

The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Humans Are Greater

It is written, "You are children to Hashem your G-d – you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people from among all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Devarim 14:1-2). From the fact that it says, "You are children," followed by "you shall not cut yourselves," we learn that if they had not been children, they would not have been given this order. However we need to understand the connection between these two concepts. Furthermore, what connection is there between not eating abominable things and the prohibition against cutting oneself for the dead? Why does the Torah juxtapose both things? The Sages have taught in the Mishnah, "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]. It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d], as it is stated: 'For in the image of G-d he made man' [Bereshith 9:6]. Beloved are the people Israel, for they are called children of G-d, as it is said: 'You are the children of Hashem your G-d' [Devarim 14:1]" (Pirkei Avoth 3:14). The Tanna chose these two things for the glory of man, since they are equal. In fact the image of the king is like the king himself, and a person who scorns the image of the king is not only scorning his image, but the king himself! If that person had no intention of denigrating the king, he would not have scorned his image. Hence it follows that one who scorns and denigrates the son of the king has harmed the king himself, which is why the Tanna repeated these two things for the love of man. From the fact that the Children of Israel were created in the image of G-d, it is forbidden for them to harm themselves. This is because when a person cuts himself, he is damaging and scorning the image of the king. Since they are His children, Hashem forbid them from cutting themselves. This is because one who harms the son of the king is as if he has harmed the king himself. It is therefore written, "You are children," as well as "Hashem your G-d" in the prohibition against cutting oneself. In other words: Be it because I am your Father, or because I am your King and your G-d, I forbid you from doing these things.

Furthermore, Hashem commanded His children not to make themselves abhorrent by eating forbidden foods. Because He is their father, He distances His children from things that harm body and soul, and there are no foods forbidden by the Torah that do not contain something harmful for body or soul. Rabbeinu Bechaye wrote that the distinction which the Torah established between permitted and forbidden foods is meant to purify the soul, for mitzvot are the life of the body and soul, as King Solomon said: "They are life to one who finds them, and healing for all his flesh" (Mishlei 4:22). "They are life to one who finds them" – this is the life of the soul; "and healing for all his flesh" – this is the life of the body. Food forbidden by the Torah damages the body and leads to cruel traits and other faults in the soul, for by nature such foods are coarse and contain moisture. Doctors are well aware of this. It is fitting for those who received the Torah to purify their minds through pure food and to guard themselves from cruelty. This is the meaning of the teaching, "What does the Holy One, blessed be He, care whether a man slaughters an animal by the throat or by the nape of its neck?" (Bereshith Rabba 44:1). The mitzvot were given solely to purify man!

Hashem paid so much attention to the honor of His children that He also prohibited them from eating blood, insects, and similar things, everything that makes the body abhorrent. This is because a person who respects the children of the king is respecting the king himself. Since they avoid food that renders the body contemptible, Scripture regards them as if they had honored the king himself, which is why He rewards them for this.

The Mishnah in Makkot notes that it is written, "Only be strong not to eat the blood, for blood is the life" (Devarim 12:23). The Sages add, "If in the case of blood – which man's soul loathes – anyone who refrains from it receives a reward, how much more in regards to theft and debauchery – which man's soul craves and longs for – shall one who refrains from them acquire merit for himself and for generations and generations to come, to the end of all generations! Rabbi Hanania ben Akashia says: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel worthy, and so He gave them the Torah and many mitzvot, for it is said: "Hashem desired, for the sake of his righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious" [Isaiah 42:21].'" The Rivan explains: This was done in order for us to receive a reward by avoiding sin, which is why He multiplied the mitzvot, for there was no need to give numerous mitzvot and warnings concerning crawling creatures and corpses, given that there is no one who is not disgusted by them. Rather, it was meant for us to receive a reward by avoiding them.

