

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Eikev

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לענן פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And it will be because you obey to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them... (7:12)

Oftentimes, when the Torah instructs us to observe the *mitzvos*, it includes two categories of *mitzvos*: *chukim* - the *mitzvos* that we don't know the reasons for, and *mishpatim* - the *mitzvos* that we are privy to their reasons. Why does this pasuk only mention the *mishpatim* and not the *chukim*?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that the generation who lived in the desert had faced countless trials and tribulations, many of which did not go as planned. Ultimately, they persevered and were positioned to enter Eretz Yisrael. This generation, given their experiences, was on such a high level that they approached *chukim* in the same way that they performed *mishpatim*. In their minds and hearts, all *mitzvos* were opportunities to connect to Hashem, be it a *chok* or a *mishpat*. That being the case, they didn't need extra motivation to know the reasons behind them. It is for this reason that the word *mishpatim* is sufficient to describe both types of *mitzvos*.

We live during a time in which our society promotes the belief of only doing things that make sense to us; essentially, we need to understand it all. The Torah is teaching us that we need to view every action and mitzvah that we do, whether it personally resonates with us or not, as a chance to cement and deepen our relationship with Hashem. Let us incorporate this important value of commitment and loyalty to Hashem into our lives, no matter the mitzvah or circumstance, so that we, along with our families, will live more devoted and dedicated lives.

HEEL OF KINDNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“And it will be because you obey to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them... (7:12)

The Torah says, “And it will be because [*“eikev”*] you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform them, and G-d will keep for you the covenant and kindness that He swore to your forefathers” (7:12). Many commentaries question the use of the word “*Eikev*,” as it's not a common word used in the Torah, and it has the second meaning of “heel.”

Oznayim LaTorah explains that when we do something alone, it helps us personally, either by helping to strengthen our relationship with G-d or by improving ourselves. However, when we perform a positive action among other people, there is a secondary benefit of inspiring them to do the same. Although this may seem like an unintended consequence (hence the term “heel,” which is in the back of the foot), it is precisely this inspiration of others and strength in numbers that creates G-d's protection and prompts more kindness.

Our actions influence others, and although we think those actions are obscured like heels, they are essential to moving forward collectively.

BIG AND SMALL ALIKE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And it will be because you obey to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them... (7:12)

If G-d were to bestow His goodness on us even when we do not deserve it, He would not be doing us any favors. First, we would feel like little children whose parents overlook their infantile behavior because adult behavior cannot be expected of them. Worse yet, it would undermine our belief in Divine justice. We would thus live lives of shame and confusion.

The rewards for observing G-d's commandments are so great that they are out of proportion to the effort required to fulfill them. Nonetheless, for the above-stated reasons, G-d made the bestowal their reward dependent upon our efforts, and the bestowal of their infinite reward dependent upon effort that specifically mirrors their infinite, unlimited nature.

Therefore, we must take care to fulfill the seemingly less-important commandments with the same devotion with which we fulfill the seemingly more-important ones. This shows that what matters to us is that G-d wants us to observe these commandments, not our own evaluation of which ones are important. G-d then bestows His goodness upon us beyond the strict dictates of what we have earned. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 71-75) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REMOVING THE HINDERANCE

Imrei Shefer

“And it will be because you obey to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them... (7:12)

If you obey even the lighter commands, which one usually treads upon with one’s heels, then G-d will keep His promise to you. (Rashi)

Actually, according to the Sages, “the reward for performing a commandment comes only in the life of the World to Come”, in other words, the reward for the proper observance of the commandments is not given to us in this life. True, the Torah makes frequent reference to rewards that are given in this world; e.g., “and I will give you your rain in due season,” and “I will give rain to your land” and other such material blessings. The Rambam, however, explains that these promises should be taken not to imply a reward but only an assurance that G-d will provide favorable conditions on earth in order to make it possible for us to observe the Torah’s laws, for poverty and suffering would impede the observance of the commandments. (Compare with, “Poverty causes a man to sin against his knowledge and against the knowledge of his Creator” [Eruvin 41].)

The Sages comment as follows on the pasuk “Therefore you shall keep My charge” (Vayikra 18:30): This means “Make a hedge around My charge”; i.e., that we should keep G-d’s charge inviolate by means of legal safeguards and “hedges” of our own making so that we will never transgress one of the Torah’s commandments. If we strenuously make every effort to devise legal safeguards in order to guard against violating the commandments, G-d in His turn will guard us from suffering, poverty or any other obstacle or impediment that might interfere with our observance of the Torah.

Therefore, we are told: “It shall come to pass because you obey” - if you’ll keep the “light” commandments, the legal safeguards that we find easy to observe, “and keep and do them” (continuation of pasuk 12) - and keep them inviolate within hedges and legal safeguards of our devising in order that we may be able to observe the commandments, “then Hashem your G-d shall keep with you the covenant and the loving-kindness” - He will reciprocate by sending us only goodness and mercy so that nothing may disturb or hinder us in the observance of the commandments that we are so anxious to keep.

EVERY STEP WE TAKE

Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov

“And it will be because you obey to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them... (7:12)

The Torah uses the expression *eikev* for the conjunction “because,” which, when employed as a noun, means “heel”; i.e., the part of the foot used in walking. This is to teach us that whenever we take a step, literally or figuratively, we must first pause and reflect whether it is in accordance with G-d’s will. If we discover that it is not, we must desist from it.

The pasuk should be understood as follows: *Ve’haya eikev* - “It shall be that at every step you hearken” to learn if it is G-d’s will that you should take that step.

INCREASING PROTECTION

Vilna Gaon

“He will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt upon you, but will lay them upon all those who hate you.” (7:15)

In the Pesach Haggadah, we read how the Tannaim, Rabbi Yosi Haglilee, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva, sought to demonstrate that the number of plagues with which the Egyptians were stricken was in excess of ten. Rabbi Yosi said that there were, in fact, fifty plagues, Rabbi Eliezer held that there were two hundred and Rabbi Akiva declared that the Egyptians had been stricken by a full two hundred and fifty plagues.

What difference does it make whether the Egyptians suffered ten plagues, fifty, two hundred or two hundred and fifty?

These Rabbis sought to derive the most numerous possible number of plagues from the Torah in order to add to the number of ills that the Jews would be spared, for it is written that “He will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt upon you.” Thus, the higher the number of plagues that afflicted the Egyptians, the greater the number of ills and afflictions that would not affect the Jewish people.

FEARLESS VICTORY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Perhaps you will say to yourself, ‘These nations are more numerous than I; how will I be able to drive them out?’ You shall not fear them.” (7:17-18)

See Rashi, who analyzes the usage of the word for “will you” [כי].

The deeper explanation seems to be the following: It is important to remember that if, while serving G-d, you encounter some obstacle, G-d forbid, not to be fearful or frightened. Then, certainly, with the help of G-d, what you fear will not harm you.

