



LEAVING EGYPT BY THE MERIT OF FAITH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Path To Follow

SHEMOT

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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

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

No Difference

Know that with regards to the prohibition against gossip, there is no difference between telling Reuven that so-and-so said something about him, and relating it to Reuven's wife or someone close to him. This is because such information will certainly upset them, and they will resent so-and-so as a result. Therefore even if they are warned not to share this information with anyone else, simply telling them constitutes gossip.

There is also no difference, with regards to this prohibition, between situations involving two Jews and situations involving a Jew and a non-Jew. People often err in this regard, such as by telling a non-Jew about the inferior merchandise that a Jew sold them, or the inferior work that a Jew did for them. This often results in losses and problems for Jews, and sometimes it can make their lives miserable.

- Chafetz Chaim

It is written, "Go and gather the elders of Israel, and say to them: The L-RD, the G-d of your forefathers, has appeared to me, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: 'I have surely visited you and what is done to you in Egypt'" (Exodus 3:16).

From the order of these words, we learn that G-d commanded Moses to first approach the Children of Israel and say that the time of their deliverance had come. If they would not believe him, Hashem gave Moses two signs to show them, after which he was to go to Pharaoh and ask him to let the people leave Egypt. If he would not believe Moses' words, he was to again demonstrate the signs that he had shown to the Children of Israel.

Moses did what G-d commanded, as we read further on: "Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the L-RD had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. The people believed, and they heard that the L-RD had remembered the Children of Israel and saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves" (Exodus 4:29-31). It is also written, "Afterwards Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, 'So said the L-RD, the G-d of Israel: Send out My people, that they may celebrate for Me in the desert'" (ibid. 5:1).

I have seen the following question in the book Tuv Ta'am: Why did G-d tell Moses to first go to the Children of Israel and perform signs before them, and only then to go before Pharaoh and again perform these signs? Why not tell him to first go to Pharaoh and perform signs before him? The Children of Israel would then see and hear that Moses and Aaron had performed these signs before Pharaoh, and they would have believed that Hashem had sent them. Why did He tell him to perform these signs twice?

Saved Only as a Reward for Their Faith

The Rambam wrote, "The Children of Israel believed in our teacher Moses not because of the miracles he performed. If one believes in something because of miracles, he may suspect that they were performed through sleight of hand or sorcery. All the miracles that Moses did in the desert were performed for the needs of the moment, not in order to prove his prophecy to them" (Yesodei HaTorah 8:1).

We may therefore say that G-d did not tell Moses to first go before Pharaoh, lest this evildoer should say: "These people do not believe in their G-d, and if they believe in the words of Moses and Aaron, it is only because of the signs and miracles that they performed before me. It is therefore on my account that their faith in G-d has emerged." To shut the mouth of this evildoer, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to first go to the Children of Israel and perform these signs before them, but not in order for them to believe in Hashem. Rather, it was because he was going to perform these signs before Pharaoh, and that evildoer was not to say: "The Children of Israel only believe because of the signs, and these signs

were only done on my account, which is why I will be rewarded!"

The proof that the Children of Israel did not believe in Hashem because of the signs that Moses performed for them comes for the verses themselves. In fact it is written, "The people believed, and they heard that the L-RD had visited the Children of Israel" (Exodus 4:31). It does not say, "The people believed in the signs," but rather "the people believed," which means that they had faith in Hashem and were saved by this faith. Our Sages also say in the Midrash, "The Children of Israel were saved from Egypt only as a reward for their faith, as it is said: 'The people believed'" (Mechilta, Beshalach 6).

Know that although the Children of Israel possessed numerous merits – since they did not change their names or their language, nor did they speak Lashon Harah, and none of them were found to be immoral, as our Sages have said (Vayikra Rabba 32:5) – they were nevertheless only delivered as a reward for their faith. If they had not acted in these four areas, they could not have survived; they would have assimilated among the Egyptians, their faith having been lacking. Yet since they acted in these four areas, they were separated from non-Jews and thus delivered by the merit of their faith.

Give us the Torah

Why is faith so important? To what can it be compared? It is like a man who is forced to enter a coal mine. When he leaves and sees that he is completely covered in dirt, he will ask for some soap in order to clean himself. Will anyone say to him, "Why did you go and dirty yourself in a mine?" Everyone knows that people who enter a mine get dirty. Hence when he was forced into the mine, everyone knew that he would become completely covered in dirt.

The same principle applies here: When the Children of Israel descended into Egypt, a place of impurity, they reluctantly breached the 49 gates of impurity. Could G-d then say to them, "Why did you contaminate yourselves with the impurity of Egypt?" They could respond, "It is You Who brought our fathers into Egypt, and by doing so You knew that their children would become contaminated through the impurity of the land. Now that we have descended into this impurity, we are only asking You for one thing: Give us the Torah, for it will enable us to emerge from this impurity."

