



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

It Makes No Difference

With regards to the prohibition against speaking gossip, it makes no difference whether the listener is a man or a woman, close or far. If a person hears disparaging words being spoken about his father or mother, and he suffers because of the affront to their honor, if he reveals what was said about them, this is also considered gossip.

It also makes no difference if the person being spoken of is a man or a woman, adult or youngster. Some people err in this regard, for when they see two youngsters hitting each other, they will go and tell the father of one of them that his son stuck someone else, which usually causes a great commotion. Out of his rage, the father of that youngster will punish him, for this is how grave disputes erupt between fathers and sons. It frequently occurs in the Beit Midrash.

– Chafetz Chaim

HOW DOES ONE LOVE G-D? (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him” (Genesis 42:8). This is surprising, for the Sages tell us that Joseph’s face resembled Jacob’s (Bereshith Rabba 84:8). Therefore how could his brothers not have recognized him? Furthermore, Joseph was not called Tzafnat Pa’aneach, for the name given to him by Pharaoh had been forgotten. If we say that some Egyptians called him Joseph, how could his brothers not have recognized him, since Joseph is a Hebrew name?

We must therefore say that his brothers did recognize him. The explanation of the expression “they did not recognize him” is that they refused to recognize his sovereignty. The proof is that, as we read in the very same chapter, they said to him: “All of us are the sons of one man” (Genesis 42:11) – including Joseph – as our Sages have said: “They said to him, ‘You and we are the sons of the same man’” (Bereshith Rabba 91:7). Likewise with regards to what we read beforehand, “Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt” (Genesis 42:3), Rashi notes that the text does not say “the sons of Jacob” went down to Egypt. This teaches us that they regretted having sold Joseph and decided to act towards him in a brotherly way, freeing him at all costs. Hence when they descended into Egypt, it was to free him and allow their brotherly feelings to resurface. However they did not go to Egypt expecting to find that he was a ruler! They still refused to recognize his sovereignty and admit the truth of his dreams.

We find something similar with regards to Pharaoh, as it is written: “A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). Our Sages are divided as to the meaning of this statement: “Rav and Samuel [differ]. One said that he was really new, while the other said that his decrees were new. He who said that he was really new did so because it is written ‘new,’ while he who said that his decrees were new did so because it is not stated that [the former king] died and that he reigned [in his place]. ‘Who did not know Joseph’ – he was like one who did not know him at all” (Sotah 11a).

We are forced to say this, for afterwards it is written: “They ate and became intoxicated with him” (Genesis 43:34). The Sages have explained, “With him they drank, but away from him they did not drink, for Rabbi Levi said: ‘During the entire 22 years that he did not see them, he tasted no wine, and they too tasted no wine until they saw him’” (Bereshith Rabba 92:5; see also Shabbat 139a).

For Your Good, Not For Mine

Let us think about this: If they avoided wine for all these years, why did they drink it now? Did they know that this viceroy was someone besides Joseph? We are forced to say that they knew who he was, although they still refused to recognize his sovereignty.

When did Joseph’s brothers recognize his sovereignty? It was when he said to them, “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you” (Genesis 45:4-5). He said to them: “I am Joseph your brother” –

know that I did not willingly become a ruler, for do you think that I yearn for glory? I became a ruler only so as to feed you during this famine. Furthermore, there was already a decree that you would descend into Egypt, and if I had not become a ruler in Egypt, you would have come here in chains. Now that I’ve become the ruler of Egypt, you will come down in chariots and with great honor.

The Sages cite Joseph as telling them, “Hashem decreed that we are to descend into Egypt in chains, as it is written: ‘Your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own’ [Genesis 15:13]. However the Holy One, blessed be He, created the remedy before the illness, sending me before you to prepare the way” (Midrash Sechel Tov, Bereshith 45:5).

This is why Joseph said to them, “I am Joseph your brother.” In other words: “I am not a ruler, but rather your brother. I know that you do not recognize my sovereignty, and that you came to Egypt in order to free me, though only as your brother, not as a ruler. You should realize, however, that it was Hashem Who brought me here for your good, not for mine.” When his brothers heard these words, they immediately recognized his sovereignty and bowed before him.

The lesson that we must all learn from here is that it is possible to perform mitzvot and study Torah, while still failing to recognize Hashem. As the Sages have said on the verse, “These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:6): “Rabbi states, ‘Why mention this? Since it is written, “You shall love the L-RD your G-d will all your heart,” [it means that] I do not know how to love G-d. Therefore it is written, “These things that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” Place these things upon your heart, and as such you will recognize the One at Whose utterance the world was created, and you will cleave to His ways’” (Sifrei, Devarim 33).