That is what the verse alludes to when it says, “Perhaps you will you say to yourself.” Because of the circumstances, you are justified to think this. However, the Torah gives us sound counsel. If we say, “How will I be able to drive them out?” the Torah advises us how, in fact, we can drive out the nations: “You shall not fear them.” Then we certainly will be able to conquer them.

ALWAYS AND FOREVER

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

“All the commandment which I shall command you today, you shall keep them to perform...” (8:1)

This verse means today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, always, everywhere, in every place, and in every corner.

EQUAL IMPORTANCE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“All the commandment which I shall command you today, you shall keep them to perform...” (8:1)

In this verse, the Jewish People are called upon to keep the commandments of the Torah. However, the verse says, “All the commandment” in the singular instead of “commandments.”

Perhaps it is written this way to stress that all of the commandments in the Torah are equally important and necessary to keep (as it says in Pirkei Avos [4:2], “One should run to perform a ‘light’ mitzvah as one would a ‘more serious’ mitzvah”), and even though some may seem more difficult or less practical, in essence, they are all a single body of law and carry equal weight.

HOLY ANTICIPATION

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“All the commandment which I shall command you today, you shall keep them to perform, that you may live and multiply, and come and possess the land.” (8:1)

In general, even if you cannot observe all the commandments, specifically the *mitzvos* that are contingent upon living in the Land of Israel, you should be eager to perform them. In the merit of your anticipation, you will ultimately fulfill them.

This is the allusion in the verse “Every commandment that I command you this day, you must be careful to do,” meaning that a person should anticipate the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvos* dependent upon residence in the Land of Israel. In this way, a person will merit to actually fulfill them. The word for “you must be careful to do” [תשמרון] is related in meaning to a similar form of this verb, found in the verse (Bereishis 37:11) “His father kept [שמר] the matter,” which, as Rashi points out, implies anticipation (see Rashi).

By doing so, “you will come and possess the land that G-d swore to your forefathers.” You will merit to enter the Land of Israel in order to observe the *mitzvos*.

IT’S ALL FROM ABOVE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And He fed you the manna that neither you know, nor your forefathers knew, that He might make you know that not by bread alone does man live...” (8:3)

The pasuk refers to the manna as *lechem* (bread), both here and in Parshas Beshalach, when Hashem first introduced it to Moshe and the Jewish people. Since bread is so essential to survival, the word *lechem* is commonly used as a reference to other basic necessities as well. Thus, this is coming to teach us that Hashem sends all of our necessities from Heaven, not just the manna. Moreover, He continues to oversee every single thing in This World with direct *hashgachah* (Providence). This is also exemplified in the miracle of the manna, which clearly highlighted the Divine protection that the Almighty afforded His nation in the wilderness.

Accordingly, maintains Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz shlit’a, excessive attempts or efforts to make our livelihood greater will not facilitate obtaining any more than what we are meant to receive, as dictated from Above. The reason we are required to work at all is merely because Hashem has decreed that we must perform an action so that His bountiful blessings can flow from it. Working harder will not help us to attain anything more than is decreed for us.

When a person truly realizes that he is working solely because it is the Will of Hashem, then he will not be obsessed with the desire to accumulate money. Rather, he will work each day according to his needs for that day. There is no reason for him to worry about the future, for he knows *lechem* is sent from Heaven, as Chazal express: “The One Who gives life, gives sustenance” (Taanis 8b).

HASHEM’S BLESSINGS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“...that He might make you know that not by bread alone does man live, but by everything that emanates from G-d’s mouth does man live.” (8:3)

Sustenance comes from G-d’s blessing. By reciting the blessings over bread and other foods, we invoke that blessing. (Likutey Halachot IV, p. 135a)

The essential life force of a person comes from “G-d’s mouth,” which is the Torah. (Likutey Halachot II, p. 82a)

It is not the physical bread, but the spiritual quality of the food - the G-dly spirit within the food - that gives a person life. (Likutey Halachot, I, p. 20)

SOUL FOOD

Arizal

"...that He might make you know that not by bread alone does man live, but by everything that emanates from G-d's mouth does man live." (8:3)

How could the soul - which is purely spiritual - partake of physical food? Every creature exists only by reason of the command that G-d gave during Creation. (Compare with "the Heavens were made by G-d's word" and "by ten Divine utterances was the world created.") It is the strength of the Divine command, inherent in our physical food, that provides nourishment for our souls.

When we take a fruit, for instance, and recite the blessing over it, we release the fruit's inner, spiritual essence with which the fruit was endowed by G-d's word at the time of its creation. It is this inner essence that provides the spiritual food that souls require.

This is the meaning of the pasuk: "Man does not live by bread only" - people do not live from the physical bread they can see, "but by everything that proceeds out of Hashem's mouth does man live." We live only by the word that G-d expressed at the time of Creation, which caused the bread to come into existence. We live from this spiritual essence because this is the food that provides nourishment for our soul.

CREATING VESSELS

Rebbe Nachman

"...that He might make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live." (8:3)

A person who looks to G-d for his daily support creates a vessel with which to receive G-d's bounty. (See Likutey Moharan I, 76:2)

The Jews in the desert looked towards Heaven to supply them with their daily needs, creating the vessel with which to receive the manna.

There is no comparison between a person who can see what he is eating and a person who cannot. Rav Yosef [who was blind] said (Yoma 74b), "This implies that a blind person is never satiated."

This verse refers to the manna that G-d fed the Jews in the desert. Although the manna acquired the taste of whatever a person desired, since the Jews could not see the actual food, they were not satiated.

Similarly, when a person cannot see the light of spirituality, he remains unsatisfied. One must purify his desire to serve G-d in order to experience the light of spirituality and attain spiritual satiety. (See Likutey Moharan I, 13:5)

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Your clothing did not wear out from on you, nor did your feet swell, these forty years." (8:4)

We are taught that during the 40 years that the Jewish people traversed the desert, their clothes not only never wore out; they grew with them, and the Clouds of Glory cleaned them (see Rashi).

Allegorically, our "clothes" are our means of self-expression: thought, speech, and action. The clothes that we weave for ourselves by pursuing purely mundane or selfish ends wear out all too quickly and can be outgrown; the clothes we weave "under the Clouds of Glory," i.e., by studying the Torah, praying, or performing G-d's other commandments, never tatter, and grow with us. (Ohr Torah 159) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SATISFYING BLESSINGS

Reb Shlomo of Karlin

"...and you shall eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem your G-d..." (8:10)

This means that you shall be satisfied from the blessing itself, which you will recite after you have eaten the food.

