you were reclining. Yet now that I recline, you stand upright!" He replied, "I acted according to the rule of Hillel, while you acted according to the rule of Shammai. What's more is that I had to act in this way, lest the disciples see it and fix the Halachah for future generations accordingly" (Berachot 11a).

AT THE SOURCE

The Pious Refrain

It is written, "I will not take from a thread to a sandal strap. I will not take anything that is yours" (Genesis 14:23).

Abraham took nothing for himself, not even the cost of his work; he did not want to accept anything. In light of what the Sages have said, namely that the Patriarchs fulfilled Torah mitzvot even before they were given, we can understand Abraham's refusal to take even the cost of his work. It was because, by doing so, it would have contained a trace of a free gift to a non-Jew, something that is forbidden because "you shall not show mercy to them" (Deuteronomy 7:2); you shall not give them a free gift.

The Chatam Sofer Zatzal explains that this pursuit took place, as we know, on the night of Passover. During that time, it is forbidden for a person to receive compensation for work he has done, for it is considered "wages of Shabbat or a festival." Even if there are ways that it is permitted to receive wages for Shabbat or a festival, the Sages have said that pious individuals refrain from it (Shabbat 120a). Hence Abraham did not want to take anything "from a thread to a sandal strap."

Containing Strife

It is written, "There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle" (Genesis 13:7).

In the next verse we find the statement, "Abram said to lot, 'Please, let there be no conflict between me and you.'" At first "there was riv [strife]," and in the end "let there be no meriva [conflict]." Rabbi Moshe Alsheich Zatzal writes, "This is because our Sages in the Gemara [Sanhedrin 7a] say that a dispute begins with something small, but then it grows and spreads among people."

Abraham therefore asked Lot, "Since up to now there has been no dispute between us, but only between our herdsmen – and even between our herdsmen the dispute has not reached the point of being a meriva, something feminine that multiplies, spreads, and grows larger, but only a riv, something masculine – let us ensure that it does not become a meriva, in the feminine, with the potential to multiply. Let us ensure that it remains 'between you and me.'"

Outside of Eretz Israel

It is written, "Between Kadesh and Bered" (Genesis 16:14).

We should be surprised that the Torah indicates where Hashem spoke to Hagar when she called the place Be'er-lahai-roi ("well of living One Who sees me"), stating that it is "between Kadesh and Bered."

The book Ohr Yakrut cites the Sages' pronouncement regarding the prophet Ezekiel, which is that prophesy does not rest on a person outside of Eretz Israel unless it already rested on him beforehand, when he was in Eretz Israel.

The Mishnah at the beginning of tractate Gittin explains that someone who brings a get from a place called Rekem and Hegar (Kadesh and Bered – Rashi) must say, "It was written in my presence and signed in my presence," for these places are considered to be outside of Eretz Israel.

That being said, how could Hagar have seen the Shechinah outside of Eretz Israel? This is why she said, "Even here I saw a trace of the G-d Who sees me," for she had already seen the Shechinah in Eretz Israel, while living in Abraham's home. She was therefore able to see it outside of Eretz Israel as well.

Measure for Measure

It is written, "Sarai, Abram's wife, did not bear him children, and she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar" (Genesis 16:1).

The Midrash cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as stating that Hagar was the daughter of Pharaoh. When Pharaoh saw the miracles that were done for Sarah while she was in his palace, he took his daughter and gave her to Sarah.

He said, "Better for my daughter to be a maidservant in this house than a mistress in another." Thus it is written, "She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar."

When Avimelech saw the miracles that were done for Sarah when she was in his palace, he also took his daughter and gave her to Sarah. He said, "Better for my daughter to be a maidservant in this house than a mistress in another." Thus it is written, "Daughters of kings are your visitors, the queen stands erect at your right in the golden jewelry of Ophir" (Psalms 45:10).