Out of a Love for G-d

In reality, we must ask the following question: If we say that a person who fails to reflect upon these things does not truly know the Holy One, blessed be He, then how many thousands of people who perform mitzvot and study Torah fall into this category? How can we possibly say that they have failed to recognize the Creator of the world?

From this we learn that a person will not recognize the Holy One, blessed be He, unless he separates himself from frivolous pursuits and the concerns of this world in order to cleave to Hashem. When a person is in love with the things of this world, he will not love G-d or even recognize Him. Even if he performs mitzvot, he still does not truly know Him. From here we learn that it is a mitzvah to understand and know Hashem. How? By loving Him.

Hence on the verse, “Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him”

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(Malachi 3:18), the Sages have said: “The ‘righteous’ is the same as ‘one who serves G-d,’ the ‘wicked’ is the same as ‘one who does not serve Him.’ [Hillel] said: One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times” (Chagigah 9b).

We therefore learn that there is a tzaddik who serves G-d and a tzaddik who does not serve Him. How is this possible? One who studies a chapter more than necessary, in order not to forget what he has learned, is not only studying to remember, but because the Creator commanded him to study. That is, he studies out of his love for G-d, which leads him to recognize Him. As for a person who does not study more than necessary, this indicates that he studies only for the sake of understanding, not because he loves G-d. Hence he is not described as one who serves Him.

BY ALLUSION

The Customs of Chanukah

It is written, “At the end of two years, Pharaoh dreamed, and behold: He was standing by the river” (Genesis 41:1).

Rabbi Yosef Ben Harosh Zatzal writes that this verse contains several allusions to Chanukah. He takes each letter of the verse as the first letter of expressions that describe various aspects of the mitzvah:

The custom of the Jewish people is to always light eight candles, which is done from left to right. We prepare numerous wicks with oil. We must light while standing, and we light a shamash. The mitzvah itself consists of lighting. We must then read the blessing. We recite Hallel in full, and we recall Hashem’s mercy.

Buy Us a Little Food

It is written, “Their father said to them, ‘Go back, buy us [shivru lanu] a little [me’at] food [ochel]’” (Genesis 43:2).

The book Ohel Moed sees an allusion in this verse to the lights of Chanukah. The term lanu has a numerical value of 86, and if we break (shovrim) lanu, we get half, namely 43.

Thus the expression shivru lanu is equivalent to 43. The term me’at (“a little”) refers to the smallest letter in the term ochel (“food”), namely aleph (numerical value: one). Together this makes 44, equal to the 36 candles and 8 shamashim of Chanukah.

Slaughter a Slaughtering and Prepare

It is written, “Bring the men into the house and slaughter a slaughtering and prepare [utvoach tevach vehachen]” (Genesis 43:16).

The book Mateh Moshe cites HaGaot Mordechai in stating, “I, Yom Tov, received by tradition another sign in Parsha Mikeitz: utvoach tevach vehachen. The chet of tevach and the term vehachen are formed by the same letters as Chanukah. This alludes to the festive meal that we prepare on Chanukah. Also, the letters of utvoach tevach have a numerical value of 44, the number of candles that we light on Chanukah.”

Shabbat Chanukah

For Maftir of Shabbat Chanukah, we read: Zot chanukat hamezbeach beyom hamashach oto ma’et nesi’ey Israel (“This was the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed, for the leaders of Israel” – Numbers 7:84).

These are the initials of the words: Zerah emunim tiknu chet nerot kahalalacha teichef. Hapetach mismol zemanan b’shekiat chama. BeShiur yadua veligmor mehallel. Hamadlik mevarech shtaim hoze achat. Tadlik vetossif meorim assur tashmisham. Nashim shechenim yadliku o Yishtatfu yamim shemone retzufim oto lezecher. (A faithful line enacted eight candles of Chanukah. The door to the left at the time of the setting of the sun. The number is known, and we complete the Hallel. The one who lights says two blessings. We add lights, it is forbidden to benefit from them. For women, neighbors light or participate for eight entire days as a memorial.)

AT THE SOURCE

Tzafnat Pa’aneach

It is written, “Pharaoh called Joseph Tzafnat Pa’aneach” (Genesis 41:45).

In his book Karnei Remim, Rabbi Shaul HaCohen Zatzal explains why this verse went to the trouble of explaining that Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name: Tzafnat Pa’aneach. He states that it was in order to prevent people from asking how Jacob and his sons could not have heard that Joseph ruled all of Egypt, since Canaan is only a dozen days away from Egypt.

