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MATOT MASEI

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To Follow



FOCUSING ON MITZVOT BETWEEN MAN AND HIS FELLOWMAN (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

This week's parsha describes the events that transpired between Moshe and the tribes of Gad and Reuven: "The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had very abundant livestock. ... The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe.... 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.' Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?' " (Bamidbar 32:1-6).

This passage requires an explanation. Why did Moshe not allow the children of Gad and Reuven to tell him what they wanted straightaway? Instead, Moshe interrupted and reprimanded them. Could we possibly think that the children of Gad and Reuven did not want to enter Eretz Israel, but wanted to rebel against Hashem as their fathers had done?

There is something else that needs to be explained. These cities were part of the territory of Sihon and Og, and they were left uninhabited after being conquered. Therefore why did Moshe not annex them to Eretz Israel, in which case this dispute would have never occurred?

We may explain this passage through Mussar. Since we always read this parsha during the Three Weeks, it must deal to the destruction of the Temple and the lesson that we must draw from it. From where do we see that there had been a revolt?

The Gemara speaks of a Jew who held a great feast in his home for the Sages. His servant, however, mistakenly invited his enemy to the feast, a man by the name of Bar Kamtza. When the host realized what had happened, he turned to Bar Kamtza and, in a harsh tone, told him to leave. Despite Bar Kamtza's supplications not to be humiliated by being sent away, the host stubbornly refused and utterly humiliated him. Bar Kamtza was filled with rage and said, "Since the Sages saw how scornfully this man treated me, and yet they said nothing, I will go and speak to the emperor!"

He therefore went before the Roman emperor, who was in control of Jerusalem, and said to him: "The Children of Israel are rebelling against you!" The emperor asked, "How do you know this?" He answered, "Send me to them with an offering from you for the Temple. I am certain that they will not offer it upon the altar." The emperor sent his offering, and on the way to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a blemish on it, one

considered a blemish only by the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, the kohanim wanted to offer it on the altar for the sake of peace. Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas objected to this, arguing: "People will say that blemished animals are offered upon the altar." It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed, which would prevent him from informing on them to the emperor. However Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?" Bar Kamtza returned to Rome and described what happened to the emperor, who sent his armies against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Hence Rabbi Yochanan said, "By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our house has been destroyed" (Gittin 55b-56a).

Elsewhere we find that the Sages have said, "Why was the Second Temple destroyed, since in its time people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because of the prevalence of baseless hatred" (Yoma 9b). This requires an explanation, for if the Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred among the Jewish people, then it was not the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas that destroyed it. How can we reconcile these two explanations, which appear to contradict one another?

The Sages who attended the feast witnessed their host humiliating Bar Kamtza, but they did not say a word. Yet afterwards, when a blemished animal was presented to them, everyone began to discuss the case, with some permitting and others prohibiting it as an offering. When that happened, the Attribute of Justice came upon them and said: "When these Sages saw their host humiliating a fellow Jew on account of baseless hatred, they remained silent and did not say anything to him. They did not reprimand him from shaming another Jew in public. Yet now that humiliation is no longer the issue, but rather an offering, they do not remain silent. Some of them permit it as an offering, while others forbid it. They are therefore not worthy of dwelling in their land, where there are disputes among them."

If they had remained silent when the blemished animal had been brought before them, we could say that they simply did not know how to issue a reprimand. However since they issued reprimands in one case but not in the other, this made them culpable. At that point the Attribute of Justice attacked them and the Roman emperor sent his legions against Jerusalem. Not long afterwards, the Temple was destroyed and the Children of Israel went into captivity.

This is why Rabbi Yochanan said that the humility of Rabbi Zechariah was responsible for destroying the Temple. Without his humility, the blemished animal would have been offered, and the Attribute of Justice would have been unable to say anything against them.

