

Orchot Tzaddikim: The Ways of the Righteous Translated by Seymour J. Cohen - Selected Texts and Excerpts

THAT YOU MAY WALK IN THE PATHS OF GOOD
MEN AND KEEP THE WAYS OF THE
RIGHTEOUS Proverbs 2:20

Solomon was the wisest and greatest of all men. He was king over earthly and celestial beings. After he had seen every sort of activity, tried all things and made known all sorts of wisdom, he concluded all of his words by saying, “The end of every matter is fear of the Lord.” And thus he began, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7), and he ends, “A woman that feareth the Lord, she

shall be praised” (Prov 31:30). And Solomon was the richest of all men, as it is written, “And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones” (I Kings 10:27). For him it was proper to say “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl 1:2), and one ought not to busy himself with anything save for the reverence of Heaven. And thus did Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, say: “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God” (Deut 10:12). And thus did David, the King, peace be upon him, say: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10). And because we see that man is the choicest of the creatures of the Creator in the lower world and that he is perfected in his form and that there is within him the soul that contemplates the secret of the highest heights and of the lowest places and that he is the chief object of all intentions in the world, and that everything that was created in this world, all of it, is for his need. And, in addition to this, there has been given to man

a Torah of Truth, to teach him the righteous way, for man is very dear to the Lord, since we see that even the angels serve in supplying the needs of a righteous man as we have found in the case of Abraham, our father and Isaac and Jacob: “The angel who hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen 48:16), and “So he strove with an angel, and prevailed” (Hos 12:5).¹

You should know and you should understand that if he whose nature inclines him towards an evil quality or one who is accustomed to an evil quality does not take it to heart to repent of it but always permits it to grow stronger, that this will bring him to a state where he will reject and loath good qualities. And just as much pain and anguish and troubles are the sickness of the body so are most of the evil traits the sickness of the soul. And just as the sickness of the body tastes the bitter as sweet and the sweet as

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bitter and there is, among those who are ill, one that longs for food that is not good for him and hates good food, and all of this depends upon the extent of his sickness, so do people whose souls are sick, long for and love evil traits and they hate the good path or are too lazy to walk on it, and it is very hard for them according to the extent of their sickness. And thus Isaiah says concerning these men, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that change darkness into light, and light into darkness; that change bitter into sweet, and sweet into bitter” (Is 5:20). And concerning them it is said, “Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness” (Prov 2:13). Now how and what is the correction for the sickness of the soul? Let them go to the wise men who are the healers of souls and they will heal their illnesses with the traits that they will teach them until they will restore them to the good path. And concerning those people who know their evil traits but do not go to the wise men to heal

them Solomon said: “The foolish despise wisdom and discipline” (Prov 1:7).²

Therefore, we must have pity on the people who are sunk in the nothingness of vanity and we must teach them the importance of the just weight and the correctness of the scales, to let them know how silver is tested and to teach them the path of the righteous in order that a man should choose, at the very outset of his being tested, a path that will bring him to a place that is fresh and fertile where all that is good can be found and by “good” we mean reverence of God, which is the goal of all of deeds. And this is the question which the Lord, Blessed be His Name, asks every man, as it is written: “What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God” (Deut 10:12). And no deed is considered worthy unless it contains pure reverence. Therefore, it is necessary to make

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known to everyone that every man who wants to bring his soul towards the attainment of good qualities must mingle reverence to Heaven with each and every quality. For it is fear of the Lord, reverence of God, that strengthens all of our qualities. And fear of the Lord or reverence of God is like the thread which we run through the holes of pearls and then we tie a knot at its end so that it will firmly hold all the pearls. There is no doubt that if the knot should tear, all of the pearls will fall. Such is the reverence of Heaven. It strengthens all of the qualities and if you will undo the knot of reverence, then all your good qualities will depart from you, and when you have no good qualities within you then you have neither Torah nor Commandments. For the whole Torah depends on the constant improvement of the qualities. As regards the qualities, the good and the bad, the wise man can make good ones of bad ones but the fool can make evil qualities out of good ones. As for him who walks

in the darkness, and does not consider the improvement of his qualities, it is possible that one quality will destroy all of his merit. For example, one who takes great pride in his deeds and boasts and preens himself always with the shame of his companions, and seeks to obtain honor through his companion's disgrace, such a man is like one who fills a barrel with fine wine, but there is in the bottom of the barrel a little hole. There is no doubt that all of the fine wine will be lost because of the small hole, if he does not stop it up. So this man who is arrogant, even though he is filled with Torah, will lose everything through this evil quality if he does not hasten to repair it. There are so few in the world who recognize the truth. There are those who are not wise enough to recognize it. Just as a man whose two legs are amputated cannot ascend a ladder, neither can such a one ascend the stairway of wisdom if he has no understanding. But there is also a man who is wise, but has been impressed

with the lusts of the world from his youth until he directs all of his wisdom to attaining his desire and to do the will of his evil desire for he has been accustomed from his youth to do evil deeds until they are firmly fixed in his soul. Thus it is very difficult for him to escape from the trap and snare of his sins: Then there is the man who does have the wisdom to recognize what is right and has also the desire to walk in good paths, but he has never been in the presence of the wise to hear from them instruction concerning wisdom and the righteous path and, because of this, he walks in the darkness, and he is like a man who has a hidden treasure in his house and does not know about the hidden treasure, and he sells the house to another.³

And as for the youths with whom folly has become great, it is still possible for a man to swerve them to the good path, for it is easy for youth to learn and

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they have not the strength or the wisdom to depart or to flee from beneath the hand of the one that corrects them, and so they must bear it. But in the days of old age, people cannot be swerved from their paths easily or from those traits which were in them in the days of their youth. And they are like a silver tray that was hidden in the soil and became coated with a thick tarnish during the long time that it was hidden there. Such silver needs to be polished and repolished until the silver returns to its original beautiful appearance. Thus is it with a man who has followed his own way and his habit and has become deeply sunk in the depths of inferior qualities, it becomes necessary to polish his intelligence so that he can distinguish between that which is unclean and that which is clean and to continue this task until the good qualities are impressed and bound in his heart.⁴

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Pride is the coin which the Great King, Blessed be He, voided, and about which He warned us in His Torah, as it is said: “Take care lest you forget the Lord your God and fail to keep His commandments” (Deut 8:11). For the arrogant person forgets his Maker, as it is written, .. and (when) your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God ... and you say to yourselves, *My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me” (Ibid. 8:13-18). And in the case of a king it is said: “Thus he will not act haughtily towards his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left..(Ibid. 17:20). If the Torah warned against pride even in the case of a king, so much more does it warn ordinary men that they should not attempt to lord over one another. Arrogance may be divided into two types. One: the pride of a man in his body; Two: the pride

of a man in his intellectual attainments and in his deeds. The pride of a man in his body or person is, in turn, divided into two classifications, one good and one evil. And this is the pride of a man in his body which is evil. When arrogance becomes strong in the heart of a man, then it rules over him from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. In his head and in his throat, as it is written: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks..(Is 3:16). In his hands and in his feet, as it is written: "Let not the foot of pride overtake me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away" (Ps 36:12). And it was because of the "foot of pride" that the daughter of Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion was punished, for it was decreed that she dwell in a brothel because on one occasion, when she was walking before the great men of Rome, she heard them say, "How beautiful are the steps of this maiden! " Whereupon, she took particular care of her step (Abodah Zarah 18a).

With eyes, as it is written: “Haughty eyes” (Prov 6:17). A person can be haughty with his ears when he does not hear the cries of the wretched poor. A person can be haughty with his nose when he stands near the poor or when he enters their houses and they smell bad to him. And he can be haughty with his speech when he speaks impudently and with pride against the righteous. Pride can also be recognized in his food and drink, and in his wearing of proud garments—the garments of a heathen — and against this we are warned in the Torah of Moses, as it is said: “You shall not follow the practices of the nation ...” (Lev 20:23), and it is also written: .. Neither shall ye walk in their statues ...” (Ibid. 18:3), and it is further said: “Take heed to thyself that thou be not ensnared to follow them..(Deut 12:30). All of these precepts concern one matter — warning that Israel should be distinguished from the nations in its garments, speech and customs, and thus it says: “... for I have

set you apart from the peoples” (Lev 20:26). Arrogant people are disgusting in the eyes of the Lord, as it is said: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov 16:5). And such a one is easily surrendered into the power of his evil impulse, for God’s help is not with him since he is abominable to the Lord. And even though he does not lord it over any man by word or deed but in his heart alone, he is called “abominable” for it says, “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord,” that is to say, even if he has no arrogance except in his heart.⁵

Now if you can avoid the temptation to display your goodness, the evil desire may tempt you to the other extreme and say to you. “You cannot serve God completely unless you avoid the flatterer altogether. Therefore conceal your good deeds and do the opposite of what you were previously

⁵ 25, 27, 29

tempted to do— Pray briefly, and when you study any form of wisdom do it privately and let no one know of your prayer and study other than the Creator alone. And let there not be seen in you any good quality. On the contrary, let there be apparent an idleness or laziness in your Service to God in order that you be not esteemed and thus lose your Heavenly reward, and do not warn people against evil and direct people to do good, and do not let people know that you have wisdom and do not teach it to others and do not show any sign of one who reveres God, as for example, the Tefillin, the Mezuzah and the Tzizit, but on the contrary go along with the crowd and mingle with them in their food, drink and gaiety, and hilarious laughter.” All this is the scheme of the evil desire to trap men in his net and he who does these things, believing them to be the performance of God’s command, his loss is a million times greater than his reward and he is like one who escapes a small fire into a big

fire. The right way is for him to pray with intent and at length and direct others to do good and warn them against evil and do good deeds both openly and in secret. And if people honor and esteem him — in this no harm is done, since he did not intend to win honor and esteem when he did these things. Therefore, when you do your good deed, consider in your soul from whom you expect a reward. If from God — then your act is completely good; if from another source, your act is not completely good. You should also analyze if the good deed which you do publicly you would do in the extremest privacy and anonymity with the same zeal with which you do it publicly. And if it is clear to you that you would, then your good deed is wholly good.⁶

