

# The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

## PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Va'eschanan

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### PRAYING IN THE MOMENT

#### Reb Noson of Nemirov

*"And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying..." (3:23)*

Specifically, "at that time." Moshe knew that each time is different. The way a person feels today is different from the way he felt yesterday and the way he will feel tomorrow. Moshe always pleaded with G-d according to how he felt at the specific moment.

### NEVER BACK DOWN

#### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying..." (3:23)*

The Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni 31) tells us that when Moshe was told by Hashem that he would not be allowed to enter into Eretz Yisrael, he immersed himself in prayer. After the 515<sup>th</sup> request, Hashem commanded him to stop, because with one more prayer, Hashem would have been obligated to annul His decree.

In life we always try to do our best. The question is, is our best really our best? If Moshe would have asked to be let into Eretz Yisrael and been rejected, perhaps that would have been considered "his best"; after all, he tried very hard and received a "no." Perhaps after 100 times, he would have considered that he had done "his best." After all, after pleading with Hashem 100 times, one could certainly say that he exhausted all options. Yet, Moshe continued until he was specifically told to stop praying.

How many times do we put in great effort toward attaining a goal without succeeding? We tell ourselves that we tried our best; we put in all possible effort. Yet, in truth, our best is only attained once we make a diligent appraisal of our goal and then push ourselves out of our comfort zone to achieve it. Unless we have reached that point, perhaps we have not truly tried our best.

Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg related the following true story about a boy he knows who didn't give up.

There was a young boy called Yossele who lived with his mother. Ever since his father passed away, there was very little money in the house, and Yossele had to work from a very young age. Toward the time of his bar mitzvah, his mother told him about his obligation to learn Torah, and Yossele immediately ran to the cheder to be accepted.

He met the principal and asked to be enrolled. The principal asked him which Gemara he can be tested on, but Yossele said that he knew no Gemara. "Then which Mishnayos do you know?" asked the principal. But Yossele said that he knew no Mishnayos. "Then what can I test you on?" asked the bewildered principal. "You can test me on siddur. We only have a siddur at home, and I know it very well," answered Yossele.

### GRATUITOUS GIFTS

#### Kotzker Rebbe

*"And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying..." (3:23)*

Although the righteous may properly make a claim to a reward on the basis of their good deeds, they solicit it from the Omnipresent only as an ex-gratia gift. (Rashi)

It never even occurs to authentically righteous people that they have done anything good. How, then, could they support their claim to any reward by citing a record of their past good deeds?

Actually, the righteous may base their claims on the good deeds that they may perform in the future, if they are preserved in life. Nevertheless, they do not approach G-d with that plea but solicit their reward only as an ex-gratia gift.

Moshe, too, could have based his claim for a reward on the good deed that he expected to perform in the event he would live to enter the Promised Land, fulfilling the commandment to "cleave to the Land." Nevertheless, he didn't request anything of G-d. He only "pleaded" to Him, praying for an ex-gratia gift.

## **BOUNDLESS KINDNESS**

### **Divrei Shmuel**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

Moshe prayed his heart out to Hashem “at that time” - at the time of prayer. Each and every time a person prays, he hopes for a positive response from Hashem. However, there are times when he has merits to deserve such a response, and at other times, unfortunately, he does not. This is why Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for *“matnas chinam”* - a free gift. For Hashem’s kindness knows no bounds or time limitations.

## **HEARTFELT PRAYERS**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

The perseverance and intensity with which Moshe Rabbeinu davened to be allowed into Eretz Yisrael serves as a model for us of true prayer. Tefillah is known as *avodah sheb’lev* - an “exercise” of the heart. It is meant to be an emotional, realistic and heartfelt experience, not just an intellectual one. When a Jew prays, he should feel Hashem’s presence and talk to Him as if he were speaking with another person.

Moshe tells the Jewish people how he poured out his heart to Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael, and yet Hashem said no. Moshe tried everything. He prayed 515 different tefillos, the numerical value of ואתחנן (“And I pleaded”), until Hashem told him, “Moshe, stop praying! You may not enter the land.”

This outcome may seem harsh, but Hashem was only thinking about the good of His children. Hashem knew that if Moshe entered the land, he would immediately build a *Beis HaMikdash* that would contain such immense holiness that it could never be destroyed. And then when the Jews would sin, Hashem would be forced to destroy them, since He would not be able to destroy the *Beis HaMikdash* in their place. Thus, the greatest kindness from Hashem to the Jewish people was that Moshe did not enter Eretz Yisrael!

So why do we pray? If Hashem will, in any case, do what is best, what does prayer accomplish? This is a crucial question, and the answer is even more crucial. In this parshah, Moshe teaches us that the purpose of prayer is not getting what we want or what we ask for. Of course, when we pray, we beg Hashem for what we want, and very often, Hashem answers those prayers and our requests are fulfilled. However, when we don’t get what we asked for, we must realize that our prayers are never in vain, since the true purpose of prayer is to become close to Hashem.

When we pray, plead, and pour out our hearts and innermost desires and feelings to Hashem, we develop a genuine and unbreakable bond with our Father in Heaven. This closeness is greater than anything in the world we could possibly ask for. (Dargah Yeseirah)

## **GRATUITOUS GIFTS**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

*Va’etchanan* (ואתחנן, I pleaded) comes from the root *Chanan* (חנן, gracious), signifying an undeserved gift. Although tzaddikim have many merits, they plead to G-d to grant them their requests as undeserved gifts. (Rashi)

When a person desires something from G-d, he should pray to receive it solely as an undeserved gift, and not as payment commensurate with his deeds. Furthermore, he should not insist that G-d acquiesce to his prayer, but graciously accept G-d’s response, whether it be to grant his request or not. (See Likutey Moharan I, 20:5)

## **DON’T PROCRASTINATE**

### **Reb Naftali of Ropshitz**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

The Torah does not mention any specific time. This is to point out that one should never say that he had no time, patience, or thought at that time, but at another time or when the occasion will arise, he will pray.

## **PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

The Kedushas Levi asks why the Torah adds the word *“leimor”* - saying. If Moshe was beseeching Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael, obviously he was speaking to Hashem! Why then does the Torah include the extra word *leimor*?

The Kedushas Levi explains that Moshe’s *tefillah* took place in two stages. First, Moshe davened to be able to daven. Moshe understood that before he could request the possibility to enter Eretz Yisrael, he had to daven to Hashem for the ability to daven in the first place.

Moshe recognized that tefillah is a privilege and that one must prepare to speak with the Creator of the world. A person shouldn’t run into shul. Rather, we must realize the incredible opportunity that we have of speaking to Hashem one-on-one.

We are currently transitioning from these last three weeks, the period of mourning over the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, to *Shabbos Nachamu*, when Hashem comforts us and gives us profound hope for what our relationship with Him could be.

Let us internalize the proper approach to davening that we learn from Moshe in order to connect to Hashem. Let us take this message to heart and spend a few minutes a day preparing for the amazing opportunity that tefillah provides us. If we follow this formula, we are sure to enhance our davening experience and deepen our relationship with Hashem.

## **IMMEDIATE LOVE**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

G-d’s love for the Jewish people is well-known. Everything that occurs is for the sake of the Jewish people. Everything that transpires from G-d is for their welfare. Although at the beginning of an event, the good may not be obvious, ultimately it will become clear that everything was for the good of the Jewish people. To that end, we ask G-d, “Show us, G-d, Your kindness” (Tehillim 85:8). We know that ultimately everything is for our benefit.

This is why we ask that this goodness should be seen immediately, at the very outset of what occurs. This, then, is the mystical allusion in the verse “I entreated G-d at that time, saying.” The word “saying” (לאמר) denotes love, as in the verse (Devarim 26:18) “G-d has selected you [האמירך].” We ask that G-d’s love for us, His kindness over us, should be revealed immediately.

## **UNTIL THE VERY END**

### **Kotzker Rebbe**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

Moshe begged Hashem that “at that time” - at the moment before his death - he should be able to say, “Hashem is G-d.”

## **PRAYING TO PRAY**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

The word "saying" seems to be redundant. The explanation would appear to be as follows:

Moshe first entreated God to enable him to pray. “Saying” refers to what he had wanted to ask, except that at first, he was unable to articulate it, since he was abashed before God. Therefore, Moshe had to entreat God to help him pray.

## **EVERY WORD IS HEARD**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying...” (3:23)*

If a person prays or meditates but feels that Hashem is not responding, G-d forbid, he should not despair and think that Hashem is not paying attention. He should have complete faith that He is listening to every word of prayer and supplication and no syllable is lost.

Each word of prayer makes an impression above and evokes Hashem’s mercy each time as long as the individual does not lose his faith under any circumstances. As the intent of his prayers becomes stronger, Hashem will turn to him and will fulfill his needs. (See Likutey Eitzos, p. 200)

## **STARTING ANEW**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“G-d, my Lord, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand...” (3:24)*

Moshe prayed as if he were just now starting to serve G-d. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 154)

## **SEEING THE GOOD**

### **Ohel Torah**

*“Let me go over, I pray You, and see the good Land...” (3:25)*

Isn’t it obvious that if Moshe went into the Land he would surely be able to see it? Yes, but we must pray at all times for G-d to cause us to see the good in everything.

Therefore, Moshe prayed: “Let me go over... and see the good Land” - cause me to see only the good side of the Promised Land.

## **THE GOOD LAND**

### **Kotzker Rebbe**

*“Let me go over, I pray You, and see the good Land...” (3:25)*

Why were the words “and see” used here? Is it not obvious that if he entered the land he would see it?

It was Moshe’s prayer that if he should enter the land that he should “see the good land,” not the land that the spies had seen as negative.

## **PERSISTENT PRAYER**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“But G-d turned Himself against me because of you, and would not listen to me. G-d said to me, ‘You are asking too much! Don’t speak to Me anymore about this!’” (3:26)*

The sages tell us that Moshe prayed 515 different prayers (this being the numerical value of the word for “I prayed” [ואתחנן]) before G-d told him to stop asking Him to enter the Land of Israel.