The Sages say in the Aggadah: "If you want to know the difference between the actions of our G-d and the actions of the nations, [consider that] when a king enacts decrees, even evil ones, nobody can contest them. One who fulfills them receives no reward, but one who transgresses them is put to death. Yet when the Holy One, blessed be He, enacts decrees for the Children of Israel, they are rewarded if they observe them. Now it is written, 'you shall not cut yourselves...for a dead person,' whereas the nations cut themselves for the dead and harm themselves, as it is written: 'You have cut yourselves as they do.' What does the Holy One, blessed be He, say to the Children of Israel? 'I am Hashem' – Who rewards faithfully. He says to them, 'Do not hurt yourselves, and I will give you a reward.'"

Furthermore, the Torah has also sanctified the Children of Israel in what is permitted, as it is written: "Sanctify yourselves in what is permitted to you." G-d desired to separate the Children of Israel from animals, in order for them not to resemble beasts, as the Sages have said: "In three ways are humans like the ministering angels: They possess understanding like the ministering angels, they walk erect like the ministering angels, and they can speak in the holy tongue like the ministering angels. And in three ways are they like animals: They eat and drink like animals, they procreate like animals, and they relieve themselves like animals" (Chagigah 16a).

Since the areas in which humans are similar to animals are equal in number to the areas in which they are similar to the ministering angels, we do not know what humans resemble more. However when they distance themselves from forbidden foods and sanctify themselves in what is permitted, their food no longer resembles that of the animals, for animals eat whatever they find, and it does not matter to them if their food will give them harmful characteristics or not. We may therefore say that man resembles the ministering angels in four things and animals in two things. Hence he resembles angels more than animals.

The Aggadah says, "You save both man and animal, O Hashem" (Tehillim 36:7) – by the merit of the animal, You save man (Bereshith Rabba 33:1). How so? If we say that men are more precious in G-d's eyes than animals, why is the merit of an animal required to save man? When a man does evil, he becomes less than an animal, and he can only be saved by the merit of an animal, for animals do not commit evil. As for man, since he received Torah and mitzvot, he can ascend new spiritual levels if he is deserving, and he can resemble the ministering angels, as the Sages have said. If he is not deserving, however, he will lower himself and resemble an animal, at which point he can only be saved by the merit of an animal, which does not engage in wrongdoing.

A Tainted Atmosphere

It is written, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you are driving away worshipped their gods" (*Devarim* 12:2).

Sin taints the air, and a person whose heart is not whole and pure is easily influenced by an atmosphere of sin that renders people coarse. How much more is this true of places where a sin has been committed! It is written in *Sefer HaChassidim* that if someone is about to purchase an apartment or a house, he should buy a house that no one has lived in before. This is because a sin may have been committed in a place where others have previously lived, and it will have a detrimental influence on those who live there afterwards.

The story is told of a man who ventured out of the city alone, and was attacked by bandits who wanted to kill him. Beseeching them to spare his life on account of his wife and children proved useless, and even the money that he offered to give them did not succeed in changing their minds. They were determined to kill him, for the desire to murder burned within them, and they yearned to see spilled blood. When the poor victim realized that they were absolutely determined to kill him, and that there was no chance of survival, he presented them with a final request: He was ready to die at their hands, but they should at least do him the favor of not killing him there. Rather, they should kill him a little further away, and there they could carry out their plans. They agreed to this, and so they moved to another place. Yet once they had moved, these bandits felt that their hostility, which had burned within them, was now dissipating, and eventually it was completely gone. In fact their change of heart was so complete that they decided to let him go! The secret to this mysterious change was that they had initially been in a place where a murder had previously occurred. The area was therefore filled with impurity, with the ground filled with blood, the venom of murder dripping there. When they were in that place, a spirit of murder came upon these bandits and they felt a powerful urge to do evil, to the point that they could not escape this force of impurity that had descended upon them. It was only after they went elsewhere that the connection between them and the first place was broken. All that remained was the evil that they inherently possessed, and therefore they abandoned their plans, for the power of evil had greatly diminished in them.

