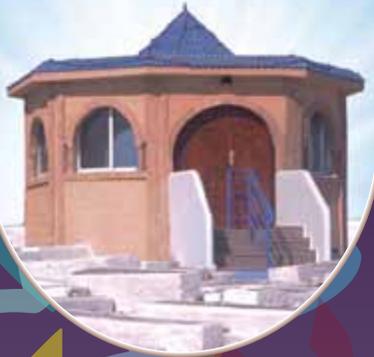


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FORESEEING CONSEQUENCES

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “All the people saw [roim] the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain; the people saw and trembled and stood from afar” (Shemot 20:15).

I find this verse extremely interesting, for we usually hear sounds; we don’t see them! That said, why does the Torah refer to the sense of sight rather than to the sense of hearing? If necessary, we can understand this verse to read: “And they feared [vayiru] the thunder,” understanding the verb as a reference to fear (yira), not to sight (reiyah). In fact they could have feared the sound of the shofar, the powerful sound of which was emanating from the mountain. As we know, the shofar was generally used to announce war or the day of judgment. However the initial meaning of the verse seems unavoidable, and we need to understand it. Let us approach it from an ethical perspective: The Gemara tells us, “Who is wise? He who foresees [the] consequences [of his actions]” (Tamid 32a). The Children of Israel were therefore like a wise man who could discern what would happen following these events. Yet clearly, the verb “saw” is out of place here, for even if a person tries to foresee the consequences of an event, he can still never fully see what will happen in the future. It is therefore not fitting to use such terminology here. In reality, this verse is saying that a person’s wisdom consists of foreseeing the consequences of his mitzvot. Is each mitzvah fulfilled to perfection, meaning solely for the sake of Heaven, or on the contrary does it contain a slight blemish, meaning an ulterior motive? In the latter case it would be “a mitzvah connected to a sin,” and thus better not to have been fulfilled.

The more that a person reflects upon his deeds, the more he can clearly foresee their consequences. Thus if we perform a mitzvah with the sole purpose of fulfilling G-d’s will and glorifying His Name in the world, we will be the beneficiary of divine aid and nothing harmful will result from our deeds.

Our Sages explain that the verse, “The wise of heart will seize good deeds” (Mishlei 10:8) refers to Moshe Rabbeinu when he occupied himself with Joseph’s bones while all the people were busy collecting the spoils of Egypt (Sotah 13a). I’ve asked myself why this verse only refers to Moshe, since the Children of Israel were also fulfilling a mitzvah at the same time. In fact G-d had promised Abraham, “Afterwards they will leave with great wealth” (Bereshith 15:14), and if Abraham’s descendants had not asked for such wealth from their Egyptian neighbors, they would have been criticized for neglecting G-d’s order. That being the case, why does the verse in Mishlei only consider Moshe to have performed a mitzvah, rather than all the Children of Israel, who were also

occupied with a mitzvah – that of collecting the spoils of Egypt?

The answer is that the Children of Israel were certainly obligated to take the spoils of Egypt. Yet in doing so, they were motivated more by a desire for wealth than a desire to fulfill G-d’s order. Since the Children of Israel did not act for the sake of G-d’s order alone, the verse “the wise of heart will seize good deeds” could not apply to them.

As for Moshe, he clearly illustrated the concept of “who is wise? He who foresees consequences.” Through his greatness and power, he was able to foresee the consequences of amassing riches, and he preferred instead to occupy himself with taking care of Joseph’s bones, since “one who is involved in one mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah” (Sukkah 26a). Moshe probably took some object from Egypt in order to fulfill G-d’s order, and furthermore he was considered like the son of Batya, Pharaoh’s daughter, who joined them in the desert and certainly took possessions from her father’s home. We can therefore assume that Moshe left Egypt with tremendous riches as well.

Since the Children of Israel did not make an effort to foresee the consequences of hastening to collect the spoils of Egypt, and since they were motivated by a desire for wealth, these riches eventually led them into committing a sin. In fact these riches contained the gold that was brought to Aaron to make the golden calf.

From here we learn that G-d blesses us materially not so we can waste our money, but rather to teach us to give to charity and support the needy and the weak. Nevertheless, we mix things up and see money as the goal, rather than as the means for achieving the goal. This is what is known as “a mitzvah connected to a sin,” and it constitutes a defect, an obstacle that prevents us from foreseeing the consequences of our actions.