The lesson for us here - inasmuch as there is a “spark” of Moshe within each of us (Tanya, Ch. 42) - is that regardless of how much we have already beseeched G-d to redeem and return us to the Holy Land, we must not become disheartened (see Mishnah Torah, Teshuvah 7:5).

Furthermore, just as Moshe not only asked G-d to fulfill his prayer on the merit of all his good deeds, but beseeched Him to fulfill his request on account of His undeserved mercy, so must we both pray to G-d in the merit of the good deeds of all the Jewish people throughout history and beseech Him to answer us out of His undeserved mercy, redeeming us supernaturally, far beyond what we deserve. (Sefer HaSichot 5751, vol. 2, pp. 729-730) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky



## **BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"But G-d turned Himself against me because of you, and would not listen to me. G-d said to me, 'You are asking too much! Don't speak to Me anymore about this!'" (3:26)*

Some things are beyond a person's ability to understand. In such cases, one must remain silent, for "Silence is a fence for wisdom" (Avot 3:13).

Moshe could not understand why he did not merit to enter the Holy Land. The Jews had committed several serious sins in the desert, yet they had been forgiven. By comparison, Moshe's error at the Waters of Strife was very minor. Why shouldn't he be forgiven, too? Therefore, G-d told him, "You are asking too much! Don't ask questions that are beyond your ability to understand."

## **BRINGING OUT OUR BEST**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"[Observe the Land of Israel from Mount Nebo,] for you will not cross this Jordan River." (3:27)*

Had Moshe accompanied the people into the Promised Land, their entry would have been miraculous: they would have been led by the Clouds of Glory and the Pillar of Fire, and the nations occupying the land would have offered no resistance. But since Moshe did not accompany them into the land, the Israelites had to battle the Canaanite nations without relying on open miracles. Therefore, they had to be prepared for self-sacrifice.

This is the inner reason why G-d did not allow Moshe to cross the Jordan River along with the Jewish people. Our purpose is to bring Divinity into the world, which we accomplish first and foremost by bringing Divine consciousness into ourselves. In order to make ourselves capable of self-sacrifice, we have to internalize G-d's message and mission so deeply that they mean more to us than anything else, even our own lives.

Similarly, when confronted with life's challenges, we can more successfully overcome them when we recall that G-d presents them to us in order for us to test our inner strength and dedication to our ideals. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 57-58, 82; Sefer HaSichot 5751, pp. 741-743) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **FOLLOW THE RECIPE**

### **Reb Yehonoson Eibeshutz**

*"You shall not add to the word that I command you, neither shall you diminish from it, but keep the commandments of your G-d..." (4:2)*

The Torah is described as a "sam ha'chaim" - elixir of life, a medicine able to purify those who take it. Thus, we are warned not to add nor detract from the Torah's words - "you shall not add or take away." A medicine is a precise mixture of various substances, and changing the

proportions can have toxic effects. So, too, are the commandments of the Torah given in the exact and correct proportions, and to change even one single word can have a terrible and deleterious effect.

## **BEYOND LOGIC**

### **Alshich HaKadosh**

*"You shall not add to the word that I command you, neither shall you diminish from it... Your eyes have seen what Hashem did in Baal-Peor, for all the men that followed Baal-Peor, Hashem your G-d has destroyed them from your midst." (4:2-3)*

There are people who sin without intention of transgressing G-d's commandments. They simply allow their reason to persuade them that they are not actually violating a Divine law.

Therefore, the Torah admonishes the Jews: "You shall not add to the word... neither shall you diminish from it" - you shall neither add nor detract from the Torah's commandments according to the dictates of your reason because "your eyes have seen what G-d did in Baal-Peor." There, too, the Jews didn't intend to worship Baal-Peor; on the contrary, they only wanted to disgrace him, for Baal-Peor was worshipped by obscene acts. Yet "Hashem your G-d has destroyed them." This should teach you that you cannot alter the Torah's commandments - not even by a fraction of an inch according to the dictates of your own reason, for the Torah's logic is quite different from your own, and much loftier, and cannot be gauged by the human mind.

## **ALL FOR OUR SAKE**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"But you who cling to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day." (4:4)*

The Divine Name *Elokim*, translated as "G-d," denotes the root cause and the prime mover. The term "our G-d" indicates that everything that occurs is for the sake of the Jewish people. In this way, the Jewish people determine all matters.

On this basis we can answer the question posed by the earlier scholars on the verse (Devarim 6:4) "Hear, Yisrael: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." The phrase "Hashem is our G-d" seems superfluous. It should have simply said: "Hear, Yisrael: Hashem is One."

The explanation, however, is as follows: We declare that Hashem, Who is our G-d and the Cause of all causes, is One. Everything that happens, even if it appears irrelevant to us, is for our sake. The Jewish people unify G-d's holy Name so that it is revealed through our rectification of the worlds. We know with a consummate faith that everything that occurs is for our sake. This, then, is the deeper meaning of the verse "But you who cleave to Hashem, *your G-d*" - implying that everything that transpires is for our welfare.

## **AVAILABLE CONNECTION**

### **Kanfei Nesharim**

*“But you who clung to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.” (4:4)*

The achievement of an attachment to G-d by mankind has been regarded in various ways by philosophers. Some claim that, at best, we can attach ourselves to Him only indirectly, through an angel. Others believe that such attachment can be achieved only after death. Still others, although conceding that exceptional individuals can achieve it in life, insist that it is impossible for an entire people to attain this lofty moral level, and others say that it can be attained only after long years of struggle and toil.

However, none of the above views are in agreement with the Torah. It is written: “Hashem your G-d shall you follow... and to Him shall you cleave” (Devarim 13:5). This means that any Jew can achieve an intense level of attachment to G-d. The Sages (Tanna D’vei Eliyahu) say that even a male or female slave can reach the spirit of G-d and that he or she needs no more than one brief moment of sincerity to do so. It is written that “one can acquire his world within one hour.”

It is in order to refute all the false notions mentioned above that the Torah states: “But you who clung to Hashem your G-d.” This means that you - who can cleave to G-d directly, without need for an angel - “are alive.” You can connect with Him in your lifetime; there is no need to wait until after death. “Every one of you” - and not just exceptional individuals - can attain it “this day,” and it can happen even today if only you will listen to His voice.

## **RECEIVING VITALITY**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“But you who clung to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.” (4:4)*

The underlying principle here is as follows: It says (Eiruvin 22a) “Today [i.e., in this world], we observe the commandments; tomorrow [i.e., in the World to Come], we will receive the reward for so doing.” Thus, the main reward is received “tomorrow.” But when a person observes a commandment and studies the Torah, he receives vitality, and this kind of reward he receives even “today.” The vitality he receives springs from the fear that a person obtains by performing mitzvos and observing Torah. From this fear, he merits to obtain wisdom, as it says (Iyov 28:28), “Behold, the fear of G-d is wisdom.” Furthermore, it says (Koheles 7:12), “Wisdom gives life to its possessor.”

This, then, is the explanation of the verse “But you who cleave to Hashem, your G-d,” indicating that when a person cleaves to G-d, his principal reward will be given “tomorrow.” However, from the observance of mitzvos, he will be infused with vitality “today.” This is why it says, “All of you are alive.” The energy generated by keeping the mitzvos and learning Torah is received “this day.”

## **CLEAVING TO HASHEM**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“But you who clung to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.” (4:4)*

Moshe urges the people to follow the rules of the Torah as they enter their new land and avoid being tempted by outside influences. Moshe ends by famously proclaiming that “You who cleave to the Lord your G-d are alive, all of you, today” (4:4). Whoever is reading this is clearly alive, so why state the obvious, and what is the overall meaning of the exclamation? Also, why is there a double reference to G-d?

The Ohr HaChaim suggests a beautiful flow and significance to this pasuk. If one starts by clinging “to the Lord” with mere actions (first reference to G-d), that person will find that G-d will become “your G-d” (second reference to G-d), a causality which will lead to feeling altogether more alive and in the present.

Having our actions dictated by a higher and noble purpose will prompt more awareness, enabling us to appreciate and enjoy the gift of the present.

## **TRULY UNIQUE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“But you who clung to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.” (4:4)*

One might think that the more we are devoted to G-d, the more our personal individuality disappears. The Torah teaches us here that the opposite is true: Our true individuality depends directly upon the depth of our attachment to G-d. What we normally mistake for our personality is really our secondary, animalistic side. Since we share the same animal drives with the rest of humanity, the personality born of these drives is, at best, a variation on the common theme by which everyone lives. Thus, the apparent individuality of this aspect of our personality is in fact an illusion.

In contrast, since G-d is infinite, the avenues through which His Divinity can manifest itself through us are also infinite; thus, it is only our Divine personality that makes us truly unique. It follows that the more we allow the animalistic side of our personalities to dissolve as we draw closer to G-d, the more we allow our unique, Divine personalities to shine forth. (Siddur im Dach 82cd) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **DIVINE SUSTENANCE**

### **Degel Machaneh Ephraim**

*“But you who clung to Hashem your G-d are alive, every one of you, this day.” (4:4)*

Our holy books say that the 248 words that comprise the *Shema* give sustenance to the 248 organs that are found in the human being.

Actually, in the three paragraphs of the *Shema* there are 247 words, but if we attach the word *emet* (truth), which has the same letters as the word *atem* (you), at the end of the *Shema*, we then say *Hashem Elokeychem Emet* - "Hashem your G-d is truth." Then we are able to sustain our bodily organs, for "you are alive today."

## **TORAH GUIDANCE**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"You will safeguard and preform [them] for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." (4:6)*

Mashal: A distraught woman once came to the Beis HaLevi, R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt'l (also called by the nickname R' Yoshe Ber).

"Please Rabbi," she cried, "my husband is gone - he just disappeared - and I don't know where he is! I'm worried that something terrible may have happened to him. Please, help me, Rabbi. I don't know what to do. I don't know if he's even alive!"

"Yes, he is alive," R' Yoshe Ber answered,

This was a great relief to hear. But she persisted. "Is he okay? Could he have been kidnapped and/or forcibly converted?" she sobbed.

"No," said the Beis HaLevi, "he did not convert."