Modesty is indeed a good quality and is the opposite of arrogance. And he who possesses this quality has already turned away his soul from all

⁶ 41, 43

sorts of evils, and he who has reached this honored lofty degree performs a precept and receives his reward according to the greatness of his humility. For Modesty is the root of Service to God, and a small deed done with Modesty is received by God, Blessed be He, a thousand times more readily than a great deed performed with arrogance. And thus did our Sages say: “The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven” (Berakoth 5b Menahoth, 110: a). But a work done with arrogance is not welcomed by God, Blessed be He, for it is an abomination to His Spirit, as it is said: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 16:5). “And because of this he cries and is not answered, as it is said: “Yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear” (Isaiah 1:15). And a man of arrogance may perform the precepts and they tear them to pieces before his eyes, as it is said: “Oh, that there were even one

among you that would shut the doors (of the Temple so that the arrogant would not presume to serve Me!)” (Mal 1:10). And when an arrogant person brings a sacrifice it is not received, as it is said: “Who hath required this at your hands, to trample My courts?” (Is 1:12). And, it is said: “Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and eat ye flesh” (Jer 7 :21). (That is to say. “Don’t offer your burnt offerings to Me; I do not want them.”) But a man with the quality of modesty and humility attains all good for it is said: “But unto the humble He giveth grace” (Prov. 3:34). And, inasmuch as he has grace in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed is He, when he cries out, he is answered at once, as it is said: “Before they call, I will answer” (Is 65:24).⁷

There is still another excellent modesty; for example, one who is humble before his Rabbi or Teacher and before the wise and before the

righteous ones who follow the paths of righteousness, and thinks in his heart, "These are the servants of God, Blessed be He — His ministers and those who love Him." And because of this he humbles himself before them and honors them. This too is excellent modesty — that he should think, "I will be humble before the wise in order that they should bring me near to them and teach me and correct me and guide me in the way of the Lord, Blessed is He." And there is another excellent modesty — that he should be humble before his pupils and that he should explain every hidden meaning, to the more apt pupil according to his ability, and to the less able pupil according to his ability. And let him explain and explain again and again with a pleasant expression and demeanor until the pupil understands the matter, and he should not say, "How can I stay with him until he understands; his mind is like a rock." And he, the teacher, should clearly outline and arrange the

lesson pleasantly many times. Surely, you already know the reward of Rabbi Pereda who reviewed one lesson with a pupil four hundred times (Erubin 54b). And there is another excellent modesty — to study in the presence of the very young and ask them to explain something that he, the teacher, does not understand. And he should not say, “How can I study in the presence of youngsters and how can I seek and expect to find an answer from him when he is younger than I?” And on this subject it is said: “From all my mentors I have learned” (Ps 119:99). And further did our Sages say: “Be exceedingly humble” (Aboth 4:4), in the presence of all men. Not before the great alone must one be humble in spirit, but also before the small. And he who walks in this path will cause the many to be meritorious, for he will be liked by all who see him and all his deeds and the manner of them will be acceptable to them. And always will they praise him and every man will bless his son that he be like this

modest man. And thus he sanctifies the Name of God, Blessed be He. But he who vaunts himself, profanes the Name of God, Blessed be He, and causes others to sin, such a person can be compared to a carcass that is cast out into the street and every passerby puts his hand to his nose until he passes by. Thus is the arrogant man — he puts the Torah to shame and those who study it, and causes people to shun the Torah, for they say, “What worth is there in the Torah if those who study it are evil?”. And reasoning thus, they turn away from Torah.⁸

But in exercising the quality of humility we ought to shun being submissive and modest before the wicked, and on this subject Scripture has said: “As a troubled fountain and a corrupted spring, so is a righteous man that gives way before the wicked” (Prov 25:26). And if he has the power he should

⁸ 57, 59

avenge the wickedness of the wicked, for the honor of God's Name, and add strength to his rebuke against them and stand against them like a roaring lion to save the plundered from the plunderer. And let him teach others the true Service of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and rebuke them with all his might, according to his wisdom — first gently, and, if this does not succeed then he must shame them. He must constantly command them to do good and warn them away from evil, with mouth and tongue, according to his wisdom, and he must hasten to exact what is due to God and not be submissive or humble in this. There is a modesty which is as evil as arrogance, as in the case of the false prophets who used to dress in the humble garments of the prophets of truth in order that people should accept their lies and falsehoods, as it is said: "Neither shall they wear a hairy mantle to deceive" (Zech 13:4). Therefore, those who are modest in their dress and speak gently and conduct themselves as pious and

just in order that others should believe them and depend upon their works, and flatter those who should not be flattered, and make secret schemes and do not worry about fulfilling the commandments except when they are in the public eye and not when they are alone, and thus deceive the people — these are profaners of God, Blessed be He, more than all others — for they cause people to disbelieve the good teachers and prophets, for these latter are then suspected by people who say, “Perhaps these men are like those who deceived us.” When anyone recognizes a false and lying prophet he should spread this abroad and let everyone know, as our Sages said: “We must publicly expose those who are flatterers” (Yoma 86b). Therefore, arouse yourself and do not be reluctant to weaken the temptation within you to exalt yourself and to deceive. And do not hold back because you see many of your contemporaries still clinging to these qualities and not attempting to

eradicate them, and they say to those who rebuke them, “Who is the man without some pride, and who is the man who is constantly upright in his business dealings, never taking advantage of a person, and all of whose deeds are faultless? Surely there are many people better and greater than I that do such and such. Therefore, I will do as they do and whatever happens to them in the world to come will also happen to me.” Those who think thus are guilty of unequalled folly. As an analogy, take the case of one whose eyes pain him greatly and he has a certain remedy that is excellent for healing the eye, and all people know the positive worth of this remedy, it is not wise to say, “I will apply no medicine, and if I become blind what of it? There are a lot of blind people in the world and what happens to them will happen to me.” Surely, this type of reasoning is nonsense and to be scorned by everyone. Therefore, scrutinize well your soul and try with all your power not to let your eyes dwell on

those who are below you in wisdom and in Service to God — for then you, yourself, will be lessened in the service of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and in the quality of wisdom. But rather, pay heed with your eyes and your heart to him who is above you, and try to follow his example and to emulate him according to your ability in exercising wisdom and in the service of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And on this subject it is said in Hosea 6:3: “And let us know — eagerly strive to know the Lord, His going forth is as sure as the morning, and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth (instructs) the earth.”⁹

Our Sages said: “Anyone who does a transgression and is ashamed of his deed is forgiven for all his sins” (Berakoth 12b). And they said further, “He who has a sense of shame is destined for Paradise” (Aboth [5:23/24]). And our Sages said, “Faith and a

⁹ 73, 75

sense of shame are linked together, for the one who is ashamed before people shows that he believes in people. If he did not believe in the importance and worth of people he would not care for their opinion and therefore would not be ashamed before them.” The wise man said, “If it brings you no shame do all that you desire.” A man should accustom himself not to do anything that will embarrass his companion and make him too ashamed to protest — as, for example, if he should suddenly enter into the privacy of his companion uninvited or stay as a house guest; and his companion is painfully ashamed to tell him to leave. Or if he reads from the diary, letters or other private papers of his companion and his companion is too embarrassed to tell him not to read his personal papers, and similar instances. And he should be careful not to impose upon his companion in any way by asking him for something, a gift — or requesting him to loan him some utensils or money when he knows his

companion does not do these things willingly but is ashamed to turn the petitioner away empty handed.¹⁰

A man should not lose his dignity by constantly begging favors of people, for if you do lose your dignity you will find it difficult to find some one who will restore it. There is a man who brings shame on his friend not because he hates him but because he wants to free himself from a sense of shame. Such a man says, “What did I do? So and so did the same thing I did.” In this way he makes light of his wrongful act. From this great evils follow: First he brings others to shame because he feels less guilty by making light of his sin. Second, he will find it difficult to repent for he thinks, “What did I do? So and so did likewise.” And third, he causes others to sin because as long as he removes his own feeling of guilt he will excuse the act in others and even

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induce them to do likewise. And if he lies about others in order to make his guilt and shame seem less, then his guilt is exceedingly great for he ascribes disgrace and shame to good people. And many more evils result from this. There is a person who is ashamed of keeping away from sins. For example, where his fellow citizens commit certain sin — as to ogle at women who pass by and similar lewd conduct, and they mock anyone who does not do likewise. In such a case a man ought to strengthen himself to bear the shame they heap upon him and resist sinning no matter how they belittle him for clinging to his morals. And there is he who is ashamed when he follows certain commandments of the Torah that many people no longer follow, and these people laugh at him for following these “outmoded precepts”. He should bear their mockery and fulfill the commandment. And a person should never abandon any precept or religious practice because he is ashamed to

perform it before people, for he should rather be ashamed before the Creator, may He be Blessed, who commanded the performance of these precepts. For it is clear that the servant of a king will not abandon the king's command though he bears much shame from everyone who may laugh at him for performing that which his king " commanded him. And he who cannot bear the shame in performing the precept and is ashamed to fulfill the command of God — and thus forsakes the path of good out of fear of shame — this kind of shame is very evil. And thus, if he is ashamed to admit the truth, this too is an evil disease. And thus, if he is too shy to rebuke people and command them to do good. And thus if he sits before his teacher and is too ashamed to ask what he does not know, whether it be a small matter or a big matter, such an attitude is very ugly. In these cases Scripture says: "Do not act foolishly by exalting yourself nor by cunningly keeping silent" (Prov 30:32). And our