We should note, however, that following this incident the Children of Israel purified themselves for 50 days. In fact they made the point of saying, at the giving of the Torah: “We shall do” before “we shall hear.” They had therefore attained the level of the angels, who agree to fulfill G-d’s will even before knowing what it is. By saying, “We shall do” before “we shall hear,” the Jewish people understood how to foresee the consequences of their actions. From their level, similar to that of the angels, they could foresee the consequences of accepting the Torah. This is the meaning of the verse, “All the people saw.” The fact the Children of Israel said, “We will do” – and only then “we will hear” – raised them to the level of the angels, a level at which they could foresee the blessed consequences of accepting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot. This is how we can explain the meaning of the expression, “All the people saw.”

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Respect for Others

It is written, “Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law...and each inquired about the other’s well-being” (Shemot 18:7).

The Sages teach, “Rabbi Helbo said further in the name of Rabbi Huna: If one knows that his friend is accustomed to greeting him, let him greet him first, for it is said: ‘Seek peace and pursue it’ [Tehillim 34:15]. And if his friend greets him but he does not return the greeting, he is called a thief, for it is said: ‘You have consumed the vineyard; what you have robbed from the poor man is in your houses’ [Isaiah 3:14]” (Berachot 6b). The relationship that the gaon Rabbi Avraham Shapira, who served as the Rosh Yeshiva of Merkaz HaRav and later as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, maintained with people consisted of determining their spiritual well-being: Was he in good spiritual health, or did he require some remedy? His educational approach was founded on just one principle – that the fear of G-d should be accompanied by joy, by a radiant face and a love for others.

Each morning as he arrived at the offices of the Heikhal Shlomo rabbinate, he would begin by asking the custodian about his day, exchanging a few words that revealed the Rav’s concern for him. He did this in order to highlight everyone’s importance.

One day the Rav took a taxi with one of his grandchildren. The taxi driver apparently didn’t realize just who he was driving, and to alleviate his boredom he turned on the radio. The radio was tuned to a station that was playing grating and gaudy music. When his grandson politely asked the driver to lower the volume, the Rosh Yeshiva was irritated by such a request, telling his grandson: “What do you want from him? This is his place of work. Let him listen to what he wants!”

Such was the principle that the Rosh Yeshiva transmitted to his students over the course of many years, namely that we must always take the needs of others into consideration. He did not give himself the right to ask for anything that encroached upon the benefit of his fellowman.

Rav Chaim Steiner Shlita, a teacher at the yeshiva, recounted the following story in this regard:

“This incident shows just how much importance the Rosh Yeshiva attributed to others, and how he would elevate a person’s status in the presence of his friends. At the yeshiva, men who were about to get married would usually come to receive a blessing from their rav on the day of their wedding.

“One day, a man who was about to get married arrived with his friend to see the Rosh Yeshiva, who warmly welcomed them and showered the groom with blessings, as was his custom. The groom’s friend, who was holding a camera, tried to orient it properly, but the camera was complicated and he didn’t know how to use it. It therefore took him some time to snap a picture, and he wasn’t able to capture the exact moment that the Rosh Yeshiva blessed his student.

“After the blessing, the groom arose without being photographed receiving his teacher’s blessing, and his friend was a little upset as well. Immediately recognizing his frustration, the Rosh Yeshiva asked the groom to sit down next to him, and they waited until a proper picture was taken of them. Why did he do all this? To prevent the groom from being upset that had not obtained the picture he wanted while meeting the Rosh Yeshiva on the day before his wedding.”

The Honor of Your Fellowman

In the Mishnah our Sages instruct us: “Let the honor of your fellowman be as dear to you as your own” (Pirkei Avot 2:10). Indeed, the Rosh Yeshiva offered a concrete example of “honoring others” in its simplest and most genuine sense.