"Well, is he coming back?" She looked hopeful.

Without hesitation, R' Yoshe Ber said, "He will come back." And a few days later, he did just that!

"A miracle from the Rabbi," cried the townspeople, but R' Yoshe Ber didn't see what the fuss was all about. "There was no miracle," he said, "just simple halachic logic. In *Halacha*, every living person is presumed to remain alive (*chezkas chaim*) so I knew he was alive. Every Jew is presumed to remain righteous (*chezkas kashrus*) so I knew he didn't convert."

"But how did Rabbi know he was coming back?" The Beis HaLevi shrugged. "If he's alive, well and a righteous Jew - why wouldn't he come back?!"

Nimshal: The Torah contains wisdom, knowledge, understanding and, of course, basic logic. It takes a righteous Jew who uses the Torah as his guide, to see the miracles of everyday life play out.

## **TRANSCENDING TIME**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"You will safeguard and preform [them] for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." (4:6)*

"Your wisdom and your understanding" - this is the mystery of intercalation (the synchronization of the lunar and solar calendars). (Shabbat 75a)

The Jewish people are above time, yet they must calculate each day and month to the second in order to establish the Festivals at their proper times. Intercalation itself is not a great mystery. The real mystery is how the Jews use those Festivals to transcend the limits of time, drawing close to the One Who is above time. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 162)

## **TRUE WISDOM**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"You will safeguard and preform [them] for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." (4:6)*

Moshe instructs the Jews to follow the *chukim*, statutes (laws without a logical explanation) and *mishpatim*, ordinances (laws with known rational explanations) as G-d presented them. The following pasuk then adds, "This is your wisdom in the eyes of people, who will hear these statutes and say, 'Only this nation is wise and understanding'" (4:6). If others consider us wise, why wouldn't we only follow laws with logical explanations rather than those that elude logic? Also, why does it matter what others think of us, let alone our laws?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky proposes specifically following the unexplained laws that set Jews apart because it demonstrates faith in G-d and a commitment to His laws. Understanding that something is beyond our comprehension is a sign of intelligence, and it serves us to decouple our actions from our limited ability to grasp their relative rationale or intrinsic benefit.

G-d's mandates are for our ultimate benefit, and recognizing this will only intensify our faith and demonstrate to the world that, in doing so, we are fulfilling a higher purpose.

## **SOURCE OF WISDOM**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"You will safeguard and preform [them, i.e., the statutes] for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." (4:6)*

Hashem offered the Torah - His most cherished possession to His most beloved nation, and we willingly accepted it, unlike the other nations of the world. From that moment on, our mission as a nation has been to fulfill the Divine Will. If so, why does the pasuk suggest that the purpose of mitzvah observance is to "display your wisdom and your understanding before the nations"?

The Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv zt'l explains that in order for a person to completely fulfill the Torah, he must acquire spiritual wisdom as well as wisdom pertaining to worldly matters. In fact, the Vilna Gaon zt'l points out in his commentary to Mishlei, that in order for a judge to render correct rulings in a civil case, he must be an expert in human nature, insightful of the various

personality types, deceptive tactics of dishonest people, and the schemes of thieves. It is impossible for him to render a just verdict if he is unaware of the machinations of the human mind and refuses to look beneath the surface. Furthermore, Chazal teach us that human decency and etiquette precede the study of Torah. So how can one take the time to learn Torah if he is not properly attuned to the ways of the world and the actions of human beings?

The aforementioned pasuk teaches us that the Torah itself is a complete resource of worldly wisdom. The study of Torah enables one to achieve a broad understanding of both religious and worldly wisdom. Hence, the pasuk is interpreted as follows: "For that [displays] your wisdom and your understanding before the nations," - the Torah is consistent with the highest levels of wisdom, even compared to those of other nations.

## **ACCEPTING ALL CALLS**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*"For what great nation is there that has a G-d Who is so close to them like Hashem our G-d whenever we call to Him?" (4:7)*

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos, 9) comments on this pasuk: "When a human being has a relative - if he is wealthy, then he acknowledges him, but if he is poor, he denies it. The Almighty, however, is not this way. Rather, even when Yisrael falls to the lowest depths, He calls them 'My brothers and friends.'"

When somebody tries to get our attention, or to befriend us, our reaction, often, depends on that person's socioeconomic status. If he is wealthy or famous, or has a large number of "friends" and "followers," then we are happy and eager to connect with that person and give him our time and attention. But if he is poor or relatively unknown, we aren't interested. We are disinclined to get to know the person, or to acknowledge our familial relationship.

For Hashem, none of this matters. When we call out to Him for help, when we seek a relationship with Him, He doesn't look at our bank account, at our social standing, at the number of our social media contacts, at our professional resume, or even at our spiritual level. There is only one thing that matters to Him, that He takes into consideration, as taught to us by a pasuk which we recite several times each and every day (during *Ashrei*) - "Hashem is near to all who call to Him, to all who call to Him honestly" (Tehillim 145:18). Hashem is interested in what we have to say on only one condition: that we speak to Him באמת, with sincerity, that our cries are authentic.

We should never feel unworthy of Hashem's love, compassion, or attention. "Whenever we call to Him." As long as we approach Him honestly, with sincerity, genuinely seeking to connect to Him, then He is קרוב, He draws near, mercifully and attentively listening to our tefillos and giving us His attention.

## **BIRTH PANGS**

### **Sefas Emes**

*"For what great nation is there that has a G-d Who is so close to them like Hashem our G-d whenever we call to Him?" (4:7)*

An explanation is brought by the Midrash on the pasuk "G-d will answer you in the day of trouble" (Tehillim 20:2) that can be applied to the above pasuk as well. The Midrash offers the parable of a woman who sits on the labor stool. "They say to her: 'May He who answered your mother answer you.'"

The Midrash asks: "Why is it written 'in the day of trouble'? Day implies light, generally symbolizing the opposite of trouble. Wouldn't it have been more fitting, then, to say in the night of trouble?" The Midrash answers: "This teaches us that any trouble that may come to the Jewish people bears the seed of happiness in it. Just like the pains of a woman in labor are only a prelude to the happiness of a baby's birth, so too, the pains and sufferings of the Jews are simply precursors for their deliverance."

We say to a woman in labor: "May He Who answered your mother answer you." Childbirth entails suffering; your mother suffered before giving birth to you. And just as her suffering ended in the birth of her child, so, too, the pain you are feeling now will serve to bring a new life into this world.

Similarly, the sufferings of Jews will carry salvation and deliverance in their wake.

This is the pasuk's meaning: "What great nation is there that has a G-d who is so close to it?" Even the sterner aspects of Divine judgment are not intended to show that G-d has cast off the Jewish people, but are meant only to bring the Jews closer to their Creator. For any deliverance must be preceded by sufferings, by the Mashiah's "birth pangs," as it were.

As the pasuk says, "this is a time of trouble for Yaakov and he will be saved from it." It is "from it," from this very trouble, that salvation will spring forth.

## **GREATNESS OF PRAYER**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"For what great nation is there that has a G-d Who is so close to them like Hashem our G-d whenever we call to Him?" (4:7)*

"Great" - this indicates prayer, as our Sages state: "Tell me, please, of the great things Elisha has accomplished" (II Melachim 8:4). That which Elisha accomplished, he accomplished through prayer." (Megillah 27a)

The greatness of the Jewish nation lies in the fact that G-d hears our prayers and changes the natural order for us. (See Likutey Moharan I, 250:4)

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G-d is good for all. (Tehillim 145:9)

When a person believes that “G-d is good for all” - that He can always be called upon to fulfill all of one’s needs for health, livelihood, children, and so on - then the main focus of his efforts will be for G-d rather than pursuing all kinds of strategies.

A person who does not believe in G-d, however, must practice all kinds of strategies. For example, if he is sick, he must try to find all sorts of medicines. And there are times when the particular medicines he needs are not available in his country, whereas those medicines that are available are useless for his illness. G-d, however, is “good for all” illnesses - to heal them. And He is always available. (See Likutey Moharan I, 14:11)

## **GUARDS FOR ALL GENERATIONS**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“Be vigilant and guard your soul very much, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and remove it from your heart; and you shall make it known to your children and your grandchildren.” (4:9)*

*Bitul* (self-nullification before G-d) is one of the highest goals of the spiritual seeker. Yet even after attaining *bitul*, one must return to his corporeal state, and he can even forget the G-dliness he has “seen” and experienced. (As an example, the Jews ascended to the level of seeing G-d at the Revelation at Sinai, yet shortly afterwards, they plummeted to the level of idolatry with the golden calf.)

Therefore, the Torah warns: “Guard yourself... or else you will forget.” One must constantly purify his mind to make it worthy of retaining the impressions of holiness and G-dliness that he has achieved. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 236a)

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If one is a Torah scholar, as is his son and grandson, the Torah will not cease from his descendants. (Bava Metzia 85a; cf. Kiddushin 30a)

The more people who accept the truth of G-d, the more G-d’s Name is exalted. Through our children, we can transmit the knowledge of G-d to future generations. Just as the beginning, middle and end of everything must be truth, we accept the knowledge of G-d upon ourselves, our children and our grandchildren (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 31a-32a). For Judaism must be transmitted from generation to generation. (ibid., III, p. 110)

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The Torah describes three levels: you, your children, and your grandchildren. Rebbe Nachman teaches that a person should strive to develop three “points” each day. One is the point of the tzaddik - one should speak to a tzaddik or a teacher each day. The second is the point of a friend - one should speak to a friend each day. The third is the person’s own point - one should speak out his heart before G-d each day, developing a personal relationship with his Creator.

Studying Torah by yourself is equivalent to developing your personal point. Studying with your child is equivalent to developing the point of a friend, for you have someone else to converse with and study with. Studying Torah with a grandchild is equivalent to developing the all-encompassing point of the tzaddik. This is understood from the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov - a father, a son and a grandson, representing all three points. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 55a)

## **PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH**

### **Reb Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno**

*“Be vigilant and guard your soul very much, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and remove it from your heart; and you shall make it known to your children and your grandchildren.” (4:9)*

There are people who care only about their children’s level of spirituality but completely ignore how they themselves are acting. The Torah warns a person to be very vigilant in how he is acting and following the precepts of the Torah, lest he removes this from his heart and only focuses on making it known to his children and grandchildren. A person can only instruct the next generation if he himself will stand by his words!

