

23) Drinking alcohol is very bad. This is because everything in this world – whether in mundane or spiritual matters – requires intelligence, as it is written (Mishlei, 24:4), “... through intelligence the rooms are filled...” Every clever person must act with intelligence, and he must wage a strategic war against his evil inclination in order to serve his Creator and to cleave to Him. A contemplative person discovers the upright path which a man must

choose in order to do that which is good and straight in the eyes of G-d and men. The sage (VaYikra Rabbah 1:6) already declared, “If you lack intelligence, what have you truly acquired? If you acquired intelligence, what do you lack?!” Due to our sins, we are very impoverished, and we do not have adequate knowledge and understanding to know either the upright path in which we should go or the action we should take. If we drink intoxicating beverages and our minds become even more confused, who are we, and what is the value of our lives? This is tantamount to a person committing suicide. Without intelligence, a person acts incorrectly – either overdoing things or not doing enough. The evil of drinking and drunkenness is that a person’s eyes are completely covered – and everyone knows it. Whoever wanders in intoxication is drained of intelligence. People who straighten their paths and desire that all of their actions should be perfect withdraw their hands from drinking alcohol.

24) Controversy is very despicable and bad in the eyes of G-d. It causes many other evils, troubles, and severe sins. On the other hand, peace is profound, especially domestic peace between a husband and wife – to the degree that it was permitted to erase G-d’s holy name in order to restore peace between spouses. Praise is not due a man whose wife and family members make their wills like his will, and with whom he is at peace. However, in this case a man should be praised – when his household members or other people stir up a dispute with him, anger him to his face, or disparage his honor, etc. and yet he loves peace, seeks peace, pursues peace, distances controversy and pushes it away with two hands! This individual is beloved Above and desired below. Fortunate is he in this world and it will be good for him in the World to Come! G-d

grants his reward in accord with his deeds. How good is his portion and how pleasant is his lot!

25) A person should distance himself from any unbecoming matter or anything similar to it. Do not give anyone the opportunity to suspect you, in order that no guilt is cast upon you. “One who causes another person to sin is worse than one who kills him.” (BaMidbar Rabbah 21:4) And it is written (BaMidbar 32:22), “... and you should be blameless before G-d and Israel...”, and you should find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and men. Everything depends on the nature of the person, the place, the time, and the circumstances. In regard to something which one must do in order to satisfy a Heavenly responsibility, he should not be concerned with the mockery of scoffers, and he should not take to heart what others say about him. Such concern is an ignoble root which yields damage and injury to the soul. The majority of troubles that a person encounters results from his desire to be respected in the eyes of other people. It is pure vanity. What effect does it have on a man if one thousand people honor him or speak badly about him and disgrace him? Does his flesh feel pain? A living man must take to heart that if he is respected Above, why should he care about the imaginary honor of a human being, who is compared to nothingness? And if a man is despised and scorned Above, what will the honor of wayward spirits offer or add to him? Everything is vanity and the vexation of the spirit.

26) How careful a person must be not to hurt his friend with speech, action, looking, or hinting! He must neither do nor say anything for which there is even a one-in-a- thousand chance that it might cause pain to his friend. Behold, our Sages (Chagigah 5a) said on the verse (Kohelet, 12:14), “... and G-d brings all deeds

to justice – even all hidden things...”: “This refers to a person who kills a louse or spits in front of his friend and he is disgusted by it.” If a person is held accountable for pain that he did not intend to cause, how much more so is he accountable for the pain he intended to inflict! If you say, “As he did to me, I will do to him; I will repay the evil-doer with his own evil!” – behold, you violate the Torah’s proscriptions (VaYikra, 19:18), “Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge...” If the perpetrator is an evil man, and Heaven has wrought this punishment through him – as the words of the verse (Shmuel I, 24:14), “Evil emanates from evil men...” – why should one, by virtue of his retaliation, become an evil man like him? And if you say, “I am just joking around...” – behold, you are messing around with your blood and your life like “Someone who exhausts himself throwing firebrands...” (Mishlei, 26:18) Therefore, be careful and vigilant that people’s dispositions towards you are favorable. Love your neighbor as yourself, with extra affection – this is a great principle in the Torah.

27) A man must be especially careful not to hurt his wife, even with words – because since her tears are easily elicited, the retribution for her suffering is imminent. Go and learn from a story told in the Talmud (Ketubot, 62b) about a pious man who was accustomed to come home every eve of Yom Kippur. One year he came late, and his wife was pained and cried. The pious man died immediately. A man should tremble and be faint: If this is the punishment for someone who did not intend to inflict any pain, how much greater will be the retribution for someone who does intend to do so! Even if one’s wife is bad, lacks intelligence, angers him to his face, and makes the house expenses exorbitant, etc., understanding must come from the husband, and he must

guide her with pleasantness and pleasant speech. “A soft tongue breaks a bone.” (Mishlei, 25:15) In any case, the husband must bear the yoke with great patience, for domestic peace is so precious. He should honor his wife out of respect for the Divine Presence. These things are time-honored. One who does so finds rest in this world, and G-d commands His blessing upon him. His reward is with him, and his accomplishments go ahead of him to the World to Come. He will stand in a ray of light. According to one’s pain is his gain.