– Kol Tzophach

The Individual and the Community

It is written, "See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse" (*Devarim* 11:26). This verse begins with the singular ("see"), but continues with the plural ("before you").

We know that the world is judged according to the majority, as we read in the Gemara: "If [a man] performs one good deed, happy is he for tipping the scale to the side of merit, both for himself and the whole world" (*Kiddushin* 40b). The verse is therefore saying: "See" – you, the individual, see what depends on you and your deeds, for "I place before you [plural] today a blessing and a curse" – before the community, for the blessing and the curse depend on the majority. Therefore how great is the responsibility of each individual, not to tip the scale for the majority to the side of guilt!

– The Av Beit Din of Slutsk

A False Prophet

It is written, "Do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream, for Hashem your G-d is testing you, to know whether you love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul" (*Devarim* 13:4).

It seems that the test of not allowing oneself to be enticed by a false prophet is a test of faith in Hashem, meaning that a person cannot allow himself to be deceived by a prophet who presents a sign or produces a miracle by modifying nature. That said, what does this have to do with loving Hashem, and why does this trial consist of knowing "whether you love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul"?

Here, this means that just as a mother whose love for her son is deeply rooted in her soul – there being no possibility of her exchanging her son for anything else in the world, regardless of any sign or miracle – likewise loving Hashem means that a

person's love for Him must be so rooted in his soul that he possesses insight that does not allow him to be deceived about the truth, even when all signs and miracles tend to support a falsehood. This is the meaning of the expression, "To know whether you love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul."

A Lesson

It is written, "Who live in the plain, opposite Gilgal" (*Devarim* 11:30).

The Gemara states, "Did they not dwell among mountains and hills? 'Opposite Gilgal' – but they could not see Gilgal! Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says: 'Here Scripture only has the intention of pointing out the route to them.... "The way" – proceed along the high-road, not through fields and vineyards. "Who live" – pass through inhabited territory and not through deserts. "In the plain" – pass through the plain and not through mountains and hills' " (*Sotah* 33b). We may explain that the Sages are teaching us a lesson here: The Torah is not asking people to live austere lives or deprive themselves of all that is good. On the contrary, G-d infused us with the life of this world, and the Torah only prohibits us from having superfluous things. This does not mean that we must separate ourselves from the life of this world. Hence the verse means that when the Children of Israel entered the land, a good land flowing with milk and honey, they could have been tempted to say: "All that remains for us is to fully enjoy this world, 'Every man under his grapevine and under his fig tree' [I Kings 5:5], so let us eat and be satisfied." This is why Hashem showed them the way: They were to go "in the middle of the road," by the royal high-road, "not through fields and vineyards." In other words, they were not to focus solely on fields and vineyards. The opposite was also true: They were not to separate themselves "towards the desert," by depriving and separating themselves from the life of this world. This is why He says, "Pass through inhabited territory and not through deserts." He also warned them to take the middle path even in regards to spirituality, meaning "in the plain," not "through mountains and hills." In other words: To reach great spiritual levels, do not seek out things that are too high for you.

– Ateret Paz

The Essence of Tzedakah

It is written, "You shall surely give him, and do not let your heart feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter Hashem your G-d will bless you" (*Devarim* 15:10).