In his book Yismach Israel, the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer Zatzal therefore states: "It seems that an angel of G-d revealed itself to Hagar because she exchanged the royal honors of her father's palace for the home of Abraham. Hence Hashem gave her the merit, measure for measure, of seeing and speaking to an angel."

THE PARABLE AND ITS EXPLANATION

One Who Faithfully Serves the King Will Attain Greatness

It is written, "After these things, the word of the L-RD came to Abram in a vision, saying: 'Fear not, Abram. I am a shield for you; your reward is very great'" (Genesis 15:1).

One of the king's ministers rebelled against him, and after having opposed the king for several years, he regretted what he had done and went before the king to beg his forgiveness. He took it upon himself to serve the king without awaiting any reward for the rest of his life, hoping to finally atone for his sin in this way. From then on, he was loyal to the king and served him with all his heart. As for the king, he gave the minister costly gifts and bestowed honor upon him.

When this minister saw just how many benefits he received from the king, he began to worry that the king was trying to reward him for his service in the years following his repentance. In that case, the sin of his rebellion would not be atoned, and it would return to haunt him at a later time. When the king noticed that the minister appeared sad, he said to him: "Why are you somber today?" The minister then told the king what was worrying him.

The king said to him, "By your life, your sin has been forgiven, and all that you received was not a reward for your service. Rather, it was because it is not fitting for the king to be served by a simple man. I therefore bestowed honors upon you and showered you with benefits to show everyone that one who faithfully serves the king will become great."

Likewise, explained Rabbi Yaakov Aharon Zatzal of Alexander, the Holy One, blessed be He, acted in this way with Abraham. As we know, Abraham began to serve Hashem at the age of 48, when he took it upon himself to serve Him without awaiting a reward, in order to atone for the sin of not having served Him during those 48 years. When a great deal of time passed, the Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed numerous benefits upon Abraham, and He also delivered Amraphel and his allies into his hands. Abraham was afraid that all this greatness had only been given to him for his service of Hashem, in which case his sin of 48 years would not have been forgiven. Hashem therefore said to him, "Fear not, Abram...your reward is very great." Do not be afraid that this greatness and the benefits you received were a reward for your service of Hashem, and that the sin of 48 years remains. The greatness that I bestowed upon you was for My sake, so that all the peoples of the world could see what tremendous good is reserved for one who serves Me.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI BEN TZION HAZAN

Cheshvan 12 is the yahrtzeit of the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Ben Tzion Mordechai Hazan Zatzal, one of the founding members of the great and holy Porat Yosef yeshiva, having served as the faithful emissary of our teacher Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad, the author of Ben Ish Hai. Rabbi Ben Tzion was born in Baghdad in 5637, and he became the eminent disciple of our teacher Rabbi Yosef Haim. Rabbi Ben Tzion's family name was originally Nachum, and in Arabic he was called Morad. The name Hazan was given to him because of the beautiful voice with which he served Hashem in reciting prayers and piyutim.

It is said that as Rabbi Ben Tzion was leaving the great synagogue of Baghdad for home one day, an Arab sheik waited for him outside.

This sheik greeted him and said, "Hashem has given you a beautiful voice. Let me give you some advice that comes with a tremendous reward." The sheik's advice was that the Rav should serve as the muezzin in his mosque, and he went into great detail about the "tremendous reward" that awaited him in paradise, after a long life. Disturbed by this surprising offer, Rabbi Ben Tzion immediately told the sheik: "Know that I have to swallow a dozen eggs every day in order to maintain my voice."

"No problem," replied the sheik. "I will even provide you with 20 eggs every day." Not only that, the sheik added, but the Rav would receive a good salary, as much as he wanted. Rabbi Ben Tzion rushed to see the Ben Ish Hai and told him what had happened. He too was surprised by this offer, and ordered him to leave for Eretz Israel as quickly as he could.