## **PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You must guard yourselves carefully, for you did not see any image on the day that G-d spoke to you at Chorev from the midst of the fire.” (4:15)*

The word for “yourselves” (נפשותיכם) in the opening phrase of this verse literally means “your life” (see Rashi on Shemos 30:2). We are therefore taught that this phrase also means that we must guard our safety and our health. Thus, Maimonides writes (Mishnah Torah, Deios 4:1) that ensuring that the body remain healthy and strong is an integral part of the service of G-d, since “someone who is unhealthy cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator.” Jewish law thus requires us to follow the instructions of qualified health professionals.

The Maggid of Mezeritch stated further that “a small hole in the body produces a large hole in the soul” (HaTamim 7, p. 664), meaning that our physical health affects our spiritual health. Thus, our physical health, safety and wellness is an inseparable part and parcel of our ongoing spiritual health. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 7, pp. 193-194; ibid., vol. 7, p. 99) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **LIVELY MITZVOS**

### **Reb Moshe Koznitzer**

*“Lest you act corruptly and make yourselves a graven image.” (4:16)*



Every mitzvah must have a soul, a life, and vitality. It should not be like a “graven image” made by hand, devoid of life.

### **FIRE OF PASSION**

#### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“For G-d your Lord is a consuming fire.” (4:24)*

Knowledge of G-d brings a person to a burning and passionate desire to draw close to Him. Conversely, one who distances himself from G-d can also be consumed by that same fire, since then it burns out of control.

### **SEEKING HASHEM**

#### **Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa**

*“But from there you will seek Hashem your G-d and you shall find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart...” (4:28-29)*

“From there” - you will be able to search for “Hashem your G-d” from the depths of your heart and find Him there, if only you seek Him diligently.

### **HASHEM CAN ALWAYS BE FOUND**

#### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“But from there you will seek Hashem your G-d and you shall find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart...” (4:28-29)*

From wherever you are, you will be able to seek and find G-d. (Likutei Halakhot III, p. 213a)

Specifically, “from there.” No matter where you are, wherever you stand, you will always be able to find G-d, for He is everywhere. (ibid., VII, p. 64)

If we were so close to G-d in our own Land and nevertheless went astray, how are we expected to find G-d in foreign lands?

Exile does not distance us even further from G-d, but actually brings us closer. In the Holy Land, surrounded by every sign of G-d’s presence, the Jews became too “familiar” with G-d - leading to laziness and a slackening of devotions until they succumbed to sin. But in exile, under the dominion of foreign nations, they began to feel their Jewishness much more acutely, prompting a return to G-d.

At times a person experiences even greater descents than exile. He may find himself falling to unimaginable spiritual depths and depravity in mind or body. Yet even from there, in the lowest of lows, he can begin to feel the promptings of a desire to return to G-d.

Sometimes the light of G-d is too great to experience at the level he was at originally. On a lower level, this light may be obscured even more. But this works to his benefit, because at that lower level, where the light shines in smaller and more limited increments, he is able to experience G-d in a way he never would have been able when the light was intense. (Likutei Halakhot II, p. 128a)

### **UNSTOPPABLE SERVICE**

#### **Sefas Emes**

*“You were shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is nothing other than Him.” (4:35)*

Rashi quotes a Pesikta Rabbasi and says: “He opened seven heavens for them [Israel], and just as He parted the higher realms, so He parted the lower, and they saw that He is unique.”

There is no deterring force in nature preventing a Jew who wishes to serve Hashem earnestly from doing so. For this person, the inner secrets within all aspects of nature will be opened and he will know the One and Only Unique One.

### **THE ONE AND ONLY**

#### **Rav Tzadok HaKohen**

*“You were shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is nothing other than Him.” (4:35)*

When we learn Torah, listen to the words of Torah, or sing Shabbat songs at the table, all these become absorbed in our essence, which leads us to the level of knowledge that “there is none beside Him.”

### **NOTHING OTHER THAN HIM**

#### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You were shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is nothing other than Him.” (4:35)*

By revealing His essence, which is beyond Creation, G-d enabled us to transcend the limits of nature, as well.

In order to overcome life’s challenges and tests, we need only remind ourselves that “there is nothing other than Him,” i.e., that nothing can constitute a real obstacle to fulfilling G-d’s intentions, since everything, in the final analysis, is part of G-d’s essence.

Evoking this awareness elevates our Divine consciousness to the level of truly perceiving G-d’s essence everywhere.

This, in turn, serves to hasten the Messianic Redemption, when “the glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together” (Yeshayahu 40:5). (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, pp. 36-46) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **HASHEM IS WITH EVERYONE**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d, the Lord in the heavens above and upon the earth below - there is no other!" (4:39)*

"Heavens" represents the "dwellers above," the tzaddikim, who place on their hearts that G-d is the One G-d. "Earth" represents the "dwellers below," the average folk. Even the average folk - even the wicked - should place G-d on their hearts, for He is always with everyone, whether righteous or not. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 22a)

## **SOLE BELIEVERS**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d, the Lord in the heavens above and upon the earth below - there is no other!" (4:39)*

The words "there is no other" refers to the Jew, for no one else believes that "Hashem, He is the G-d, in the heavens above and on earth below."

## **MAKING ROOM**

### **Chiddushei HaRim**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d..." (4:39)*

If the main thing is to "take it to your heart," it follows that the heart must be cleansed beforehand in order to make room for all this knowledge so that it may take root there.

## **THE ROOT OF KNOWLEDGE**

### **Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d..." (4:39)*

*Ein ode* - "there is none else" or "there is nothing else."

"Hashem, He is G-d in Heaven above and on the earth below" - there is nothing else we need to know, for this singular knowledge is both the foundation and the root of all knowledge in the world.

## **BRINGING KNOWLEDGE TO THE HEART**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d..." (4:39)*

A person must bring his knowledge of G-d into his heart (see Likutey Moharan II, 1:5). The heart is the seat of the emotions. One must "bring his knowledge into his heart" in the sense that his mind will control his desires - especially the three evil traits of greed, gluttony and lust.

## **VARYING VANTAGE POINTS**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d, the Lord in the heavens above and upon the earth below - there is no other!" (4:39)*

When one is concerned with spiritual issues and the attainment of good character traits, one should look "in the heavens above" - to those who are on a higher level.

When the concern is with earthly or mundane issues such as earning a living or the accumulation of wealth, one should look "on the earth below" - to those who have less.

Then one will be happy with their lot.

## **CLOSING THE DISTANCE**

### **Rav Yisrael Salanter**

*"Know this day, and take it to your heart that Hashem, He is G-d, the Lord in the heavens above and upon the earth below - there is no other!" (4:39)*

It isn't sufficient merely to "know" it; this sublime knowledge must be incorporated "into your heart," so that your will and your virtues both function in conformity with what you know. This task constitutes the entire worship incumbent on a Jew.

The space that separates "knowing" from "taking it to your heart" (i.e., the distance between the mind and heart) is as big a chasm as that which stands between knowledge and ignorance.

## **REFUGE OF TORAH**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Moshe then designated three cities [of refuge]..." (4:41)*

Allegorically, the study of the Torah is our "city of refuge." This is alluded to by the fact that in order for a city to be considered a city with regard to certain aspects of Jewish law, there must be at least ten people living in it who study the Torah all day long (Megillah 3b).

The required number ten alludes to the ten powers of the soul (three intellectual, three emotional, three behavioral, and one of expression), indicating that in order for the Torah to function as a "city of refuge" for us, we must immerse ourselves in it fully, with all ten powers of our soul.

Furthermore, the word for "refuge" (*miklat*) literally means "absorption." Thus, we must not only immerse ourselves in the Torah; we must fully absorb and internalize its message.

This is how we protect ourselves from the negative spiritual influences of our materialistic environment, thereby remaining spiritually strong enough to influence the world positively. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5717-5719, p. 230)

## **EAGER TO PERFORM**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“Moshe then designated three cities [of refuge]...” (4:41)*

Moshe pauses his speech to the nation to designate three of the six cities of refuge (4:41), even though those cities would not be activated as cities of refuge until all of them are established. Why does Moshe interrupt his speech in order to set up cities that cannot even be used yet?

Rashi explains that Moshe is eager to fulfill any commandments he can, even if they would only prove useful later. Kli Yakar adds that Moshe is demonstrating that modeling positive action is an essential value to impart to future generations. Do as I do, not just as I say.

The message is driven home by the fact that Moshe made it a point to highlight a law that would not be relevant until later, demonstrating that it's the intention and its importance that sometimes counts more than whether that action achieves an immediate result.

## **STAY WITHIN THE BORDERS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“He [the unintentional murderer] may flee to one of these cities in order that he might live.” (4:42)*

Someone who committed murder unintentionally had to remain in his city of refuge. He was not allowed to leave, for by doing so, he would expose himself to the vengeance of his victim's relative, who was legally allowed to kill him. The unintentional murderer was forbidden to leave his city of refuge even to save someone else's life.

Similarly, the Torah is our “city of refuge.” Inside the Torah and the lifestyle that G-d prescribes for us, we are spiritually alive; if we venture outside the confines of the Torah's lifestyle, we expose ourselves to the risk of spiritual death.

This is true even if it seems that we can save someone's life by making some compromise in the Torah's directives. The Torah is synonymous with life, so only through loyalty to its principles can we both maintain our own spiritual vitality and preserve or enhance the spiritual vitality of others. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 38, p. 131)

## **ACCOMPANIED BY HASHEM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“He [the unintentional murderer] may flee to one of these cities in order that he might live.” (4:42)*

The murderer in this verse is punished with exile even though he committed the “murder” unintentionally. This is because Divine providence arranges for unintentional sins to occur only if we possess some inner, hidden spiritual flaw that we need to rectify.