No Greater Division

Since the Sages say that Eretz Israel is only acquired through hardship (Berachot 5a), Moshe did not annex the territory of Sihon and Og, which is not acquired through hardship like Eretz Israel. When the children of Gad and Reuven said to him, "Do not bring us across the Jordan," it implied that they did not want to endure hardship along with the rest of the Children of Israel; they instead preferred to remain in the territory of Sihon and Og. This is why Moshe immediately interrupted them by saying, "Do you think that you can settle down quietly and without any problems, while the rest of the Jewish people endure hardship in Eretz Israel? Will your brothers go out to war while you dwell here?" This teaches us that he was afraid that there would not be any peace among them, since there can be no greater division than when one person is not concerned with another.

The children of Gad and Reuven immediately replied, "We ourselves will go armed before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones will live in the fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land" (Bamidbar 32:17). This means that they took it upon themselves to share in the hardship of their brothers in Eretz Israel, and they would not budge until the land was completely conquered. At that point it would be divided among the tribes, who would settle down in peace.

In any case, since they improperly presented their request to Moshe – for they said, "Do not bring us across the Jordan" – the Holy One, blessed be He paid them back: When Sennacherib exiled the 10 tribes from their land, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to go into exile. This is because they could have presented their request without saying: "Do not bring us across the Jordan," which seemed to imply that they did not want to share in the hardship of the other tribes. Since they used this expression, they were the first to be punished.

THE WORDS OF THE SAGES - MOUNT HOR

It is written, "Aaron was 123 years old when he died on Mount Hor" (Bamidbar 33:39).

For hundreds and thousands of years, numerous Jews have yearned to reach the summit of Mount Hor, despite the prohibition against it, in order to pray and beseech Hashem to answer their requests through the merit of Aaron the kohen, a man who loved peace and pursued peace. This yearning often goes unfulfilled, either because of the arduous physical conditions that prevent people from climbing the mountain, or because of the geographical distances involved as well as border obstacles.

This holy place is found southwest of the city of Petra in Jordan. The site has been explored many times by the greatest sages of Israel over the course of the centuries, as well as by many researchers and historians, some of whom have recorded what they saw around the mountain and next to an underground passage located there. Few of these descriptions have remained to the present day.

We Rejoiced in the Pleasant Odor

Among the writings of Rabbi Yechezkel HaCohen Zatzal, who climbed Mount Hor in 5612, we find a detailed description of this exhausting and risky undertaking, which almost killed him. He wrote the following:

"This will be written for the last generation. An account of my journey – I, Yechezkel HaCohen, the Sephardi from Persia – towards the holy city of Hebron. A spirit of purity awakened in me and pushed me to journey into the desert of Paran in order to pray at Mount Hor, the place where my forefather Aaron the kohen is buried. The Holy One, blessed be He, helped me fulfill this idea, and I traveled to the holy city of Hebron together with my wife and cousin. There we asked for advice from the sages and rabbis in town, who wanted to prevent us from going.

"Given the powerful desire that burned within us, we did not listen to their advice. We secretly looked for some Bedouins to help us, a few prominent Muslims that we bribed with a great deal of money. For 50 gold djadis, they let us use swift camels that could travel for more than 16 hours at a time.

"We left at night on 13 Cheshvan, motzei Shabbat. We traveled for four days, until we finally arrived about an hour away from the mountain. We got lost because the camel drivers had forgotten the route, and they said to us: 'Stay here. We'll ask how to get there from the local Arabs.' We then said to one another: 'Let's travel slowly. Perhaps we can get there on our own,' which is precisely what happened: A straight and laid-out route towards the holy place appeared. When we arrived, we saw a spring that flowed beneath the mountain, the likes of which we had never seen before. We then raised our eyes and saw many steps, about 400 of them, which we climbed to the top. We had great joy from the fragrant odor that emanated from the mountain. We collected three small rocks from there, and a pleasant odor still emanates from them to this very day."

[Note: Rabbi Duber of Asbanik, who purchased the courtyard of Rabbi Yechezkel HaCohen, stated that when he made this purchase, Rabbi Yechezkel gave him one of these rocks as a gift, and a pleasant odor was still emanating from it. This occurred more than 20 years after he had climbed the mountain.]