This order from the Ben Ish Hai struck Rabbi Ben Tzion like a clap of thunder on a bright day. Rabbi Ben Tzion's parents and his entire family lived in Baghdad, and he wondered how he was ever going to earn a living for himself and family in Eretz Israel. At that time, the Jewish community in Jerusalem was small, and most of its members lived in hardship, suffering under harsh financial conditions.

The Ben Ish Hai offered Rabbi Ben Tzion a solution: The Ben Ish Hai would send his writings to Eretz Israel, where Rabbi Ben Tzion would publish them and earn a living from selling them.

In 5661, Rabbi Ben Tzion left for Eretz Israel by way of Aden and Yemen. The journey lasted six entire months, until he finally arrived in Jerusalem. It was there in the holy city that his teacher sent him his writings, and he occupied himself with their publication and sale, which enabled him to earn a living.

No Need for Doctors!

That year, the prominent Yosef Shalom met the Ben Ish Hai. Yosef Shalom wanted to put his money to good use by building a hospital in Jerusalem. He presented his plan to the Rav and wanted to hear his opinion.

The Ben Ish Hai interrupted his train of thought and said, "I advise you to establish in Jerusalem an institution where anybody who studies there won't need a hospital. One who studies Torah for the sake of Heaven will not need to see a doctor. You should establish a yeshiva where Sephardic children will study, for many of them will become the spiritual leaders of the generations to come."

The prominent Yosef Shalom accepted the Ben Ish Hai's suggestion, exerting all his strength to build a yeshiva in Jerusalem. The faithful representative of the Ben Ish Hai in Jerusalem, who occupied himself with establishing the yeshiva, was Rabbi Ben Tzion Hazan, who purchased a large plot of land facing the Kotel. It was there that the yeshiva was built, being housed in a building that was large and beautiful for the time.

As a sign of gratitude towards the prominent Yosef Shalom, the yeshiva was named Porat Yosef. It is a great yeshiva that has provided the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora with generations of talmidei chachamim, rabbis, and great Torah figures.

Where Did the Two Perutahs Go?

A brief story illustrates the degree of Rabbi Ben Tzion's righteousness and honesty.

It is said that one day, as he was sitting in the office of the Porat Yosef yeshiva, Rabbi Ben Tzion's son noticed that he was constantly counting and recounting some

money that was placed on the table before him. As Rabbi Ben Tzion was counting, he whispered: "Where did the two perutahs [pennies] go? According to the ledger, two perutahs are missing from the yeshiva's account!"

This took place at lunchtime. Food had been placed on the Rav's table, but he didn't touch it. After a long time, during which the Rav was still counting and recounting, his son said to him: "Father, your food is getting cold. Why don't you eat?" Rabbi Ben Tzion replied with an air of concern, "Nothing interests me now. Let me find out where these two perutahs from the yeshiva's account have gone!" When his son heard this, he said: "What's the problem? Just put two perutahs into the account and be finished with it!" Rabbi Ben Tzion replied, "No, that's not the way we do things. We have to get to the bottom of this. Where did the two perutahs go?" At that point, his son went to the bank, where it turned out that the two perutahs had been charged by the bank as a fee for a checking book.

The Secrets of Angels

Other than his greatness in Gemara and the Poskim, Rabbi Ben Tzion was known for his greatness in Kabbalah, which he had learned from great kabbalists: Rabbi Shaoul Devik HaCohen, Rabbi Avraham Ades, and Rabbi Yom Tov HaLevi Zatzal. In 5708, when soldiers from Jordan's army attacked residents in the old city of Jerusalem, Rabbi Ben Tzion, who served as the Rav of the Jewish Quarters, went out with a white flag in his hand in order to surrender to the Jordanian forces, thereby avoiding a massacre of Jerusalem's residents.