Therefore since the Children of Israel believed in the words of Moses, they believed in what G-d was telling him: "When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). It was as if they were telling Him, "Give us some soap so we can wash away our impurity!" The Sages have explained the verse in the same way: "When you ask Me, 'By what merit shall I bring them out of Egypt,' know that it is for the sake of the Torah, which they will receive on this mountain from your hands, that they will go forth from here" (Shemot Rabba 3:4). Thus we learn that they left Egypt because they believed in G-d and asked Him to give them the Torah, so as to be cleansed of the impurity of Egypt.

AT THE SOURCE

Demonstrating Kindness

It is written, “Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro” (Exodus 3:1).

The Zohar cites Rabbi Tanchum as saying, “Although [Jethro] was an idolater, because he had been kind to him, [Moses] tended his flock properly, in a good, fatty, and rich pasture” (Zohar, Shemot 377).

In his book *Me’il Tzeddakah*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen of Izmir asks the following question: “How could it be that regarding the verse, ‘The shepherds came and drove them away,’ the Sages teach that their father renounced idolatry?” He says that perhaps Moses did not know that Jethro had renounced idolatry, and yet he demonstrated kindness to him, shepherding his flock.

This is what prompted the Rav to say, “This teaches us that we must be grateful even to an idolater, and we must demonstrated kindness to him!”

What is His Name?

It is written, “[If] they say to me, ‘What is His Name,’ what will I tell them?” (Exodus 3:13).

This is surprising, for Moses could have told the people, “G-d has sent me to you.” Exactly what did Moses mean by asking Hashem, “What will I tell them?”

The book *Kesef Nivchar* cites Rabbi Israel Darshan Zatzal as saying that, according to Rabbeinu Bechaye, Moses had “a heavy mouth” – he could not pronounce the letters dalet, tet, lamed, nun, tav; and a “heavy tongue” – he could not pronounce the letters zayin, shin, resh, tzadhe.

Now among all the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, only one does not contain any of these letters, this Name being E-heyeh.

Hence Moses asked: “[If] they say to me, ‘What is His Name,’ what will I tell them” – for I have a heavy mouth and a heavy tongue, and I cannot pronounce Your Name correctly. Hashem therefore replied: “So shall you say to the Children of Israel, E-heyeh has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). In other words: You can certainly pronounce this Name and transmit it to them correctly.

Meriting Deliverance

It is written, “Go and assemble the elders of Israel” (Exodus 3:16).

Rabbi Yechezkel Levovitz Zatzal was puzzled by this verse, for why was Moses commanded to assemble the elders of Israel and tell them of the coming deliverance before he had been in Pharaoh’s palace? After all, his very presence in Pharaoh’s palace would be accompanied by visible miracles, as the Midrash describes, miracles such as lions encircling the palace and so on.

As a result, the Children of Israel should have first seen the miracles produced by Moses and Aaron in Pharaoh’s palace – they should have first witnessed the seeds of the coming deliverance –

and only then should Moses have assembled the elders of Israel to tell them of the people’s deliverance, the reaction being that “the people believed.”

Rabbi Yechezkel learns a great principle from this: As long as Moses had not approached the Children of Israel and they did not believe in the coming deliverance, there was no need to go and find Pharaoh. In fact such an undertaking begins with a personal awakening, for only with that does one merit the help of Heaven, in which case he can go and find Pharaoh.

“The people believed” means that personal faith is the essential requirement for deliverance, despite the great desire of the Holy One, blessed be He, to save the Children of Israel. If they had not awakened themselves first, they would not have been delivered!

The Words of the Poor

It is written, “For all the men who seek your life are dead” (Exodus 4:19).

The Gemara reveals the identity of these men: Dathan and Abiram. Although they were still alive, they are described as dead because they lost their possessions, and the poor are considered to be dead.

The Vilna Gaon Zatzal explains how the verse alludes to the fact that Dathan and Abiram were not truly “dead,” but had instead lost their possessions. If they had actually been dead, the verse would have stated, “all the men who sought your life.” Since it states, “who seek your life,” it follows that they still wanted to kill Moses.

We are therefore forced to say that these men were not truly dead, but instead had lost their possessions. The poor are considered to be dead and can no longer denounce others, for their words go unheeded.

By Allusion

The Rambam

It is written, “The shepherds came and drove them away, and Moses arose and saved them, and he watered their flock” (Exodus 2:17).