"When we reached the top of these steps, we again climbed a small mountain, and from there we reached the top of the mount. We saw a completely built home there, with four walls, but without a roof. A heavy cloud hovered above it. The entrance of the house was on the west, and beneath the house to the east, there was an underground passage. We descended a few steps, until there were only two left. At that point great fear fell upon us, and our souls almost departed. In fact we considered ourselves as good as dead. We then lit several candles, took heart, and read several psalms. We looked below and saw a door made from forged metal. There were tiny stones beneath the designs, and we took one out.

"In the meantime, the camel drivers returned with numerous Arabs. They had climbed to the summit of the mountain and cried out in a powerful voice: 'Come back up! Come back up! You're liable to death!' We came back up, and

they said that anyone who ventures down to the tzaddik before having brought an offering is liable to death. It was the law of the land that the condemned can make a request before his execution, a request that must be fulfilled.

"We said to them, 'Let us eat first,' which they allowed us to do. We opened our sacks and took out several cakes that we had brought. We ate them and also gave some to the Arabs, who said to us: 'You have no way of escaping death. Yet since we are pleased with your cakes – which neither we, nor our fathers, nor our father's fathers have ever tasted [for only dates, meat, and milk can be found in the desert] – we will make an offering for you and we will eat together. Perhaps your grave sin will be forgiven.'

"We answered them, 'Alright, but we are Jews, and we do not eat meat.' When they heard this, they were very frightened and cried out in a loud voice: 'You are Jews? Woe to you! Jews have no right to enter this holy place.'

"Be that as it may, by the goodness of G-d they calmed down somewhat and said: 'Since we have already forgiven you, we won't get back to that. Now flee quickly! Don't wait another instant, for our friends are waiting for us and they won't allow you to live!' We did just that – we immediately fled. We departed, and on the eve of Shabbat we came to a cave, where we stayed for Shabbat. On Sunday, we resumed our journey and arrived in Hebron safe and sound.

"We were told that on the previous Sunday, when the residents of Hebron had learned what we had done, Rabbi Aaron Hai Cohen gathered all the children in synagogue and they read psalms and prayed for us. On Wednesday towards evening, when we had arrived at the mountain, Rabbi Aaron died as an atonement for us."

There Would Have Been Peace in the World

"The sages and rabbis of the city told us that for the past 120 years, beginning in the year 5492, nobody had ventured to the mountain. In fact an epidemic had broken out in Hebron during that year, and a minyan of ten pious men was sent to Mount Hor in order to awaken Divine mercy. Among these were two kohanim, and as they were about to recite the priestly blessing on Mount Hor, there was a large sound, accompanied by thunder and lightening, something that is never seen in the desert. All the Arabs gathered together and wanted to kill them, and they fled in order to save their lives. Since that time, nobody had gone there out fear of the Arabs.

"In Hebron, there had been an elderly shamash who was known to be pious and holy, a man who performed miracles. He said to those who had gone to pray for Divine mercy at Mount Hor, 'You saw the two doves that appeared and stood upon two columns?' They said, 'Yes, we saw them, but we couldn't understand what doves were doing in the desert.'

"He said to them, 'Those were the souls of Nadav and Avihu, who came to hear the priestly blessing by the grave of their father, for never had such a thing occurred, that kohanim should recite the blessing there. If you had completed the blessing by reaching the word shalom, there would have been peace in the world. That is why the thunder and lightening appeared.'"

May Hashem allow us to see it, quickly and in our days. Amen.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Awakening the Attribute of Justice

How great is the prohibition against Lashon Harah, such that the Torah has forbidden it even when saying something true! As for speaking in secret so as not to reveal what is said about the person in question, it is worse to speak in his presence than not in his presence. In addition to transgressing the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah, there is also the fact that one has acted brazenly, often resulting in people being humiliated in public. This will awaken the Attribute of Justice to an even greater degree.

