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Path

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RE'EH

To Follow

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## LOOKING TO THE PAST AS A WARNING FOR THE FUTURE (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

**I**t is written, "See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, that you hearken to the mitzvot of Hashem your G-d that I command you today. And the curse, if you do not hearken to the mitzvot of Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 11:26-28).

We need to understand why this passage states, in regards to the blessings: "The blessing, that you hearken," yet for the curses it uses an expression of uncertainty: "The curse, if you do not hearken."

We must also question whether Moshe was pointing out something specific to the Children of Israel when he told them, "See, I set before you today a blessing."

### Constant Pleasure is Not Pleasure

Earlier in the Torah we read, "And it will be, eikev [if] you hearken to these ordinances" (Devarim 7:12). Here Rashi explains that eikev refers to easy mitzvot that a person steps on with his heel (eikev). In other words, we must not perform easy mitzvot like a person who does something habitually, without paying attention to it, as it is written: "Like rote learning of human commands" (Isaiah 29:13). Rather, the mitzvot should seem as if they were given today.

Hence the Torah states, Vehaya eikev ("And it will be, if"), teaching us that Jews must perform mitzvot with joy, for the term vehaya denotes joy (Bereshith Rabba 42:3). In fact when a person performs mitzvot with joy, it is a sure sign that they are not burdensome to him, that he is not doing them out of habit. Rather, he performs mitzvot because he loves them, because they are precious to him.

As a general rule, when a person gets used to something, even something that is enjoyable, it no longer seems enjoyable to him. In fact the Sages have said, "Constant pleasure is not pleasure." Moshe therefore told the Children of Israel: Think about the fact that whoever distances himself from Torah, it is as if he were distancing himself from life itself, as it is written: "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it" (Mishlei 3:18).

If a person were to object by saying that we see evildoers succeeding in life, he must realize that although they are succeeding in this world, they will lose out in the World to Come.

### When Did the Problem Start?

Actually, the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes the wicked even in this world. Thus we read, "Beware lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then Hashem's wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain, and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land that Hashem gives you" (Devarim 11:16-17).

How do we know that this is correct, that the Holy One, blessed be He, removes evildoers from this world? Moshe said: "See" – you have seen the deeds of your fathers, for G-d desired to bring them into Eretz Israel as long as they did His will. However He made them wander in the desert for 40 years when they acted improperly, until they died. When did the problem start? It was when they protested the decisions of Hashem by weeping, as it is said: "Moshe heard the people weeping throughout their families, each at the entrance of his tent" (Bamidbar 11:10). It is also said, "The entire assembly lifted up their voice and cried aloud, and the people wept that night" (ibid. 14:1). Here the Sages have said, "That night was the night of Tisha B'Av. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'You have wept without cause, therefore I will set [this day] aside for weeping throughout the generations to come'" (Taanith 29a). Hence this is what Moshe told the Children of Israel: If you want to be among those who enter Eretz Israel, be careful to do G-d's will in joy. From here we learn that when Moshe gave them "the blessing," he used a term that denotes certainty – "that you hearken." Yet when speaking of the curses, Moshe did not use the term "that," but rather "if": If you act improperly, as your fathers did, know that it will lead to curses.

On the verse, "See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse" (Devarim 11:26), the

Sages in the Midrash teach: "Why is this said? It is because it is written: 'I have placed life and death before you' [Devarim 30:19]. The Children of Israel might think, 'Since G-d placed two things before us – the path of life and the path of death – let us choose the path that will please us. Hence it is written, 'Choose life'" (Sifrei, Devarim 11:26).

This is like someone who finds himself at a crossroads, with two possible paths before him. One is smooth at the beginning but filled with obstacles at the end, while the other is filled with obstacles at the beginning but smooth at the end. He starts warning passers-by, saying: "You see this road that starts out smoothly? You can be sure that a little further down, it will be filled with obstacles." He then gives them some advice: "You see this road filled with obstacles at the outset? You can be sure that a little further down, it will be smooth."

