

# Boshet

## בִּשְׁת

Come, my students, and I will teach you about the virtue of [avoiding] shame. Know, my students, that the virtue of [avoiding] shame [*boshet*] is very important because everybody who exhibits shame-facedness/modesty [*boshet panim*] is rescued from sin and iniquity. As it is written: "Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, because God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be on your faces, lest you sin.'" [Exodus 20:17] And our sages, of blessed memory, said: "So that the fear of God will be on your faces" means embarrassment [*bushah*]. "Lest you sin" teaches that *bushah* leads to the fear/avoidance of sin. Therefore, they said, it is a good sign if a person is easily embarrassed [a *bayshan*].

בְּנֵי, בָּאוּ וְאֶלְמָדְכֶם מֵעֵלַת הַבִּשְׁת. דַּעוּ בְּנֵי, כִּי מֵעֵלַת מִדַּת הַבִּשְׁת, מֵעֵלַת חֲשׂוּבָה עַד-מְאֹד. שְׂכַל מִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ בִּשְׁת-פָּנִים, נִצּוֹל מִן הַחֲטָאִים וְהַעֲוֹנוֹת, בְּעֵנִין שְׁנֵאמַר, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אַל-תִּירְאוּ כִּי לִבְעִבּוֹר נִסּוּת אֶתְכֶם בְּאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וּבְעִבּוֹר תִּהְיֶה יִרְאַתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבִלְתִּי תִחֲטְאוּ. וְאָמְרוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנָם לְבִרְכָה, בְּעִבּוֹר תִּהְיֶה יִרְאַתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם, זוֹ בּוֹשָׁה. לְבִלְתִּי תִחֲטְאוּ, מִלְּמַד, שֶׁהַבּוֹשָׁה מְבִיאָה לְיָדֵי יִרְאַת-חֲטָא. מִכָּאֵן אָמְרוּ, סִימָן יִפָּה לְאָדָם שֶׁיְהֵא בְיִשּׁוֹן.

My students, come and see how great this virtue of *boshet* is before God. Even if a person commits several transgressions and is ashamed of them but does not change them, God pardons all his iniquities. As it is written in Ezekiel 16:63: "Thus you shall remember and feel shame, and you shall be too abashed to open your mouth again, when I have forgiven you for all that you did, declares God."

בְּנֵי, בָּאוּ וּרְאוּ כַּמָּה גְדוּלַת מֵעֵלַת הַבִּשְׁת לְפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם. שְׂאֵפִילוּ עֲבַר אָדָם כַּמָּה עֲבֵרוֹת וּמִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִהֶן וְאֵינוּ שׁוֹנֶה בְּהֶן, הַקְּדוּשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא מוֹחֵל לוֹ עַל כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו, בְּעֵנִין שְׁנֵאמַר, לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרִי וּבִשְׁת וְלֹא יִהְיֶה-לָּךְ עוֹד פִּתְחוֹן פֶּה מִפְּנֵי כְלִמְתֶךָ בְּכַפְרֵי-לָּךְ לְכָל-אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂית נָאִם אֲדַנִּי אֱלֹהִים.

My students, take care not to bring shame to your friends—privately and even more so in public—because this is one of the most severe transgressions that is in the Torah. Thus said our sages, of blessed memory: “Whoever whitens the face of his friend/colleague in public, it is as if he spilled the other’s blood, because we see that the blood goes from his face and he becomes pale.” [Baba Metzia 58b] Further, they said: “Whoever shames his friend will ultimately be shamed himself.” [Masechet Kallah] And not only that, but the ministering angels will knock him down and display his degradation/indignity to the whole world. They said further: “Everyone who descends to *gehinom* [a place of misery] descends and later ascends—except for three types who descend, never to ascend: the one who commits adultery, the one who calls his neighbor a bad name, and the one who whitens the face of another in public.” [Baba Metzia 58b]