Sages of Blessed Memory said: “The one who is ashamed (to ask questions) does not learn” (Aboth 2:5). The proper way is never to be ashamed to ask concerning what one does not know whether it be a small matter or a large one. Did you not see that David, King of Israel, said in Psalms 119:46: “And I will speak of Thy testimonies before kings and I shall not be ashamed.”¹¹

And one should be very careful not to shame any man for the Sages said: “He who whitens (shames) the face of another in public has no portion in the world to come” (Baba Mezia 59a). To whiten another’s face is like murder, for the red departs and the white comes (thus one is spilling the blood of the shamed one within him) (Ibid. 58b). And the Sage said further: The pain of shame is worse than death. A person should allow himself to be burnt alive and not shame his fellow in public. And they

¹¹ 83, 85, 87

learned this from Tamar who, even though they brought her forth to be burned, did not want to shame Judah (Berakoth 43b). And even when you are required to rebuke another the Torah says: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him” (Lev 19:17). How shall you rebuke? At first, secretly and gently. However if you rebuke him at the beginning in public and shame him, then you have sinned because of this, (Arakin 16b). And this is all the more true where one shames another where no rebuke is called for. And the destruction of Jerusalem was caused because of the shaming of Bar Kamtzah (Gittin 58b). Therefore, one should be most careful not to do anything that will cause anyone in the world shame. Even when he discusses Torah with another and hears his companion make a mistake, he should not say to him, “You made a mistake!” or “You don’t understand!” or any similar expression, so that his companion be not shamed, but he should pretend

that he is not aware that his companion made a mistake. Nor in conversing should he directly refer by nickname to a man so as not to embarrass him. But if he wants to speak with someone who has a nickname, or even about him out of his presence, he should say, "So and so, from such and such a place" or "the son of so and so" or mention a few characteristics that will identify him without using the nickname. And a man should never say publicly or privately, "This one (naming him) wanted to give me his daughter as a wife but I did not want her." For in this way he honors himself and shames another. And thus he must be extremely careful in every matter that no shame should be borne by another because of his words. Let a man always be among the shamed ones rather than among those who shame others, and among those who hear insults and do not respond, for of them it is said in Judges 5:31 "But they that love Him shall be as the sun when he goes forth in his might". This is

commented on in Shabbath 88b: “Measure for measure! Because he heard insult and his face turned pallid (and yet he was silent) God will cause his face to shine more than the light of the sun, as it is similarly said in Isaiah 60:1, ‘And the glory of the Lord has shone upon thee.’” From the sense of shame one reaches humility, for he humbles himself before people because of his sense of shame. And one reaches the state of sincere modesty, since one with a sense of shame will not do any wrong acts openly. The Sages said, “Of good children — a sense of shame is written on their faces, for he who has a sense of shame — it is a sign that he is from the seed of Abraham, Issac and Jacob” (Yebamoth 79a).¹²

He who has the trait of impudence commits sins in great quantities and yet considers himself righteous. And it is in this vein that we confess our

¹² 87, 89, 91

sins by declaring, “We are not impudent and stiff-necked to say before Thee O Lord our Lord ‘We are altogether righteous and we have not sinned.’ ” And this is a very wretched and evil quality — one who is wicked and yet says “I have not sinned.” And for this the Holy One, Blessed is He, judges him and has no mercy upon him, as it is written: “Behold I will enter into judgment with you because you say ‘I have not sinned’” (Jer. 2:35). And He has said: “He that covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but who so confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy” (Prov 28:13). And this path of the hard and impudent is far indeed from the paths of repentance. And of the harlot it is said in Proverbs 7:13: “With an impudent face she said to him...”. This quality is very evil, for it brings man to shaming his companion and the poor, as it is said: “The poor pleads but the rich answer impudently” (Prov. 18:23). And how much more evil is it when he shames his teachers and acts impudently towards

them, and hardens his neck to those who rebuke him because of his excessive rudeness — then this evil quality can remove him from the world. It is proper that a man should far remove any touch of impudence from his soul. But this very quality of impudence is very praiseworthy in connection with the Torah and Service to God — to be impudent towards the wicked and stiffen the neck against them in order not to listen to their counsel, and not to accept their lies and abominations and not to flatter them. And a man should have a touch of impudence in observing the commandments if people laugh at him for doing so. He must “harden his face”, be bold towards his teachers, to ask what he does not know and not be ashamed in doing this, and he must “harden his face” or be bold in rebuking people and in revealing to them their sins.¹³

A real love for one's children must be in this path—that he thinks always to guide his children in the paths of Justice, and teach them the manner of serving God. Blessed is He, according to what is said: “The father shall make known to the children Thy truth” (Is. 38:19). And it is written: “And you shall make known (the lessons of Sinai) to your children and your children's children” (Deut. 4:9). And, as it is said concerning Abraham, “For I know him to the end that he should command his children and his household after him” (Gen 18:19). And love of money should be in this manner: — that he should love his own money in order not to covet the money of others, and not find it necessary to steal, rob, or be compelled to receive alms, but shall be able to provide for others out of his own, and clothe the poor and feed them, and strengthen with his money those who study the Torah and revere the Lord. And, also, because of his money, he can free himself from many involvements in this material

world and set definite times for Torah and the fulfillment of God's commands, inasmuch as he has sufficient for his material needs. But he should not find security in his great wealth and vaunt himself with it but should purchase with his transitory wealth the eternal life of the world to come. And the love of a wife should be in this manner — that he should have it in mind that his wife saves him from sin and separates him far from immoral conduct, and, through his wife he fulfills the command of “Be fruitful and multiply,” and it is his wife that raises his children and she works for him all her days, and prepares his food and all the other needs of the household, and because of her devotion and work he has time to study Torah and concern himself with God's commands, and thus she aids him to serve the Creator, may His Name be Blessed. And love for father and mother should be in this manner — that he should be ever mindful that they reared him and exerted themselves to teach him the ways of

the Lord, may He be Blessed, and instructed him and educated him as to Torah and Commandments, and it is through them that he can fulfill the command of the Creator, may He be Blessed, as it is written: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12). And his brothers, sisters and other relatives he should love in this manner — that he should assume and have it in mind that they are attempting to bring him to virtues that are dedicated to the service of the Creator, may He be Blessed, and that he should similarly interest himself in them to teach them and correct them and not show them many special privileges or partiality in a matter involving others. For this there is great reward for him, since this fair conduct is a great virtue, as it is written: “And he has not done a shameful thing to favor his relative” (Ps 15:3).¹⁴

¹⁴ 103-105

If he has dealings with people every transaction must be in complete faith and honesty, and he should not be strict with his companion in small matters. He should always desire that his companion should receive some joy or gain from him and let him not try to gain profit out of his companion. And let his words be gentle with all people. If a man has shamed him, let him not shame his abuser. If a man has deceived him, let him not deceive his deceiver. Let him bear upon his neck the yoke of the world, and let him not cause trouble to others. Let him avoid argument with others and let him welcome everyone with joy and with a smiling countenance, for his welcome reception strengthens love. And he must deal with another for the other's good. He must comfort and try to help every man out of his grief and worry. If someone has revealed a secret to him he must not reveal it to others even if the man who told him the secret enrages him. He must never speak evil of a person

nor listen when others speak evil of anyone, and he should always try to find something good and pure in a person wherever this is possible, and in this connection he must be most earnest and careful. Then he will surely be loved by all. He must honor every man by his deeds and his words, and let him not vaunt himself over any person at all, but let him be humble before every man. And all of these things he must do with the intent to serve God. And he must be careful to avoid the companionship of people that are not respectable, so that he will not learn from their deeds, and he must always separate himself from cynics and scoffers. And the wise man said to his son, "If it should occur to you to make friends or companions, then make friends with a wise person as it is written: 'He that walks with the wise shall be wise' (Prov 13:20). And it is said: 'Give knowledge to a wise man and he will be yet wiser' (Prov 9:9). And so if you wish to grow in wisdom be a companion to the wise, for if you do

act wisely your wise friend will praise you and not question your wisdom, and then you will know that you can rely on your wisdom. If they honor him, he will honor you; if they praise him, he will praise you. If you need his help, he will help you, and in the things you say he will declare you to be in the right. If you grow angry he will have patience with you, and you will learn from his good deeds. And be a companion to every person from whom you can learn things that will bring you to the Service of God, Blessed may He be!” And the Sages said, “If you wish to become a friend of a man get him angry with you and if he will still admit and confess the truth of what you say even in his wrath then become his companion and friend. If not, leave him. But, when you choose a friend, choose one who knows his own worth, for if he does not know himself his wisdom is of no good. Acquire a friend who will rebuke you when you do something that is not proper and who will teach you to do the good, and

who will help you with his might and money — and such a friend will be faithful. But a friend who flatters you and smooths over your mistakes and errors and comforts you when you have done evil things — separate yourself from such a one. And similarly a friend who will take from you whatever he needs and cause you much harm for the little benefit he will gain from the transaction— quickly turn away from such a friend. And do not make friends with those who “go along with the crowd” and who always agree that there is an injustice, as it is said, “Do not say ‘Conspiracy!’ just because this people says ‘Conspiracy!’” (Is 8:12).¹⁵