APPRECIATING OUR SUCCESSES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Your cattle and sheep will increase, and you will amass much silver and gold. Everything you have will increase; beware lest your heart becomes haughty, and you forget your G-d..." (8:13-14)

Moshe warns the people to beware to not forget G-d and not keep His commandments because G-d took us out of Egypt and cared for us in the desert (8:11,14-15). Moshe warns that the very thought that the might of our hands is what accumulated our wealth will lead to forgetting G-d and then following and worshipping other gods. First, why is there dual language to (1) beware and (2) not forget G-d? Second, if the strength of our hands is, in fact, what helps us accumulate wealth, are we to discount that possibility?

The Ohr HaChaim points out that our responsibility is to always maintain an appreciation and gratitude for all we have. Therefore, listening to G-d's laws needs to include an appreciation of the context of those actions. And should we find ourselves accomplishing something great, we need to acknowledge the deeds and sacrifices of those before us, including G-d's deeds, in putting us in a position to be successful.

It is this intentional gratitude that will enable us to fully live in the present and appreciate the beauty of our role in life, and in our successes.

ALWAYS AND FOREVER

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"Your cattle and sheep will increase, and you will amass much silver and gold. Everything you have will increase; beware lest your heart becomes haughty, and you forget your G-d..." (8:13-14)

An abundance of money is like having too much blood. Too much blood is detrimental, especially if something impure should enter the bloodstream. With too much money, something impure may also get mixed in, such as fraud, theft, or cheating.

The remedy for too much blood is bloodletting. For the overabundance of money, the same remedy is required, such as giving to a needy cause.

Without a remedy, "your heart will become haughty, and you will forget Hashem, your G-d."

SPARKLING MONEY

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Your cattle and sheep will increase, and you will amass much silver and gold. Everything you have will increase; beware lest your heart becomes haughty, and you forget your G-d..." (8:13-14)

Many sparks of holiness can be found throughout the world, especially in inanimate objects like gold and silver (i.e., money). By engaging in honest business practices, one elevates these sparks. But if one doesn't seek the G-dliness within the gold and silver and succumbs to avarice, his "heart" will swell with arrogance, and he will forget G-d. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 98)

CONQUERING DOUBTS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Who leads you through the great and awesome desert filled with snakes, fiery serpents, scorpions, and thirst..." (8:15)

These represent the doubts and confusions a person encounters in life. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 131a)

In the desert, the Jews trod upon the forces of evil in order to vanquish them and elevate them into the realm of holiness. This is why they remained there for forty years. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 414)

Similarly, the Jews offered sacrifices in the Temple on behalf of the nations, atoning for their evil and elevating them into the realm of holiness. (ibid., III, p. 416)

HAUGHTY FALSEHOODS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"You may say to yourself, 'My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this wealth...' (8:17)

The primary area in which the evil inclination overwhelms a person is through his livelihood. A person foolishly believes that he can earn a living solely through the "power of his hand," and does not pay attention to Divine Providence. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 19a)

This attitude leads one to believe he is invincible when it comes to making money. It may also lead him to think he can steal from others, or otherwise do what he wants, because he feels "It is my strength..." (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 119a)

HARMFUL JOY

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"It shall be that if you forget Hashem, your G-d, and go after the G-ds of others... I testify against you today that you will surely perish." (8:19)

Why is the word "v'haya," which denotes joy, used in this verse? Where is the joy in "if you forget Hashem, your G-d?"

There are two ways a person commits transgressions. One may transgress because the evil inclination is too strong to be overcome. The punishment for this is not that severe because it is not a deliberate transgression but one done just to satisfy the desire.

However, others transgress deliberately to rebel against the Divine command and to abrogate the Torah. It is about them that the Torah speaks. They are in a state of joy when they "forget Hashem," therefore, "I testify against you today that you will surely perish."

NEVER DESPAIR

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Listen Yisrael, today you cross the Jordan..." (9:1)

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 31) explains that even after Moshe was told by Hashem that he would not be allowed to enter into Eretz Yisrael, he continued to request it until he was instructed to stop - after the 515th request. The Ohr HaChaim adds that Moshe even tried to encourage the Jewish People as a whole to intercede on his behalf to persuade Hashem to let him enter into Eretz Yisrael (Devarim 9:1). This is a great testimony to the tremendous persistence of a Jew; despite everything going against him - even a promise from Hashem - Moshe never gave up hope that everything could change.

We find that this "Jewish trait" of persistence is highlighted in the Gemara's (Bava Basra 4a) description of Herod - the non-Jewish slave of the illustrious Chashmonai family of Kohanim. After being awoken by a Heavenly Voice declaring that he would be successful if he rises against his masters, Herod slaughtered the whole Chashmonai family as well as nearly all of the great Rabbis of the generation. This uprising led to his appointment as the ruler of the Jews under Rome's dominion.

Yet, despite all of Herod's glory and mighty rule over the whole of Israel, the *Gemara* tells us that Herod, and his entire family are still referred to as slaves. On this comment of the *Gemara*, Tosefos cites the *halacha* that when a master loses hope that his slave will ever return to serve him, the slave is automatically released from servitude, and is no longer considered a slave (within the opinion of Shmuel; Yevomos 48a). If so, asks Tosefos (Yevomos 45b), why are Herod and his family still considered slaves? Surely, having risen to such power and authority, Herod's master - whoever he was - would have surely relinquished all hope of him ever returning? Could it be that Herod would ever go from ruling an entire kingdom to taking out Yankel's garbage?!

The incredible answer, explain Tosefos, is that Herod and his family are always referred to as slaves because indeed, it is plausible that the Jewish master would have said to himself that despite his great power, "maybe Herod will not be the king forever, and then he will be my slave!"

From Tosefos' words, and from Moshe's example, we see that a Jew should never give up. No matter how high the odds are stacked against him, there is always hope because Hashem can change everything in an instant.

CONSUMING FIRE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must know today that it is Hashem, your G-d, who passes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them, and He will subdue them before you. You will drive them out or destroy them quickly, as G-d spoke to you." (9:3)

The imagery of G-d as consuming fire in this verse can be understood as follows: Fire ascends; flames look as if they are trying to break loose of whatever they are burning. It is only the burning matter that keeps the flames anchored, whereas once it has been consumed, the flame dies out.

Similarly, since G-d is non-corporeal, it is not "natural" for Him to be revealed in our physical world. What enables G-d to be miraculously revealed in our world is the performance of the commandments, all of which involve some form of physical matter. The commandments act as the agent of combustion. By consuming the materiality of physical matter, revealing its Divine element, the Divine flame can burn - and continue to burn.