And what is insolence [*azut*—the opposite of *bushah*]? One who commits a transgression in the presence of others and is not ashamed is called insolent, as is one who repeatedly transgresses the same sin. And one who stands tall and arrogant with his head up and is not ashamed in front of others is the opposite of *bushah*. Such a person who is arrogant and feels no shame in front of others is like an idol worshiper. As it is written in Jeremiah 6:15: “They have acted shamefully; they have done abhorrent things [idol worship]. Yet they do not feel shame, and they cannot be made to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among the falling. They shall stumble when I punish them, said God.” And it is said that the result of

בְּנֵי, הוּוּ זְהִירִין שְׁלֵא לְבִישׁ פְּנֵי חֲבֵרֵיכֶם אֲפִילוּ בֵּינְכֶם לְבִינָם, וְכָל-שֹׁכֵן שְׁלֵא לְבִישָׁם בְּרַבִּים, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיא מִן הָעֵבְרוֹת חֲמוּרוֹת שְׁבִתוֹרָה. שֶׁכָּף אָמְרוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ זְכוֹרֹנָם לְבִרְכָה, כָּל הַמְּלַבֵּין פְּנֵי חֲבֵרוֹ בְּרַבִּים, כְּאִלוֹ שׁוֹפֵף דָּמִים, דְּחֻזֵּינָא לֵה דְאֲזִיל סַמְקָא וְאֲתֵי חוּרָא. וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ, כָּל הַמְּבִישׁ אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ, סוּפוֹ מִתְּבִישׁ. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלֶּא שְׁמֵלֶאכִי-הַשְּׂרֵת דְּחֻפִּין אוֹתוֹ וּמִרְאִין קְלוּנוֹ לְכָל בְּאֵי-עוֹלָם. וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ, כָּל הַיּוֹרְדִין לְגִיהֵנוֹם, יוֹרְדִין וְעוֹלִין, חוּץ מִשְׁלֶשָׁה שְׂיּוֹרְדִין וְאִינֵן עוֹלִין, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן. הַבָּא עַל אֶשְׁת־אִישׁ, וְהַמְּכַנֶּה שֵׁם [רַע] לְחֲבֵרוֹ, וְהַמְּלַבֵּין פְּנֵי חֲבֵרוֹ בְּרַבִּים.

וּמַהוּ הָעֲזוּזָה? שְׁעוֹבֵר עֲבָרָה בְּפְנֵי בְּנֵי-אָדָם וְאִינוֹ מִתְּבִישׁ מִהֶן, וְנִקְרָא עוֹז-פְּנִים. וְהָעוֹבֵר עֲבָרָה וְשָׁנָה בָּהּ, וְהַהוֹלֵךְ בְּקוֹמָה זְקוּפָה וּבְעֲזוּזַת-מִצַּח וְאִינוֹ מִתְּבִישׁ מִן הָאֲנָשִׁים. שְׁכָּל מִי שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ עוֹזוֹת-פְּנִים וְאִינוֹ מִתְּבִישׁ, הָרִי הוּא כְּעוֹבֵר עֲבוּדָה-זָרָה, כְּעִנְיָן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, הוֹבִישׁוּ כִּי-תוֹעֵבָה עָשׂוּ גַם-בוֹשׁ לֹא-יְבוֹשׁוּ גַם-הַכְּלִים לֹא יִדְעוּ לָכֵן יִפְּלוּ בַּנְּפִלִים בְּעַת-פְּקוּדָתֵים יִכְשְׁלוּ אָמַר יי. וְאוֹמֵר, אַחֲרֵית הָעֲזוּזָה, מִחֻלְקָתָהּ. וְאַחֲרֵית הַמְּחֻלְקָתָהּ, חֲרָטָה.

insolence is controversy/disagreement and disharmony. And the result of disagreement is remorse and regret.

[Datan and Aviram suffered from *azut*.]

## Commentary

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It might seem odd to many of us to think that a concept like shame could have a positive value. Yet that is precisely Yechiel's claim, namely, that the virtue of *boshet*—"shame"—is of critical import to the moral and spiritual life of a Jew. Yechiel begins describing the merits of this key concept by discussing its utilitarian value.