And if a man is careful in guarding himself from these things and if his words are gentle with all people and he is pleasant and sociable with them, is abused by them but does not abuse them, honors them — even those who make light of him — and

¹⁵ 109, 111

deals with every person honestly and does not spend too much time in the gatherings of the ignorant and their parties, and is not seen flitting about, but occupies himself with Torah, wrapped in his fringed Tallit and crowned with his Tefillin, and does more than is required of him by the letter of the law, but at the same time, does not separate himself utterly from the community and make himself a hermit, and if as a result of his behavior every one will praise him and love him and long to emulate his deeds — such a person sanctifies the Name of God and about him Scripture says! “And he said to me ‘You are my servant Israel through whom I will be glorified’ ” (Is 49:3).¹⁶

As for the love of pleasure, such as eating, drinking and sleeping, know that man must direct his heart and all his deeds only to know the Lord, Blessed is He. So a man’s sitting, arising and his speech

¹⁶ 113

should all be centered on this. How? When he does business or works at a job for pay, let there not be in his heart the thought of gathering money for its own sake; but to do so in order that he may secure the things his body needs — food, drink, a dwelling place, and marriage. And when he does eat, drink and enjoy connubial pleasures, he should not put it in his heart to do these things solely for his pleasure until he is not able to eat and drink anything except the foods that are sweet to his palate, and he marries only for pleasure. But he must put it into his heart that he must eat for the health of his body and limbs. Therefore, he should not eat everything the palate longs for as does a dog or a donkey, but should eat those foods which are good for the body, whether they be bitter or sweet. And he should not eat things which are bad for the body even if they are sweet to the taste. He must accustom himself to this habit and determine in his heart that his body shall be completely well and strong, in order that his

soul may be upright and firm to know the Lord, may He be Blessed. For it is impossible for him to understand and grow wise in the Torah and commandments if he is hungry or sick or one of his limbs pains him. Therefore it is not good to fast always, lest his strength grow weak and his intelligence grow less. Therefore he should arrange and direct all his matters to the service of the Creator, may He be Blessed. If he fills his stomach then he may grow heavy in body, and if he eats too little he will be weak, so it would be good for you to have less of the trimmings at a meal and depend on one dish if you can, and let that suffice for you in modest quantity. Intend that this food shall reach your stomach for the sake of nourishing you and not merely to delight your taste, and accustom your appetite on a few occasions to do without delicacies, so as to discipline your nature so that it will be easy for you when you cannot obtain these foods. If possible, abandon those foods or dishes

which take much time and trouble to prepare and let your meals during the day be lighter than your evening meal, and accustom yourself to eating twice a day so that the functioning of your limbs may be light and easy and in this way your studies of the Torah will come easier. And accustom yourself to drink water unless your intention is to drink wine for your health's sake, or to drive away worry, and be very careful not to drink too much wine for it saturates and washes away Torah. This is the general rule that should always remain with you: A man should not satisfy all of his desires in eating and drinking, but he should eat and drink enough to keep his body in a healthy state and should refrain from reaching for a surplus of food. A man should not love this world for the sake of eating, drinking and having pleasure. For example, the wise man says: "I will eat in order to live." And the statement of the fool is "I will live in order to eat." On this subject it is said: "The righteous eat to the point of

satisfying their desire, but the stomach of the wicked is always wanting no matter how much they eat” (Prov 13:25). And so with a man who marries. Let him be mindful that this is in obedience to Divine command, that he should fulfill the command of “Be fruitful and multiply” and that he should have children who will serve the Lord, may He be Blessed, and revere God. Or he should be mindful that he satisfies his desires and quiets his passion with his wife and is therefore not tempted by other women, or to be considerate of his wife when he senses that she longs for his embrace so that she be not tempted by other men, or he may have regard to the health of his body which requires normal sex habits for its health. But he who indulges too frequently will suffer many ills. He who walks in the path described above serves the Lord, may He Be Blessed, always, even when he is engaged in doing business, even when he lives with his wife, for his intention is to fulfill his bodily needs so that

he can serve God, Blessed be He. And even when he sleeps, if he sleeps, so that his mind will be refreshed and his body rested, so that he does not become ill and therefore not be able to serve the Lord, Blessed is He, because of his illness — that sleep with this intent is considered service to God, Blessed be He. And on this subject our Sages commanded and said: “Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven (God)” (Aboth 2:17). And this is what Solomon said in his wisdom: “In all thy ways, know Him and He will direct your paths” (Prov 3:6).¹⁷

And with all his thoughts he should meditate how to do the will of the Creator, and purify the many others to do likewise, and to sanctify the Name of God and to surrender himself completely in the love of God, Blessed be He.¹⁸

¹⁷ 117, 119, 121

¹⁸ 123

Concerning the quality of Hatred, we see in it the firm prohibition “You shall not!” As it is written: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart” (Lev 19:17), and with this verse we have been warned to remove from our souls the trait of hatred. This trait causes many sins — such as gossip, for he who hates his companion tells it to the world because of his hatred, accuses him, and always seeks and desires evil to happen to him, and rejoices at his misfortune, and tries to harm him whenever he can, and seeks vengeance upon him, and nurses a grudge against him and has no pity upon him though he be in great distress. And because of his hatred, he slanders all the good deeds of the one he hates and makes them hateful in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. The hater withholds the good that is due to the hated and will not admit the truth of anything his victim says or does, and if the victim owes him anything, the hater oppresses him. There are several kinds of hatred. There is one who

hates his companion because he harmed him in money matters or struck him, or shamed him, or slandered him. For all of these and similar causes, a person should not hate his companion and be silent about his grievance as it is said in connection with the wicked: “And Absalom did not speak with Amnon either bad or good for Absalom hated Amnon” (II Sam. 13: 22). But it is a mitzvah that he let his companion know that he feels he has been wronged and say to him, “Why did you do thus and thus to me?”. As it is said: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor” (Lev 19:17). And if the offender repents and asks the person who was wronged to forgive him, he must forgive him and the one who forgives should not be cruel it is said: “And Abraham prayed to God” (on behalf of Abimelech who had wronged him) (Gen. 20:17). And even if the offender does not ask him to forgive him, the one offended should not hate him but should conduct himself towards him with love, and in the end it will come to

this— that the one in the wrong will correct what he has spoiled. There is an evil which is grievous, indeed, and that is hatred without cause, and it is that evil which caused the destruction of the Second Temple. Then there is hatred arising from jealousy, which is even worse, and it is proper for a person to reprove his soul to separate itself far from these evils.¹⁹

One of the Sages said: “The best plan of those you can plot against your enemy is to turn him to your love (to make a friend of him) if you can.” There is a hatred that is a mitzvah: for example, a wicked man who will not accept correction — it is a command of the Torah to hate him, as it is said: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov 8:13). And it says: “Lo, I hate them O Lord that hate Thee and I strive with those that rise up against Thee, I hate them with the utmost hatred; they are my enemies” (Ps 139:21-

¹⁹ 131, 133

22). And a man should hate lies and falsehood. The end of the matter is this — that a man should hate everything which separates him and holds him back from loving the Creator of All, as it is said: “I hate every false way” (Ibid. 119:128). And this is a great general rule, that a man should hate every false thing, and every act which will increase hatred for false ways will increase love for Torah” (Ibid 163). And let each person love truth and peace as it is written: “Therefore, love ye truth and peace” (Zech 8:19).²⁰

But the best and most lofty manifestation of the quality of mercy is when a man has mercy upon his son in order to bring him to the service of the Creator, may He be Blessed, as it is written; “The father shall make known Thy truth to his children” (Is. 38:19), and has more mercy upon his son’s soul than upon his body. For it is necessary to strike him

²⁰ 137

with the rod of chastisement in order to make him walk in the right path, yes, even if he chastises him harshly, for this apparently cruel conduct is in reality sublime mercy. And if he should withhold the rod of chastisement from his son because he feels too much pity for him to strike him and lets his son go on in the hardness of his evil heart — then this type of mercy drives out and destroys the son from life in the world to come. And even one who raises an orphan of whom it is said: “Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child” (Exod. 22:21), it is a commandment to give stripes even to him in order to make him go upright in the upright path. Nevertheless he must, in spite of this command, (to correct the orphan) conduct himself with this orphan with more mercy than with all others, but he must not permit him to go on in the obduracy of his heart. And it is also necessary that he not indulge in too much self pity, but that he reprove himself and bend his evil desire. And he should have mercy on his

relatives, as it is written: “And that you hide not yourself from your own flesh” (Is. 58:7). And, also, on the poor must one have mercy, and especially on those who revere God. And this is the principal manifestation of mercy — that he should be gracious and show mercy to those who serve God, and do His will. But there is a kind of mercy that is worse than cruelty. For example, when one has mercy on the wicked and strengthens them. And there is a great stumbling block before the one who raises up the wicked and gives them his hand and abases and rejects the good, and on this it is said in the Torah: “Neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him” (Deut. 13:9). Nor shall one have mercy upon the poor in the course of a law suit, but judge the case fairly, as it is written: “Neither shall you favor a poor man in his cause” (Exodus 23:3), which means that he should not pervert justice because of sympathy with the poor man’s distress. And there is

mercy which is cruelty. For example, when one gives alms to a poor man and afterwards burdens the poor man by saying, “I gave you this and this; now you must do something for me and serve me just like all that I did for you.” And of this type of mercy it is said: “The mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Prov 12:10). One must also have pity on animals for it is forbidden to cause pain to living creatures and on this subject the Torah has said: “Thou shalt surely help him lift him (the animal) up” (Deut 22:4). And one must feed one’s animals before he himself sits down to eat (Berakoth 40a).²¹

Cruelty is the opposite of Mercy as it is written: “They are cruel and have no compassion” (Jer. 50:42). And this trait of cruelty is not found in righteous people but in the souls of the wicked as it is written: “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Prov 12:10). This quality is also found in the

²¹ 139, 141, 143

impudent as it is written: “An impudent nation that shall have no regard for the person of the old and show no mercy to the young” (Deut. 28:50). And you already know the evil of the trait of impudence. Go forth and learn the evil nature and the punishment of cruelty, for in the matter of the reward of a wicked man — rebellious and disobedient — it is said: “A rebellious man seeks only evil, therefore, a cruel messenger shall be sent against him” (Prov 12:11). Every cruel person has no quality of kindness in his make up, even towards himself, as it is written: “The merciful man does kindness to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubles his own flesh” (Ibid. 11:17). The cruel person is very far from all good qualities, for he has no pity on the poor, and will not loan to them in the time of their distress and gives them nothing. And it is written: “He that is gracious to the poor lends to the Lord” (Ibid. 19:7). And it is further said: “Well is it with the man that deals graciously and lends, and orders his affairs justly” and it says (Ps.