This is why the verse took the initiative by saying that Pharaoh changed Joseph’s name to Tzafnat Pa’aneach when he appointed him as governor of Egypt. Hence nobody was aware that it was Joseph who ruled, for they thought that it was Tzafnat Pa’aneach. The fact that Joseph was a ruler was therefore unknown to his father and brothers in the land of Canaan.

Proving an Accusation to be False

It is written, “He gave him Asenat daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, for a wife” (Genesis 41:45).

The commentators have asked how Joseph could have married the daughter of Poti-phera, who is Potiphar. Since we know that the tribal fathers observed the entire Torah even before it was given, how could Joseph have married Asenat, for she was an Egyptian and forbidden to him?

They have offered a certain number of explanations. The book Shevet HaLevi states that Joseph married her in order to prove to everyone that the wife of Potiphar had lied by claiming that he had sinned with her.

In fact the Sages have said, “A man who is suspected of intercourse with a woman is forbidden from marrying her mother, her daughter, or her sister” (Yebamot 26a). Since Joseph was, so to speak, with a forbidden woman, her father, brothers, and everybody else would know that the wife of Potiphar had made a false accusation.

Facilitating the Pursuit

It is written, “They had gone out of the city, had not gone far, when Joseph said to the one in charge of his house: ‘Get up, pursue the men’” (Genesis 44:4).

In the writings of our teacher Rabbi Chaim Vital Zatzal, it is stated that one who recites Tifillat HaDerech before going on a journey, his prayer will protect him from trouble along the way.

This is why Joseph, noted the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Zatzal, commanded his servants to pursue the men before they had left the city. At that point they still had not had enough time to recite the prayer, and therefore they could be caught and returned to Joseph.

It is also for this reason that Joseph ordered, “Fill the sacks of the men with food, as much as they are able to carry” (v.1), for it was meant to prevent them from traveling quickly, making it easier for them to be pursued and caught.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

SAVING A LIFE IN DANGER

When the sons of Jacob returned to him and reported that Joseph wanted them to return to Egypt with Benjamin their youngest brother, Jacob refused to send him. He said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If disaster were to befall him on the journey...” (Genesis 42:38). Judah eventually said to him, “Send the lad with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live and not die, we as well as you and our children” (ibid. 43:8). Judah excluded himself from the World to Come if he were to fail in bringing Benjamin back.

Here Rashi cites the Midrash in noting that Judah told his father, “As for Benjamin, we are not sure whether he will be taken or not taken, but all of us will die of hunger if we do not go. It would be better to leave the doubtful situation and take what is certain.”

The origin of the mitzvah of saving someone whose life is in danger can be found in the Gemara, which states: “From where do we know that if a man sees his neighbor drowning, being mauled by beasts, or attacked by thieves, he must save him? From the verse, ‘You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor’ [Leviticus 19:16]” (Sanhedrin 73a).

In the same Gemara, the Sages also explain that this is included in the positive mitzvah, “You shall return it to him” (Deuteronomy 22:2), which includes returning his body. The Rambam states in this regard, “Whoever can save him, but does not, transgresses: ‘You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor’” (Hilchot Rotzeach 1:14). One who sees his neighbor drowning, being mauled by beasts, or attacked by thieves and can save him; or one who hears idolaters or informers conspiring against him or setting a trap for him, but does not warn him about it; or one who knows that a non-Jew plans to attack his neighbor, and he can appease and calm his hatred – in all such cases, one who does nothing transgresses, “You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor.”

A Doubt Versus a Certainty

The Gemara describes a fundamental discussion on the question of priorities: Must a person save his neighbor’s life or his own life? It states, “Two are on a journey [in the desert], and one has a pitcher of water. If both drink, they will die, but if one only drinks, he can reach civilization. Ben Patura taught: ‘It is better that both should drink and die, rather than one should see his companion’s death.’ Until Rabbi Akiva came and taught: ‘That your brother may live with you [Leviticus 25:36] – your life takes precedence over his life’” (Bava Metzia 62a). This means that according to Ben Patura, a person is obligated to give up his own life in order to save that of another, whereas according to Rabbi Akiva, a person is not obligated to do so.

The Acharonim (see Minchat Chinuch 297) have characterized the discussion of the Tannaim as being a question of whether a certainty that a person will live and his neighbor will die takes precedence over a doubt that both a person and his neighbor will live. According to Ben Patura, it seems better for both of them to drink and live for a short time, in which case their lives will be in doubt, although they may find water during that time. However if only one of them drinks, he will certainly live and the other will certainly die. According to Rabbi Akiva, a person is not obligated to put his life in danger in order to save his neighbor.