In his book *Rosh Devarecha*, Rabbi Yitzchak Dadoun recounts a discussion that he had with Reb Chaim Poutash, the chauffeur of the Rosh Yeshiva when he became the Chief Rabbi of Israel: “As his chauffeur, I drove him to hundreds of different events. In general, his hosts would give him a truly royal reception. As for myself, an ordinary man, I remained on the side and observed. How could I participate in such gatherings, in receptions that included Torah giants, rabbinical judges, or the Rosh Yeshiva’s relatives, who had invited him to a chuppah or other ceremony to honor them with his presence? That’s why I waited for the Rav in the car.

“However the Rav never gave me permission to do so. As soon as he arrived at his destination, after a few polite greetings and words of thanks, he would turn around and ask the organizer or those in charge: ‘Where’s Chaim?’

“‘Chaim?’ they would ask with surprise. ‘Who’s Chaim?’

“‘My chauffeur,’ the Rosh Yeshiva would respond. ‘He’s outside. I can’t sit down if he’s not here. You have to call him. He works hard.’

“Thus without exception, somebody – sometimes the host himself – would come and get me, and upon the Rav’s request, people made certain to get me something to eat and drink.

“Although the Rosh Yeshiva never ate anything during these ceremonies, he refused to sit down until he saw me inside as well. That’s how I realized just how much importance he attributed to the honor of others.”

Guard Your Tongue

Being Careful

A person should be careful not to praise Reuven in the presence of his business partner Shimon (or a wife in the presence of her husband, or a husband in the presence of his wife) for having lent him money, given him tzeddakah, or generously paid an employee. In fact this can upset Shimon and cause him to get angry with his business partner Reuven. Sometimes this can even result in a loss or dispute, for the other will think that he has wasted his money by being generous. – Chafetz Chaim

Respect for Torah Scholars

It is written, “Whoever touches the mountain shall surely die” (Shemot 19:12).

The book Chafetz Chaim sheds light on the following subject: If a mountain, which has neither understanding nor feelings, was nevertheless sanctified by the fact that the Torah was given upon it – to the point that all Israel was warned against touching its very boundary – how much more sanctified is a person who is careful to honor a Torah scholar, who studies the Torah itself, and who possesses intelligence and senses insult!

When the gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leibush Lipschitz Zatzal, the author of *Aryeh d’Bei Ilai*, served as the Rav of Vishnitsa, the residents of the city hoped that he wouldn’t involve himself in the affairs of the Chevra Kadisha. Each year on Chol HaMoed Sukkot, people would select the Chevra Kadisha’s director.

Something terrible then occurred, as the book *Deu Dorotechem* recounts. One day the Rav wanted to intervene in the choice of the director. At the time, the leaders of the community were opposed to the Rav, and this presented them with an opportunity to exact revenge on him. They went to find the Rav and firmly told him to leave Vishnitsa right away, on that very same night during Chol HaMoed. Rabbi Aryeh Leibush tried to delay the sudden blow, which had struck him with lightning speed, and asked if he could at least remain in the city until after Sukkot. However the leader of the community shook his head as a sign of contempt and refusal.

Rabbi Aryeh reacted badly, and he immediately said that the man should stay that way – which is precisely what happened. For the rest of his life, this man continually shook his head. The leaders of the community did not escape either, for they all shared in humiliating the Rav and were all punished in a supernatural way.

Not long after Rav Aryeh Leibush’s departure, a fire broke out in the city and quickly spread, completely destroying two-thirds of the city’s homes. Thousands of people were homeless, and everyone realized that this happened because they had failed to respect the glowing embers of Rabbi Aryeh, the author of *Aryeh d’Bei Ilai*. Non-Jews also believed that they were cursed for having harming this tzaddik, whom Hashem avenged.

The driver who escorted the gaon out of Vishnitsa at midnight recounts that when they had left the city, he stood up in the carriage and turned towards the city. He then spread out his hands to Heaven and prayed.

That was how the gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leibush Lipschitz moved in a single night from Vishnitsa to Brigel, where he studied Torah and served G-d in holiness and purity, never involving himself in community matters again. He applied the well-known saying to himself: “I first wanted to better the whole world, and when I saw that I couldn’t, I then wanted to better the country, and when I couldn’t do that either, I wanted to at least better my city. However I saw that I couldn’t even do that, and so now I try to better myself.”