112:5), “Happy is he that considers the poor. In the day of evil the Lord will deliver him” (Ibid. 41:2). And all these instances are the opposite of cruelty and are not found in the cruel person. For the cruel person feels no pain at the troubles of his companions, as you see in contrast with David who said: “As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, I afflicted my soul with fasting, and as for my prayer for them — may it return to my own bosom” (Ps. 35:13). And in the Book of Job it is written: “If I have not wept for him that was in trouble and if my soul grieved not for the needy” (Job 30:25). And all this is very far from the cruel man. This trait of cruelty is found only in people whose natures are like the nature of lions that prey and violently rend. When the spirit of wrath takes strong hold of a man then the quality of mercy flees, and Cruelty grows powerful to ruin and destroy as it is written: “Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming” (Prov. 27:4). There is no wrath like the anger of

Cruelty. In the attributes of the Creator, may He be Blessed, you will find: “In wrath remember Compassion” (Hab. 3:2). But this is far from man’s ability — to have mercy in the midst of his anger. And there is this aspect of the quality of Cruelty in the soul of man — to avenge himself on his enemies as it is written: “And he will not spare in the day of vengeance” (Prov. 6:14). The meaning of this verse is that where there is the desire for vengeance there is no compassion, only cruelty. And Scripture says: “You shall not avenge nor bear a grudge” (Lev 19:18). We are warned not to bear a grudge even in our heart— all the more so not to do any deed with the hands to hurt a companion. Even when your enemy has fallen through no fault of yours, you must not rejoice as it is written: “Rejoice not when you enemy falls and when he stumbles let not your heart be glad” (Prov 24:17). The avenger or the grudge-holder never overlooks a grievance and never forgives his companions who have wronged

him, and this attitude drags after it quarrels and hatred, and you already know how good and how pleasant is the quality of peace. And in the general scope of cruelty is included him who robs his companion of anything and therefore caused him pain. And there is a great punishment in store for him who robs the poor — and one who does so is deserving of death as it is written: “Rob not the weak because he is weak” (Ibid. 22:22). And it is written: “For the Lord will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them” (Ibid. 22:23). And even though there be greater and more severe sins than robbery the punishment for robbing is very grievous, as it is written about the generation of the flood, “The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them” (Gen. 6:13). Our Rabbis said, “If there is a box filled with sins — there is no more severe accuser among them than robbery” (Sanhedrin 108a). And he who causes pain to an orphan or a widow through

robbing them or shaming them or any kind of malicious pain is worthy of death through the power of Heaven. This is also true of judges who have the power to save them from the hand of their oppressors and do not fairly judge the case of the orphan or the widow — they are deserving of death as it is written: “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child” (Exod. 22:21). And it is further written: “If you afflict him in any way, for if he comes unto me I will surely hear his cry” (Ibid. 22). And it is written: “My wrath shall burn and I will slay you with the sword and your wives will be widows and your children will be orphans” (Ibid. 23). Measure for measure: “Your wives shall be widows” for “afflicting widows” and “your sons shall be orphans” for “afflicting orphans.” And anyone who causes pain to a fellow Jew transgresses a prohibitive command, as it is said: “And you shall not wrong one another but you shall fear the Lord” (Lev. 25:17), and this phrase “you shall not wrong” is said concerning

wronging by words (Baba Mezi'a 58b). And our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said: "All gates are closed to hearing accusations against the repentant except the gate of wronging a fellow Jew" (Ibid. 59a). Therefore, should one be very careful not to cause pain to his companion in any way — not by deeds and not by words. He who robs from his companion it is as though he slew him — even if he robs him of a trifle such as only a penny he is deserving of the death penalty. Also this crime belongs under Cruelty — one who spreads slander about his companion and, thus, causes him pain and shame. And he who slanders the morality of a man's family, (such as attacking the legitimacy of his birth) there is no atonement for such a crime to all eternity.²²

And if you are a man who inspires fear, and the fear of you is upon other human beings so that they are

²² 145, 147, 149

afraid to refuse your requests, be very careful not to overburden them even by asking them to warm a flask of water or sending them on an errand to the market square to buy merely a loaf of bread. And on this subject it is said in the Torah: “But over your brothers the children of Israel you shall not rule one over another harshly” (Lev 25:46). And as to this precept we have been warned that a man should not cause his companion to work at hard labor and not command him to anything unless he does it willingly and knowingly. A Canaanite slave may be directed to do hard labor, yet even in this latter case the pious way is to be merciful to him and not to make the yoke too heavy and not shame him, not by a blow and not by words, for Scripture has permitted you to receive his labor but not to shame him (Niddah 47a). And the master must speak quietly to his Canaanite slave even though there is a quarrel between them, and he must listen to his slave’s complaints, and so did Job say: “If I did

despise the cause of my man servant or of my maid servant when they contended with me — What then shall I do when God rises up and when He remembers some wrong He claims I did to a slave, what shall I answer him. Did not he that made me in the womb make him (the Canaanite slave) also? And did not the One fashion us (both) in the womb?” (Job 31:13-15). Our Sages of the first generations used to give their slaves food of every single dish that was served them (Ketuboth 61a). They would always feed the animals and their slaves before their own meal for lo he says: “Behold, as the eyes of servants unto the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look unto the Lord our God” (Ps. 123:2). And the truly pious, before he himself would eat, would give to his slave from every single dish that was to be served to him — and for the merit of this act Elijah would speak to him sooner. (See Kethuboth 61a). The Torah says: “And you shall

love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), and one who has within himself the quality of cruelty is very far from this. This cruel person is not liked by his fellow men, and there is no kind regard for him in the eyes of the world. Even when it becomes necessary to rebuke someone we have been warned not to rebuke with cruelty, as it is written: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor but not bear sin because of him” (Lev 19:17), which means “Do not rebuke him strongly and with cruelty to shame him and thus be guilty of sinning against him.” Until now we have told of the evils of cruelty, but there are places where it is necessary to conduct one’s self with cruelty against the wicked, as Job said: “And I broke the jaws of the unrighteous, and plucked the prey out of his teeth” (Job 29:17), and as the Torah itself has commanded us to execute the wicked and to lash them. And thus did our rabbis say: “He who does not want to build a Sukkah, nor make fringes for his tallit... nor fix a Mezuzah on his

doorpost deserves to be beaten within an inch of his life” (Ketuboth 86a). And all this requires cruelty of a sort — to pursue the wicked and to press heavily upon them in order to restore them to good conduct. And it is necessary to be cruel in judgment in order not to favor relatives, friends and the poor, but to decide according to the law.²³

And a man should be cruel in his battle against the wicked and not have mercy upon them. And our Rabbis said: “Everyone who becomes merciful when cruelty is needed will in the end become cruel when mercy is required” (Koheleth Rabbah 7). And so you find in the case of King Saul. Because he had mercy on Agag there came forth from Agag, Haman, who became an oppressor of Israel. A person should also be cruel to his body to trouble it always to do the will of the Creator, may He be Blessed, and not to have mercy on his body by

²³ 151, 153, 155

pampering it and pursuing these vain things with obduracy, but he should make himself cruel over himself to bend his evil desire to live a life of pain and to occupy one's self with Torah and to fulfil the commandments even if it is very difficult for him to do so. But he should not be so cruel to himself as to harm his body, but let him adopt the middle road. And you, son of man, examine yourself and be far from cruelty and have mercy upon the poor and the needy and let the poor be as the members of your family. "Then the Lord ... will show you mercy and have compassion upon you and multiply you" (Deut. 13:18). Everyone who has mercy on his fellow creatures will have mercy shown him from heaven (Shabbath 151b).²⁴

This is also an answer to the poor who say: "With what can we do good?" We have nothing to give as justice (alms) to the poor." Such statements are

²⁴ 155, 157

nonsense, for the poor man can give the righteousness of his good deeds and of fulfilling the commandments,— his care in giving Service to the Creator, may He be Blessed, with all his ability. It is through the merit of the good and the righteous that the Holy One, Blessed is He, does good to the world and sustains it. Is there a greater justice or alms or charity than this? But even the poor man can give some alms, even though he himself sustains himself through alms he receives, and his reward is doubled and redoubled, for the little he gives is as important as the great contributions of the rich man. And so did our Rabbis say: “Whether one gives much or another gives little — the important thing is that the heart be directed to Heaven” (Berakoth 5b) [Menachoth 110b].²⁵

There is another kind of joy and laughter that is very evil, for example, he who laughs at one who is very