Thus, the unintentional murderer of this verse is not entirely blameless. Yet, the Talmud (Makkos 10a) informs us that if he is a student of the Torah, “his teacher is exiled to his city of refuge along with him.” The reason for this is, as the verse quoted above states, that the exiled individual must be enabled to “live” in the city of refuge - and for seekers of spiritual wisdom, life without the possibility of advancing in the knowledge of the Torah is not life.

Allegorically, our teacher, G-d, accompanies us into our spiritual exile. It thus follows that even if we are not at the highest spiritual level, G-d is still with us, making Himself available to teach us, through His Torah, how to advance spiritually and eventually be redeemed. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 2, pp. 1020-1026. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky)

## **REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME**

### **Kli Yakar**

*“...that the [unintentional] murderer may flee there... Bezer in the wilderness... and this is the law, which Moshe set before the Children of Yisrael.” (4:42-44)*

Moshe set aside three Cities of Refuge even though they could not be used by murderers for this purpose until the other three cities would be set up in Canaan across the Jordan river, and even though he knew that he wouldn't be permitted to enter the land and complete the task. For, as Rashi comments to pasuk 41, Moshe said to himself: “Any duty that is possible for me to perform, I will perform.”

This should teach us - with regard to performing each and every command in the Torah - that we must set about the task of fulfilling it even if we know that we will not be able to complete the work.

Dovid HaMelech, too, made all the preparations for the *Beis HaMikdash's* construction, even though he was fully aware that the actual work was to be done not by him but only by his son Shlomo.

“And this is the law”: This is the teaching derived from the fact that Moshe “separated” the three Cities of Refuge, even though he knew he wouldn't be able to complete the task - “that Moshe set before the Children of Israel”: that Moshe taught the Jews to follow in connection with the performance of each and every commandment.

## **FIRE OF THE TORAH**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“On the mountain, G-d spoke with you face to face from amidst the fire.” (5:4)*

The fire at the Giving of the Torah can be found in the Torah itself, as G-d says (Yirmiyahu 23:29), “Is not My Word like fire?” (Likutei Halachot II, p. 98)

## **EGO IN THE WAY**

### **Reb Moshe of Kobrin**

*"I stood between Hashem and you..." (5:5)*

It is the "anochi" - the "I" (egotism, selfishness) - that stands between G-d and you (mankind). As long as "anochi," this ego-centricity, rules you it will prevent you from coming near to G-d.

## **AS HASHEM COMMANDED**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem your G-d commanded you." (5:16)*

The Sages say that if a child is commanded by his or her father to transgress a commandment of the Torah, the child must not obey because G-d said that "you and your father are both duty-bound to honor Me."

This pasuk is to be understood as follows: "Honor your father and your mother," but only "as Hashem your G-d commanded you" only in the manner commanded by G-d, in keeping with all the other things G-d has commanded.

It is only fitting that the modification as "Hashem your G-d commanded you" should be given at this point rather than in the original enumeration of the Ten Commandments in the book of Shemos. When the Ten Commandments were first given on Mount Sinai, the other precepts of the Torah had not yet been made known. But by the time Moshe reiterated the Ten Commandments before his death, all the precepts were already known to the Jews. It was therefore appropriate to add at this point that honor paid one's parents must not be permitted to conflict with the other commandments of the Torah.

## **INFINITE REWARD**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem your G-d commanded you." (5:16)*

The promise of long life in this verse refers to our continued existence in the afterlife. Indeed, since the reward for observing G-d's commandments is infinite, it is impossible that we could ever fully receive it in our finite, earthly lifetimes (see Igeret HaKodesh 3).

In contrast, G-d's promises of prosperity in this world are nothing more than the tools through which He enables us to fulfill His commandments: Just as an employer must supply his employees with the tools they need to do their work, so does G-d provide us with the good health, wealth, and serenity that we need to fulfill His commandments.

The length of our lives in this world, on the other hand, is a function of the specific mission for which each of our souls has been sent down into this world. When we have completed our mission in this world, we are summoned to the next one, where G-d can fulfill His promise of long life to an infinitely greater extent than is possible in this world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, pp. 197-207) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **ETERNAL WORDS**

### **Sefas Emes**

*"These are the words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain... a great voice, not pausing..." (5:19)*

The words contained in the Torah are for all times and all generations, for whenever congregations assemble, the Presence will dwell upon them, as our Sages say (Avos 3:7): "If ten people sit together and engage in Torah study, the Divine Presence rests among them."

## **PERMEATING ALL EXISTENCE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"These are the words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain... a great voice, not pausing..." (5:19)*

G-d's voice produced no echo when He pronounced the Ten Commandments (Shemos Rabbah 28:6). G-d's voice was absorbed by the mountains themselves.

Inasmuch as the spiritual and material are two distinct aspects of reality, we normally would not expect the spirituality of the Torah to be absorbed into physical reality. But since G-d revealed His essence at Mount Sinai, and His essence transcends the normal dichotomy between spirituality and physicality, this revelation was indeed able to permeate the physical dimension of existence.

As the Jewish people were about to pass from their spiritual existence in the desert to their material existence in the land, they needed to be reminded that the voice of G-d and the Torah permeate all existence. As such, everything, even the inanimate kingdom, is saturated with latent Divine consciousness. Nothing about reality can truly be an obstacle to fulfilling G-d's will; if it appears to be so, this is only a façade, a test of our determination and devotion to our Divine destiny.

By approaching the Torah and its lifestyle as an encounter with G-d Himself, we continue to cause His voice to permeate all reality, thereby making the world a home for Him and fulfilling the purpose of creation. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1092-1098)



## **CONTINUOUS REVELATION**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“These are the words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain... a great voice, not pausing...” (5:19)*

One meaning of the expression “not pausing” is that the voice of G-d at Mount Sinai continued - and continues - to be revealed in the prophecies and teachings of the prophets and sages of each generation. The fact that these prophecies and teachings were not explicitly articulated when the Torah was first given is simply because the world and the Jewish people did not yet require them. They were nonetheless implicit in the original revelation of the Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1092-1098) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **INDIVIDUAL LEVELS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem your G-d commanded you.” (5:16)*

Moshe thought that the people were capable, as he was, of hearing G-d give them the Torah directly. He was right in one sense: When they were in his presence, he elevated them to his level, rendering them capable of hearing G-d directly. The Jewish people, however, understood that without Moshe presence they would be incapable of bearing such an intense revelation. They therefore requested that Moshe receive G-d’s revelations directly and then convey His words to them, and G-d approved of their request.

G-d approved the people’s request because He wanted them to receive the Torah on their level, without the spiritual elevation derived from being in Moshe presence, for only thus would they be able to internalize it fully.

The lessons for us are firstly, that G-d wants us to understand the Torah fully, for only in this way can we internalize it, making it the driving force in our lives. Secondly, when we initiate others into a new level of spiritual life, we must make sure that they understand what we are teaching them on their level; it is not enough that they get swept up in our enthusiasm. Only when they internalize the significance of what we are teaching them can it remake them into new, more spiritually developed people. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 204-206) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **EVEN IN THE COMFORT OF HOME**

### **Kotzker Rebbe**

*“Go say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’” (5:27)*

Through Moshe, G-d said to the Jews: “Here, at Mount Sinai, I beheld your reverence and devotion. Now let Me see how you’ll conduct yourselves in your tents, in the privacy of your homes.”

## **PRIORITIZING OUR ROCKS**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“Along the entire way that Hashem, your G-d, commanded you, shall you go; in order that you live and enjoy good.” (5:30)*

Mashal: A professor of philosophy in a large university picked up a large empty jar one day in class and proceeded to fill it to the top with rocks. He then asked his students if the jar was full. They unanimously agreed that it indeed was full.

He then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked his students again if the jar was full. Again, they unanimously agreed that the jar was full.

Then the professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

The professor said, “I want you to recognize that this is your life. The rocks are the important things: your family, your friends, your health, and all the other critical things. The pebbles are the secondary things that matter such as your job, your house and your car. The sand is everything else. Remember, if you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for anything else - like the pebbles or the rocks!”

Nimshal: The same concept applies to life in general. If a person spends all his time and energy on the small stuff, he will never have room for what’s important to him. Our life’s goal is to serve Hashem and to teach our children to do likewise. These are our “rocks” and should be prioritized accordingly.

## **KEEP YOUR GAURD UP**

### **Meshech Chochmah**

*“That you will fear Hashem your G-d to keep all His statutes and His commandments, you, and your child, and your grandchild, all the days of your life, so that your days will be long.” (6:2)*

Shouldn’t the wording have been “All the days of your life, you, and your child, and your grandchild”? The order was reversed deliberately. As our Sages (Pirkei Avos 2:5) put it: “Do not be sure of yourself until the day of your death.”

The pasuk is to be understood as follows: “That you will fear Hashem your G-d to keep all His statutes” - you shall fear G-d, and devise legal safeguards for the commandments of the Torah to keep yourself from transgressing its precepts. “You, and your child, and your grandchild” - even if you already have children and grandchildren, and may be at an age when the evil impulse has already grown faint within you, you still must not be sure of your immunity to temptation but must continue to keep these legal safeguards “all the days of your life” - for as long as there is life within you, you can never be so sure of yourself that you could afford to do without them.

## **DEPENDENT ON US**

### **Meshech Chochmah**

*"Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it... as Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, has promised to you, a land flowing with milk and honey." (6:3)*

Shouldn't the text read "IN a land flowing with milk and honey"? The text intends to stress that the Promised Land's prosperity - whether or not the Land of Canaan will indeed be a land of "milk and honey" - is dependent entirely on the Jews conduct. Only if they live in accordance with the Torah's commandments will their land be blessed and fertile.

Therefore, the Torah says: "Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it... as Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, has promised to you." If you will do it, the land will be "a land flowing with milk and honey," but if you will not keep G-d's commandments, it will not be so.

## **HEARING THE CALL**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"Hear, Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d; Hashem is One." (6:4)*

Another explanation of this verse along the lines of the teaching of our Sages (Avos 6:2; Zohar 3:126b) that every day a Divine echo reverberates from Mount Chorev and the righteous merit to hear it: This, then, is what the verse means when it says, "Hear, Yisrael."