Hashem Defends the Honor of Torah Scholars

One day an old beggar came to see the gaon Rabbi Moshe Sofer Zatzal, the author of *Chatam Sofer*, and was invited inside the tzaddik’s office. He stayed with him a long time, to the astonishment of the *Chatam Sofer*’s relatives, who were aware of just how precious each moment was for him. At the end of their meeting, in addition to giving him a good sum of money, the *Chatam Sofer* wrote him a letter of recommendation that would help alleviate his situation. The *Chatam Sofer* then arose and accompanied him outside. Upon seeing all this, everyone was stunned at the honor that the tzaddik accorded him.

When the *Chatam Sofer* returned inside, he explained what had happened: “When my teacher, the gaon Rabbi Nathan Adler Zatzal, served as the Rav of Frankfort, he was confronted by numerous opponents who persecuted him and embittered his life. He was eventually forced to leave the city because of them.

“I asked my teacher the following question: ‘The Sages have said that Hashem defends the honor of Torah scholars [Berachot 19b], and the Midrash also states [Tanchuma, Toldot] that the Creator watches over the honor of the tzaddik even more than His own honor. That being the case, how is it possible that the people who fought and persecuted you are living in peace and have not been punished?’

“He answered me, ‘Don’t worry, my son. You will see that they will all come knocking at your door as beggars asking for charity.’ Things turned out exactly as he said they would: They all came, one by one, to recount their troubles to me, troubles that make hairs stand on end. All of them, that is, except one.

“I was surprised and upset that the words of my Rav had not been fulfilled in their entirety. And so it happened that the last person arrived today. I brought him into my office and listened to his story. It turned out that his fate was the bitterest of all. I am a witness to the importance of the Sages’ warning to beware of their ‘burning embers, lest you be brunt – for their bite is the bite of a fox, their sting is the sting of a scorpion, their hiss is the hiss of a serpent, and all their words are like fiery coals’ [Pirkei Avot 2:10].”

In the Light of the Parsha

At the Giving of the Torah

Our Sages affirm (Shabbat 88a) that at the giving of the Torah, each word spoken by G-d was split into 70 languages. Rabbi Yishmael compares this to a hammer that splits a rock into pieces, for just as a hammer “creates” numerous other pieces with each strike, likewise each word that emanated from G-d’s mouth was multiplied into 70 languages. Why did Hashem split His word into so many languages? One might suppose that it was in order for all the nations to hear His voice. However He had already offered the Torah to the nations, without success, as our Sages state (*Avodah Zarah* 2b). That being the case, why did they have to be witnesses to the giving of the Torah, and why did Hashem silence the entire world for this purpose (*Shemot Rabba* 29:9)?

G-d did this solely to demonstrate to the nations of the world what they could have received, and what they had lost. Furthermore, Hashem made it known that the whole world depends entirely on the Children of Israel’s study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot. Just as the whole world was silenced when the Torah was given, and just as nature itself yielded to this event, likewise the Jewish people make nature yield to the Torah when they study it. As our Sages have explained on the verse, “I will call upon G-d Most High, to the G-d Who fulfills for me” (*Tehillim* 57:3): “Even if a girl of three years and a day loses her virginity, and the Beit Din decides [to extend the month or the year, such that she is younger than three years old], her virginity will return” (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 6:8).

This is why, when the nations of the world went to see the wicked Bilam, they asked him: “Perhaps a flood is coming upon the world?” (*Zevachim* 116a). They didn’t understand the reason for nature’s upheaval and transformation, which they had witnessed. Hence they believed that a flood was upon them, for during the flood [in the time of Noah] nature was overturned and astrological signs were useless (*Yerushalmi, Pesachim* 1:1). They did not realize that the Children of Israel were accepting the Torah, and that nature had yielded to the latter.

Two Rescues

It is written, “Blessed be Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh; Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt” (Shemot 18:10).

Why the two-fold use of the word “rescued”?

In Responsa Halachot Ketanot (2:61), the gaon Rabbi Moshe Hagiz explains that two different rescues occurred: The first occurred when Moshe and Aaron were rescued from the brutality of the Egyptians and Pharaoh when they went to see him as part of their mission. The second occurred when the people were rescued from the hand of the Egyptians, who subjugated them.

Now in regards to Moshe and Aaron we read, “Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.” Yet in regards to the people, we only read: “Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt”!

