



# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## *The Bitter End of the Wicked*

**It is written, “The L-RD will not be willing to forgive him” (Deuteronomy 29:19).**

There are some people in whom a discrepancy exists between what they say and what they think. In a way, they know that they are acting improperly and are on a destructive path filled with sins. However in their hearts they feel that they are righteous, as Scripture states regarding the adulteress: “She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I have done nothing wrong’” (Proverbs 30:20). Sadly, we may even have a situation in which a person serves Hashem, prays, and speaks words of Torah and piety, yet in his heart he turns to idolatry. This situation is described in our parsha: “Lest there be among you a man or woman...whose heart turns away this day from the L-RD our G-d” (Deuteronomy 29:17).

It is obvious that such a person performs evil deeds, which in turn means that he will live in fear of the curses written in the Torah. However he will quickly try to calm the storm raging inside by telling himself that there is nothing to worry about, that “I will have peace” (v.18). He thereby creates a fictional atmosphere of tranquility and well-being for himself, permitting him to continue along his disastrous course. This is the meaning of, “I will walk as my heart sees fit” (ibid.). Why is the sinner certain that he will be at peace? Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explains that it is because the wicked rely on the merit of the tzaddikim. That is, the wicked tell themselves: “I’ll live by the righteousness of the tzaddikim. They’re many, while I’m just one sinner.”

It is certainly true that the tzaddikim enable the world to exist, as the Mishnah itself states: “To bestow ample reward upon the righteous, who sustain the world” (Perkei Avoth 5:1). Yet this is no reason to rid ourselves of the fear that results from the sins we commit in telling ourselves, “I will have peace.” Heaven never issued a promise to sinners that their punishment would be annulled on account of the merit of the tzaddikim. Rather, it is said that man goes “to his world” (to his final resting place). This teaches us that each person goes to the world that he himself built, and there, in the world of retribution, he will receive the reward or punishment that his deeds deserve, without any connection to the tzaddikim with whom he lived in this world. On the contrary, “Anyone who says that the Holy One, blessed be He, is disregarding [of sin], his life may be disregarded” (Bava Kama 50a). Hashem never forgoes punishing anyone who deserves it, nor does He favor anyone in judgment.

A sinner also makes another calculation in his heart. He tells himself, “I will have peace,” because he bases himself on the Sages’ statement: “The royalty of earth is a reflection of the royalty of Heaven” (Berachot 58a). Among earthly kingdoms, we know that when a ruler needs a thief, he will be summoned even if he has to be fetched from the gallows. Some people therefore tend to think that the Holy One, blessed be He, will also forgive them because He endowed them with great natural abilities, to the point that the community needs them. Such people therefore hope to be saved by the merit of their abilities. There is certainly much truth to this, and it may very well be that someone is spared because he was useful to the community and put himself at people’s disposal. Yet pity the person who goes from that possibility and concludes, “I will have peace even though I’ve completely yielded to the desires of my heart.” May Heaven help such a person, for he brings G-d’s wrath upon himself, and the curses written in our parsha will come down on him.

## *Stray Thoughts*

**It is written, “You are standing today, all of you” (Deuteronomy 29:9).**

Why does the Torah explicitly say “all of you”? We may explain this as meaning: All of you – Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Litvak and Chassid – in short everyone! The Sefat Emet says that it has another meaning: Each person who studies or prays without letting his thoughts stray is included here.

The story is told of a Jew who had finished praying the Amidah. Having just

uttered the words oseh shalom, his friend came along, extended his hand, and said to him, “Mazel Tov! Shalom Aleichem! You were just thinking about being in America and reflecting on the wedding of your daughters. Now that you’ve returned, I wanted to wish you Mazel Tov and Shalom Aleichem.”

## *The Five Days of Judgment*

**It is written, “You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d, the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers” (Deuteronomy 29:9).**

The Vilna Gaon said that the word hayom [today] is composed of ha, which has a numerical value of five, and yom. There are five days of judgment in the year: Two days of Rosh Hashanah, and one day of Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabba (the final verdict), and Simchat Torah (when the verdict is sent to be executed). A person finds himself before Hashem during these five days of the year, which the Torah alludes to by stating: “You are standing hayom [today], all of you, before the L-RD your G-d.”

## *Yom Kippur*

**It is written, “For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in Heaven, that you should say: ‘Who can ascend to Heaven for us to take it?’” (Deuteronomy 30:11-12).**

The Ramban states that the expression ‘this commandment’ refers to teshuvah. The Chatam Sofer asks, “What is the connection between teshuvah and the fact that “this commandment” is not found in Heaven nor across the sea?” He answers by noting that Yom Kippur was established as a day for atonement and forgiveness, being designated as such for three reasons:

1. On Yom Kippur, Hashem told Moses: “I have forgiven according to your word” (Numbers 14:20).
2. Abraham was circumcised on Yom Kippur.
3. The Akeidah took place on Yom Kippur.