Rabbi Ben Tzion Hazan died on Cheshvan 12, 5712. This anniversary is observed by the students of Porat Yosef, who devote the Torah learning of this day to the founder of their yeshiva.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

The Torah Endures Only With One who Separates Himself from this World

It is written, "Terah died in Haran, and the L-RD said to Abram, lech lecha [go for yourself]" (Genesis 11:32-12:1). Rashi asks why the death of Terah is cited first, since Terah was still alive when Abraham went down to Egypt. We may explain this by saying that a person cannot merit the words of the Torah unless he is ready to give his life for them, as it is written: "Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for them" (Berachot 63b). How can a person kill himself for the words of the Torah in this world? It is by forgetting everything that concerns this world. When his father and mother do not let him study Torah, he must forget them and study it, even if it is difficult for him to distance himself from his father and mother. He must kill himself for it, in which case he is promised that the Torah will firmly endure with him.

When Avraham saw that his father Terah practiced idolatry and did not let him study Torah, he immediately began to distance himself from him. At that point, it was as if his father Terah was already dead and could no longer hinder him. Why did he act in this way? It was in order to serve G-d, not to bow before the idols that his father made and sold.

Since Abraham left Haran and viewed his father as being already dead, G-d immediately revealed Himself to him and said: "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house" (Genesis 12:1). Here the Sages have explained: "Because Abraham our father said, 'Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?' the Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, 'I am the Guide, the Sovereign of the universe'" (Bereshith Rabba 39:1). Hashem did not reveal Himself to Abraham as long as he was living with his father in Haran, next to idols. When he left that place, G-d immediately revealed Himself to him.

– From the Teachings of Rabbi David Hanania Pinto

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

A Condiment to Wisdom

There is a special field in the wisdom of the Torah and its mysteries, one that consists of rearranging words in various ways while preserving their original meaning and numerical value. The Mishnah cites Rabbi Eliezer ben Chisma in teaching, “The laws pertaining to bird-sacrifices and the calculation of the onset of menstruation – these are essentials of Halachah. The calculation of cycles and numerical computations of Hebrew words are condiments to wisdom” (Pirkei Avot 3:18). Halachah is the essence of the Torah’s wisdom, and making astronomical calculations or computing the numerical value of words is like an outer garment with regards to that wisdom.

In the Gemara, the Sages mention this field of study and its source in the Torah, which is in this week’s parsha. They say, “How do we know that the Torah [acknowledges] notarikon? Because it is written *ki av hamon goyim natitcha* [‘For a father of a multitude of nations have I made you’ – Genesis 17:5]” (Shabbat 105a). The Sages then use the concept of notarikon in order to analyze the expression *av hamon*, expanding upon each of its letters in order to represent a different aspect of Abraham’s standing in the world: “A father [av] among nations,” “A chosen one [bachur] among nations,” “Beloved [haviv] among nations,” “A king [melech] to the nations,” “Distinguished [vatik] among the nations,” “Faithful [ne’eman] among the nations.”

The Torah Temimah explains that the reason for using the notarikon is that in former times, in the era of ancient Greece and Rome, when people were rushed or engaged in battle, they would abbreviate words or entire expressions with just a few letters, using established symbols and signs.

The author of Tosafot Yom Tov reveals that the term notarikon means “abbreviated,” for in Greek and Latin a writer is called notario. Writers would usually employ abbreviations in their writing, which is why these symbols were called notarikon, meaning “used in writing.”

One of the 32 hermeneutic rules used to interpret the Torah, according to Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yossi HaGalili, employs the notarikon. In fact the Sages in the Talmud list a number of significant Halachot that have been interpreted by means of notarikon. Some examples are the following:

In Sukkah 34b, the expression *ulekachtem lachem* (“and you shall take to yourselves” – Leviticus 23:40) teaches us that if one of the four species is missing, everything is invalidated. From where do we learn this? It is from the word *ulekachtem*, which can be read as *velakach tam*, meaning that the act of taking (*lakach*) must be perfect (*tam*). In other words, the four species can only be taken together.