²⁵ 159, 161

careful and pious in the way he serves God, may He be Blessed, and fulfills His commandments, and in this there are four evils: The first is that he darkens his own soul from the light of the commandments when he rejects or laughs at those who fulfill them — and he makes the Commandments ugly in his own eyes. The second evil is that perhaps with his mocking laughter he can dissuade the righteous man from his righteous deeds for the later may not be able to bear the laughter. The third is that people who have never tried to walk in the ways of God, may He be Blessed, may not, because of this laughter, ever repent, and will walk in darkness all their days. Then it is clear that the scoffer does not only hold back his fellow from the great good that is treasured up for the righteous but thrusts him down into the lowest pit. This scoffer falls within the guilt category of those who cause others to sin.²⁶

Remorse is the quality wherein a person does something and then in retrospect regrets the deed. This is the most direct path to repentance because he who has sinned and regrets, it is as though he had not sinned. It is impossible to repent without remorse. This means that a man's wrongs are not atoned for if he does not regret them. Even his prayer is not accepted unless he regrets his deed, for how can he say, "Forgive us our Father for we have sinned" if he does not regret his sins? For instance, a king whose servant was corrupt and seeks forgiveness from the king, if the servant does not regret his sinful deeds in his heart and repeats his evil acts daily the king will be angrier with him. Similarly concerning one who robs his fellowmen and comes every day imploring the king to forgive him while he continues to rob, there can be no doubt that this robber only increases the wrath of the king by asking for forgiveness. Therefore, he must regret

his conduct, pray, confess and direct his thoughts not to repeat such wrongdoing any more, then will his prayer be received. However, if one does a good deed and then regrets it, this is a bad quality.²⁷

The Wise Man said, “He who has his anger in thought only, but restrains it, you can see dignity and glory on his countenance, but he whose anger is not only in his thought, expresses his folly in his features and in his manner.”²⁸

Therefore, a man should employ this quality in all his affairs, for memory is a fence to truth, and it helps a man to fulfill his vows. If there is a matter between him and his companion, he must-remember it and not alter his words. If someone tells him a secret and commands him not to reveal it, he must remember this and not reveal it. If a person borrows money or household utensils from

²⁷ 225

²⁸ 241

a friend, he must remember exactly what he has borrowed and take care to return everything. One who has many business interests and is very busy should be very careful not to borrow money or things from people, since he is liable to forget everything and not remember. If someone has done him a good deed he should make a point of remembering it so that he can reciprocate. Concerning charity, one must remember the poor and constantly keep their distress in mind, and thus he will be able to help them. And if a man comes to give testimony in a court of law concerning what he has seen and what he knows, he must be very careful to remember and he must not diminish from or add to that which he saw. See how the Holy One, Blessed be He, has warned us concerning memory. As it is said, "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments and His ordinances" (Deut. 5:11). And it is very important to remember God in all of one's deeds. And thus did

David say, “I have set the Lord always before me” (Ps. 16:8). Memory is a very lofty quality and it is an instrument that strengthens all the commandments and all the Torah. Concerning the fringes, it is said, “And remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them... that ye may remember and do all My commandments” (Num. 15:39-40).²⁹

The ninth thing one should remember is that he who has a wife whom he loves as himself, or a son whom he loves with all his heart, always exerts himself to supply their every need and fulfill their every wish; and he does not do so because he fears them or because they will do good to him because he fulfills their wishes, but because of his great love for them. All the more so should he act so before God, and earnestly direct all of his deeds to His Great Name alone. He should not fulfill the Commandments out of love or fear of men or out of

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the hope of deriving some benefit, but he should unify all of his deeds to God's Great Name alone and not mix this with any other motives. The tenth thing he should remember is what all his deeds have been until the present day. If he has occupied himself with the service of his Creator, he should recall every day how he has served the Lord and in what manner he may have rebelled against Him. He should always set his mind on occupying himself more with the service of God, Blessed be He, than with his own needs. And if he has not heretofore devoted himself to the service of the Creator, then at least let him do so from now on. The eleventh thing a man should remember is how alert he is and how he hastens in his business in order to make money and how he thinks about this night and day and he is not anxious to love any man except him who helps him accumulate gold and silver. All of his labors in the pursuit of wealth may be for nothing and there is always the possibility that he will lose

all he has, or that his money will be his undoing, or that he will die before long, yet in spite of all this he exerts himself in this way. If this is the case, what should a man do for the sake of his soul which lives forever? Moreover, how obliged a man is to mend his ways and be constantly alert to remember to purify and cleanse his soul with a cleansing that lasts forever and ever. Now, see what a difference there is between the two worlds, and the excellence of one over the other is like that of light over darkness.³⁰

The twenty-fifth thing that a person should always remember is the pleasures of the world-to-come; he should put the love of this world out of his heart and the love of the world-to-come should grow ever stronger within him. As one of the pious men has already said, “Just as water and fire cannot be united in one vessel, so can you not unite in a

³⁰ 325, 327

faithful heart love of this world and love of the world to come.” And one should have some love for this world only because from this world he will take provision for the world to come.³¹

The twenty-ninth thing one should remember, in regarding people, is that one man may out-weigh a hundred, not because of physical endowment but because of his understanding, his wisdom and his righteousness. Therefore, you must always improve your soul, for all qualities stem from it. For though a man were strong and healthy and handsome he would not be worth anything if he were a simpleton. And if a man were ugly and weak, but was distinguished by his wisdom, he would rise to greatness and to importance.³²

And a man should be very careful not to remember if his friend does a bad thing to him, and concerning

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this it is said, “Nor bear any grudge” (Lev. 19: 18), but he should dismiss all hatred from his heart. But if he has done evil to another, he should remember it in order to make good what he did to him. And if he has heard idle talk he should not remember it.³³

Therefore man was created with two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth to say to him that he ought to speak less. Silence is fitting for the wise, and thus all the more so for fools.³⁴

“There is no better medicine than silence” (Megillah 18a). But there are times when silence can be evil, as it is written, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5). With respect to words of the Torah, if a person sees that the fools are scorning the words of the wise, he should answer in order to turn them back from their errors so that they do not imagine themselves wise

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in their eyes. If a man sees another man committing a transgression, he should protest and reprove him. And long ago Solomon said, “A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15: 1), “and a soft tongue breaketh the bone” (Prov. 25:15). Therefore, a man should accustom himself to speak gently and not harshly. And be careful to guard your tongue like the apple of your eye, for “A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Prov. 18:7). And it is further written, “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (Prov. 21:23). And it is said, “Oh, that ye would altogether hold your peace! And it would be your wisdom” (Job 13 :5). And if you are sitting in a group, it is better that they should say to you, “Speak, why are you so silent?” than that you should speak and your words become such a burden to them that they finally say to you, “Be silent!” One should be very careful not to shame any man. and not to cause any man anguish by his words. If one is sitting near a man

who has a physical defect of which he is ashamed, or if there is some flaw in his family pedigree, then one must be careful not to speak about that type of defect or flaw. Even if one does not speak specifically about his neighbor but about such a defect or flaw in another person, his neighbor will think that the speaker is really referring to him and will be ashamed. If a man did a shameful thing and later did repentance for it, one must take care not to speak about that act in front of him. And he must not even say to him in jest, "How could you do such a thing and not guard against it? You should have undertaken a different matter!" Or if a man tells you something that you already know, be silent until he finishes for perhaps he will add something that you did not know before. Then too, he derives pleasure from the telling and even if you know that he is not going to add anything, be silent until he finishes. If two men had a quarrel and afterwards they were reconciled, neither should say to the other, "You did

such and such to me, and therefore I did such and such to you.” And this is true even if he has no intention of resuming the quarrel. For when he says to the other, “You did to me such and such! ” then his companion is bound to say, “On the contrary, the fault was yours!” with the result that the quarrel is stirred up once again. And even if you do not stir up the quarrel, this comment will shame him with the knowledge that he did wrong. There is one who sits before a wise man and is silent and derives a reward for this, for example, one who intently sets himself to listen. And there is one who is silent, and derives a sin from his silence, for example, one who thinks, “Why should I speak before him, inasmuch as he does not know enough to answer me suitably; he does not know as much as I by a long way.” And he should be very careful not to think thus, as our Sages said, “There are seven marks of an uncultured man, and seven of a wise man : the wise man does not speak before him who is greater than

he in wisdom; and does not break in upon the words of his fellow; he is not hasty to answer; he asks in accordance with the subject matter, and he answers to the point; he speaks of the first thing first and of the last, last; concerning that which he has not heard, he says: 'I have not heard'; and he acknowledges the truth — and the reverse of these are to be found in an uncultured man” (Aboth 5:7).³⁵

The second type is the one who mocks the words of people because he holds them in contempt because they too did not prosper in money matters and in the attainment of honor, and he makes fun of the poor. Not that he accuses them of any defect; they are simply despicable in his eyes. And this comes about because of arrogance or, at times, because the scoffer has ease and too much pleasure, as it is said, “Our soul is full sated with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the

³⁵ 357, 359

contempt of the proud oppressors” (Ps. 123 :4). This is proof that those who live at ease are often scoffers, and at times because of their great security they mock the righteous, as it is said, “Every one mocketh me” (Jer. 20:7). And it is said, “Whoso mocketh the poor blasphemeth his Maker” (Prov 17:5). The explanation is that he who laughs at the poor man because he is poor, does so because it seems to him that the man is poor because of his lack of wisdom while he himself is rich because of his wisdom, as it is said, “My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut 8:17). Thus, he who scoffs at a poor man reviles the Creator. For he (the poor man) is the work of God, as it is written, “The rich and the poor meet together — The Lord is the maker of them all” (Prov. 22 :2). And therefore he is really scoffing at the word of God, Blessed be He.³⁶