### The Tzaddikim Finish by Rejoicing

Likewise Moshe told the Children of Israel, "See the wicked who succeed in this world? You can be sure that they will succeed only for a short while, and in the end they will lose out. See the righteous who experience misfortune in this world? You can be sure that they will end up rejoicing."

The Sages also compare the situation to a sick person who goes to a doctor. The doctor says to him, "Do not eat cold things or sleep in a damp place." Another doctor warns him even more sternly: "Do not eat cold things or sleep in a damp place, so as not to die like so-and-so died" (Torat Kohanim 16:3).

Here too, Moshe told the Children of Israel: "Do not act improperly as your fathers did, when they protested against G-d, for if you act in this way and fail to accept His mitzvot with joy, you will have no right to enter Eretz Israel, and you will die in the desert." This is why Moshe said, "See." It was so the Children of Israel could see the deeds of their fathers and learn from what happened to them. Why did he say all this? It was so they would not emulate their fathers in any way.

# THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

## COMPLEX MATH, YES. A PAGE OF GEMARA, NO!

*It is written, “You shall not eat any abomination” (Devarim 14:3).*

It sometimes happens that a child who learns at a Talmud Torah with great enthusiasm, devoting himself completely to the study of Torah, will suddenly lose his enthusiasm and stop studying with joy. All his zeal for learning Torah will disappear, as if it had never existed.

Why does this happen? Parents are baffled, not knowing what has happened to their son, who used to be diligent and whose teachers spoke so highly of him. Nevertheless, a child’s spiritual downfall may increase with each passing day.

What follows is an incident that occurred to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky Shlita of Bnei Brak.

Among those who were waiting in line to see Rabbi Chaim was a highly skilled engineer, a leading professor in his field. He was also an orthodox, G-d-fearing Jew who was about 85 or 90 years old, a man whose sons and daughters all followed the ways of Torah.

When the professor appeared before the Rav, he explained that he was barely able to understand a page of Gemara. Even after numerous attempts over a span of decades, he was unable to understand it. Being a professor of engineering, he could understand all the complex mathematical formulas of his profession, but he found that understanding a page of Gemara was simply impossible.

The professor continued, explaining how this greatly troubled him, for in the courses that he took on Halachah, he was barely able to understand a passage in the Mishnah Berurah. And when it came to the Gemara itself, his great intelligence just shut down.

The elderly professor spoke with much pain. We have to stress that he was G-d-fearing man, in which case we can perfectly understand how this problem upset him, especially in light of the fact that all his children followed the ways of Torah and were G-d-fearing people.

As he was speaking, the professor suddenly became silence. He then told the Rav that while he was sitting there, it was very possible that he finally understood the reason for his inability to swim in the sea of the Talmud.

With eyes filled with tears, he recounted his past, what he been enduring since childhood. All of a sudden, he stopped reminiscing and mentioned something that had happened with the gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger Zatzal. A woman had come to see him in tears, bringing her 9-year-old son with her. With great sobs, she described how the desire to study Torah had suddenly left the boy. This story can be found in an edition of Yerushalayim Shel Malah, which the professor had leafed through some time earlier.

### *The Meat at the Wedding*

Rabbi Akiva Eiger reflected a little, and told the woman that her son had probably eaten something non-kosher, which is why his mind had closed. The mother was stunned. “Everything in my home is kosher! There isn’t a doubt about a single product in our home!” However the gaon insisted, and in his great sanctity he told the woman that the reason for her son’s blockage was the fact that he had eaten something non-kosher.

The mother returned home and began to check everything in the house. What did she discover? In her village, the Rav had fired the local shochet, prohibiting him from continuing to practice shechita. The shochet was extremely insolent, however, and he continued to practice shechita for the residents of the village, despite the Rav’s decree.

During that time, one of the families in the village celebrated a wedding. It seems that the hosts wanted meat at a bargain price, and therefore it was obtained from the shochet who had been fired. It turned out that the woman’s son had been at the wedding and ate the meat slaughtered by that shochet.