Furthermore, just as a thick tree produces a bigger fire than a small wick, the more commandments we perform, the more we refine and elevate the materiality of the physical world. This enables a bigger, brighter, and warmer flame of Divinity to blaze in our lives, manifest as enthusiastic love and awe of G-d and passionate devotion to our Divine mission. (Tanya, chapter 53 [75a]; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5714-5715-5716, p. 271) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

TAKING SMALL STEPS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Do not say in your heart... 'Because of my righteousness did Hashem bring me to take possession of this land... Not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart are you coming to take possession of their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations...' (9:4-5)

Parashas Eikev starts with Moshe's reminder to the people that if they keep G-d's laws, G-d will keep the covenant that He made with their ancestors by giving them the land of Israel and children (7:12-13). However, Moshe later told the people not to feel like they deserved this land. Rather, it's because other people are so wicked that G-d is giving the Jews their land (9:4-5). What is the point of a covenant if conditions have to be met for the covenant to be honored? Secondly, are we only getting the land and children because we're not as bad as everyone else, and not because we were promised or earned it?

Rabbi David Block suggests that all three reasons are simultaneously accurate. The initial covenant with Avraham was given to positively impact the whole world, not just Avraham and his progeny. Avraham's mission was to build a nation that would change and improve the world, a task that requires land and children to advance and accomplish those objectives. However, the covenant is conditional on our commitment to following the Torah's laws. Therefore, our parashah begins by reminding us that we don't need to be perfect before we can enhance the world.

Don't wait until you're rich to give charity, don't wait until you're happy to smile at someone, and don't wait until you're unemployed or retired to make time to study Torah. Small commitments today will provide us with bigger opportunities tomorrow.

WRITTEN IN STONE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"At the end of forty days and forty nights, G-d gave me the two stone tablets, the Tablets of the Covenant." (9:11)

The first five commandments were chiseled into the first tablet, and the second five commandments were chiseled into the second tablet. Since there were many more letters in the first five commandments than in the second five, it follows that there were many more letters on the first tablet than there were on the second tablet. Furthermore, the size of the letters and the space between the letters and lines was the same in both. Nonetheless, the two tablets were miraculously the same size (Rashi on Bamidbar 7:23).

Moreover, the letters were engraved straight through the tablets, from one side to the other, yet the words could be read regularly from both sides (Rashi on Shemos 32:15).

This is why Scripture emphasizes that the tablets were made of stone. The miraculous way that they were written was manifest in the lowest level of physical existence, solid rock.

This teaches us that the purpose of the sublime spirituality inherent in the Torah is that it permeate all of physical reality, down to its lowest, most material level. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 29, p. 57) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ENTWINED WITH THE LEADER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d said to me, 'Arise, descend quickly from here, for your people have become corrupt...'" (9:12)

When G-d told Moshe to descend, He not only meant that he should descend the mountain; He also meant that on account of the people's misdeeds, Moshe would have to descend from the exalted level of Divine consciousness to which he had ascended when he received the Torah directly from G-d.

Moshe clearly did not participate in the people's misdeed. Moreover, he could not even be faulted for not protesting their actions, since he was not there. Nonetheless, he was adversely affected by their sin, because the nature of the bond between a true Jewish leader and his flock is such that when they ascend, he ascends too, and when they fall, he falls too.

We all are leaders, since we all have people whom we can influence. From this incident with Moshe, we see how entwined our own personal success in life is with the success of those whom we can influence. The surest way to promote our own spiritual growth is by promoting the spiritual progress of others. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, p. 175) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DESPERATE TIMES, DESPERATE MEASURES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"I grasped the two tablets and hurled them from my two hands, shattering them before your eyes." (9:17)

Mashal: A great artist decided to paint his masterpiece. He journeyed with a companion up a mountain and began painting an exquisite landscape. After several days, the painting was complete.

He then began to view his work from different angles to see what improvements he could make. He started walking backwards, admiring his work. He continued to pace from side to side, focusing only on his work, until eventually he came within a few feet of the edge of the mountain cliff.

His companion realized the danger he was in and called to him to stop moving, but the artist paid no notice. He was only seconds away from falling off the cliff to a certain death.

Again, his friend shouted to him to stop, but again the artist was too engrossed in his work to pay attention to the warning. Finally, the friend picked up a knife, ran to the picture, and slashed it, destroying the masterpiece in one fell swoop.

"What are you doing?" the artist cried out in disbelief.

"Look behind you and you'll see why I did it," replied his friend.

When the artist looked behind him, he realized that destroying his work was the only way his life was spared.

Nimshal: Hashem told Moshe that the Jewish People had sinned with the Golden Calf and that He was prepared to destroy them immediately. Moshe recognized the need for drastic action and threw down the *luchos* without a moment's hesitation, thereby halting the outrage. It was just what was needed to bring the nation back from the brink!

EVERLASTING ESSENCE

Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin

"I grasped the two tablets and hurled them from my two hands, shattering them before your eyes." (9:17)

Only the stone tablets that were "before your eyes" were broken. However, the inner essence of the tablets and the letters that had been engraved upon them flew away and remained whole.

(Compare with Rashi: "And [Yosef] bound [Shimon] before their eyes" [Bereishis 42:24]. This means that Yosef bound Shimon while his brothers were watching, but later freed him and gave him food and drink.)

SELFLESS LEADERSHIP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

[Moshe said to the Jewish people, "When I saw that you had made the Golden Calf,] I grasped the two tablets and hurled them from my two hands, shattering them before your eyes." (9:17)

Moshe was already carrying the two tablets, so he had no need to "grasp" them in order to break them. He grasped them as a gesture of ownership; he wanted to acquire them as his own personal property in order to assume the full blame for breaking them.

We see here Moshe's selfless devotion to the Jewish people. Not only did he break the tablets in order to "destroy the evidence" of the Jewish people's covenant with G-d that they had just broken. Not only was he willing to give up his life in order that G-d forgive the Jewish people. He even took upon himself the blame for breaking the tablets. And let us recall that Moshe had absolutely no part in the incident of the Golden Calf - he was not even "guilty" of not trying to prevent it, since he was not present when it took place!

Moshe's example is a lesson for all of us, for we are all leaders. We all are responsible for each other - whether in the circle of the family, of our friends, of our associates, of the Jewish people, or of all humanity. We should be ready and willing to give up whatever necessary - our resources, our reputations, even our lives - in order to ensure the survival of the Jewish people and the furtherance of our Divine mission to transform the world into G-d's true home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, pp. 56-58) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DESCENT FOR THE ASCENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Moshe,] 'Hew out two tablets of stone like the first ones.'" (10:1)

The relationship between G-d and the Jewish people that was embodied in the first tablets was more direct than the relationship that was embodied in the second tablets. Nonetheless, the relationship expressed in the second tablets was (and remains) potentially more intense (Shemot Rabbah 46:1).

Studying the Torah and properly extracting from it G-d's practical and spiritual instructions for living life would now require more mental exertion and moral dedication than was required when we possessed the first tablets. We must tap deeper reserves of power and inspiration than we needed to before. This requires that we demonstrate more of our inherent spiritual strength.