In reality, Moshe and Aaron were granted special protection when they went to see Pharaoh as Hashem’s emissaries. Such was not the case for the people, who benefited from deliverance in general. Hence for the people we simply read, “from under the hand of Egypt.”

No Specific Date

It is written, “On this day they arrived at the desert of Sinai” (Shemot 19:1).

Why does the verse not specifically mention the date on which the Torah was given? The author of Kli Yakar writes, “G-d did not want to limit the giving of the Torah to a known date, for we must live each day of the year as if we had received the Torah on that very day.”

Our Sages compare the Torah to a mother feeding her infant at her breast: Each time that the baby drinks her milk, he discovers new flavors in it. Likewise anyone who studies the Torah will find something new in it each day. Hence we should have a renewed sense of receiving the Torah on Sinai each day, which is why there was no reason to limit its giving to a specific date.

By a Foreigner

It is written, “They shall judge the people at all times” (Shemot 18:22).

The book Toldot Yitzchak asks the following question: Had Moshe not already thought of the idea that Jethro suggested to him? His response is the following: Some ideas cannot be suggested by judges themselves, for they are only acceptable if others suggest them. If Moshe had made this suggestion, it would have given people the impression that he was burdening others with his responsibilities. People could have interpreted this as pride, insofar as Moshe was making others judge the simple cases, whereas he kept the difficult cases for himself.

Furthermore, if Moshe had made this suggestion and the Children of Israel had accepted it, it would have seemed that they wanted to take away from Moshe the honor of judging them, preferring instead to be judged by a member of their own tribe. Hence this suggestion had to be made by a foreigner, someone from whom no such doubts could arise.

No Need for Signs

It is written, “You shall see, from among the entire people, able men...” (Shemot 18:21).

Rabbi Shimon said: “It does not say, ‘You shall choose,’ but ‘You shall

see’ – namely by means of the gift of inner sight of those characteristics which we have mentioned. All these are indicated in this verse:

“You shall see” refers to the hair;

“from among the entire people” refers to the forehead;

“able men” refers to the face;

“G-d-fearing” refers to the eyes;

“men of truth” refers to the lips;

“hating covetousness” refers to the hands.

All these are the signs by which to recognize able men. They are signs for those on whom the spirit of wisdom rests.

However Moshe had no need for these signs, since we read: “Moshe chose able men from among all Israel” [Shemot 18:25]. He chose them through the spirit of prophesy, for we read: “When they have a matter, he comes to me” [v.16] – this “he” in the singular, rather than “they” in the plural, indicates that it refers to the spirit of prophesy.

– Zohar II:78a

Men of Faith

Stories of the Tzaddikim from the Pinto Family

Only Goodness and Kindness

Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, may his merit protect us, was often busy caring for the needs of the poor and needy in the city. He used his time in the same way each weekday: Every morning after Shacharit, he went to the old cemetery and prayed by the grave of his grandfather, the kabbalist Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol, may his merit protect us, whose name he would always invoke when blessing people. He would say to those who came to him for a blessing, “May the merit of my holy father and grandfather protect you.”

He would then head out towards the new cemetery, where he would pray by the grave of his father, the holy tzaddik Rabbi Yehudah (Hadan) Zatzal. From there he would return to the city and purchase food for its needy inhabitants.

It was at the city’s main gates where Rabbi Haim Pinto would stand for several hours, waiting for travelers or people arriving from outside the city in order to make them fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah. Rabbi Haim would ask them to give money for the poor of the city, and in this way they could fulfill the mitzvah of giving in secret. That is, those who gave would not know to whom they were giving, and the poor were not ashamed to receive help from the tzaddik, who was acting as a shaliach mitzvah.

The Jews who passed by that place knew that Rabbi Haim Pinto had an uncanny ability to tell each person exactly how much money he had in his wallet. The result was that no one could escape him, meaning that everyone had to give according to his means.

There were also some people who gave him an amount that he had decided in advance. A trustworthy man told our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita that people were “looking” for Rabbi Haim, or would pass him by on purpose so he could ask them for a certain amount of tzedakah. They knew and believed that if Rabbi Haim asked them for money and they agreed to give, it would be a segula for success, and they would enjoy a good day from every point of view.