The eighth category of falsehood is he who boasts of qualities that he does not possess. And this is a great sin. And even if he really possesses these qualities when he praises himself it appears from his words that he did not do his charitable or generous acts for the sake of Heaven, but for his own sake, for his own praise. And our Sages, of blessed memory, said, “He whom others honor because they believe that he knows two tractates of the Talmud, and he knows only one tractate, is obligated to say, ‘I know only one tractate’ ” (T.P. Shebi’ith 10:5). All the more so is it forbidden to lie and to boast about qualities that one does not possess at all. The ninth category is he who tells a story that he has heard, but he changes some of the narrative as he likes. Now there is no loss to any man in this, but he receives a bit of pleasure out of his lying, even though he does not gain any money out of it. For example (Yebamoth 63a), Rav would say to his wife, “Make me lentils,” and she would

make him peas — and whenever he would say to her, “Make me peas! ” she would make lentils. Hiya, his son, went and reversed the matter. Whenever his father wanted peas, he would tell his mother, “Make lentils! ” and she would make peas, and this the son did out of honor for his father, in order that there should be prepared for him the food that he wanted. Even so, Rav restrained him and persuaded him not to do this any more, because, “They have taught their tongue to speak lies” (Jer. 9:4). But the guilt in such a falsehood is not like the guilt of those who lie for no reason at all as we have mentioned in the fourth category. Thus far we have discussed the nine categories of falsehood. But a man should be careful in the following matter too. If his friend comes to him and asks to borrow something that he has, he should not say, “I haven’t got it.” But he may refuse him in a manner that does not call for lying. And in the Book of the Pious, there is a ruling that even if a heathen should come to the

house of a Jew and ask him to loan him money, and the Jew has the money but he does not wish to loan it to this heathen, he must not say, “I have no money,” but he should refuse him in any way he can without lying (Sefer Hasidim, 426). But it may well be that if the heathen were to learn that the Jew did have money, then he would not be able to take his leave of the heathen without causing hatred. Therefore, it might be better for him to say, “I don’t have money” — for the sake of good relations. It all depends on the circumstances and on how he sizes up the situation. If he thinks he will cause no ill will by saying, “I have money, but I need it for something else,” let him do so. Great is a liar’s punishment. For even when he speaks the truth, no one believes him (Sanh. 89b). “And falsehood cannot stand for long.” No man should cause others to lie for his sake. What is meant by this? If a man sees two people speaking together about a secret matter, he should not go and ask one of them to reveal the matter to

him. For he may not want to reveal it, and consequently he will put him off by telling him something else, the result being that he has lied (see Sefer Hasidim, 1201). Similarly he should be scrupulous in all of his affairs, not lying in business matters, and not causing others to lie. And he should be careful not to associate with a liar, and he should speak to such a one as little as possible. It requires great wisdom to avoid lying, for the evil inclination is always lying in ambush for a man, to cause him to fall into his net. But there are times when the Sages permitted one to lie, for example, in order to make peace between one man and another (Yebamoth 65b). Similarly, one may praise a bride in the presence of the bridegroom and say that she is lovely and charming, even though she really is not (Kethuboth 17a). A guest (Arakin 16a) who has been well treated by the master of the house should not to say in front of many people, "How good that man is in whose house I was a.

guest, how much honor he paid me,” lest many come to that host who are not worthy to be his guests, and concerning this it is said, “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted as a curse to him” (Prov. 27 :14). And concerning a tractate of the Talmud, if they ask him if the lesson is fluent in his mouth, modesty demands that he should say, “No.” And if he should be late to the synagogue because of marital relations, and they asked him why he delayed, let him ascribe it to something else (Baba Bezi’a 23b). And in all these cases where the Sages permitted one to alter the truth, if he can manage not to lie, that is preferable to lying. For example, if he is asked, “Do you know this particular tractate of the Talmud?” he might answer, “Do you think I know it?” And if he can put off the questioner in some way so as not to lie, that would be very good.³⁷

³⁷ 375, 377, 379, 381

And he who is a man of truth, in every transaction of his, whether it be in buying or selling, or in loaning, should express his full intention at the outset, and he should accustom all those who do business with him to know that he will not alter, that he will not add to or diminish from the terms agreed on. The wise man said, "Always place the truth before you." By this he meant that a man ought to make certain signs for himself, for example, in business matters that he remember not to speak falsehood. And he should put this down in writing, and he should bring this writing with him and he should look at it before he begins his transaction. He should write something when he sits in his study, and at his table, that he should remember not to speak falsehood, and that he may not forget to speak the truth. And so did one person do. He wrote on the walls of his house, and in his study on the upper part of all the walls: "Remember the day of death, and you will not sin." And he who does not

speaking anything but the truth will live, and live long, and be free.³⁸

Do not be ashamed to receive the truth from any man whatever — even from the smallest of the small and the most despised, even from him should you receive the truth. For a precious pearl, even in the hands of the small and the despised, is still a precious pearl. Now that our exile has lasted so long because of our many sins it is more important than ever that Israel should separate themselves from the vain things of the world and take hold of the Seal of the Holy One, Blessed be He, which is Truth — and sanctify themselves even in things that are permitted to them (Yebamoth 20a), and not to lie— not to a Jew and not to a heathen, and not to deceive them in any matter, as it is said, “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (Zeph. 3:13). And it is further written, “And I

³⁸ 387, 389

will sow her unto Me in the land” (Hos 2:25). Surely a man sows a *seah* in order to harvest many *kurim*, thus, the Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only so that proselytes might join them (Pesahim 87b). And so long as they conduct themselves among the heathens without guile, the latter will cleave to them. And behold the Holy One, Blessed be He, was furious with the wicked for their robbery, as it is said, “For the earth is filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11).³⁹

When there is truth below, God looks down with justice upon the earth, as it is said, “Truth springeth out of the earth, and righteousness hath looked down from heaven” (Ps. 85:12). Therefore see that all your matters shall be done in truth, and rely upon “The faithful God who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 7:9). What is this

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faithfulness of God? It is that He keeps His covenant. If a righteous man commits a small sin, God exacts retribution in this world. And clearly, it is much better for the righteous person to be sentenced even with afflictions like Job's, all his days in his body, which is a valueless thing, and in this world where he has but a short time to live, and to have God give a good reward to his soul, which is honored in the upper world and never dies away, and is never finished, to the end of time. And this is surely better for the righteous person than if God did not exact retribution from him in this world, and then would have to sentence him in the world of souls to the punishments of Gehennah, and then if, because of his sins, God should lessen the lofty place of his soul in the world of souls, where otherwise he would cleave to the radiance of the Most High, to which light there is no estimate or likeness. As for the wicked, He has given them their reward in a little pleasure, which soon ceases, in the brief world that

is this world, while their sins are kept for the long world-to-come, and the great torment that is Gehennah, and which is too great to be calculated.⁴⁰

Flattery may be divided into nine categories. The first is where a man knows that his friend is a wicked man and a deceiver, that he spreads evil reports about the innocent, that he robs the money of others, and yet this man who knows all this comes and flatters him — not that he actually flatters or praises him, but rather he speaks smoothly to him saying, “You did no wrong in what you did.” In this case there are many transgressions and much punishment. First of all, he should have reproved the offender for his sins, yet not only does he fail to do this, but he says to him, “You have not sinned,” thus strengthening the bonds of evildoers. This flatterer will be punished because he was not

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zealous for the truth. Not only this, but the flatterer places a stumbling block before the sinner by saying, "You have not sinned," for then the offender will not repent of his evil deeds and will continue to sin. This is apart from the guilt that the flatterer incurs because of the injury and pain of the people whom the sinner has injured and given pain, and whom the sinner will not reimburse for the damage nor conciliate his victims because of the flattery of the flatterer. For the flatterer justifies the wickedness, it is said, "He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the righteous, even they both are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 117:15). All the more is this true if the wrong of the sinner is known to many, and the flatterer flatters the sinner publicly and says, "Pure and upright are you," then the flatterer has profaned the Name of God, he has shown contempt for law and judgment. A man should undergo danger rather than be guilty of this sin. And our Sages, of blessed memory, said,

concerning Agrippas, that when he was reading the Torah and came to the verse. “Thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother” (Deut. 17: 15), his eyes shed tears. Those who were near him said, “Do not fear Agrippas. You are our brother.” In that hour the “enemies of Israel” [a euphemism for the “Children of Israel” where anything dire is said concerning them! became liable to destruction for they flattered Agrippas (Sotah 4a-b). Nor should one who sits in judgement fear any man, as it is said, “Ye shall not be afraid of the face of any man” (Deut. 1:17). More over, such flattery entails the guilt of falsehood. The second category is where the flatterer praises a wicked man before people, whether in his presence or not, even though the flatterer does not justify him in his evil deeds but makes a general statement, “He is a good man.” Concerning this it is said, “They that forsake the law, praise the wicked” (Prov 28 :4). For if the one who praises the wicked man had not

abandoned the Torah he would not praise the wicked man who transgresses the Torah and its words. Nor should he defend the wicked man before people and say “He did a good act (on another occasion), therefore have pity on him (in this case).” He who does this is very evil, for those who hear him will think that he is really a righteous man and will honor him. And there are many stumbling blocks caused by paying honor to the wicked. For when honor is given to the righteous sages and they are held in the highest regard, then all the people listen to their counsel. Then, too, others will envy them their good deeds and will continue to seek instruction and knowledge will increase, and from studying Torah not for its own sake they will be led to studying Torah for its own sake.⁴¹