After the revelation of God and the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel are in a state of shock. Amidst "the thunder, and the lightning, and the sound of the *shofar*" (Exodus 20:15) that accompany God's appearance, a list of rules is thrust upon them. They are intimidated by God and are frightened by this moral burden.

Moses reassures them. By putting the fear of God on their "faces," he argues, they will not stray from the Law. Yechiel uses this episode as a paradigm for the perennial struggle to be good—for the conflict we constantly feel between following God's will and being tempted to do the very opposite.

Yechiel connects the virtue of shame to the fear of God and posits that the former is the stepping-stone to the latter. One who possesses *boshet panim*—"shamefacedness"—will ultimately be saved from the clutches of sin. In other words, the virtue of *boshet* (as a catalyst for the fear of God) has a clear utility: It is humanity's shield from temptation, our weapon against moral transgression.

**From the Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b-31a**

There are three partners in the making of a human being: a father, a mother, and the Holy One of Blessing. When we honor our parents, God says: "It is as if I am dwelling among them and they are honoring me. When we vex our parents, God says, "I am glad not to be living among them, they would no doubt drive me crazy as well."

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Exodus 20:12**

Honor (*kaved*) your father and mother that your days may be prolonged on the soil that Adonai Your God is giving you.

**Repeat of the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Leviticus 19:3**

You shall each revere (*tira 'u*) his mother and father, and keep my Sabbaths, I am the Lord Your God.

**From the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 32a**

From where do we learn that if one's father told him, "Do not return a lost object," [or, alternatively, to desecrate Shabbat] that the son should not listen to him? From the verse, "You shall each revere his mother and father, and keep my Sabbaths," you are all [your parents no less than you] obligated to honor Me.

**From the Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 49a**

The love of parents goes to their children, but the love of children goes to their children.

**From Menorat Ha-Maor, Rabbi Israel ben Joseph Alnakawa**

A man should honor his father and mother more for the moral instruction they gave him, than for their having brought him into this world. For in bringing him into this world, their own pleasure was their motive.

**From the Babylonian Talmud, Semakhot 2:5-6**

A young child from B'nai Brak broke a bottle on the Sabbath. His father threatened to box his ears, and the boy, afraid, killed himself in a deep pit. They came and consulted Rabbi Akiva, who said: No mourning rites whatsoever are to be withheld. As a result of this and similar incidents, the Rabbis said: A person should not threaten a child even with boxing his ears. Rather, he should punish him immediately, or say nothing.

he does not want to buy it.<sup>9</sup> אם היתה בעל תשובה – If someone was a penitent, זכור מעשיך הראשונים – one should not say to him, "Remember your past deeds."<sup>10</sup> אם הוא בן גרים – If someone was descended from proselytes, זכור מעשה אבותיך – one should not say to him, "Remember the deeds of your forefathers."<sup>11</sup> וְגַם לֹא תוֹחָה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ – For it is stated in the Torah: *And you shall not oppress a proselyte.*<sup>12</sup>

**Gemara** A Baraisa cites the verse that forbids verbal wronging:

לֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ – The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: *one should not wrong his fellow.*<sup>13</sup> אֶת עַמִּיתוֹ – The Torah states: *AND A MAN SHALL NOT WRONG HIS FELLOW.*<sup>14</sup> הַכְּתוּב מְדַבֵּר – THE VERSE IS DISCUSSING VERBAL WRONGING.

The Baraisa continues:  
אִתָּה אִמְרַתְּ בְּאִנְיָתְךָ דְּכָרִים – Do you indeed say that the verse deals with verbal wronging, או אינו אלא באנאת ממון – OR IS IT NOT RATHER dealing with monetary wronging (i.e. price fraud)?