All this is true: It was because of these things that Yom Kippur was chosen as the day of forgiveness. However the Jewish calendar is fixed according to the lunar month, whereas the constellations follow the solar cycle. There is therefore no correspondence between the two, and when we observe Yom Kippur, the constellations will not be in the same place, nor in the same configuration, as on the days cited above. Even if we could identify those dates, what would people do outside Eretz Israel, those who didn’t know when Yom Kippur occurred? The answer is that Hashem forgives us if we are inadvertently and even deliberately wrong. An example of being inadvertently wrong occurs if the Beit Din sanctifies the month correctly, yet in some distant land the wrong day for Yom Kippur is established. All the same, Hashem forgives them for their sins.

An example of being deliberately wrong is when the Beit Din decides, for whatever reason, to add a day to the month. In that case it deliberately brings witnesses who have not seen the moon, and they are told to say that they actually did see it. Even in that case Yom Kippur atones for sins. The Chatam Sofer said: “The mitzvah of teshuvah is not beyond the seas – those who err concerning the date of Yom Kippur because they live far away, beyond the seas – nor is it in Heaven – the constellations not being in harmony with the date – but it is in your mouth – a reference to the Beit Din that established the day from the outset of the month – and in your heart – those who travel to distant places and err by observing Yom Kippur on the wrong day.”

## *How Can We Successfully Emerge From the Judgment?*

The masters of Mussar have left us with some good advice.

It is written in the prayers, “Remember us for life, O King Who desires life. Inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, O living King.” There are situations in which a person is allowed to live, yet he consumes his portion from the World to Come. Why is this permitted? It is because Hashem rewards those who hate Him immediately in order to mislay them. To what can this be compared? It is like a king who had a good

friend who often gave him advice. The king eventually found out that his friend had sold all the secrets of the kingdom! How did the king repay such treason? He decided to place the traitor in a cage in the center of town, without food or water. A proclamation was issued throughout the land that everyone should come and see the punishment of this traitor. At first the traitor behaved normally. However by the fourth day people saw that his excruciating hunger drove him to bite a chunk of flesh off his own arm and start eating it! At that point a farmer arrived and saw the traitor eating what appeared to be some meat. "What kind of punishment is this?" he asked. He was told, "You fool! He's eating his own flesh!"

Hashem allows people to go on living, yet it may be that they're living off their portion in the World to Come!

What should we do? The situation is like that of a king with his army. He obviously has to maintain his fighting forces, and he cannot withhold their wages. He has to furnish them with food, one of the conditions of their service. When a Jew asks to be remembered for life – when he tells Hashem, "For Your sake, O living King, it is for Your sake that I want to live! I want to devote my life to You. I want to sanctify the Name of Heaven in the world! I want to attend Torah classes and do good in the world" – at that point a Jew has done his part.

The gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Shalom Schwadron Zatzal recounted the story of a boy who began missing Torah lectures that he was giving on Shabbat afternoon. When the Rav asked him about it, the boy replied that he was going to see some soccer games. The Rav asked the boy to describe the game, one that to him was worth missing a Shabbat Torah lecture. The boy began describing it as follows: "There are two teams and one ball. Each team has one goaltender, and the objective of the game is to prevent the opposing team from putting the ball in one's goal." The Rav asked the boy, "Is the goaltender always in front of his goal?" The boy answered, "No, he eventually leaves and goes home." The Rav then said, "So what's the problem? Once the goaltender leaves, a player just have to put the ball into the goal." The boy answered: "But Rabbi, the goaltender only leaves once the game is over. Putting the ball into the goal is meaningless after the game!" This story deals only with a game, but on Rosh Hashanah we are not playing games. We are dealing with our very lives, and time is running out. There is not much time left until the judgment is announced on Rosh Hashanah. Let us hope to be among the "average" people, for then we will be allowed to go into "overtime" until Yom Kippur

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### *The Duty to Perform Teshuvah*

It is written, "For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant" (Deuteronomy 30:11).

Exactly which mitzvah is Scripture referring to by the expression, "For this commandment"?

Rabbi Yosef Albo, the author of *Sefer Halkarim*, said that this verse is speaking of teshuvah. "It is not hidden from you" – it is within easy reach, even if from an intellectual point of view we cannot imagine the sinner returning. In fact the sinner has harmed his King and should be put to death, for even when a king renounces his honor, it is not renounced (Kiddushin 32b). However the King of kings has demonstrated His great kindness by giving us the possibility of repentance.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin gives us another explanation. The words, "It is not in Heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12) means that the sinner has committed an offense in Heaven above, and therefore it is only right that his repentance should be ineffective – unless he ascends to Heaven to repair the damage he has done. However the verse tells us that "it is not in Heaven," hence there is no need to go up and get it, which means that repentance in this world is sufficient. "It is not across the sea" (v.13) means that a person does not need to repent in the very same area that he sinned, "for the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it" (v.14).