AT THE SOURCE

Part of Our Soul

It is written, "He shall not profane his word. All that proceeds out of his mouth, he shall do" (Bamidbar 30:3).

The Be'er Moshe notes what he heard from Rabbi Shimon Shurak Zatzal, which is that a person must not profane his words. Rather, he should fulfill everything that emerges from his mouth, be it good or bad. In this way he creates defenders and accusers, as the Zohar states.

Similarly, a person breathes out air when he speaks, this breath comprising part of his life. Once the soul leaves the body, there remains neither breath nor speech, which shows that the breath that emerges from a person's mouth as he speaks is part of his soul. This is why we have been commanded not to speak words in vain, for part of our soul is invested in them.

Having an Influence Above

It is written, "He shall not profane his word" (Bamidbar 30:3).

In his book Chomat Anach, the Chida states: "I have heard that it is not surprising that when a person speaks in this poor and lowly world, his words have an influence above. We note that wine placed in a cellar, in a closed barrel, is affected when grapes are being pressed, even if they are very far away, something that is very surprising. From here we have proof that words have an influence above."

By way of allusion, the initials of the expression Lo yachel devaro kechol hayotze ("He shall not profane his word. All that proceeds") have the same numerical value as the term yain ("wine").

"Betrayal"

It is written, "So there were delivered from the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand" (Bamidbar 31:5).

The book Ner Israel states that we may explain this according to the tzaddik Rabbi Israel of Rozhin Zatzal, who says that the term veyimseru ("so there were delivered") comes from the root mesira, which designates betrayal and accusation.

The Sages have said, "For everything that the Divine law has forbidden us, it has permitted us an equivalent" (Chullin 109b). How are betrayal and accusation permitted? It is possible that accusing someone of concealing his righteousness to ordinary people – by telling everyone that he is really a tzaddik – constitutes permissible "betrayal."

When Hashem ordered these tzaddikim to be chosen, it is obvious that because of their humility, everyone chosen as a tzaddik would say that they were suspected of being something they were not. Hence there was no other way but to "accuse" them, meaning that the neighbors of the men who concealed their righteous deeds – those who were aware of their virtues – "accused" them of being tzaddikim.

The Same Status as Eretz Israel

It is written, "Let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan" (Bamidbar 32:5).

Some have objected: Why did the children of Gad and Reuven wait until after the war with Midian in order to ask for a heritage on the other side of the Jordan River? Why did they not ask for a heritage as soon as the war with Sihon and Og ended?

In his book Chatam Sofer, Rabbi Moshe Sofer explains this according to a teaching of the Rambam: The Children of Israel only received the order to kasher their vessels after the war with Midian, not after the war with Sihon and Og. This is because the territory of Sihon and Og had the same status as Eretz Israel, and they were permitted to use a "forbidden vessel" in order to capture Eretz Israel. There was therefore no need to kasher their vessels.

Hence the Chatam Sofer states that once they received the order, after the war with Midian, to kasher their vessels, they realized that the territory of Sihon and Og had the same status as Eretz Israel. This is why they came and asked, "Let this land be given to your servants as a heritage."

Allusions to Refuge

It is written, "The cities that you shall give to the Levites: The six cities of refuge that you shall provide for a murderer to flee there, and in addition to

them you shall give 42 cities" (Bamidbar 35:6).

The Ohev Israel of Apt said that the six cities of refuge are the six words of the verse Shema Israel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad. It is in these words that a Jew will find certain refuge for his problems at all times. "In addition to them you shall give 42 cities" – these are the 42 words in the Ve'ahavia paragraph of the Shema. These are words in which a person can strengthen himself in the service of the Creator, words in which he can find refuge against the evil waters that inundate this lowly world.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE TSADDIK RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

The Sanctified Power of a Person's Words

In this week's parsha, in the passage concerning vows, we find a fundamental difference between vows made by a man and those made by a woman. For a man we read, "All that proceeds out of his mouth, he shall do" (Bamidbar 30:3). He must fulfill his vow, which is valid regardless of anyone else's opinion. As for a woman, however, the validity of her vow depends on other people, on her husband or father, as we read: "[If] her father hears her vow... her husband may confirm it or her husband may annul it" (vv.5-14). In other words, there are certain times and circumstances in which a woman's vow becomes invalid if her husband or father do not agree with it. We need to understand the reasons behind this difference.