"You, Jewish people, are able to hear, at every moment and every instant, the voice that emanates, which declares, 'Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One.'"

Another explanation: In all his affairs, a person has to cleave to G-d and fear Him, as it says (Mishlei 3:6), "In all your ways you shall know Him." It is possible to perceive the unity of G-d in all of one's affairs, when one performs them in accordance with the directives of Torah.

In this context, we can understand why, when we recite the Shema, we say the opening command, "Hear, Yisrael." After all, Moshe was the one who said to the Jewish people, "Hear, Yisrael," addressing us, the Jewish people, enjoining us to remain aware that G-d is One. This being the case, what we should say is only "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." Why do we recite Moshe's exhortation, "Hear, Yisrael"?

The answer is that we preface by saying, "Hear, Yisrael" in order to imply that a Jew can "hear," i.e., comprehend, the unity of G-d in all of his affairs; in everything that he does, he can comprehend that "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One" - the unity of G-d. [The word "hear" in this context means more than simply hearing the audible words with our physical sense of hearing. It additionally implies understanding the implications of the words being physically heard.]

Another explanation of this verse: It is an underlying principle that G-d is a perfect unity, but when it comes to serving G-d there is diversity. One person worships G-d primarily with the attribute of love; another worships Him primarily with the attribute of fear; and another, with the attribute of beauty. Likewise, with regard to the other attributes, people differ.

This is the mystical allusion here: The Name *Havayah* is G-d's essential Name (Pardes Rimonim 19:1), while the Name *Elokeinu* ["our G-d"] alludes to G-d in the context of our service of Him (see Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 5). This is why Rashi explains in several places (Bereishis 20:13; 35:7) that the name *Elokim* denotes plurality, for in truth, in serving G-d, there are many different qualities, as explained above. But regardless of the attribute and quality by which a person perceives and serves G-d, he has to cleave to the Name *Havayah*, which indicates G-d's simple and absolute unity.

This is the allusion in the verse? "But you who cleave to Hashem, your G-d," implying that we need to cleave to "Hashem, your G-d." In other words, each and every person in his service has to attach himself to G-d, Who is the perfect unity, even though our service of Him is expressed in many diverse ways. Even though our service of Him is expressed in many diverse ways, a person has to cleave to G-d's unity, as explained above.

This is the mystical allusion in the phrase "Hashem is our G-d." "Hashem" alludes to G-d's essence, His absolute unity; "our G-d" to the numerous diverse ways that we perceive and serve Him. However, in our Divine service, we have to cleave to His unity. This is alluded to by the last two words, "Hashem is One," indicating that we must cleave to Hashem, which refers to His unity.

## **ENCOUNTERING HASHEM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Hear, Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d; Hashem is One." (6:4)*

When we say "G-d is one," we mean that the creation of the world did not change G-d in any way. He is the same after creation as He was before creation - filling every moment of time and every iota of space. When we look at the world from this perspective, we no longer see trees and tables; we see only G-d. (Tanya, chapter 20)

The implications of such a worldview are sweeping. If G-d is everything, then there is no longer any possibility of self-centeredness or even self-awareness. The importance and significance we normally grant the world and the attention and devotion we normally let it command dissolve into nothingness. We can no longer be fazed by any seeming obstacle that the world seems to pose to the observance of the Torah, because we know that when we look at trees and tables, we may be seeing trees and tables, but we are really looking at G-d in the guise of trees and tables. (Likutei Torah 4:4)

This awareness enables us to truly “know G-d in all our ways,” to transform every aspect of our lives - whether sublime or mundane - into an encounter with G-d. (Sefer HaSichot 5690, p. 86) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **BLOCKING OUT THE DOUBT**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Hear, Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d; Hashem is One.” (6:4)*

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: Even if a person recited the *Shema* in the morning and the evening, he fulfills the mitzvah of “This Torah should not be removed from your mouth” (Yehoshua 1:8). (Menachot 99b)

This is an expression of the idea that a person must be satisfied in life even if he just has a little (see Likutey Moharan I, 54:3). One must strive to learn as much Torah as possible. However, even if he falls short of his goals, he should be happy with what he has accomplished.

A person should close and cover his eyes with his right hand while reciting the first verse of the *Shema*. (Orach Chaim 61:5)

The Hebrew word *ayin* (אין, eye) sounds like the letter *ayin* (א), which is numerically equivalent to seventy. A person’s eyes can lead him to the roots of Torah, which are associated with the seventy members of Yaakov’s household (Bereishis 46:27), or they can lead him astray to pursue the material desires of the archetypal seventy nations. When we close our eyes as we reaffirm our faith, we block out the enticements of this world and transcend material desires. (See Likutey Moharan I, 36:3)

## **HEARING FAITH**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“Hear, Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d; Hashem is One.” (6:4)*

The *Shema* represents the holy point of faith that is found within every Jew. This faith is developed in three ways: by conversing with the tzaddikim, by conversing with a friend, and by conversing with G-d. Therefore, it is written, “Love G-d” (Devarim 6:5) - for in developing one’s inner faith, one develops love for G-d.

The verses of the *Shema* then give us the tools for nurturing faith. “These words that I am commanding you” (ibid., 6:6) corresponds to studying the Torah and the teachings of the tzaddikim. “Teach them to your children” (ibid., 6:7) corresponds to conversing with a friend. “Speak about them” (ibid.) represents conversing with G-d (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 56a-57a).

The three paragraphs of the *Shema* that are included in our daily prayers contain 248 words, which is the numerical value of *Rachem* (רחם, compassion).

The main compassion a person can attain is to believe in G-d and come to know Him. Then he is considered a human being with 248 limbs. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 314)

The *Shema* is our declaration of faith. Yet shouldn’t it be enough to proclaim: “G-d is our Lord, G-d is One” without prefacing it with “Hear, Israel”?

This preamble teaches us that we must listen closely and pay attention to what we are saying, as one says to another, “I have something very important and wonderful to tell you so listen carefully!” (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 164a)

“Hear” - let your ears hear what you say. (Berakhot 15a)

“Hear” in any language that you can hear [i.e., understand]. (ibid., 13a)

Listen carefully to what you are saying about G-d’s Unity. Then, whatever you hear, no matter if it is spoken in the Holy Tongue or in a mundane language, you will detect the message that G-d is present at all times. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 328)

## **LOVING HASHEM**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“And you shall love Hashem with all your heart and all your might...” (6:5)*

One fulfills the mitzvah of “Love G-d” by making the Name of Heaven beloved through him. How? When he has read and studied and attended Torah scholars, and his dealings with people are pleasant and he conducts his business affairs honestly, what do people say? “Fortunate is the one who taught him Torah...” (Yoma 86)

The mitzvah of “Love G-d” is the root of all of the positive commandments. A person who, by acting honestly, causes G-d’s Name to be beloved, arouses that root of all mitzvot. (See Likutey Moharan I, 93:1)

[The word *Levevkha* (לבבך, your heart) is spelled with two *vets* (ב) instead of one.] This signifies man’s two inclinations, the good inclination and the evil inclination. Both should be used in the service of G-d. (Rashi)

One must subdue the urges of his evil inclination to the desires of his good inclination, which brings peace between these two forces. (See Likutey Moharan I, 62:2)

“With all your might” - this means with all your money. (Rashi)

A person can love G-d with all his money when he has faith that G-d provides for all his needs. (See Likutey Moharan I, 23:5)

## **AWAKENING OUR LOVE**

### **Sefas Emes**

*“And you shall love Hashem with all your heart and all your might...” (6:5)*

Some philosophers cannot understand how “to love” can be a command. They say that love is a natural phenomenon and that it cannot be commanded.

We can answer that it is the nature of the Jew to love Hashem; however, it is necessary to awaken this natural love and cultivate it. That is the mitzvah of “And you shall love” - one should act to awaken the hidden strength to “love Hashem.”

## **FOSTERING LOVE**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“And you shall love Hashem with all your heart and all your might...” (6:5)*

In this week’s parashah, we are commanded to love G-d with all our heart, soul, and money (6:5). How can we be commanded to love, and how real can that love be if it emerges from a commandment?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger explains that upon realizing what people and G-d have done for us, our natural response is to appreciate it. When someone genuinely shows us love, it’s natural for us to feel appreciated and return that love. The commandment acknowledges the reflexive nature of love and enables us to behold and appreciate the love reflected in all that G-d has done for us, which will naturally lead to our loving Him back.

By extension, this lesson is true of all our relationships; focusing on love and kindness will inevitably bring that back to us in return and contribute to our overall happiness.

## **DOING OUR PART**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*“And you shall love Hashem with all your heart...” (6:5)*

The Sforno writes that loving Hashem means that we are performing mitzvos with feelings of happiness, proud in the knowledge that we are doing what is good in the eyes of Hashem, and that there is therefore no more worthy act than the mitzvos we are doing.

This means that our happiness when performing a mitzvah is not relevant to whether we are successful in the mitzvah’s outcome, rather, the very fact that we are serving Hashem and doing what is good in His eyes is a fulfillment of the mitzvah to love Him - and a reason to serve Him with joy.

This lesson was profoundly taught by the Chazon Ish to two young bachurim whom he sent on a crucial mission, but only fully realized sixty years later.

Upon hearing that an anti-religious group had separated immigrant Sefardi children from their parents and brought them to a “resettlement camp,” the Chazon Ish understood that their intention was to indoctrinate the children to abandon their rich Jewish heritage in favor of a new life in a new country with new values. Unable to make the trip himself, he instructed two bachurim to go to the camp and encourage the children to remain strong in their Jewish values.

After a long journey, the young men reached the gates of the camp where they were met by a burly guard who had no intentions of letting them in. They decided to wait a while in the hope that a change of guard would give them the opportunity they needed. When this was clearly not happening, they decided to find a hole in the fence. Trying to remain undetected, they checked the entire parameter and found no means of getting in. Finally, they decided to scale the fence, but that too was met without success. Despondent at their wasted day, they traveled back to the Chazon Ish to report their failure. The Chazon Ish, however, told them not to be disheartened, for they tried their best and that was obviously all that Hashem needed from them.