We may explain this teaching according to the verse, "When a man makes a vow to Hashem, he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do" (*Bamidbar* 30:3). The Torah also warns us, "You shall observe and carry out what emerges from your lips, just as you vowed a voluntary gift to Hashem your G-d, whatever you spoke with your mouth" (*Devarim* 23:24). In the Gemara, "from your lips" means *tzedakah*. I believe that the essence of the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is not what we give to the poor, but the way in which we give – what we say to people as we give. An individual who speaks gently to a poor person receives many blessings, for when he speaks to him from the heart and receives him with kindness, welcoming him like a brother, he revives his spirits. One does not bestow such *tzedakah* with the hand, but with the generosity of the heart. The Torah enjoins us, "You shall observe and carry out what emerges from your lips, just as you vowed a voluntary gift to Hashem your G-d," meaning that just as you gave the amount of your vow and carried out what emerged from your lips, you must pay attention to what "proceeds from [your] mouth" when giving *tzedakah*. Draw the poor closer with soft words that attract the heart, for the essence of *tzedakah* lies in what emerges from your mouth. Thus "when a man makes a vow to Hashem, he shall not profane his word" – he must not desecrate his word by giving with his hand but pushing away with his mouth, with harsh words. The deed is what emerges from the mouth, meaning the way that one speaks to the poor. The Torah states, "Beware lest there be a base thought...and you look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him" (*Devarim* 15:9), gnashing your teeth at him and sending him away with harsh words. You must certainly give to him, and furthermore giving should not seem bad to you. You must give to him willingly and with kindness, for as a result – as a result of your words to the poor – Hashem your G-d will bless you. In fact the act of giving itself is not guaranteed to help him, for he will not stop being poor as a result, and you will have to give him again. Yet because you give to him generously and without regarding it as difficult – but instead you demonstrate kindness to him as you give – Hashem your G-d will bless you.

For They Are Our Life

It is written, "See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse" (*Devarim* 11:26).

In the blessings of the Torah we say, "Who has given us the Torah of truth and implanted within us eternal life." Where there is truth, there must necessarily be life, and truth that is not living is not truth. The same applies to a Rav and his student: When does a student recognize that the Torah of his Rav is truth? It is when the Rav lives from his Torah. The Torah is a Torah of life, and the study of Torah which has no life cannot be genuine.

How much responsibility does this place upon a teacher! He can teach a verse from the Torah and give his students numerous explanations for it, and yet the verse may remain dry to them. The students may know the verse, but they will not sense the truth that is hidden within it. Yet sometimes a teacher will provide just one explanation for a verse, a very simple explanation, but his students will sense the enthusiasm within their Rav. When that happens, things will become clear to them and they will sense the truth within the verse (Rav Wolbe *Zatza*).

We pray for the sake of "our descendants and the descendants of Your people, the house of Israel." When do we enable our descendants and students – who are also our descendants – to inherit the Torah? It is when the Torah is pleasant to us and absorbed by our blood. The Torah is within us at that point, and it is our life. We can then make others inherit it. Such is not the case when our Torah is simply superficial and intellectual, for then we have no influence on either our students or our children. Hence after our request to "make pleasant the words of Your Torah," we can ask for our Torah to have an influence on others.

We must infuse a desire to study within the hearts of our students by enabling them to acquire a love for Torah. This is the foundation that will keep them studying Torah. Since children have pure hearts, we can establish the principles of education in their hearts. Then when they grow up and reach *yeshiva gedola*, they will continue to nourish themselves with the same principles that they received in childhood. Yet if the foundations have been lacking since *cheder*, there is nothing upon which to build for the future. We know that the higher we build, the deeper the foundation must be, and the deeper and better-built the foundation is, the higher we can build. Conversely, every small crack in the foundation puts the entire building at risk. Hence our role is to prepare a solid and robust foundation.

– *Messilot Chaim BaChinuch*

Turn it Over and Over

It is written, "See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse" (*Devarim* 11:26).