To those who think that a person must put his life in danger in order to save another, as stated in the Yerushalmi (cited in Kessef Mishneh), the Minchat Chinuch objects that we are obligated by the mitzvah, “He shall live by them” [Leviticus 18:5], for this mitzvah takes precedence over the prohibition, “You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor.” Furthermore, a danger to life pushes aside all prohibitions of the Torah.

This is why he is content with the statement which states that, since this law is cited in the Yerushalmi, we are obligated to respect it.

The Chazon Ish believes that according to Ben Patura, the reason why one person cannot drink all the water is because when two people drink it, they are temporally saved until their lives are once again in danger, and the long life of one person does not take precedence over the short life of another. As for Rabbi Akiva’s view, the long life of one person does take precedence over the short life of another, which is why one’s life takes precedence over that of his neighbor.

The Chazon Ish points out, however, that in a case where there is no temporary respite from danger, even Ben Patura recognized that one is not obligated to give up his life in order to save another.

Rabbi Reuven ben Itzrobali

In his book Shevet MiYehudah, the gaon Rabbi Unterman Zatzal deals with the following theoretical question: Two people are drowning at sea, and one of them finds a lifebuoy that can save only one person. If they both cling to it, they will both die. What must the person who found it first do? Rabbi Unterman concludes that the first person must save himself, for in this situation we cannot say that it is better for both of them to drown, rather than for one of them to see the death of the other.

The Sefer Chasidim describes an especially pious form of conduct: “There are two people, and enemies want to kill one of them. If one of them is a talmid chacham and the other is uneducated, it is a mitzvah for the uneducated person to say, ‘Kill me and let him live.’” This was done by Rabbi Reuven ben Itzrobali, who asked for his life to be taken and for Rabbi Akiva to be spared, since the community needed Rabbi Akiva.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Strict and Exacting

See how strict and exacting G-d’s justice is with the righteous, as the Sages have said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, deals strictly with those around Him, even to a hair’s breadth” (Yebamot 121b). In fact the Gemara teaches, “‘This is my G-d and anvehu [I will adorn Him]’ [Exodus 15:2]. ... Abba Saul interpreted this as ani vehu [I will be like Him] – You must be like Him: Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so must you be gracious and compassionate” (Shabbat 133b). Thus whoever is not gracious and compassionate is far from the characteristics of G-d.

This is why the sons of Jacob said to one another, “Truly, we are guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. Therefore this distress has come upon us” (Genesis 42:21). This is surprising, for how did they know that this misfortune was the result of their refusal to listen to Joseph, rather than for having sold him?

Since they sold him because they believed that he was liable to death, as the commentators have written, they did not believe that they were being punished for having sold him. To what did they attribute their punishment? To the cruelty that they demonstrated by not listening to Joseph’s pleas. Although they only exhibited this fault for a brief time, the Holy One, blessed be He, still punished them all for having distanced themselves from compassion at that instant.

A TRUE STORY

VANITY OF VANITIES

It is written, “Joseph answered Pharaoh: ‘It is not in me; G-d shall answer Pharaoh’” (Genesis 41:16).

When Pharaoh summoned Joseph in order to recount his dreams to him, he said: “I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream to interpret it” (v.15). Joseph replied, “It is not in me; G-d shall answer Pharaoh.” When Joseph interpreted his dream, although Pharaoh was an idolater, he immediately believed in Hashem and said: “Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of G-d?” (v.38). He then told Joseph, “Since G-d has let you know all this, there is none as discerning and wise as you” (v.39).

On the other hand, when Moses came before Pharaoh and told him that the world has a Creator, and that He wants the Children of Israel to leave Egypt, Pharaoh said to him: “Who is the L-RD, that I should obey His voice?” (Exodus 5:2). From that point on, the ten plagues began little by little, and they caused him to start believing and eventually to repent. Yet even at the end, when Pharaoh sent the Children of Israel away, he and his servants regretted it and said: “Why have we done this, to have released Israel from serving us?” (Exodus 14:5).

This is surprising, and it leads us to question the difference between Pharaoh in Joseph’s time and Pharaoh in Moses’ time. Both were idolaters, so why did the former immediately believe in Hashem, while the latter did not believe in Him even after seeing numerous signs and wonders?