The anniversary of the Rambam’s death (Tevet 20) always falls on the week of Parsha Shemot, or on the day immediately following Shabbat of Parsha Shemot. This allusion can be found in the above verse:

“The shepherds came and drove them away” – by the expulsions and massacres of the Middle Ages, the Shepherds Crusade, the Lepers Crusade, and the Almohades; “Moses arose and saved them” – this is our teacher Moses ben Maimon, who accomplished this task through his great work *HaYad HaChazakah*; “and he watered their flock” – the holy flock of the Children of Israel, who could not draw water from deep springs, from the ocean of the Talmud.

– Ohr HaChama, Citing the Gaon Rabbi Meir Mazuz Shlita

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

A MITZVAH TO RECOUNT IT IN PUBLIC

It is written, “The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong, very, very” (Exodus 1:7).

The Sages explain the redundancy here, namely why the Children of Israel are described as being: (1) fruitful (2) teemed (3) increased (4) became strong (5) very (6) very. They say, “Each woman bore six at one birth” (Shemot Rabba 1:8).

With regards to this subject, a story is told by the gaon Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin Zatzal in his book *Oznaim LaTorah*. It is a mitzvah to recount this in public, for it is said: “Speak of all His wonders” (Psalms 105:2).

One day, an academic came to visit the gaon Rabbi Eliezer Gordon Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, and asked him how the Midrash could exaggerate so flagrantly. That is, how can a woman really give birth to six children at a time?

The man added that he certainly believed that the Children of Israel had greatly multiplied in Egypt, and in a supernatural way. Yet to go from that to what the Midrash states was too great a leap.

He believed that the Children of Israel had multiplied in Egypt in a supernatural way because the “statistical figures” proved it, and there was certainly no reason to doubt the statistics.

In a Supernatural Way

How so?

The Children of Israel came to Egypt numbering 70, and they remained there for 210 years. In a natural way, they should have left Egypt numbering 1,200, or at the most 1,500. However the Torah teaches us that they numbered 600,000 upon leaving Egypt, a figure that represents the number of men who were fit to serve in the army. If we add the elderly and children among the population, we arrive at 1.2 million people. And if we add the women, we arrive at 2.4 million people. We must therefore say that the Children of Israel increased in Egypt in a supernatural way.

“I’m forced to accept these numbers,” the academic said to Rabbi Eliezer Gordon of Telz. “However how can I believe the words of the Midrash, according to which every woman gave birth to six children at a time?”

Statistics Prove It

Rabbi Eliezer Gordon answered in kind: “If you believe in statistics, I will use it to prove that the words of the Sages, which seem dubious to you, are not exaggerated in any way. These are not blustery words, but the pure Torah truth.

“The number of firstborn who are counted in Parsha Bamidbar amounts to 22,000 and a few hundred, while all the Children of Israel who could serve in the army were counted, and they numbered 600,000 and a few thousand.

“Now we know that the firstborn were counted from the age of one month and up, whereas the Children of Israel were only counted from the ages of 20 to 60. We therefore need to increase this number by adding the 600,000 elderly men and boys among

the people (without counting the women, who did not enter into this number, since only firstborn males are counted).

“The resulting numbers are extraordinary by modern-day standards: An average family today has about 5 children, meaning that every firstborn has 4 siblings. As for those who left Egypt, there were only 22,000 firstborn among 1.2 million, the total number of males who left Egypt. In other words, every woman that gave birth to her first child had 54 other children after him (since there were only 22,000 mothers who had a firstborn, and they had 1.2 million male children, so when we divide this number by 22,000, we get 55). Now since in Moses’ time the average life span was 70 years, as we read in the book of Psalms, and since a woman in general gives birth 10 times in her life, it follows that each woman gave birth to six children at a time.”

The arguments of his adversary were thus reduced to nothing, and he was forced to admit, despite his wishes, the truth of the Sages’ words.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Ivri From Avar

It is written, “The L-RD, the G-d of the Hebrews, happened upon us” (Exodus 3:18).

Further on it is written, “The L-RD, the G-d of the Hebrews, has sent me to you, saying: ‘Let my people go, that they may serve Me in the desert’ ” (ibid. 7:16). Something similar to this is said with regards to Abraham: “The fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew” (Genesis 14:13). Why is the Holy One, blessed be He, called the “G-d of the Hebrews”? The word Ivri (Hebrew) comes from avar (the past). As opposed to the nations of the world, who only seek technical progress and advancement, the Jewish people focus on the past. They grow their beards, cover their heads, and do not conform to modern times.