The woman returned to see Rabbi Akiva Eiger and told him what had happened. “That’s the reason for the boy’s blockage,” the Rav said. As for how to rectify the damage, Rabbi Akiva Eiger ordered the boy to be sent to study Torah in Eretz Israel. The boy went, and he became one of the greatest talmidei chachamim of Jerusalem.

### *Repentance Must be in Proportion*

“In my case as well,” the professor said, “my intellectual blockage began when I was still very young, while I was studying in the village cheder. That’s why I thought that the same thing occurred to me,” he ended with trembling.

After a difficult time trying to remember, the professor recalled that when he was about 9-years-old, he saw some pork in the home of a non-Jewish friend. At that point he was suddenly overtaken with a compulsive desire to eat, unable to hold himself back. He ended up tasting it, despite knowing full well how grave the prohibition was.

“From that point on, when I tasted the treif meat, my mind was blocked. I couldn’t even understand the Gemara that I was learning in cheder,” said the old professor in tears. He asked Rav Chaim what he could do to rectify this sin.

Rabbi Haim advised him to fast for a day in order to sincerely reject the fact that he had eaten treif meat. Even when the professor told him that he found it very difficult to fast because of his advanced age and frail health, and that he could barely fast on Yom Kippur, Rabbi Haim still told him to make an effort to fast for a day.

From here we see just how attentive parents should be to the spiritual welfare of their children. There are many ways in which their children are liable to eat things that are not completely kosher. Even if not done on purpose, they are liable to stumble in hidden prohibitions such as orla, tevel, and the like. These foods enter the pure and clear minds of children and act like snake venom. In that case, there is no reason to be surprised that a child’s Torah study deteriorates.

What follows is another example of food that is completely kosher, and yet can lead to an intellectual blockage:

Some grocers estimate that their clients own them more 200,000 shekels in unpaid bills. These clients purchase as much food as they want, and when they are asked to settle their bill, they become angry with the merchant, who dares to bring up the subject.

The Rebbe of Sanz Zatzal was very strict about paying debts on time. He told his chassidim that if they had not paid their bills at the grocer or vegetable merchant, they should not come to ask him for a blessing for their children.

“From the fact that you don’t pay your bills on time, the merchant is obligated to finance your purchases with his own money. It is considered as if your children were eating stolen food! In that case, how can you possibly think that you will succeed in educating your children,” asked the Rebbe in astonishment.

# AT THE SOURCE

## Study First

***It is written, “Safeguard and hearken to all these words” (Devarim 12:28).***

Rabbi Chaim ben Attar Zatzal asks why this verse does not mention hearkening first, followed by safeguarding. Why does the verse adopt the reverse order (“safeguard and hearken”), given that it is the opposite of what happens in reality?

In his book *Ohr HaChaim*, he answers this question based on Rabba’s words in the Gemara: “One should always study the Torah first and meditate on it afterwards” (*Avodah Zarah* 19a). Let a person first study in order to know the path to follow, to observe and do all that is written in the Torah. Only then can he reach the level of hearkening. Once he has studied and observed, he can then hope to understand things intellectually, through reasoning.

## Open Your Hand Now

***It is written, “You shall surely open [phatoach tiptach] your hand” (Devarim 15:8).***

In his book *Yad Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Tzarfati Zatzal gives a fine explanation for the double expression phatoach tiptach. He cites the Midrash in stating, “It has been taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: When a person enters the world, his hands are clenched, as if to say: ‘The whole world is mine, I shall inherit it.’ Yet when he leaves it, his hands are spread open, as if to say: ‘I have inherited nothing from the world.’ Thus as Solomon said, ‘As he emerged from his mother’s womb – naked – so will he return’ [*Kohelet* 5:14]” (*Kohelet Rabba* 5:20).