The term *re'eh* ("see") has the same numerical value as *ohr* ("light"). Moshe told the Children of Israel, "Do not claim that you have managed to understand the reasons behind the *mitzvot* and can distinguish between a less serious and more serious *mitzvah*. By your life, within every *mitzvah* there are great lights that no man can see!" The more a person studies Torah, the more light he discovers in it, as our Sages have said: "Turn it over and over" (*Pirkei Avoth* 5:21). Our Sages have also said that the Holy One, blessed be He, hid the primordial light within the holy Torah. Thus one who studies the Torah for its own sake will merit that light. Here the Gemara teaches, "One who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times" (*Chagigah* 9b). In fact if a person studies and digs into a subject more than 100 times without being satisfied with himself, it is because each time that he studies, he merits finding a new light that he has not previously discovered, in which case his soul will cleave to the Torah even more. We must learn the lesson from this, for it occasionally happens that some people assemble for a Torah lecture and complain by saying, "We've already heard this, and it adds nothing to what we already know. So why do we have to listen to it again?"

The Deeds of the Great

Man's Soul is the Light of Hashem

In the introduction to his book *Shibolei HaLeket*, the pious Rabbi Avraham states: "I would like to mention the wonders that Hashem performed for me when I was gravely ill. I was bedridden, and I could no longer tolerate my pain. I thought that my life was coming to an end, and I was suffering to such an extent that my relatives were distancing themselves from me, for I was a burden to my family. I was stunned and trembled when I realized that the journey was long, the provisions meager, and that people were preparing for the passing of my soul when they saw that I was cold and in the throes of death. Those around me took my wife and children out of the room, as well as my other relatives, for they saw the signs that my soul was about to leave my body, and my face was contorted. Yet in His goodness, Hashem 'chastised me severely, but He did not give me over to death' [*Tehillim* 118:18]. This occurred not through my merit, but solely through the merit of my holy ancestors.

"In a vision, my eyes saw a small man standing before me with a lit candle in his hand. He extinguished it in the blink of an eye, but then quickly re-lit it before my eyes. I said, 'Please, tell me what you are doing here with this candle.' He replied, 'The candle alludes to the soul, and the days of your life have already passed. I have hinted to you that just as it was re-lit very quickly, you will have a quick recovery. This is the sign that I have given you. Know that in your case there were arguments for and against you, and your merits were weighed on a balance. I have come to tell you that the All-merciful G-d has added days to your life, and has told the angel [of death]: "Stop, for he will still do many things for the community. I have decreed that in three days, he will be healed of his illness." ' This occurred three days before the festival of Shavuot, and everything happened exactly as he had predicted. On the first day of Shavuot, I went to synagogue and literally became a new person. I immediately gathered my strength, and I arose to study the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. On account of this miracle, I entitled my book *Shibolei HaLeket*."

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller – The Author of *Tosaphot Yom Tov*

All Jews who visit the cemetery in Krakow (the city of the Rema) are shocked to see that the grave of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman, the author of the Mishnah commentary by the name *Tosaphot Yom Tov*, is located at the cemetery's periphery. Everyone wonders how such a great man, righteous and pious, was laid to rest next to those who committed suicide or were excommunicated.

The spiritual leaders of Krakow respond with the following story:

In our city, there was a Jew by the name of Reb Shimon the miser, a wealthy man who didn't want to give anything to charity. All those who, in their distress, begged him for help would leave empty-handed.

All the inhabitants of the city royally detested Reb Shimon, and whenever he walked in the street, people pointed him out and said, "Look, there's the miser!"

While Reb Shimon was known for his stinginess, there were two extremely generous people in the city, Shemariahu the baker and Gabriel the butcher. Whoever was in need of *challah* and meat for Shabbat, yet didn't know where to turn for help, went to see Shemariahu and Gabriel.

This situation lasted for a long time, until eventually the wealthy Reb Shimon passed away. The *Chevra Kadisha* nearly refused to take care of him, and its members wanted to dig a hole in the ground and throw his body into it. They only decided to give Reb Shimon a decent burial because the Torah commands it. They asked Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman, the Rav of the city, for his advice. He got angry and said, "What – a rich man who never gave a cent to charity? He should be buried at the periphery, next to those who were excommunicated." This is exactly what was done: He was buried in disgrace, and the earth covered him over. On the following Thursday and Friday, however, the city was shaken and everyone knew that Reb Shimon was dead. The secret was finally revealed: Reb Shimon had paid Shemariahu the baker and Gabriel the butcher all that the poor received from them. That "miser" had in fact been practicing "giving in secret." He didn't want anyone to know that he gave anything to charity.