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The sixth category of flattery is he who is in a position to protest against an evil and does not protest, nor does he pay any attention to the deeds of the sinners. This thing comes close to flattery, for then the sinners think, "As long as they do not protest and do not reproach us, all of our deeds must be good." But we have been commanded to root out the evil from our midst, as it is said, "So shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee" (Deut. 13:6). And our Sages said, "Everyone for whom it is possible to protest against the sinful things of the people of his household, and he does not protest, is considered guilty of the wrongs of the men of his household. If it is possible for him to protest against the deeds of the people of his city and he does not do so he is held responsible for the wrongs of the people of the city. If it is possible for him to protest against the wrongs of the whole world and he does not do so, then he is considered guilty of the wrongs of all the world" (Shabbath 54b). And

it is said, “And they shall stumble one upon another” (Lev. 26 : 37). And our Rabbis, of blessed memory, explained it as meaning, “Each man for the sin of his brother,” which teaches us that all Israel are responsible, one for another (Sanh. 27b). The seventh category of flattery is he who sees that the people of his place are very stubborn and he says in his heart, “Perhaps they will not pay any attention if I rebuke them,” and therefore, he refrains from reproving them. This, too, is a sin and he will bear his iniquity, for he did not attempt to warn and rebuke them; if he had done so, perhaps they would have repented. And it was for this that the otherwise completely righteous persons were punished with the destruction of the First Temple (see Shabbath 55a). However, if it is a thing known to everybody and it has been searched out and tested and established that the sinner hates correction and will not listen to those who rebuke him, concerning this it is said, “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee”

(Prov. 9:8). And they said: Just as it is a commandment to say a thing that will be heard, so is it a commandment not to say a thing that will not be heard (Yebamoth 65b). And our Sages said, “Better that they (the sinners) should commit a wrong not knowing that it is a wrong, than that they should commit that wrong intentionally” (Shabbath 148b).⁴²

The ninth category of flattery is he who honors the wicked because he wants to preserve peace. It is true that he does not speak good of the wicked and he does not conduct himself in any way that would cause people to think that the wicked person is honored in his eyes, for he does not show him any honor except in the way that people honor the rich, because their path has been prosperous, and not because of their own merit. Yet even in this there is sin and guilt, for it has never been permitted to

⁴² 405, 407

honor the wicked, except for terror, that is to say, if one is afraid that the wicked man will injure him or cause him a loss at a time when the hand of the wicked is mighty. Therefore it was permitted to honor the wicked man as people respect all men who are mighty, but he should not praise him and should not speak good of him to people. And so said our Sages, of blessed memory, “It is permissible to flatter the wicked in this world” (Sotah 41b). But there are wicked whom we may not flatter. Whence do we derive this? From Mordecai, who was advised to flatter Haman, to which he retorted, “Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity” (Deut. 23 :7). And they would say to him “Our Rabbis taught that we must flatter them for the sake of peace,” but even then, Mordecai did not want to flatter such a wicked man as this. And a man may flatter his wife for the sake of peace in his home, and he may flatter his creditor so that he does not oppress him, and his teacher so that he

will teach him Torah. And it is a very good deed to flatter one's pupils or companions so that that they will study and hearken to his words, accepting his reproof to observe the commandments. Likewise one may flatter any man where he thinks that he will thereby draw him to him, so that he will listen to him, and perform the commandments. If he were to come to him with anger, the man would not listen to him. but if he comes to him with flattery, the man will accept his rebuke. In such a case, it is a very good deed to flatter him in order to bring forth the precious from the vile. For there is a man that will not accept a rebuke when it is delivered with scolding, but will when it is done gently, as it is said, "The words of the wise spoken in quiet" (Eccl 9:17). There are times, however, when scolding is necessary, as it is said, "A rebuke entereth deeper into a man of understanding" (Prov. 17:10). And there are times when even a lashing is proper, as it is said, "And stripes for the back of fools" (Prov.

19:29). And there are times when even a lashing will do no good, as it is said, “Than a hundred stripes unto a fool” (Prov 17:10). If so, what shall we do to him? There is no way of correcting him, therefore you must drive him away.⁴³

The fifth category is this. If the object of the gossip is a former sinner who has repented, and someone tells about the sins that he committed before he repented, in this there is great guilt (Baba Mezi’a 58b). “For one who repents of his wrongdoing, his sins now become merit” (T.P. Peah 1:1). And this gossiper shames him with sins that, through repentance, have become his merit. Moreover, he places a stumbling block before him for the victim may think in his heart, “Just as he shamed me so shall I shame him,” and enter into a quarrel with him, with the result that he perverts his repentance and returns to his former state. Moreover, others who

⁴³ 409, 411

hear of this one's shame may be restrained from repenting their evil deeds, and thus the gossip has locked the doors of repentance. And know, that if a man sees that his companion transgressed a commandment in secret and he reveals it in public, he is guilty of a sin, for perhaps the transgressor has repented of his evil way and did not want to admit it except to an understanding Sage who would not shame him, so that he could repent of his evil deed. But one should keep away from one who has done evil until he knows that his companion has repented of his evil way. And if the sinner is a scholar and a man who fears to commit a sin. it is proper to take it for granted that he has done repentance, and that if his evil inclination overcame him once he surely must have had remorse afterwards. He who speaks gossip is punished not only for the injury he did to his fellow man but also for rejoicing in his shame, as it is written, "And you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Just as he loves his own

honor, so should he love the honor of his companion, and it is written, “And he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 17 : 5). In a sense, the sin of one who gossips about something that is true is greater than that of one who tells false gossip. For when a man tells true things about another, people believe him and the victim remains contemptible in their eyes even after he has shown remorse and repented his sin; but as for false gossip, most people will understand that it is a lie and will not believe it. But, in general, falsehood carries a greater guilt than the truth. The sixth category is he who gossips about community officials who are worthy and who collect funds honestly and apportion alms to those who revere God. He who slanders them, saying that they steal from the charity funds and show bias in favor of some recipients as against others, and distribute the alms to those they favor and to their own relatives — this is gossip in which the guilt is

incalculable. For it causes officials to quit their posts and others, who are evil, to be chosen in their place with the result that the gossip deprives the charity givers of an opportunity to do good and he robs the deserving poor, for the other collectors who are evil will have no mercy on the good. The consequence is that this gossip has nullified the service of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and shamed the servants of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and their children and their relatives. For instead of fulfilling his duty to honor the officials, not only did he not honor them but he did evil to them. And he thus restrains other God-fearing people from being officials, for they think. “Why should we engage in an activity where people will suspect us, just as they suspected these others, who are God-fearing men?” And our Sages, of blessed memory, said, “Gossip slays three people — the one who speaks gossip, the one who

listens to it and the one about whom the gossip is said” (Arakin 15b, and see T.P. Peah 1:1).⁴⁴

If you see a man who speaks a word or does a deed which can be interpreted either favorably or unfavorably, then if he is a man who reveres God you are obliged to give him the benefit of the doubt, even if the unfavorable interpretation appears more likely. And if he is an ordinary person who guards himself from sin, but occasionally stumbles, it is still your duty to put doubt aside and decide his favor. And our Sages, of blessed memory, said: “He who judges his neighbor in the scale of merit is himself judged favorably” (Shabbath 127b). And this is a positive commandment in the Torah, as it is said, “But in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor” (Lev. 19:15). And if the matter inclines to the unfavorable interpretation, let it be with you as though there were a doubt and do not judge the

⁴⁴ 429, 431

man unfavorably. But if the man's deeds for the most part are evil, and you know that he is not one who reveres God in his heart, then you should put the unfavorable interpretation on his deeds and words. If a man revealed your sin, do not say, "Just as he revealed my sin, I will now reveal his sin," As it is said, "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge" (Lev 19:18). Neither may you boast and say, "Even though he has revealed my sin, I will not reveal his," for by so speaking you have already revealed the half of it.⁴⁵

Finally, he should know how to strengthen himself exceedingly and to bear the great burden of restraining himself from that evil which he is accustomed to do. For this is obvious that a sin that he has been accustomed to do all his life he will regard as permissible (Yoma 86b), and it is very difficult for him to give it up. Therefore, a man needs

⁴⁵ 437, 439

great will power and high fences to give up what he has been accustomed to. And it requires a great accord in all his heart and soul to hold himself back from committing that sin, and he must remove this habit from his heart as though he had not been accustomed to do this. And he must become accustomed to reject in his heart all the evil things, as it is said, “And rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13).⁴⁶

The nineteenth principle of repentance is the abandonment of the sin when the sin comes again to his hands, and he is in the grip of his desire. And our Sages said, “Who is the truly repentant person whose repentance reaches the very Throne of Glory? He who is tested and emerges innocent in the same circumstance, and in the same place and with the same woman” (Yoma 86b). And the meaning of this statement is: If the temptation to do

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the sin should come once again to him, and he is in the grip of the evil desire and yet he conquers it because of reverence for the Lord, Blessed be He, this constitutes repentance. And if this temptation did not come to him again in this matter then let him each day add within his soul reverence of the Lord, Blessed be He. And thus should he do all his days, and this is even a higher step than repentance. The twentieth principle of repentance is to cause multitudes to turn away from sin, as much as he is able, as it is said, "Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions" (Ezek. 18 :30). We learn from this that this is one of the principles of true repentance. And it is said, "Thou shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people" (Lev. 19:17). We have learned from this that if he does not rebuke him then he is guilty for the other's sin, and thus said David,

“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall return to thee” (Ps. 51:15).⁴⁷

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Note from RU:

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