Similarly, we should realize that any apparent setback in life is in reality an opportunity for even greater progress waiting to be capitalized upon. On the cosmic level, this means that we can utilize the final moments of our present exile to elicit the infinite revelations of Divinity that will accompany the Messianic redemption. (Hitva'aduyot 5742, vol. 4, pp. 2002-2004) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THE TZADDIK LIVES ON

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Bnei Yisrael traveled from the wells of Bnei Ya'akan to Moseirah. There Aharon died and was buried. His son Elazar became the Kohen in his place." (10:6)

Aharon didn't pass away at Moseirah, but at Har HaHor. However, when the Clouds of Glory disappeared upon Aharon's passing, the Jews traveled back eight encampments until they returned to Moseirah. There they eulogized him. Thus, it was as if he died there. (Rashi)

The Jews could not believe that Aharon had passed away. Here was a man who had stood up to the Angel of Death and turned back the plague unleashed by the episode with Korach (Bamidbar 17:12-13). How could he die? The Jews blemished their thoughts by thinking that they had lost Aharon and his influence. For as long as a *tzaddik's* teachings can be transmitted from generation to generation through his disciples, the *tzaddik* is not dead.

To correct their error, Moshe showed the people a vision of Aharon at rest (Rashi, Bamidbar 20:29), implying that if they wanted Aharon to continue living among them, they would have to draw his teachings through his son. The same is true of every *tzaddik*: though he may be lost to us physically, his teachings remain with his disciples. (Likutei Halakhot VII, p. 432)

CONSTANT DIVINITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d separated the tribe of Levi at that time to bear the Ark of the Covenant of G-d, to stand before G-d to serve Him, and to bless the people in His name, to this day." (10:8)

The tribe of Levi was singled out from the other tribes to be dedicated full-time to the service of G-d, maintaining the Temple and officiating in it. Divorced from mundane pursuits, the Levite is expected to "stand before G-d" at all times, i.e., to maintain constant Divine consciousness. In this, the Levites were fundamentally different from the rest of the people, who were given territorial estates that they worked in order to earn their livelihood.

On the other hand, the Levites were expected to be intimately involved with the rest of the people, instructing them in the ways of G-d - teaching them both their religious duties and the particulars of righteous conduct.

The ideal of the Levites serves as a model for all of us, even those who are intensively involved in earning a living. We all can strive to both maintain constant Divine consciousness and elevate the spiritual lives of our fellows. (Sefer HaSichot 5750, vol. 2, pp. 617-619) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

NEEDED HUMILITY

Reb Naftali of Ropshitz

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." (10:12)

One should constantly be on the level of "what" - who am I, what am I - for humility precedes fear of Hashem, as it states in Mishlei (22:4), "The reward of humility is the fear of Hashem," and as it is written in Tehillim (31:20), "How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You." Humility is a necessary characteristic for "those who fear You."

MATURED FEAR

Baal Shem Tov

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." (10:12)

One's fear should not be the same as a child's, whose fear is of the punishment. The fear should be that of an adult whose fear is for the consequence of the act upon his soul.

GUARANTEED TO BE GRANTED

Kotzker Rebbe

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d...” (10:12)

Rashi states, “Our rabbis commented from here that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven.”

This means there is always doubt if a request will be granted. The one exception is the “fear of Heaven.” That request is granted immediately.

ACCEPTING HIS SOVEREIGNTY

Rebbe Nachman

“And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d - to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul.” (10:12)

G-d gives man the free will to choose whether or not to fear Heaven. (Berakhot 33b)

G-d humbles Himself, as it were, by asking the Jews to fear Him. (See Likutey Moharan I, 219:2)

Kingship is inherently impoverished in that “there is no king without a kingdom” - that is to say, a king requires a nation that accepts his sovereignty. When we fear G-d, we show our acceptance of His sovereignty.

GUARANTEED REVERENCE

Ohel Torah

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d...” (10:12)

Our Rabbis derive from this that everything is in G-d’s hands except the fear of G-d. (Rashi)

When we pray to G-d to fulfill a request, we cannot be certain that our prayers will be answered. The decision is entirely “in G-d’s hands.” G-d is free to choose whether or not to fulfill the request.

But such doubts do not exist when we pray to G-d to inspire us to revere Him. In that case, we may be sure that our prayer will be answered.

ALWAYS AVAILABLE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d...” (10:12)

Many *mitzvos* need something in order to fulfill them. For example, one cannot fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* without a garment, nor can one affix a *mezuzah* without a doorpost. *Yiras Shamayim* - awe of Heaven, however, is dependent on nothing. A Jew can fulfill this *mitzvah* anywhere, anytime.

SPARK OF MOSHE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d...” (10:12)

This “reverence” is the fear that G-d would see us doing something that we would be embarrassed or ashamed to have Him see us do. This constant awareness that we are living in G-d’s presence might have been easy for Moshe, but how could he assume that it would be easy for the rest of us?

The answer is that indeed, every Jew contains within him a spark of Moshe. When we reveal our inner Moshe, the fear of G-d does indeed become relatively easy to attain.

The Moshe within us is thus our inborn ability to reach profound levels of Divine consciousness. Possessing this inner spark enables us all to contemplate and meditate upon G-d’s presence within the world and His being absolutely beyond the world, and thereby awaken ourselves to a profound awareness of His presence. Even though we may not be able to sustain this awareness constantly, the depth of its impression upon us when we contemplate how G-d is both within and beyond the world profoundly makes it relatively “simple” to reawaken this awareness at any time. (Tanya, chapter 42)
- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

EMULATING HASHEM

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d - to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul.” (10:12)

The Torah commands us to love Hashem and “ללכת בדרך” - “to walk in His ways” - to emulate the Almighty. Whenever someone transgresses, it is an insult to the Almighty. Yet, Hashem continues to give him life and energy. We, too, must work on ourselves to exhibit patience and tolerance towards others. Even if they have insulted and hurt us without asking for forgiveness, we should not refrain from doing kindness to them.

STRENGTHENING DESIRE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d - to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul.” (10:12)

The *Gemara* notes that Moshe’s instructions to the Jewish People to “only” fear Hashem implies that fearing Hashem is an easy thing to do. Questioning whether this implication is true, the *Gemara* (Berachos 33b) concludes that for Moshe it was easy, but for the rest of the Jewish People it was indeed a significant undertaking.

Why would Moshe, the greatest of all educators, tell his students - the Jewish People - that fearing Hashem was simple, when he knew that for them it wasn't?

(The Ran (Derashos HaRan, 10) suggests that this is like someone with millions of gold coins saying to his friend without even a single gold coin, "All that is asked from you is one gold coin!")