Nothing to Get Upset About

In his book *Darchei Mussar*, Rabbi Yaakov Neiman Zatzal explores this issue by relating a true story:

In Warsaw, there was a very wealthy and G-d-fearing Jew, a man who was in the business of shipping cargo with a fleet of merchant vessels. One day, word began to spread that this Jewish merchant’s entire fleet had sunk, leaving him with absolutely nothing. Nobody dared to relate this news to the merchant.

The news reached the ears of the Rav of Warsaw, who took it upon himself to relate the bitter news to the merchant. The Rav therefore summoned him, and they began to chat about subjects pertaining to the fear of Heaven. “This entire world is vanity of vanities,” the Rav told him, “and if someone loses something in this world, he has nothing to get upset about.” From the look on the merchant’s face, it was clear that he was in complete agreement.

After a few hours of speaking about this world and its vain pursuits, the Rav asked him: “After all that we have said, if one of your merchant ships were to sink, along with all its merchandise, would you be heartbroken?”

“No,” the merchant replied. “Up to now, we’ve said that everything is vanity, so I wouldn’t be heartbroken.”

The Rav said to him, “This still doesn’t prove that you fear Heaven completely, for even if one of your ships were to sink, you would still be wealthy. I would like to know how you would react if two or three of your ships were to sink.” The merchant hesitated for a moment, and then he said: “Even in that case, I would have no reason to be heartbroken.”

The Rav then said, “That still doesn’t provide absolute proof that you fear Heaven completely, for even if two or three of your ships were to be lost, you would still remain relatively wealthy. What if all of your ships were to sink?”

“It’s not easy to answer that question with a wave of the hand,” the merchant replied. He said that he would need some time to give the Rav his response.

“You have answered correctly,” the Rav said to him. He then brought him to a nearby room and placed the book *Chovot HaLevavot* before him, opening it to the chapter dealing with faith in Hashem. The merchant sat down and began to read the book and reflect upon its words, namely that one who places his trust in Hashem is wealthier than an alchemist who can turn mud into gold. When he reached the end of the chapter, he left the room, approached the Rav, and said to him: “Now, even if all my ships were to sink in the sea, I wouldn’t be heartbroken, since I’m convinced that the Holy One, blessed be He, is all powerful and that I can rely on Him.”

“If that is so,” the Rav replied, “if you have reached this level of understanding, I must tell you of some news that has reached me, which is that all your ships have been lost at sea.”

My Ships have Sunk?

When the merchant heard these words, he fainted. Doctors were immediately summoned to bring him about. The Rav then asked him, “Tell me, an instant before receiving this news, you assured me that you would not be heartbroken. Why did you faint when I told you?”

The merchant replied, “When I said that the entire world is full of vanity, I thought that my ships were sailing at sea. In fact I really thought of the world as being full of vanity, containing nothing of truth. Yet as soon as I heard that my ships had sunk, I passed out from anguish.”

Therein lies the difference between Pharaoh in Joseph’s time and Pharaoh in Moses’ time. When Joseph told Pharaoh that the world had a Creator – that it was He Who increased his treasures, since all the money in the world had come into Egypt during the years of famine – and that Egypt would become an abundant storehouse of grain, Pharaoh said: “I am certainly prepared to accept such a G-d.” Yet when Pharaoh in Moses’ time heard that G-d wanted to free his slaves, the entire Jewish people who did all his work, and that he would lose such a valuable asset, he hardened his heart. He became insolent towards Hashem and said, “Who is the L-RD, that I should obey His voice?”

This is also the difference that exists between a Jew and a non-Jew. A non-Jew only serves his idols when he thinks that he will receive what he desires from them. Yet as soon as he is hungry or his savings diminish, he curses them. As for a Jew, who is among the chosen people, he says: “For I love [Him]; the L-RD hears my voice, my supplications” (Psalms 116:1). When do the words “I love Him” apply for a Jew? It is even when “the throes of death surrounded me, and the pains of Sheol seized me. I found trouble and sorrow” (v.3). Even then, “I called upon the Name of the L-RD” (v.4).

The Midrash says the same: “But as for the righteous, their G-d stands over them, as it says: ‘Behold, the L-RD stood over him’ [Genesis 28:13]” (Bereshith Rabba 89:4). This means that the righteous ask for nothing from Hashem. Instead they carry Him, suffer for Him, and proclaim His Name. The righteous are like a chariot for the Shechinah, and Hashem, so to speak, “rides upon” them. As for the wicked, they stand upon their gods. The river is their god, and they only want to take from the river, from their god. As soon as they do not receive what they want, they part ways with their gods and reject them. As Leah said in comparing Reuven to Esau, an idolater: “See the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law” (Berachot 7b).