The Baraisa answers:  
כִּי תִמְכְּרוּ מִמֶּכֶר לְעַמִּיתְךָ או קנה מיד עמיתך – WHEN [THE VERSE] STATES:<sup>15</sup> *IF YOU SELL SOMETHING TO YOUR FELLOW, OR BUY FROM THE HAND OF YOUR FELLOW, one man shall not wrong his brother,* הֲרֵי אֲנִי אֲנָתָה מִמֶּנּוּ אָמַר – WRONGING IN MONETARY MATTERS IS ALREADY MENTIONED. הא מה אני מקיים – HOW, THEN, DO I EXPLAIN the verse *AND A MAN SHALL NOT WRONG HIS FELLOW?* – It must deal with verbal wronging.

The Baraisa cites several examples of verbal wronging:  
כִּי יָבִיעַ – HOW SO? אם היתה בעל תשובה – IF SOMEONE WAS A PENITENT, זכור מעשיך הראשונים – REMEMBER YOUR PAST DEEDS.<sup>16</sup> אם הוא בן גרים – IF SOMEONE WAS DESCENDED FROM PROSELYTES, זכור מעשה אבותיך – ONE SHOULD NOT SAY TO HIM, REMEMBER THE DEEDS OF YOUR FOREFATHERS.<sup>17</sup> זכור מעשה אבותיך – IF SOMEONE WAS A PROSELYTE WHO CAME TO STUDY TORAH, זכור מעשה אבותיך – ONE SHOULD NOT SAY TO HIM: REMEMBER THE DEEDS OF YOUR FOREFATHERS.<sup>18</sup>

Is it appropriate for a MOUTH THAT once ATE NEVEILOS AND TREIFOS,<sup>15</sup> VERMIN AND CRAWLING CREATURES – to now COME to learn TORAH THAT WAS COMMUNICATED BY THE MOUTH OF THE ALMIGHTY? אם היו יסורין באין עליו – IF SOMEONE HAD SUFFERING VISITED UPON HIM, אם היו חלאים באין עליו – OR IF SOMEONE HAD DISEASES VISITED UPON HIM, או שהיה מקבר את אל יאמר לו בדרך – OR IF SOMEONE BURIED HIS CHILDREN, או שהיה מקבר את אל יאמר לו בדרך – ONE SHOULD NOT SAY TO HIM IN THE WAY THAT THE COLLEAGUES OF JOB SAID TO HIM:<sup>16</sup> *הלא יראתך בקלתך תקנותך ותם דרכיך זכר נא מי הוא נקי אבד* – *COULD NOT YOUR FEAR [OF HASHEM] HAVE GIVEN YOU YOUR CONFIDENCE, YOUR HOPE, THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR WAYS? DO RECALL WHO IS THE INNOCENT THAT WAS EVER LOST WITHOUT A TRACE.*<sup>17</sup> אם היו המרים מבקשין תבואה ממנו – IF DONKEY DRIVERS WERE SEEKING in search of work GRAIN FROM SOMEONE so that they could transport it, לא יאמר להם לכו אצל פלוני שהוא מוכר תבואה – HE SHOULD NOT SAY TO THEM, "GO TO SO-AND-SO WHO SELLS GRAIN," ויודע בו שלא מבר מעולם – WHEN HE KNOWS THAT [THIS PERSON] NEVER SOLD GRAIN in his life. רבי יהודה אומר – R' YEHUDAH SAYS: אף לא יתלה עיניו על המקח בשעה שאין לו רמים – A PERSON SHOULD NOT even EYE MERCHANDISE WHEN HE DOES NOT HAVE MONEY to buy it.

The Baraisa notes that the Torah juxtaposes the prohibition against verbal wronging with the obligation to fear God, and explains why:

לְכָל דָּבָר – FOR THE MATTER<sup>18</sup> DEPENDS ON a person's INTENT, which is hidden from other mortals.<sup>19</sup> וְלְכָל דָּבָר – AND concerning ANY MATTER THAT DEPENDS ON THE

## NOTES

9. [One should not ask a merchant the price of his wares, giving the impression that he wishes to make a purchase, if he actually has no intention of buying.] *Meiri* explains why this constitutes *onaah* (verbal wronging): Having inquired about the price, the potential "buyer" will be too embarrassed to tell the merchant that he never intended to buy the article. Instead, he will simply walk away from the item without saying anything, thereby implying that it is not worth the asking price. When other buyers hear about this, the merchant might be forced to lower the price, and he will thus suffer a monetary loss because of the would-be customer's behavior. Moreover, even if no other customer sees what this would-be customer has done, the merchant still suffers unnecessary trouble and anguish.