This contains an allusion: Given that a person will open his hand when he leaves this world, leaving everything to others, let him open his hand now. Opening his hand in this world will be more beneficial to him than opening his hand in the World to Come, which will not help him in any way. Hence the verse uses the double expression phatoach tiptach: Open your hand in this world, and you will open it in the World to Come.

## The Blood of the Ram

***It is written, “You shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking” (Devarim 15:8).***

The Chatom Sofer interprets this verse allegorically, stating: “We know that the ashes of Isaac’s ram are gathered before Hashem on high. They are considered as part of Isaac’s body, his sinews and limbs. From these sinews and limbs come physical abundance and spiritual sanctity for the entire Jewish people when they observe the 248 positive precepts and 365 negative precepts.”

Now with regards to the mitzvah of tzeddakah, a person enables both the poor and himself to live at the same time, as in the story of the tzaddik Binyamin (*Bava Batra* 11a). We find the opposite with Choni HaMeigel, who said that his eyes had no pity on the poor.

Hence it is written, “Life for life.” We know that blood is life, which is why a person who gives tzeddakah in the proper way draws the blood of Isaac’s ram. Thus we have *Dam Ayil* (“blood of the ram”), which is formed by the first letters of the expression *dei machsoro asher yechar lo* (“sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking”).

## Shining on His Face

***It is written, “You shall surely open your hand to your***

***brother, to your poor and to your destitute” (Devarim 15:11).***

Rabbi Chaim Vital, the disciple of the Arizal, testifies in his book *Taamei HaMitzvot* that with regards to generosity and self-denial, “I saw that my teacher [the Arizal] paid no attention to whether his garments were very dignified, and he ate very little food. Yet with regards to his wife’s expenses, he would buy her whatever she wanted.

“In tzeddakah, my teacher gave with great joy and a large heart, generously. Sometimes he didn’t even look if he had anything left in his hand.

“My teacher said that each mitzvah has a corresponding letter in the alphabet. When a person does a mitzvah, the letter of that mitzvah shines on his face, and the letter of the previous mitzvah that he performed disappears. This applies when a person does a single mitzvah, which is then absorbed inside.

“Yet when someone does the mitzvah of tzeddakah, this letter is not absorbed quickly like the letters of other mitzvot. Instead it shines on his face for the entire week. This is what constitutes, “his righteousness lasts forever.”

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

### *To Whom Are the Secrets of Torah Revealed?*

***It is written, “See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse” (Devarim 11:26). It would appear that the term “see” is redundant here, for can one see a blessing or a curse?***

However the term *re’eh* (“see”) has the same numerical value, including the word itself, as *raz* (“secret”). This means that whoever wants to search for and discover the secrets of Torah will find them, and its mysteries will be revealed to him, as King David said: “Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah” (*Tehillim* 119:18). However one who does not want to see the secrets of the Torah and puts no effort into it, even if he studies the same passage with his friend, will not discover what his friend does. King Solomon said, “If you seek her like silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of Hashem and discover the knowledge of G-d” (*Tehillim* 2:4-5). To what can this be compared? It is like someone who loses something and becomes distraught over ever finding it again. When does he have any chance of finding it? Only when he looks everywhere for it. However if he stays home and whines about it, without looking, the lost object will not reappear on its own.

The same applies in regards to Torah. A man cannot understand it and will not find the treasures it contains if he does not put an effort into looking for them. The Mishnah teaches, “If a man says to you, ‘I have labored and not found,’ do not believe him. If he says, ‘I have not labored but I still have found,’ do not believe him. If he says, ‘I have labored and found,’ you may believe him. This is true in regards to words of Torah” (*Megillah* 6b). This teaches us that nobody can understand the Torah unless he puts an effort into it. As the Sages say, “Whoever occupies himself with the Torah merits many things. ... The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him” (*Pirkei Avot* 6:1).