It was not until sixty years later that these two men, now grandfathers, finally understood their pivotal role on that day. The revelation happened when one of the men attended a wedding of a neighbor and heard the groom’s grandfather give an impromptu speech describing being separated from his parents as a young boy and being taken to a “boarding school.” Then he described how the counselors and teachers would convince the boys to take off their kippot and cut off their payot, explaining that since they were now in Eretz Yisrael there was no reason to have any defining signs of being a Jew. Since everyone was Jewish, they explained, no one wore these things. The young boys were convinced; after all, from the moment they left the boat, they had not seen a single person in the Holy Land looking like them in any way. They had all but decided to follow the advice of their teachers, when one boy saw out of the window two young men who looked just like them walking around outside. In fact, throughout the day, many of these boys were able to catch a glimpse of the two bachurim as they went back and forth around the camp’s perimeter. This sight alone allowed the young children to realize that they were being tricked, and gave them the confidence to withstand the pressure being asserted upon them. “And now look at me,” said the grandfather in tears, “my grandson, a great Torah scholar is getting married. Who knows what would have become of me if not for those two young men?!”

We cannot always see the far-reaching results of our efforts. All we need to do, however, is try our best, and understand that the mitzvos we are doing are always good in Hashem’s eyes. Internalizing this message serves as a fulfillment of the mitzvah of loving Hashem, as well as giving us a deep sense of pride and joy every time we perform a mitzvah.



## **ASSURED LOVE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“And you shall love Hashem with all your heart...” (6:5)*

If someone loves G-d, he does not need to be told to do so; if he does not love G-d, telling him to will not change his mind. Therefore, both the medieval sage Rabbi Moshe Maimonides and the founder of Chasidism, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, explain this verse to be both a commandment and a promise.

In the preceding verse - “Hear, Yisrael: G-d is our G-d; G-d is one” - we are commanded to contemplate the unity of G-d. If we meditate on the meaning of this verse deeply enough, we are assured that will we indeed thereby come to love G-d. (Derech Mitzvotcha 199b) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **IT’S A NEW DAY**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

The mitzvot that G-d commanded should appear fresh to us each day. (Rashi)

Just as we wake up refreshed each day, with our minds and intellects renewed, we should make the effort to renew our approach to G-d daily through the intellect of the Torah. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 27a)

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Each day, the Evil One finds a new way to entrap us. Buoyed by a new approach and new feeling, we can meet the adversary head-on and be victorious. (ibid., IV, p. 6a)

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One must renew his faith every day. (ibid., II, p. 250)

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“Today” - as if it is a new document. (Rashi)

Each day, we recite the blessing “Blessed are You, G-d our Lord, King of the world, Who gives us the Torah” (Morning liturgy). We say “gives” in the present tense, for each day, G-d bestows the Torah anew. Each day, a person can find a spirit of renewal within the Torah according to how well he prepares himself to receive the Torah. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 192b)

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The only way a person can have compassion on himself and attain his eternal goal is by renewing himself daily. Just as yesterday will never return, so too, today will not return. Each day is a separate, new creation by G-d and each individual who is alive on that day is able to benefit from it. Even if one’s deeds until now were questionable, today is when everything starts and begins anew. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 223a)

## **UPON OUR HEARTS**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

The great maggid, Rav Shalom Schwadron zt’l, used to relate in the name of his rebbi, Rav Leib Chasman zt’l, that just as the Torah tells us about the mitzvah of tefillin: You are to tie them as a sign on your arm (6:8), which is interpreted to mean that there may not be a *chatzitzah* (separation) between the tefillin and the skin, so too, when we are commanded to place the mitzvos upon our hearts, it means that nothing should come between them and the mitzvos.

Any bad middah or negative behavior that would prevent the love of Hashem from entering into our hearts must be removed. Working constantly on one’s character is, therefore, a definite prerequisite for reaching the level of true *ahavas Hashem*.

The Kotzker Rebbe zt’l makes an insightful, yet practical, point. At times, a person’s heart might be “closed,” and although he intellectually absorbs information and Torah ideals, they do not truly become a part of him. Do not worry, says the Kotzker, for even in such a state the Torah implores every Jew to keep this intellectual knowledge, this mission of hope, this lofty concept of loving Hashem, upon your heart! This way, even if one’s heart is closed, the moment it “opens up” the message will fall right inside and stay there!

This is a wonderful insight into spiritual growth. Achieving the supreme ideal of loving Hashem requires a great deal of time and effort, and if one doesn’t emotionally feel this love, he shouldn’t be discouraged. He should keep thinking about Hashem and His endless kindness and be patient. Eventually, his heart will open up and he will feel a deep and special love toward Hashem.

## **MEAN WHAT WE SAY**

### **Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

Twice each day, every Jew recites the pasuk, “You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” This pasuk is phrased entirely in the second person singular. Hence, when we recite it, it is as if we were saying it not to ourselves but to another person.

This explains the command in the pasuk immediately following; “And these words that I command you this day shall be upon your heart.” They should not only be on your lips but also in “your heart.”

For, as a rule, the span that separates lip-service from the service of the heart is as vast as the distance that divides Heaven and earth.

## **PATIENCE – WORK IN PROGRESS**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

On the surface, it would seem that the Torah should phrase the end of the pasuk differently, stating that the Torah should be placed IN your heart and not ON your heart. Why does the Torah instruct us to place the Torah on our heart?

The Kotzker Rebbe explains (Ohel Torah) that at times our hearts are closed and apathetic to the instructions and values of the Torah. Nevertheless, we are to place the Torah on our hearts because when we do get inspired, all of the Torah that was placed on the heart will seep right in.

The Kotzker Rebbes insight is very powerful. As parents, we often expect our children to simply actualize the messages and behaviors of the Torah that we communicate to them. Instead, we must realize that the job of a parent and educator is not to force the Torah INTO the heart of a child. Rather, it is our job to place as much Torah as we can ON the heart. When that child or student is inspired, the heart will soften and open, and all the Torah that was placed on the heart will seep right in.

While we certainly need to teach and communicate to our children, to the best of our abilities, what they are supposed to do, we also need to remind ourselves that we are all works in progress. We must continue to encourage them and model for them what the right thing to do is. If we continue to place those lessons on their heart, they are sure to leave an indelible mark on our children and their future development.

## **LET HIM REIGN SUPREME**

### **Rav Yisrael Salanter**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

When Jews recite “Hear, O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One,” with the purpose of proclaiming G-d’s rule over the entire universe, they must not forget to allow G-d to also reign over themselves.

## **HEARTFELT WORDS**

### **Reb Mordechai of Chernobyl**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

First and foremost, “These words that I command you shall be upon your heart” must enter the heart and become an integral part of one’s being. Only then can one teach them to others, for words that come from the depths of one’s heart will enter the heart of another.

## **WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT**

### **Kotzker Rebbe**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

In *Shema*, we are commanded, “Place these words [of Torah] upon your heart.” But shouldn’t we be told to place them “in” our hearts?

There will be times when we may not be receptive to the words we learn. Nevertheless, Hashem says to place them on your heart, so the moment your heart opens wide, the words can fall right in!

## **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

### **Imrei Shefer**

*“And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6:6)*

Our Sages teach (Avos 5:19): “For any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone; but if it does not depend on a specific cause, it will never cease.”

“And you shall love... with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your possessions” - for such love, which is not dependent on anything, one will give up everything intuitively.

“And these words will be upon your heart” - they will always be with you and they will never be nullified.

## **HEART TO HEART**

### **Alshich HaKadosh**

*“And these words that I command you this day shall be upon your heart. You shall impress them sharply upon your children...” (6:6-7)*

To impart the Torah’s laws and moral teachings to others, you must be imbued with the words you want to teach. Only then will your words leave an impression on your listeners, for “only words that proceed from the heart can enter another person’s heart.”

Only if the words will “be upon your heart,” only if they are indelibly engraved upon your own heart will you be able to “impress them sharply” also upon your children.

Then, your own words of instruction will serve as sharp, penetrating arrows when you direct them at your children or at your disciples. But if G-d’s words are not acutely impressed upon your own heart, your words of instruction will have no effect on others.

To stress this fact the Torah uses the term *ve’shinantam* (“and you shall impress them sharply”) rather than the more common *ve’limadtam* (“and you shall teach them”).

## **IN ALL PLACES, AT ALL TIMES**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“You shall impress them sharply upon your children, discuss them while sitting in your home, while you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you arise.” (6:7)*

Speak in [words of Torah] and not in idle chatter. (cf. Sifri)

Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you can speak in words of Torah. Even mundane chores can be elevated to Torah! (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 147b)

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Just as a person can write the letters of Torah on a piece of parchment and turn that parchment into a Torah scroll, so too, a person can transform himself into a Torah scroll. By inscribing the letters of Torah upon himself - i.e., by speaking continually in Torah and words of holiness - he can turn his body into a receptacle of Torah and holiness!

Thus, if one speaks words of Torah “when he is sitting at home, traveling on the road, going to sleep, and waking up,” then he can “bind them upon his hand... and write them upon *mezuzot*,” for he has transformed himself into an object as holy as *tefillin* and *mezuzot*.

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The *Shema* declares G-d’s Unity. Therefore, it commands us to remember G-d both at home and on the road. We must remember G-d equally in all places, for G-d reigns everywhere. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 200a)

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The travels that we undertake represent our efforts to rectify the sparks of holiness scattered throughout the world. Wherever we travel, we perform a mitzvah or several mitzvot and thereby elevate those sparks. This in itself elevates our travels to a spiritual level. A person must always remember G-d, no matter where he is. Then he will be able to rectify his faith along with the sparks of holiness. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 32a)

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Every day and every circumstance differs from every other. To develop properly, we must learn to be flexible in our devotions. On Pesach, we draw close to G-d by eating matzah, while on Sukkot, we draw close to G-d by eating in the sukkah. Certain devotions apply only to weekdays, while others apply only to Shabbat. Each week we read a different Torah portion, and each portion is divided into seven, corresponding to the different days of the week. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 56a-57a)

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“Sitting at home” corresponds to the revealed aspect of G-d, the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot, with which a person feels “at home.”