What must a person do to repent?

In his heart he must acknowledge his sin. He must repent and truly confess with his mouth, resolving never to return to it. He must realize that there is no limit to the power of teshuvah, and that nothing can stand in the way of one who repents. If a person wants to know just how far the power of teshuvah extends, he can learn it from Cain, from the inhabitants of Nineveh, from Manasseh, and from the many others who repented and annulled the evil that was decreed against them.

The Sages have said, "Repentance and good deeds are a shield against retribution" (Perkei Avoth 4:11), and Rabbi Meir used to say, "Great is repentance, for the sins of the entire world are forgiven on account of an individual who repents" (Yoma 86b). Adam repented and was saved, and because Hashem gave him the possibility of repentance, he uttered the psalm Mizmor Shir Leyom HaShabbat (Psalm 92). Pity the one who does not take advantage of this golden opportunity to regret his sins and return to his Father in Heaven! Such an attitude is well described by the story of the king who imprisoned a group of bandits. While behind bars, they managed to dig a tunnel through which all but one escaped. When the jailer discovered the tunnel and saw that one bandit had stayed behind, he began to strike him with his rod: "You fool! There's a tunnel before you, yet you don't use it to escape?" Only a person devoid of intelligence remains imprisoned when he has the means to escape.

Thus one who delays repenting and returning to his Father in Heaven when he has the chance – especially during these days of judgment, when Hashem is close to us – such a person will be severely punished, for he refuses to take advantage of this opportunity! Let us therefore return to our Father and King, in which case we will merit a year filled with good news.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### *Rejoicing in the Happiness of Others, Not in Their Pain*

*It is written, "I will rejoice intensely with the L-RD. My soul will exult with my G-d" (Isaiah 61:10).*

The Sages have said that a person should recite a blessing over evil in the same way that he recites a blessing over good. In what situations does this apply? It applies in cases when evil strikes you alone. If evil strikes other people, you are forbidden to rejoice, and on the contrary you must put an effort into helping them. This is the meaning of the verse, "I will rejoice intensely with the L-RD." That is, when G-d manifests Himself as "the L-RD" (i.e., with the attribute of mercy) – when He grants you abundance – only then do you have the right to rejoice and bring joy to others – "I will rejoice intensely." However the expression, "My soul will exult with my G-d," uses the Divine Name representing strict justice. Therefore only when evil strikes me alone do I have the right to rejoice, in accordance with the Sages' statement that a person should recite a blessing over evil in the same way that he recites it over good. However a person does not have the right to rejoice when evil strikes others, since other people have no right to rejoice when evil strikes him.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### *The Importance of Speech*

Our parsha states, "The matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler asks: What must we do with our mouths? What is Hashem asking of us? We must realize that the mouth has tremendous power. If a person gets used to speaking sanctified words, words of Torah, it will have a tremendous influence on his train of thought as well as his heart. Imagine a loaded truck at the top of a hill, one whose brakes have failed. If it begins to roll backwards, then even ten men exerting every ounce of their effort would be unable to stop it. On the other hand, a single person jumping into the driver's seat could start the engine and perhaps stop the truck. Similarly, a person's mouth is the engine that can lead him to infuse his heart with Torah, wisdom, and Mussar. This is because man was created only to toil with his mouth (Sanhedrin 99b), and his heart is drawn toward his deeds.

## A MATTER OF EDUCATION

### *Devotion is the Key to Greatness*

On the verses, "It is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in Heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:11-12), Rashi cites the Sages in saying that if the Torah were in Heaven, "You should have gone up after it" (Eruvin 55a). It is obvious that the Sages wanted to teach us something by saying this, given that the Torah is not in Heaven. We learn two things from the above verses: 1) The Torah is accessible ("it is not hidden from you"); and 2) To fulfill Hashem's will, we must make an effort equal to that needed to ascend to Heaven.