Similarly, the Sages interpret the verse *uchtavtam al-mezuzot beitecha* (“and you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house” – Deuteronomy 6:9) by saying that *uchtavtam* can be read as *lu ketav tam* (the writing must be perfect), and there is no perfect writing on wood or stone, only on parchment (Menachot 34a). *Ukeshartam*, the act of attaching them (*keshira*), must be perfect (*tam*), which is why the four sections of the tefillin must be together. The term *yadcha* can be read as *lu yad keha* (“the weak hand”), which indicates that we must place the tefillin on the weak arm, which is the left. The Ba’alei HaTosafot cite a proof that we must sit, not stand, during Birkat Hamazon, for it is written: “When you have eaten and are satiated [vesavata], you shall bless [uverachta] the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 8:10). They have explained that *vesavata uverachta* may be read as *veshav and berachta*, meaning “you shall be seated when you bless.” This alludes to the fact that one must sit down to recite Birkat Hamazon.

Furthermore, the Sages of the Gemara have used the notarikon to indicate and mark the Halachot that appear in the Gemara, in order to help a person as he studies so he can make notes and not quickly forget what he has learned. In the second chapter of Baba Metzia (21b), they have said that within the entire Talmud, we know by tradition that the Halachah follows Raba whenever he disagrees with Abaye, with the exception of “*ya’al kagam*,” an abbreviation of the first letters of the Halachot over which Abaye and Raba had a disagreement. Employing gematriot provides us with another means of interpretation. In the language of the Sages of the Mishnah, this word is used to designate a numerical calculation. In Greek, the term *geometria* is understood to mean the science of measurement. It is composed of two words: *Geo* (earth) and *metria* (measurement).

The Sages treat the concept of gematriot seriously, often using this concept to find the connection between the written Torah and the oral Torah. For example, the tradition that in Moses’ time the vow of a Nazir lasted 30 days is interpreted from the expression *kadosh yihyeh* (“holy shall he be” – Numbers 6:5), for *yihyeh* has a numerical value of 30.

In general, Gematria is used as a numerical calculation of information that already exists, for things that have the same numerical value and go together logically and according to the same truth, even without the Gematria that identifies them. This is the meaning of the affirmation of Rabbi Eliezer ben Chisma: “The laws pertaining to bird-sacrifices and the calculation of the onset of menstruation – these are essentials of Halachah. The calculation of cycles and numerical computation of Hebrew words are condiments to wisdom.” The knowledge of Gematria is described as a “condiment” because it draws the heart towards the hidden wisdom of the Torah. This knowledge is concealed behind similar numerical values, although Gematria itself is only a language of numbers, not words.

Endless Mathematical Calculations

In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Genesis, the Ramban mentions the subject of Gematria: “We have yet another mystic tradition that the whole Torah is comprised of Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the letters of the words separate themselves into Divine Names when divided in a different manner, as you may imagine by way of example that the verse of Bereshith divides itself into these other words: *Berosh yitbareh Elokim*. This principle also applies to the entire Torah, besides the combinations and the numerical equivalents of the Holy Names.”

In every generation, the Sages of Israel have studied gematriot at length and discovered hidden things in the Torah. These discoveries have been for both their time and all the generations, consisting of explanations that shed new light upon Halachic details and ethics. Rabbeinu Yaakov Ba’al HaTurim expanded upon this subject at great length in his commentary on the Torah, and after him many people discovered Halachot and explanations of the Sages in the very words of Scripture itself by using the concept of identical numerical values. In the same spirit, the author of Kehilat Yaakov wrote his Birkat Peretz, and numerous others followed this path. The tremendous growth of technology that has occurred in our time has led to software that, by means of complex and innumerable mathematical calculations, can easily find the numerical value of a given idea that is similar to a Torah concept. (Of course, it is always possible to find similar numerical values between different concepts that have no logical connection to one another. The equivalency of numerical values in such cases means absolutely nothing.)