The Children of Israel merited the deliverance from Egypt only because they did not emulate the Egyptians. They did not change their names, their language, or their clothing (Lekach Tov, Shemot 6:6). Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “Go and tell Pharaoh that because the Children of Israel do not seek the newest fads, but follow the ways of their ancestors in times past, they will be delivered by this merit.”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI CHAIM MORDECHAI ROSENBAUM – THE NADVORNA REBBE

Stories of miracles were told among the contemporaries of the Nadvorna Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai, the son of the tzaddik Rabbi Itamar Zatzal, whose yahrtzeit takes place this week. The noble appearance of the Rebbe was completely devoid of worldly trappings. His home was a gathering place for thousands of Jews who presented themselves before him in order to be saved from their misfortunes. Already in Europe, during the Second World War, as the Nazis were deporting Jews from one place to the other, at times transporting them a great distance, they would always see the Rebbe going about with a bag in his hand. This bag contained his tallit, his tefillin, and a small Sefer Torah from which he would read the weekly parsha.

His disciples said that he never parted from his bag, bringing it with him wherever he was led, until finally his custom became famous. Everyone recognized and knew this small Jew, who carried a small bag containing his religious articles wherever he went.

Those who have written about his life recount that this custom originated from the fact that “the Rebbe felt that these religious articles were really a part of his body. Just as he could not go without a part of his body, likewise he could not go without the holy Torah.”

To a Celestial Yeshiva

Among his fine character traits, people always noticed his joy, the joy of the mitzvah in the service of Hashem. In fact sadness was never seen on his face, nor was it ever heard on his lips. He accepted trials with love and he rejoiced in them. We know that he sent his son Yitzchak Eizik to Eretz Israel by boat in order to study in a yeshiva. The British ruled Eretz Israel at the time, and when the ship arrived on its shores, the British opened fire on it. His son Yitzchak Eizik, who happened to be on the bridge of the ship, was struck by a bullet and died on the spot. When news of this reached his father, he opened his sanctified mouth and said with incredible courage, all while accepting Hashem’s judgment with love: “I sent him to study in a terrestrial yeshiva, Master of the universe, and You summoned him to a celestial yeshiva. May Hashem’s Name be blessed now and forevermore.”

I am Like a Merchant

“My son, you will be a Rebbe in the town of Sart!” This was an explicit command, an order that his father the Rebbe, Rabbi Itamar, gave to him at the tender age of 25. Since Rabbi Chaim Mordechai felt himself to be small in Torah, he did not even try to refuse, for he knew that he had to respect his father’s decisions. He went out heavy-hearted into the streets of Sart, finding a town that had been abandoned and deserted. Only a small percentage of its residents still observed the traditions of

their fathers. Hopelessness found a home in Sart, though not in the heart of the young avrech, in which the fire of Torah burned. A sanctified zeal infused him with warmth and strength. It was in this way that a revolution began in Sart. At first, a small group of traditional Jews assembled around Rabbi Chaim Mordechai. Other Jews came and joined them, and then still more. They melted before his warmth, before the love and goodness that radiated from him. The community continued to grow, and suddenly Jews with beards and peyot could be seen in the streets. Houses of study and Torah schools appeared like mushrooms after a rain shower. Once again Sart began to resemble a Jewish town. The Rebbe, through his study, infused his joy for life and his spirit into the town. Night and day, he peered into the Gemara and studied with tremendous joy. On the day of his wedding, he gave a hadran for the siyum of the Talmud. From there, he went back to learning from the beginning and managed to complete the Talmud dozens of times. This goes without mentioning books of Halachah, the Poskim, and the holy Zohar, which never left his table. It must be pointed out that when people who were not very observant came to him for a blessing, he would tell them: “I am like a merchant who sells articles and receives something in return. I am ready to promise that the Holy One, blessed be He, will grant your prayers, but you must give something in return.” He would then ask for them to observe some mitzvah, such as Shabbat. If they promised to do so, the Rebbe promised that they would be saved from their distress, which is what would happen. Those who stepped into his room immediately realized that a man of truth was standing before them. He was the complete image of truth and purity, like the column of fire before the camp of the Children of Israel.

Through Joy You Will be Delivered

In Eretz Israel, the Rebbe established Torah and chesed institutions, which he directed according to the principles of Torah. Even today, they serve as a light for Torah and chesed in every way.

About a week before the Rebbe died, prior to being brought to the hospital, he separately told each person who was with him: “Be happy! Don’t lose your joy, for through joy you will be delivered! It is said that through joy we are delivered from all our trials.” On Sunday, 15 Tevet 5738, his pure soul ascended to Heaven. The previous year, while baking matzot on the day before Passover, the oven in the yeshiva broke down. Contrary to his usual habit, the Rebbe was not in a hurry to fix it. When the subject was brought up, he said: “My son will repair the stove.” May his merit protect us all.