True, the Torah is accessible through study and the performance of mitzvot. However our Torah study and mitzvot performance are meant to encourage us to cleave to Hashem. In other words, we must not fall into the category of a "vile person within the permissible realm of the Torah" (see Ramban on Leviticus 19:2). The Torah must be constantly engraved in our hearts, something that requires considerable effort on our part. As the Sages have said, "Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it" (Berachot 63b). The verses are therefore asking us to attach ourselves to the Torah on an exterior level, something that does not require great effort. The second thing we learn, however, is that tireless effort is required of us in order for the Torah to become an integral part of our beings. Not only that, but this effort must come before the first principle we mentioned. As the Mishnah states, "Anyone whose fear of sin comes before his wisdom, his wisdom will endure" (Perkei Avoth 3:9). Internalizing the Torah to better the person who studies and practices its mitzvot is only possible with a prior fear of Heaven. It is clear and obvious that all the obstacles we encounter are only obstacles because of a lack of effort on our part. If we gave the utmost of our abilities, the act of sinning would no longer be considered a failure, for we would have done our best, and in a situation of constraint "the Merciful One forgives." Devotion is what characterizes Hashem's people. It is the key to ascending the mount of Hashem and standing in His holy place. The effort required for the days of judgment, and for education in general, must focus entirely on devoting ourselves to G-d's word – without any deficiencies in thought or deed – and without allowing hopelessness to get the better of us. It is in this way that we will merit a year that is truly good.

## EISHET CHAYIL

### *Transparent Clothing*

Garments on a hanger do not look the same as when they are being worn. There are also many garments that look opaque when worn inside, yet turn out to be transparent in the sunlight. We must therefore check a garment both by wearing it and examining it in the light. Only then are we in a position to decide if it is forbidden to wear because it is transparent, or if it is opaque and permitted to wear. If a garment turns out to be transparent, it can only be worn if we wear appropriate clothing beneath that covers all areas, to below the knee, that need covering and where the garment is transparent. For a blouse, this means front and back, in addition to the sleeves. Once this lining has been put on, we must again check in the sunlight if the transparency problem has been solved. Sometimes even two layers of clothing, if they are thin, remain transparent in sunlight. Therefore to avoid losing money and getting upset, every woman should be careful when purchasing clothes, choosing them according to all the rules of modesty in order to avoid any Halachic problems.

## A TRUE STORY

### *The Great Treasure*

It is written, "For the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it" (Deuteronomy 30:14).

The story is told of a Jew from Warsaw named Eizik. On several occasions he dreamed of wanting to travel to Prague and dig under a bridge that led to the royal palace. In his dream he was told that he would find a great treasure and become rich. Reb Eizik therefore traveled to Prague and made it to the bridge near the royal palace. At that point he saw that many soldiers were guarding the bridge and preventing people from approaching it. Greatly disappointed at the fact that it seemed impossible to start digging there, he began to walk around for several days, completely dejected. The local army commander saw him there and eventually called out to him. When he asked him what he was doing, Reb Eizik told him about his dream. When the army commander heard that, he began to laugh: "You took the trouble to come all the way here because of some dream? I also had a dream! I dreamed that there was a treasure buried under the stove of a Jew by the name of Eizik who lived in Krakow. Does that mean that I would ever pay him a visit?" When Reb Eizik heard this, he went back home and began digging under his stove, and there he found an immense treasure! Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa explained that becoming great depends on the individual. Even when someone goes to a tzaddik, he must realize that he has to do the digging in his own soul to find his treasure. He too can become great and reach lofty spiritual levels, "For the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it."

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### *Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol*

The tzaddik and Kabbalist Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol (the elder) was righteous and holy from early on in life. His father, the saintly Rabbi Shlomo Pinto (may his merit protect us), passed away when he was just 12 years old, at which point Rabbi Haim's reputation quickly began to spread. Many Moroccans from the surrounding towns came to him so that he might intercede on their behalf in arousing Hashem's mercy. By the goodness of his heart, Rabbi Pinto never refused anyone's request. His name is linked to thousands, indeed myriads of miraculous stories, there not being enough paper in the world to record them all, these miracles that people saw with their own eyes and in his presence. It is said that one day, following a disagreement between the governor of Marrakech and Mogador, Rabbi Pinto (who lived in Mogador) decided that the governor of Marrakech was in the right. From that day on, the governor of Mogador did not stop persecuting Rabbi Pinto. It did not take long for the governor to be punished, for he was afflicted by great suffering. In his grief he addressed himself to Rabbi Pinto, who told the governor that he was also going to be imprisoned! Each time the governor experienced suffering, he would cry out, "Rabbi Pinto, help me" which is exactly what he did. From that point on, the governor became a friend of the community, and for many years nothing detrimental happened to the Jews of Mogador.

Although thousands of similar stories are told of Rabbi Haim Pinto, he never grew proud. He worked his entire life trying to do good for Jews and to help them through their difficulties. He finally ascended to Heaven on Elul 26, 5605 and was buried in Mogador. His amazing deeds are recorded in a book that will soon be released. Produced by our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita, this book is meant to tell our generation about Rabbi Haim Pinto's incredible deeds. May his merit protect us all.