Let us try to explain. We know that at the giving of the Torah, when the Children of Israel said, "We shall do and we shall hear," it was like an oath, as the Sages have said (Nedarim 8a). This is also why the festival of the giving of the Torah is called the festival of Shavuot, due to the shevuot ("oaths") that the Children of Israel made to fulfill all the words of the Torah, be they written or oral. Furthermore, they also promised to fulfill all the decrees issued by the rabbis, as the Sages have said: "Where did He command us? Rabbi Avia said [it is] from, 'You shall not turn aside' [Devarim 17:11]. Rabbi Nehemiah cited, 'Ask your father, and he will show you: your elders, and they will tell you' [ibid. 32:7]" (Shabbat 23a). Therefore at the giving of the Torah, when the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I am Hashem your G-d" (Shemot 20:2), the words uttered by G-d entered their ears, and from there the sound spread throughout their bodies and engraved themselves in their bones. Thus it infused them with the certainty that Hashem is G-d and that they must observe the entire Torah and its mitzvot.

According to this, we can understand the phrase: "All that proceeds out of his mouth, he shall do." Everything that can strengthen Torah observance is included in this vow, which the Children of Israel took upon themselves on Mount Sinai. As we know, vows are primarily meant to serve as a fence and protective barrier for the Torah, as we read: "Vows are a fence for abstinence" (Pirkei Avot 3:13). That being the case, everything done to augment Torah study as a protective barrier is included in the Torah.

All these things were said to men, for they must fulfill all the mitzvot of the Torah. However women are exempt from mitzvot related to specific times (Kiddushin 29a), and they are also exempt from studying Torah (ibid. 34a), since they are under the authority of their fathers or husbands. Hence they are exempt from the oath that was made on Mount Sinai, and they are only subject to oaths dealing with mitzvot that they are obligated to fulfill. We find support for this idea in a statement made before the giving of the Torah. At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "So shall you say [to] the House of Jacob and speak [tagaid] to the Children of Israel" (Shemot 19:3). Here the Sages state, "Say to the women through soft speech [amirah], but speak to the men in a way as tough as sinews [giddim]" (Mechilta ad loc).

From here we see that for men, the oath taken at the giving of the Torah is of primary importance. Hence for men it was decided that everything that proceeds from their mouths, they must do. It is only by annulling their vows before a Torah sage that they can be exempted, in a specific way described in the Gemara (e.g. Nedarim 22b). Such is not the case for women, who in principle are not fully bound by the oath, since they are under the authority of their fathers or husbands.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER RABBI CHAIM YOSEF DAVID AZOULAY – THE CHIDA

In the year 5484 (1724), during the month of Sivan, the oldest son of Rabbi Yitzchak Zerachya Azoulay and his wife Sarah was born in the old city of Jerusalem. He was named Yosef, after his maternal grandfather, and the names of Chaim and David were also given to him. When he became famous as an adult, people were content on calling him the "Chida," from the initials of his complete name: Chaim Yosef David Azoulay.

The Azoulay family was considered one of the oldest and most respected in all Eretz Israel. The Chida was a descendant of the famous tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Azoulay, the author of Chesed L'Avraham, who immigrated to Israel from the town of Fez, Morocco around the year 1620. From his earliest years, one could discern exceptional traits in the young Yosef. Frail by nature, he nevertheless studied with great diligence and without respite from morning till night.