At the end of the Six Day War when the Kosel plaza was finally recaptured, the first soldiers on the scene were mostly from a religious unit. Understanding the deep significance of this holy place and what it represented, tears of joy and gratitude streamed down their faces. But crying uncontrollably along with them was a non-religious soldier who they knew had no relationship to Judaism.

"We know why we are crying," they asked him, "but why are you crying?"

"I'm crying because I don't know why I should be crying!" he answered, explaining that he saw the intense emotion on everyone else's face, and realizing he had no connection to any of it and felt no significance toward his surroundings, he began to cry.

With this story, perhaps we can answer our question. Moshe knew precisely who he was talking to, what level they were at, and what motivated them. Because of this, he told them that they should find it easy to fear Hashem, in order to motivate them. For, they would become frightened at the realization that they were so far from the ideal of fearing Hashem that they would be inspired to change. Essentially, Moshe was telling them that they should be fearful for not being fearful!

There are many areas of holiness that we are far from. While our natural reaction might be to think "it's not for me" or "I'm nowhere near there" and move on with our thoughts, at least let us contemplate how sad it is that we are not where we could be and how rewarding it would be to get there. Perhaps then, we will indeed be motivated to get there, and what was once a very difficult thing, will become surprisingly easy.

BUILDING DYNASTIES

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." (10:12)

Rashi comments on the verse (Shemos 1:21), "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared Hashem, that He made them houses," that Hashem rewarded the midwives for their devotion.

These "houses" were not buildings; they were dynasties. Yocheved, a midwife, became the ancestor of the Kohanim and Levites. Moshe and Aharon were her sons in merit of her "awe of Heaven."

Moshe's humility came naturally to him because he was born as a reward of Yocheved's awe. To Moshe, the term "fear" was not a lofty word, for it was not an effort for him to obtain "fear of heaven."

I AWE OF THE TZADDIK

Baal Shem Tov

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." (10:12)

"Only" implies something relatively simple, leading to our Sages' question: "Is revering G-d a small accomplishment?" They respond, "Yes, for Moshe it is a small matter."

Many have questioned the meaning of this response, because, after all, the verse is addressed to all Jews and not exclusively to Moshe. But first, let us examine another verse: "You shall revere G-d" (6:13). Our Sages state that this includes reverence for Torah sages.

The Maharsha explains the appropriateness of this association: When one is in awe of a Torah sage, then even if he is utterly unlearned, he will come to revere G-d as well.

This clarifies our original verse as well: The Jews were in awe of Moshe, as it says, "They were afraid to approach him" (Shemos 34:30). Since they experienced the reverence of a Torah sage, it was easy for them to extend that feeling to a revere of G-d. "For Moshe it is a small matter" means that because they had awe "for Moshe," it was therefore "a small matter" to arrive at a reverence for G-d.

MISPLACED HUMILITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." (10:12)

The underlying principle here is as follows: A person must be modest in all of his ways and deeds. So a person might assume that he must also think little of his Divine service. But G-d forbid to think such a thing! On the contrary, a person must tell himself that the deeds that he performs, the commandments of G-d that he observes, are important to Him, and that G-d, as it were, gets pleasure from the *mitzvos* he performs. For if, G-d forbid, a person was self-deprecating in this respect, saying to himself, "Of what significance are my deeds to G-d?" this would be heretical. On the contrary, when it comes to the *mitzvos* of G-d, a person must tell himself: "The deeds that I perform are the will of G-d, which are important in His eyes. He gets pleasure from my actions, from my observing His commands."

This is the same idea that our Sages alluded to when they said (Sotah 5a), "A person with arrogance should be ostracized, but a person without an eighth of an eighth of arrogance should also be ostracized." The world of delight, i.e., the *sefirah* of *binah*, is the eighth attribute counting from *malchus* up, as is known (see Zohar 3:223b). In other words, G-d rejoices in the *mitzvos* performed by the Jewish people. For his part, man must rejoice in knowing that he gives satisfaction to his Creator.

Realizing this, he cleaves to the eighth attribute, the world of delight. This, then, is the deeper meaning of what the passage means when it says, “An eighth of an eighth,” implying that a person has pleasure from the pleasure that G-d derives from the *mitzvos* that he performs. As you know, our Sages say (Zohar 3:7b), “Yisrael sustains their Father in Heaven.” “Sustenance” indicates pleasure, meaning that G-d enjoys the *mitzvos* that the Jewish people perform.

This, then, is the deeper intent of what it says, “Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, demand of you? Only to fear.” The word for “what” [מה] represents the attribute of humility. As our Sages say (see Chullin 89a), “Not like Avraham... rather like Moshe, who said (Shemos 16:7), ‘And what are we?’”

Thus, this verse can now be read, “Now, Yisrael, what, i.e., humility, is what Hashem, your G-d, demands of you, except to fear...,” implying that when it comes to the attribute of the fear of G-d, a person must not be humble, thinking to himself, “Of what significance are my deeds to G-d that I should fear Him and perform His commandments?” We are forbidden to say this. On the contrary, one should be proud, as explained above.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE GREATNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d require of you? Only to revere Hashem, your G-d...” (10:12)

Another explanation of this verse: Know that G-d is infinite, and His essence is incomprehensible to any creature in any of the worlds: not to any angel in the world of *Beriah*, or *chayah* in the world of *Yetzirah*, or *ofan* in the world of spiritual *Asiyah*, and not to any mortal being. The more a person serves G-d, the more he realizes that he does not begin to understand G-d’s essence at all.

This idea is alluded to in the *Midrash* (Vayikra Rabbah 24:9), which comments on the verse (Vayikra 19:2) “You shall be holy, for I, your G-d, am holy”: “One might think that a person is expected to be as holy as G-d; therefore, the Torah concludes, ‘For I, G-d, am holy’ - My holiness is higher than your holiness.”

This means that “My holiness,” i.e., our ever-growing appreciation of G-d’s exalted holiness, infinitely high, comes from “your holiness”: The more we sanctify ourselves, the more we realize that G-d’s holiness is infinitely higher.

I heard the following from the holy rabbi, R’ Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing, on the verse (Tehillim 27:4) “One thing I ask of G-d, that I seek”: “What I ask of G-d is to continually seek G-d.” In other words, the psalmist asks G-d that he should continually seek G-dliness, realizing that whatever degree of understanding he has achieved pales in comparison to what more can be comprehended. And “the words of the wise are beautiful” (Koheles 10:12).

This is the allusion in the verse “Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d...” The word for “what” [מה] alludes to the *Ein Sof* (see Zohar 1:4a). The phrase “what does Hashem, your G-d” refers to the *Ein Sof*, Who is incomprehensible. Since it is impossible to fear Him if He cannot be understood, the verse continues, “Only to fear,” alluding to what can be understood of Him. That is the greatness of G-d, which is comprehensible, in order that a person should cultivate a fear of Him. A person can comprehend how the angels and *seraphim* stand before Him, with fear, dread, and trepidation.