10. This is in no way related to business transactions. Here, he wrongs the person by embarrassing him (*Meiri*).

11. We may not even mention his ancestor's deeds, let alone his own past deeds (*Tosafos*; cf. *Maharsha* and *Pnei Yehoshua*).

12. *Exodus* 22:20. *Mechilta* ad loc. explains that *לֹא תוֹחָה*, you shall not wrong, forbids verbal wronging (whereas *וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ*, and you shall not oppress him, refers to price fraud). *Rashi* ad loc. cites the verse in *Isaiah* 49:26 as a precedent for Scriptural use of the term *אֲנָתָה* (or derivatives of it) to mean verbal wronging.

13. *Leviticus* 25:17.

14. *Ibid.* v. 14.

15. *Neveilos* (sing. *nevelah*) – carcasses of animals or birds that were not slaughtered according to the procedure prescribed by the Torah.

*Treifos* (sing. *treifah*) – animals or birds possessing one of a well defined group of body defects that will result in their death within twelve months (see *Rambam*, *Hil. Ma'achalos Asuros* 4:6-9). The meat

of such an animal or bird is forbidden even if it is killed through ritual slaughter.

16. *Job* 4:6-7.

17. These verses record a portion of Eliphaz's speech to Job. After many tragedies befell Job, his friend Eliphaz set out (with two other friends) to comfort him (see *Job* 2:11), but after hearing Job's bitter reaction to his tragedies (*Job* ch. 3), Eliphaz chastised him (*Job* ch. 4): "You should have used your fear of God," declares Eliphaz, "to find confidence, hope, and integrity." "And remember," he added, "that innocent people are never utterly destroyed; if you were truly innocent, these tragedies would never have befallen you" (based on *Tosafos*; see *Maharsha*; cf. *Rashi* to *Job* 4:6 and *Ramban* in *Kisvei Ramban* ad loc.).

(Eliphaz says only that innocent people are not utterly destroyed. Clearly, he is not declaring that good people never suffer at all, which we know is untrue.)

[Our Gemara characterizes Eliphaz's harsh criticism of Job as *onaah*, verbal wronging. Apparently, a person suffering tragic losses lacks the capacity to react constructively if he is told that his troubles are a result of his own evil deeds. Accordingly, this type of criticism hurts the person for no useful purpose, and it is therefore considered *onaah*. If someone wants to genuinely help the suffering person, he can gently remind him to examine his deeds (see *Berachos* 5b).]

18. I.e. of saying or doing something that can be construed as "verbal" *onaah*.

19. That is, if the person had an innocent reason to say or do what he did (e.g. he thought that he was sending the donkey driver to someone who did sell grain, he thought that he might buy the merchandise he was eyeing), then his action is perfectly proper, but if he does so disingenuously, it constitutes *onaah* (*Rashi*).

person's INTENT, "וְנִרְאָתָּ מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ" - IT IS STATED:  
AND YOU SHALL FEAR YOUR GOD.<sup>[20]</sup>

The Gemara cites some Tannaic teachings about the gravity of verbal wrongdoing:

R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Shimon ben Yochai: גדול אונאת דברים מאונאת קמון - Verbal wronging is a greater sin than monetary wronging (i.e. price fraud). שנה נאמר בו, וְנִרְאָתָּ מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ" - For concerning this, i.e. verbal wronging, it is stated: *And you shall fear your God*, וְהָאֵלֹהִים לֹא נִרְאָתָּ בוּ, וְנִרְאָתָּ מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ" - And R' Elazar says that verbal wronging is more serious for another reason: זה כגומו - This (i.e. verbal wronging) affects his (the victim's) very self, וְהָאֵלֹהִים לֹא נִרְאָתָּ בוּ - whereas this (i.e. monetary wronging) affects only his (the victim's) money.<sup>[21]</sup> רבי שמואל - R' Shmuel bar Nachmani said: בר נהמני אמר - With this, i.e. monetary wronging, restitution is possible; וְהָאֵלֹהִים לֹא נִרְאָתָּ בוּ - but with this, i.e. verbal wronging, restitution is not possible.<sup>[22]</sup>

The Gemara cites another example of verbal wronging and discusses its severity:

A Tanna taught the following Baraisa in the presence of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: כל - IF ANYONE MAKES HIS FRIEND'S FACE TURN WHITE from shame IN PUBLIC, - IT IS AS IF HE HAS SPILLED BLOOD, i.e. murdered the friend. אמר ליה - He [Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak] said to [the Tanna]: שפיר קא דחתינא ליה דאזיל סומקא - What you are saying is right, וְנִרְאָתָּ מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ - because I have seen how the red coloring leaves the face of an embarrassed person and his face turns white.<sup>[24]</sup>

The Gemara continues to discuss this idea:

במערכא - Abaye said to Rav Dimi: אמר ליה אבוי לרב דימי אמר - About what are they careful in the West?<sup>[25]</sup> אמר ליה - [Rav Dimi] answered him: באחורוי אפי - They are careful about not embarrassing people.<sup>[26]</sup> ר' חנניא - For R' Chanina said: הכל יורדיו לגיהנום חוץ משלשה - All descend to Gehinnom except for three.

The Gemara interrupts its presentation of R' Chanina's statement with a clarifying remark:

הכל סלקא דעתך - Can it even enter your mind that literally all descend to Gehinnom? That is surely impossible! אלא אימא - Rather, say: כל היורדיו לגיהנום עולים חוץ משלשה - All those who descend to Gehinnom soon ascend except for three, שיוורדיו נאין עולין - who descend but do not ascend.<sup>[27]</sup>

The Gemara now resumes its presentation of R' Chanina's teaching:

והבא על אשת איש - Someone who cohabits with another man's wife, והמלבין פני חברו ברבים - and someone who makes his friend's face turn white from shame in public, ונהמנה שם רע לחבירו - and someone who calls his friend an embarrassing nickname.<sup>[28]</sup>

The Gemara asks: *But nicknaming is the same as embarrassing. Why are these counted separately?*

The Gemara explains: *Even if someone is used to being called by his nickname and does not turn white upon hearing it, still it is a grievous sin to call him by that name.*<sup>[29]</sup>

The Gemara elaborates on what a serious sin it is to embarrass someone in public: אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן - Rabbah bar bar Chanah said in the name of R' Yochanan:

## NOTES

20. See, for example, *Leviticus* 19:14,32;25:36,43. See also *Rashi* ad loc.

The Baraisa explains why the obligation to fear God was juxtaposed with the prohibition against verbal *onaah*. When someone inflicts verbal *onaah* upon his friend, he can easily excuse himself by saying that he was sincere and meant well. Thus, it is only fear of God that will prevent a person from inflicting *onaah*, for only He knows what a person is thinking. For this reason the Torah writes: Fear God, Who knows whether you intended to help your friend or to hurt him (*Rashi*).

21. *Maharsha* explains why this makes verbal *onaah* more serious than monetary *onaah*. When a person defrauds, he does so in spite of the fact that other people realize what he is doing. But when someone inflicts verbal *onaah*, which he can justify to the public (see previous note), he indicates that he fears public opinion but not God. This is a most grievous sin (see also *Berachos* 28b).

22. And many people are more hurt by verbal wronging than by monetary loss (see *Sefer HaChinuch* §338).

23. That is, money can be replaced, but the pain caused by verbal wronging cannot be undone.

24. [Thus, his blood has been taken from him.]