At the age of eight, his mother rendered her soul to her Creator following an epidemic. Her death greatly affected Yosef. He matured ahead of time and became serious for his age. He didn't play with the other children, but began studying our holy Torah both day and night. Barely nine years old, his father enrolled him in the Beit Yaakov Beit HaMidrash, an institution that was famous for the quality of its instruction, and from which the majority of Jerusalem's scholars emerged. It was in this house of study that the incredible talent of the young prodigy blossomed. By the age of 12, he had already written some original laws concerning kashrut, and he also composed a few responsa on aspects of Halachah. Moreover, the boy revealed a brilliant ability as a speaker, appearing in public to give uplifting drashot. In 5502 (1742), not long after his marriage, Jerusalem saw the arrival of the extraordinary gaon and kabbalist Rabbi Chaim ben Attar (known as the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh), who established his Knesset Israel yeshiva. His days in the holy city were short-lived, however, for he rendered his soul to the Creator on Tammuz 15, 5503 (1743). The Chida became a member of his yeshiva, and this short interval was long enough for him to enter into a deep relationship with the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim ben Attar. In the works that he would later write, the Chida often cites the teachings and customs of Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, whom he considered to be his main teacher. Soon after this period in his life, the Chida was able to become one of the disciples of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi (the Rashash) in his Beit El yeshiva. This Beit HaMidrash was the main center for great tzaddikim and kabbalists who, by completely devoting themselves to Torah study, aspired to hasten the arrival of Mashiach.

The saintly Rabbi Shalom Sharabi and two of his disciples, the Chida and Rabbi Chaim de la Rosa, felt that the time was right to hasten the Final Redemption. These three tzaddikim, great men among their generation, removed themselves from all earthly matters and chose to live an ascetic life of fasting and self-mortification in order to sanctify and purify themselves.

The following story took place in winter, when a thick blanket of snow covered the city of Jerusalem. These tzaddikim rolled about in the snow, praying with incredible devotion and fasting for three consecutive days. At the end of their fast, they went to an isolated place and began to concentrate on yichudim in order to hasten the coming of Mashiach. They were suddenly terrified, however, by the sound of a heavenly voice: "My sons, you do not have the right to hasten the Geula [Final Redemption]. The hour has not yet come, and to prevent you from attempting it again, one of you will be exiled abroad." Since the Heavenly voice did not declare who among them would suffer this fate, they drew lots and designated the Chida. Without hesitating, the Chida accepted the decree and put himself on route for a long exile, during which time he would meet the great men of his generation and travel to many countries, including Egypt, Italy, France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Sicily, Crete, and Turkey.

It is not without reason that the Chida acquired a reputation, during his own lifetime, as a man of supreme holiness, one to whom everyone looked. It was not simply because of his many great books that he gained perpetual renown. He was truly a complete man, one who harmoniously combined character traits and virtues that are rarely found in a single individual.

Without a doubt, the Chida exemplified the best of everything: His eminence in all domains of Torah, the influence that he had on his contemporaries, the depth of his knowledge in worldly matters, and the prestige he garnered that earned the respect and esteem of the great men of the nations. Yet incontestably, his most remarkable trait was his humility.

We have a faithful witness in his journal Ma'agal Tov, wherein the Chida recounts his personal observations as a keepsake, without any thoughts of publication. The following entry is found inside:

"As for myself, the least of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in Amsterdam G-d made me find grace in the eyes of officials and deputies – me, the least of my brothers. I praise G-d, blessed be He, Who increased my name despite my utter lack of abilities."

This is but an infinitesimally small portion of the thousands of entries found in his personal journal, accounts that attest to his great modesty. When we examine the greatness of the Chida's genius by looking at his works, we are left breathless before the abundance of abilities that Heaven gave him. It is almost impossible for us to evaluate this spiritual giant by our own standards. He gained a mastery over his character that he constantly used to elevate himself in the rungs of perfection.

The Chida wrote more than 100 books. One can hardly imagine how so many quality works could have been written by a single man, one who constantly devoted himself to so many other endeavors.

On Friday night of Shabbat Zachor, Adar II, 5566 (1806), Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azoulay rendered his pure soul to his Creator. May his merit protect us all. Amen.

A TRUE STORY

Saving Many by the Sanctity of His Mouth

It is written, "He shall not profane his word. All that proceeds out of his mouth, he shall do" (Bamidbar 30:2).