HUMBLE GREATNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Hashem, your G-d, is the G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome G-d... He executes judgment of the orphan and widow, loves the stranger, to give him bread and clothing.” (10:17-18)

In Parashas Eikev, Moshe reiterates G-d’s assurances and perils based on His people doing what’s required and expected of them. Moshe declares, “G-d, your G-d, is the G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome G-d,” and in the next pasuk asserts that “He executes judgment of the orphan and widow, loves the stranger, to give him bread and clothing” (10:17-18). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wonders why such a grand statement is followed by a very specific statement in seemingly striking contrast.

Rabbi Sacks explains that G-d’s greatness is followed by His humility here to teach us that these two traits must go hand in hand. You can’t be great without being humble, without first considering those less fortunate or those who may otherwise be forgotten.

With a careful reading of the *pesukim*, one can take this lesson a step further: To love, feed, and clothe the stranger, one must not simply be aware of their predicament but understand their need, appreciate their situation, and empathize with their plight. Greatness requires an appreciation for the circumstances of strangers among us and, even more, empathy for the non-strangers in our lives.

SIMPLE UNITY

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“Love the convert, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (10:19)

G-d rejoices greatly when a “simple unity” emerges from “diverse phenomena.” (See Likutey Moharan II, 2:6)

That is, G-d’s Oneness should be manifest in every single thing. But because of the complexity of the creation and each individual’s unique perceptions, each person and thing represents a “diverse phenomenon.” Only when people draw themselves to G-d and His Oneness does the “simple unity” - a reflection of the One G-d - emerge from the “diverse phenomena.”

We are commanded to love the convert because he left behind his “diverse phenomena” - his individual perceptions and chose to seek out and serve G-d. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 62a)

PROPHETIC UNITY

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“Your fathers descended to Egypt with seventy souls. Now G-d your Lord has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.” (10:22)

The initial letters of the words *B’shivim Nefesh Yardu Avotekha* (בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיך, your fathers descended with seventy souls) spell *Navi* (נביא, prophet). The power of prophecy descends upon the Jews when they are united, as were the tribes and their descendants when they went down to Egypt (see Bereishis 46).

TRUTHFUL STANDING

Rebbe Nachman

“...and what He did to Dasan and Aviram... when the earth opened its mouth wide and swallowed them... and all the possessions that were at their feet.” (11:6)

“All the possessions that were at their feet” - this is a man’s money, which stands him on his feet. (Pesachim 119a; Sanhedrin 110a)

The strength to remain standing comes from truth, as it is written, “Truth stands [i.e., endures]” (Shabbat 104a). With truth, a person retains his possessions. (See Likutey Moharan I, 47:1)

ELEVATING MATERIALISM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“...and what He did to Dasan and Aviram... when the earth opened its mouth wide and swallowed them... and all the possessions that were at their feet.” (11:6)

The sages point out that the reason why the Torah describes property as being at their “feet” is because our wealth is what enables us to stand on our own two feet, i.e., to be self-sufficient. The imagery of us standing on the wealth beneath our feet also teaches us that by elevating our wealth - by using some of it for charity - we elevate our entire being, as well.

The sages describe the period prior to the Messianic redemption as the era of “the heels of Mashiach” (based on Tehillim 89:52), meaning the time when we can “hear his footsteps” (see Tehillim 77:20) if we are properly attuned to the spiritual dimension of life.

The fact that the same metaphor (“feet”) is used for wealth and the pre-Messianic era teaches us that at this time in particular we can elevate the materiality of the world - and thereby ourselves, as well - by giving charity generously. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

LEVELS OF LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And it will be if you listen to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul...” (11:13)

This verse seems to repeat a similar verse in the previous section of the Torah - but in that verse we are told to love G-d “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” Apparently, there are two levels of intensity in loving G-d: one that includes “with all our might” - i.e., constantly rising above what we consider to be rational or even possible - and one that does not.

This is because we are not all the same. Some of us can maintain a constant awareness of G-d’s presence in our lives that inspires us to love Him “with all our might,” while some of us cannot maintain this awareness constantly.

Nonetheless, even those of us who can serve G-d only “with all our heart and all our soul” on an ongoing basis can still rise to serve Him “with all our might” occasionally. In the Messianic future, we will all be able to sustain this high level of Divine awareness. It is for this reason that both verses - both versions of our love of G-d - have been included in the text of our daily prayers. (Likutey Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 79-85; Sefer HaMa’amarim Melukat, vol. 4, pp. 6-7; *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 282) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

SERVICE OF THE HEART

Rebbe Nachman

“And it will be if you listen to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul...” (11:13)

What is the service of the heart? It is prayer. (Taanit 2a)

One should devote his full concentration to the words of his prayers, so that it should not be said of him: “They honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Yeshayahu 29:13). (See Likutey Moharan I, 49:2)

(Rabbi Chaim Kramer elaborates: Whenever Rebbe Nachman speaks of prayer, he is referring to the daily prayers, the special prayers of *Shabbat*, *Rosh Chodesh* and Festivals, *Tikkun Chatzot* (the Midnight Lament), reciting Tehillim, blessings over food, and other prayers that appear in the prayer book. He also has in mind *hitbodedut* - a person’s private, secluded prayer in which he pours out his heart to G-d in his native tongue. The prayers one composes on his own will always be the closest to his heart - i.e., “the service of the heart.”)

DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Rebbe Nachman

“Then I will provide the early rains and the late rains for your land at the proper time, so that you can gather in your grain, your wine and your oil.” (11:14)

The Hebrew word for wine is *tirosh* (תירוש). On this, our Sages state: If one is worthy, he becomes a *Rosh* (ראש, head); if he is unworthy, he becomes *Rash* (רש, impoverished). (Yoma 76b)

When a person merits to drink wine in holiness - such as when he makes *Kiddush* or drinks the Four Cups on Pesach - "it goes to his head" - i.e., he attains the *Rosh*, a state of higher consciousness and wisdom. But if he does not merit to drink wine in holiness, it demeans him until he comes to poverty and a blemished covenant. (Likutey Moharan I, 29:8; *ibid.*, I, 20:10)

PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Guard yourselves so your hearts are not misled and go astray... and worship false gods." (11:16)

The Baal Shem Tov interpreted this verse to mean that the moment a person turns away from G-d, he is already "serving idols" in some sense (Tzava'at HaRibash [ed. Kehot] 76).

Divine consciousness encompasses the awareness that G-d is the only true reality, and that everything else depends upon Him to exist. As soon as a person allows this consciousness to lapse, he is by that very fact tacitly ascribing at least some independent reality to creation. Having lost sight of the fact that G-d is the only independent force in the world, he succumbs to the illusion that he should respect lesser "deities" - whether these be celestial forces, natural forces (such as cause and effect), or societal forces (such as wealth, power, and prestige). This is a subtle but very real form of idolatry.