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER RABBI MOSHE FORHAND

The gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Forhand Zatzal, one of the greatest rabbis of Hungary, served his Creator every day while it was still night. As soon as the sun arose, he would recite tehillim with great enthusiasm. His prayers were also characterized by great enthusiasm, and each day he would open his heart before Hashem with tremendous emotion, as tears flowed from his eyes. He poured out his soul in prayer, the sounds of which moved everyone in synagogue. Especially in times of hardship, he roared like a lion in his prayers and supplications for the suffering of the Jewish people. The pages of his book of Tehillim testified to this, for they were all inundated with the tears that he shed for each and every person who came to him in the bitterness of his heart.

Rabbi Moshe Forhand led his community with strength and dignity for 32 years, all of them equally good, from the city of Makava, guiding it in the ways of Torah and the fear of Heaven. He witnessed the city experience peace and glory, and he also saw it experience tremendous suffering, that of the community when the Holocaust shattered the Jewish world. He saw the entire exile before him like a fire. When terrible rumors from afar began to spread regarding the disasters befalling the Jewish people, he finished the entire book of Tehillim early one morning with torrents of tears flowing from his eyes and cries arising from his heart. He instituted a regular minyan in his town's synagogue to recite the book of Tehillim every day.

One day in his house, he said with an emotional voice: "The moment has come for me to return home." Those who heard it were surprised. He then repeated this phrase, adding that he was leaving for the sake of his community and would defend it as best he could before the Celestial Court. He would go and ask for mercy so his descendants and the members of his community would be saved. On Thursday, Sivan 17 5704, Rabbi Moshe Forhand rendered his soul to his Creator in holiness and purity.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### *Hashem Will Judge Him Favorably*

Also be aware of a great principle in regards to this subject: If we see someone who apparently said or did something wrong – be it in regards to a person's relationship with G-d, or in regards to a person's relationship with his fellowman – and it is possible to judge his words or deeds in a favorable way, if the person in question is a G-d-fearing man, we are obligated to judge him favorably, even if it seems much more likely that he sinned. Even if the person in question is an ordinary individual, who keeps away from sin in a general way, if the chances that he sinned are equal to the chances that he did not sin, we must judge him favorably, as the Sages have said: "One who judges his neighbor favorably, Hashem will judge him favorably." This comes under the mitzvah to judge our fellowman with righteous judgment.

– Chafetz Chaim

## A TRUE STORY REPRIMANDING BY DEEDS

One Shabbat, some Jews came to Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel and told him that a certain Jew had dared to open his store in plain daylight, a store that was located in a city suburb.

The Rav listened, and the following Friday night he announced to the members of the congregation that they should not wait for him to come for the morning service. Instead of going to synagogue, he enveloped himself in his tallit and went to the distant suburb to find the man who had dared to desecrate Shabbat.

It was still early, and the man's store had not yet opened. Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim asked for a chair from one of the neighbors and sat down, book in hand, near the store's front door.

The merchant quickly arrived with the intention of opening up, just as he had done on the previous Shabbat. As he approached, however, he noticed the Rav sitting there reading a book. He stepped back and thought, "It's not right to open the store in front of the Rav. No doubt a brit is taking place nearby and someone asked him to be the sandak. I'll wait until he leaves before opening."

Imagine the man's surprise when he noticed that an hour passed, then another, and yet the Rav was still sitting on the chair in front of his store reading a book! A thought then entered his mind: "Maybe he's only here because of me?"

Although this merchant had been quite far from Torah and mitzvot, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim was loved by all Jews in town, including those who had distanced themselves from the ways of Torah. Therefore the man did not want to upset the Rav, who had been sitting there for many hours. He approached him hesitantly and said with a trembling voice, "Perhaps the Rav would like to go home and rest? Perhaps he would like to eat something? I promise by all which is dear to me that, starting today, my store will remain completely closed every Shabbat and holiday."

Without saying a word, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim got up, gave the merchant a thankful look, and slowly began returning home.

The next Shabbat, the Rav was able to pray without any worries. The merchant kept his word, and his business remained closed every Shabbat and holiday!