The commentators have stated that this verse contains a hidden teaching. If a person is careful to fulfill everything that emerges from his mouth, not to render it profane for any reason, he will merit a great blessing: All that proceeds out of his mouth, He shall do – the Holy One, blessed be He, will fulfill all his desires. All his requests will be granted with goodness and blessing, for "the tzaddik decrees and Hashem executes."

The chassidim recount an amazing story in regards to this teaching, a story often told about Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, who was known as the defender of Israel.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would usually circumcise babies in the morning, immediately following Shacharit. It once happened that his daughter brought her newborn son to his grandfather the tzaddik so he could perform the mitzvah of circumcision on him. On the day of the circumcision, all the chassidim assembled in the early morning at the Beit HaMidrash. After finishing his prayer, the Rav returned home, but asked the people in attendance to wait for him. He retired into a certain room, where he remained alone for four straight hours.

Those present, who waited for quite a long time, eventually lost their patience, for they did not know when the Rav was going to return. Should they go back home, or wait there?

Naturally, the father of the baby and the young mother were very distressed to see people leaving, with only a small minyan remaining behind. All of a sudden, the Rav returned. He circumcised the baby with great joy, recited the blessing on the wine and personally announced the baby's name: Yehudah Leib. The Rav's son-in-law, the father of the baby, was somewhat hurt by this, since he had already thought of another name for the child. However he could not change what had been done.

When people assembled for the mitzvah meal, the Rav's son-in-law had the courage to say to the tzaddik: "I have two questions for you. The first: Why did you delay the circumcision for so long? You waited four hours instead of performing the circumcision right away, as you usually do! The second: Why did you call him Yehudah Leib, since I already had another name in mind?"

The Rav said before everyone present: "I experienced great joy today, and I want to share it with everyone. In coming to the Beit HaMidrash, I had a vision of a dark cloud that was stirring loudly. I immediately went to see what was happening, and I learned of the death of a very great tzaddik, Rabbi Yehudah Leib of Apt. When his soul departed, several groups of tzaddikim emerged from Gan Eden to welcome him. As we know, great tzaddikim usually pass by Gehinnom before entering Gan Eden.

"Yet it so happened that this tzaddik, as he was passing the gates of Gehinnom, jumped into it and left everyone behind!

"All the tzaddikim were thunderstruck. Why did Rabbi Yehudah believe that he should not take his place in Gan Eden? Rabbi Yehudah said to them, 'Now that I find myself in the World to Truth, I testify about myself that I fulfilled the mitzvah, "He shall not profane his word. All that proceeds out of his mouth, he shall do." I also fulfilled the mitzvah of redeeming prisoners. I learned this from the Holy One, blessed be He, Who redeemed 600,000 Jewish souls from Egypt, and Who has said: "Whoever saves but a single Jewish soul, it is as if he has saved the entire world." Furthermore, He has promised us in the Torah that whoever fulfills, "He shall not profane his word," then "all that proceeds out of his mouth, He shall do." This is why I will not move from here before having redeemed souls from Gehinnom.'

"The tzaddikim went to speak to Hashem, and He told them that the Book of Redeeming Prisoners was about to be opened, and the number of souls that Rabbi Yehudah Leib had saved during his lifetime would be revealed. It was discovered that he had saved 220 people. Heaven therefore ruled that he had the right to save 220 souls from Gehinnom.

"What did Rabbi Yehudah Leib do? He descended to the seventh level of Gehinnom, where we find those who descend for all time, and brought out twice as many as he had been allowed. Each time that he ascended, he bought out the same number. The leader of Gehinnom said to the tzaddik, 'What are you doing? You have already taken more than double!' Rabbi Yehudah Leib replied, 'It's a gift!' He then brought them into Gan Eden."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak continued his account: "When I saw the power for this great tzaddik, I immediately gave his name to my grandson, since he merited for Hashem to carry out what had emerged from his mouth."