Although a person generally turns red when he is embarrassed, this is because the blood gathers in his face before draining from it (*Tosafos*).

25. I.e. in Eretz Yisrael, which was to the west of Babylonia (modern-day Iraq). [For an explanation of why Abaye was especially interested about the practices of Eretz Yisrael, see *Ben Yehoyada*.]

26. Literally: turning faces white.

27. I.e. they do not ascend soon after descending but rather remain in Gehinnom for a long time (see *Eruvin* 19a and *Tosafos* here; cf. *Meiri*).

28. Literally: a bad nickname. When someone is called by such a nickname, he is generally embarrassed. Therefore, the punishment for using such a nickname is as severe as for embarrassing someone. For an explanation of why a person is punished so severely for these three particular sins, see *Ritva* and *Pnei Yehoshua*.

29. Although the person called by the nickname has grown used to it and it no longer embarrasses him so, still the one who used it intended to embarrass him, and this is a grievous sin (*Rashi*; *Maharsha* maintains, however, that using the nickname is forbidden because this is similar to slandering him; see also *Tosafos* to *Megillah* 27b ולא רייהו).

## WHEN TO SAY NOTHING

Just as one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so is one commanded *not* to say that which will *not* be heeded.

—Babylonian Talmud, *Yevamot* 65b

Rabbi Israel of Vishnitz was in the habit of strolling with his *gabbai* [assistant] for a half hour every evening. On one such occasion, they stopped in front of the house of a certain wealthy bank manager. The man was known to be a *maskil*, a follower of the "Enlightenment" movement, i.e., anything but a follower of the rebbe. Rabbi Israel knocked on the door and, when a servant opened it, entered the house. The puzzled *gabbai*, without asking a word, followed the rebbe inside.

The bank manager received his distinguished guest respectfully and politely. The rebbe took the seat that was offered him, and sat for quite some time without saying a word. Knowing that protocol would deem it impertinent to ask the rebbe directly the reason for his visit, the host whispered his question to the rebbe's assistant, but the *gabbai* simply shrugged his shoulders. After a good while, the rebbe rose to leave, and bade his host farewell. The bank manager accompanied him to the door and, his understandable curiosity getting the better of him, asked: "Could you please explain to me, rebbe, why you honored me with a visit?"

"I went to your house in order to fulfill a mitzvah," the rebbe replied, "and thank God I was able to fulfill it."

"And which mitzvah was that?" asked the confused bank manager.

"Our Sages teach that 'Just as one is commanded to say that which will be listened to, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be listened to.' Now if I remain in my house and you remain in yours, what kind of mitzvah is it that I refrain from telling you 'that which will not be listened to'? In order to fulfill the mitzvah prop-

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erly, one obviously has to go to the house of the person who will not listen, and *there* refrain from speaking to him. And that is exactly what I did."

"Perhaps, rebbe," said the bank manager, "you would be so good to tell me what this thing is? Who knows, perhaps I *will* listen?"

"I am afraid you won't," said the rebbe.

The longer the rebbe refused, the greater grew the curiosity of the other to know the secret: he continued to press the rebbe to reveal "that which would not be listened to."

"Very well," said the rebbe finally. "A certain penniless widow owes your bank quite a sum for the mortgage of her house. Within a few days, your bank is going to dispose of her house by public sale, and she will be out on the street. I had wanted to ask you to overlook her debt, but didn't, because of the mitzvah of 'not saying . . .'"

"But what do you expect me to do?" asked the bank manager in amazement. "Surely you realize that the debt is not owed to me personally, but to the bank, and I am only its manager, and not its owner, and the debt runs into several hundreds, and if . . ."

"It's exactly as I said all along," the rebbe interrupted, "that you would not want to hear."

With that he ended the conversation and walked away.

The bank manager went back into his house, but the rebbe's words found their way into his heart and gave him no rest until he paid the widow's debt out of his own pocket.

—Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah*, pages 189–191; I have based the above on Uri Kaploun's translation of Rabbi Zevin's rendering of the tale.