When the matter became known, the *Tosaphot Yom Tov* wept and grieved tremendously. How could he have given the command that such a *tzaddik* be buried at the periphery? He found no peace of mind until he gave his community the order that, upon his own death, he should be buried next to Reb Shimon, a man who had carried out the *mitzvah* of giving in secret.

Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller was born in 1579 in Wallerstein, in the southern German state of Bayern. His father, Rabbi Nathan, died a few days before his birth. He was thus raised by his grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Wallerstein, who in his time was the Rav of all the Jews of Germany.

In his youth, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman studied in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov Guinzbourg in the city of Frieberg. Still quite young, he elevated himself greatly in Torah and wisdom, and at the age of 18 he was named as the Dayan and Rosh Yeshiva of Prague, a position that he held for 28 years.

There in Prague he studied Torah with Rabbi Yehudah Leow (the

Maharal) and Rabbi Ephraim Shlomo Luntshitz (the author of *Keli Yakar*). It was at this time that he wrote his great work on the Mishnah, *Tosaphot Yom Tov*. Everyone immediately accepted this commentary, and *talmidei chachamim* and *bnei Torah* fixed times for studying it daily. Thus for hundreds of years it has accompanied a Jew who studies *mishnayot*. It is said that Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman wrote his commentary in three years, from 1614 to 1617. He indicated the completion date by affixing his signature to the end of tractate *Taharot*, specifying that he was 38 years old at the time.

In the month of Heshvan in the year 1625, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman was appointed as the Rav of Nickelsburg, a famous community that included many scholars. Some time afterwards, he was appointed as the Av Beit Din of Vienna.

There in Vienna he enacted a number of decrees for the community. For example, he ordered a daily reading in synagogue, before the Morning Prayer, from the book *Orchot Chaim* by the Rosh, a book that he divided into seven parts. He also translated it into Yiddish for the benefit of the entire community. Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman composed a special *Mi Shebeirach* (individual blessing) for the synagogue faithful who refrained from speaking mundane words during prayer and Torah readings.

In 1628 he was named as the Rav and Rosh Yeshiva of Prague. Once again, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman returned to the city in which he had spent his best years. In 1644 he had the great honor of becoming the Av Beit Din and Rosh Yeshiva of the large city of Krakow, where he found peace and respect. Everyone greatly admired him, and his influence spread to all Polish Jewry.

The *gaon* lived for 27 years in Poland, dying in Krakow on Elul 6, 1654 at the age of 75.

The *gaon* Rabbi Zelig Margaliot, who was his cousin, said the following of him: "When he died, he didn't leave behind any money with which to buy a burial shroud," for he never took money from a dubious source and never accepted gifts.

Before his death, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman wrote an autobiographical work entitled *Megillat Eiva* (*Eiva* being formed by the initials of the words *Eicha Yashva Vadad Ha'ir*, the first words in the book of Lamentations). In it he recounts the story of his life, from his birth until the day he became the Rav of Krakow. He also requests that his family set aside a day of rejoicing in order to celebrate the day that he was released from prison.

Rabbi Yom Tom Lipman Heller, the author of *Tosaphot Yom Tov*, was truly a *gaon* and *tzaddik*, a man whose memory will never leave us.

Guard Your Tongue!

Even All His Possessions

Even if a person realizes that he will incur a significant loss by not engaging in *Rechilus* [talebearing], it is still forbidden. For example, if his employer will fire him unless he engages in *Rechilus*, he is still forbidden to do so. Not engaging in *Rechilus* is included among the negative prohibitions, for which one must lose all his possessions in order not to violate, as explained in the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 157:1.

– *Chafetz Chaim*