“Traveling” corresponds to the times a person feels distant from G-d. Wherever a person finds himself and whatever he feels, he must keep these thoughts of G-d “close to his heart.” (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 50a)

## **THE TEACHER’S REWARD**

### **Baal Shem Tov**

*“Teach them thoroughly to your children, discuss them while sitting in your home, while you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you arise.” (6:7)*

The word “*ve’shinantam*” (teach them thoroughly) comes from “*shinun*,” to repeatedly review a subject until it is completely clear. “To your children” refers to those who wish to understand. “*Ve’dibarta bam*” (discuss them) can be translated literally as “speak into them,” so that your teachings penetrate your students.

The result of your diligence will be “sitting in your home” - your disciples will be empowered to elevate their “home,” meaning their personal sparks of G-dliness. “While you walk on the road” - they will be successful in elevating others as well as their environment, which will be especially relevant to you “when you lie down” - after a person’s passing, when he reaps the rewards of his efforts, “and when you arise” - in the ultimate era of reward, the era of the Resurrection.

## **REALIZING HASHEM’S LOVE**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Bind them as a sign upon your hand, and let them be an emblem between your eyes.” (6:8)*

Because of G-d’s great love for the Jewish people, and His desire for us to attach ourselves to Him, He clothed His G-dliness in the letters of the Torah and in the 613 mitzvot.

By fulfilling the specific laws involved in the making of the tefillin - as well as those involved in every other mitzvah - we can come to realize G-d’s love for us. (See Likutey Moharan I, 33:4)

## **THREEFOLD SERVICE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“When your child asks you at some point in the future, saying, ‘What are the testimonies, rules, and ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?’” (6:20)*

The Torah’s “ordinances” are the commandments that human reason would dictate on its own, such as the prohibitions against thievery, murder, and so on. “Testimonies” are the commemorative commandments, such as the holidays, tefillin, and so on, which mortal intellect would not otherwise legislate but which make perfect sense once the Torah commands them. “Rules” refer to the commandments that have no rational basis (even if some lesson can be inferred from them), such as the prohibitions of mixing milk and meat, mixing wool and linen, or the rite of purification with the ashes of the red cow.

Although every commandment in the Torah falls into one of these three categories, we are bidden to fulfill every commandment in all three ways:

Every commandment challenges us to understand its message to us, and in that sense is an “ordinance.” Similarly, every commandment is an expression of G-d’s inscrutable will, despite the fact that we can grasp some elements of its meaning, and in that sense is a “rule.” Finally, every commandment testifies to our relationship with G-d, and is thus a “testimony.” - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **JOYOUS HUMILITY**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*“Not because of the multitude of your populations beyond all peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you; for you are the smallest of all the peoples.” (7:7)*

“The smallest” - this signifies humility. (Rashi)

Humility especially applies to the tzaddikim, who bring joy to the Jews. For humility brings a person to great joy, as in “The humble will rejoice even more with G-d” (Yeshayahu 29:19). (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 304)

## **HUMBLE SELECTION**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“Not because of the multitude of your populations beyond all peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you; for you are the smallest of all the peoples.” (7:7)*

Moshe is telling Klal Yisrael that the root cause of Hashem’s love for His people is not because of their huge population, because they are indeed the smallest nation. This seems to be redundant: If they are the smallest nation in the world, of course Hashem could not have chosen them because of their great and impressive size!

The Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter zt”l (Sefas Emes), puts this in its proper perspective. Large and small are all relative. In the case of the Jewish people, they may be small in quantity but large in quality. In spiritual terms, they have the unique capacity to rise to the highest levels of G-dliness and inspirational fervor, yet at the very same time remain grounded to the earth, humble and self-conscious of themselves in comparison to their Creator and His host of Heavenly Beings. This is the fulfillment of Hashem’s blessing to Avraham Avinu: “I will make you into a great nation” - a nation that is greater than any other in its stature of spiritual holiness, unique in its service of Hashem. However, what truly sets the Jewish nation apart is its humility, modesty and total self-nullification to G-d; this is what makes them a “small” nation.

The pasuk thus tells us that the underlying reason why Bnei Yisrael became the Chosen Nation is not because of their greatness in spiritual endeavors; there are many worlds and countless Divine Beings that maintain great spiritual levels. It is because of our small stature our unassuming and humble nature that is the Jewish People’s greatest virtue.

## **HUMBLE GREATNESS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Not because of the multitude of your populations beyond all peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you; for you are the smallest of all the peoples.” (7:7)*

An additional meaning of this verse is that G-d chose us because we do not aggrandize ourselves when He showers us with His beneficence; rather, we consider ourselves unworthy of G-d’s special favor.

The trait of self-effacement is particularly critical for the Jewish people. Aware of the gravity of our mission, it is very easy to become overly impressed with our importance. Cultivating humility is therefore crucial.

This is not to imply that we should shy away from fulfilling our Divine task. On the contrary, we should continually seek to expand our influence, both over the less-than-holy aspects of our own selves and over the world in general. But we should be so enthralled and so absorbed with our mission that we feel insignificant in comparison to it.

Our self-effacement then enables us to be even more effective in accomplishing our Divine mission, inspiring us to de-emphasize our own selfhood even more. We thus enter a continuous spiral of greater effectiveness and greater self-effacement. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, p. 49) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **STANDING PROUD**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“Not because of the multitude of your populations beyond all peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you; for you are the smallest of all the peoples.” (7:7)*

As Moshe prepares the people to enter their own land, surrounded by neighbors who are unfriendly toward them and their values, he warns them not to intermarry, make covenants, or concede to other nations. He then reminds them that they are unique and explains that G-d has chosen them not because they are numerous but because they are the “least of all the peoples” (7:7). What does our size have to do with covenants and compromises with neighbors?

Daniel Lowenstein suggests that our self-esteem may sometimes be affected by how small of a nation we are. One such example is when Shechem abducted Yaakov’s daughter and flippantly offered to marry her. While Yaakov was frozen with fear for his survival while considering their proposal, his sons were not afraid to confront a more substantial group. Similarly, as a small nation fighting for its survival amongst our enemies, we must stand proudly for our morals and convictions despite our small size or any other handicap.

Having healthy confidence in ourselves and in our principles is crucial to maintaining control over outside detractors and influences.



## **ATOMIC ABILITIES**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"...for you are the smallest of all the peoples." (7:7)*

The Jewish people have almost always been a small minority. This may prompt us to wonder how we can be expected to fulfill our Divine mission. Even if we can survive, how can a tiny minority influence the majority? Moreover, assimilation and war have continued to erode our population, and the demands of modern life leave the rest of us progressively less time for spiritual pursuits and less sensitive to spirituality.

But now that scientists have learned to unleash the power of the atom, the world has learned that size is not always an indication of power. Once we learn how to access its latent energy, even the smallest particle of matter can release incredible force.

The basic process used to release atomic power is nuclear fission, in which the atom is broken down into smaller components. As Jews, this teaches us that the key to releasing our latent, infinite potential is by breaking our egos, thereby allowing our inner, Divine essence to shine through. The better we master this "spiritual technology," the less we need be intimidated by being an apparently insignificant minority or by having only limited time and energy to devote to holy endeavors. Within us lies the power to change the entire world for the good! (Hitva'aduyot 5711, vol. 1, pp. 313-319; Igrot Kodesh, vol. 8, p. 168; *ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 422) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **ACT NOW**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Observe the commandments, statutes and laws that I am commanding you today, to do them." (7:11)*

One of the hallmarks of spiritual maturity is valuing every opportunity to do good. Each of us has much spiritual work to do in order to bring the world - both the world in general and our own, private world - to its ultimate perfection. This being the case, we should be overcome with eagerness to accomplish whatever we can at the earliest opportunity ("today") in order to reach the goal of perfecting the world.

Thus, spiritually minded people do not put off for tomorrow what they can accomplish today. (Hitva'aduyot 5712, vol. 2, p. 229) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **TODAY'S MISSION**

### **Reb Noson of Nemirov**

*"Observe the commandments, statutes and laws that I am commanding you today, to do them." (7:11)*

"Today, to do them" - and tomorrow [in the World to Come], to receive the reward for doing them. (Rashi)

The evil inclination is really a friend, not an enemy. By setting up barriers to mitzvah performance, it enables a person to overcome opposition and thereby receive a great reward for his efforts. When the person dies, his evil inclination dies, too. Thus, in the World to Come, one can no longer perform mitzvot or expect a reward. He must work to perform mitzvot in this world - while he still has an evil inclination - in order to receive his reward in the Future.

When Mashiach comes, however, the evil inclination will still be with us. For how else will Mashiach be able to rectify the world? How can a person attain perfection if he has no temptations to overcome?

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"Today," in this world, you can do it. That is, today you can make light, expansion, an order of your life, provided you do the mitzvot. Everything good can happen - if you begin today! (Likutey Halakhot I, pp. 24a)

## **HAFTORAH**

### **THE GREATEST COMFORT**

#### **Bnei Yissaschar**

*"Comfort, comfort My nation..." (Yeshayahu 40:1)*

Comfort yourselves with the thought that you are "My nation," G-d says. Let the thought that you are "My nation" serve as your comfort in times of trouble.

### **A NEW ERA**

#### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"Comfort, comfort My nation..." (Yeshayahu 40:1)*

This week's *haftorah* is the first of the seven *haftoros* of consolation - the *Shivah D'nechemta*. After Tishah B'Av, which commemorates the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem embraces His children, enveloping them in hope and love. This *haftorah* captures the emotion of a loving parent who, after having been forced to punish his child, picks him up and kisses away the pain of distance and separation.

Although he had originally predicted the *Churban* (destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*), Yeshayahu HaNavi prophesied here the triumphant resurrection of Jerusalem. The exiles will return, and the very hills of Jerusalem will testify to the eternity of Hashem and His chosen people. Our ultimate Redemption will be far more than just a return to the land. It will herald the dawn of a new era for our nation.

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