By periodically re-focusing on how G-d is the only true reality, we can ensure that our allegiance to true values remains pure. (Sichot Kodesh 5720, pp. 392-393) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

COUNTERVAILING HAUGHTINESS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Guard yourselves so your hearts are not misled and go astray..." (11:16)

One does not rebel against G-d unless he has too much wealth and becomes arrogant. (Rashi)

The earth has a gravitational pull that draws everything towards it. Harvesting represents a countervailing force - that which pulls things away from their source, the earth. Similarly, the earth represents humility, that which people tread upon, while arrogance represents a countervailing force.

The *tzaddik* corresponds to the earth, while arrogance corresponds to people whose words and deeds stop others from drawing close to the *tzaddik*.

As Rashi explains, a person is likely to forget G-d when he feels sated and haughty. Therefore, we wait to eat from the new harvest until we bring a sacrifice to G-d, showing that we wish to sanctify our acts of harvesting - that we wish to draw close to G-d despite having to sometimes use a countervailing force. For otherwise, we "forget" G-d, and the earth will no longer place its strength into the new crops. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 135a)

REMOVING THE BLOCKAGES

Chacham Yosef Yavess

"Take care, lest your heart stray to serve other gods and bow to them. For Hashem's anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies and there will be no rain..." (11:17)

The skies want to produce rain, and the ground wants to give forth its produce. Blessing and prosperity want very much to burst forth in abundance; it is man who stops them with his sins.

If we do *teshuvah* and increase our observance of *mitzvos*, we can remove the blockade and earn the bounty of blessing, good fortune, and happiness.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Take care, lest your heart stray to serve other gods and bow to them. For Hashem's anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies and there will be no rain and the ground will not yield produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that Hashem is giving to you." (11:17)

The Baal Shem Tov understands the words *v'avadatem meheira* as the Torah commanding us to destroy the "meheira" - the things that cause us to rush, from our lives.

We live in a world in which we are constantly pressed for time. We have *davening*, learning, family, work and *chesed*; the list goes on and on. Each obligation is vying for our attention. We find ourselves exhausted and feeling that we are falling short of what we want to accomplish. The worst part is that after all is said and done, we are not even able to evaluate if we are spending our time wisely because our lives demand that we are constantly on the go.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the words *v'avadatem meheira* are instructing us to slow down and eradicate the "meheira" in our lives. We must all come to realize what is important in life and what we should prioritize. It is incumbent upon us to carefully assess who we want to be and determine how we want to become that person. If we keep this in mind, we will become better spouses, better parents and better *ovdei Hashem*.

CONSTANT PRAISE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"You shall place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul..." (11:18)

When our Sages said that they never took their *tefillin* off, it means that they were continually praising and defending the Jewish people.

As our Sages (Berachos 6a) observed: "Those *tefillin* of the Master of the Universe, what is written on them? 'And who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the land?'" We deduce from this that Hashem is constantly praising the Jews and also takes pleasure in those who praise them. That means that we can infer that our Sages were constantly wearing their *tefillin*.

KEEPING A CONNECTION

Yid HaKadosh

"You shall place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul..." (11:18)

Rashi comments, "Even after you will go into exile, be distinguished through the performance of the commandments - for example, put on *tefillin* and affix *mezuzos* - so that they should not be new to you when you return."

The verse states in Tehillim (139:24), "And see if I have vexing ways; and lead me in the ways of eternity." One should not think that if he becomes depressed, G-d forbid, and cannot pray with a clear mind that he should not pray, for Dovid HaMelech tells us that one should be careful not to have such thoughts, but "lead me in the ways of eternity." One should continue to pray as usual, using the Prayer Book adopted by the Great Assembly, who redacted the words for prayer to enlighten us as to the true ways of the heart.

Rashi advises us that when a person's thoughts are in exile and he has lost all desire to perform the *mitzvos* and wishes to refrain from their performance, G-d forbid, he should nevertheless don the *tefillin* and affix the *mezuzos*, as described in the Torah.

That is what is meant by "they should not be new to you when you will return" and "lead me in the ways of eternity." After you come out of depression and despair, and your normal thoughts return, the *mitzvos* should not appear to you as something new, as we read earlier: "And it shall be that if listening, you will listen..." (Devarim 11:13). Our Sages (Berachos 40a) interpreted this as: "If you listen to the old, you will listen to the new."

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"Teach [the laws] to your children to discuss them while you sit at home, walk on the way, go to sleep, and wake up." (11:19)

The verse states (Mishlei 20:11), "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right." While a child is young, his spiritual abilities can be seen. However, it is imperative to be aware of his abilities. If one cannot properly assess the child, besides not helping in the nurturing of the child's spiritual brilliance, the rich spiritual treasures that the child possesses are blunted and uprooted.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Teach [the laws] to your children to discuss them while you sit at home, walk on the way, go to sleep, and wake up." (11:19)

Last week's parashah included the first paragraph of *Shema*, instructing us to teach our children Torah. This week's parashah seems to echo the same theme in the second paragraph of the *Shema*.

Last week the Torah told us: "Teach your children, and speak the Torah while you sit at home, walk on the way, go to sleep, and wake up" (6:7). This week's instructions are "Teach [the laws] to your children to discuss them while you sit at home, walk on the way, go to sleep, and wake up" (11:19). Why does the Torah seem to repeat the exact instructions?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky argues that there is a difference between the two sets of instructions. While the first directive tells us to teach our children to learn Torah, the second paragraph mandates that we teach our children to speak in Torah while they go about their daily lives. We accomplish this by conveying the love we have for the Torah and cherishing the spirituality that we derive from it.

Facilitating a deeper understanding of the loved ones around us will enrich our lives and theirs and strengthen the bonds between previous/future generations, each other, and with G-d.

LOVE AND PROTECTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must inscribe them upon the doorpost of your house and upon your gates." (11:20)

By affixing a *mezuzah* - a parchment inscribed with passages from the Torah that affirm G-d's oneness and command us to love Him - to the doorposts of our homes, we affirm that everything we possess, and all aspects of our lives are infused with our dedication to G-d.

The *mezuzah* is affixed to the right doorpost because the right side is associated with love (*chesed*), as is stated in the Song of Songs (2:6; 8:3), "His right hand embraces me." Maintaining Divine consciousness inspires us to love G-d in all aspects of our lives.

Affixing the *mezuzah* to the doorpost of the home's entrance - in addition to the doorposts of all inner doorways - is an affirmation that the ideals and Divine consciousness inscribed on the *mezuzah* are meant to accompany us when we leave our homes, as well. This heightened Divine consciousness protects us spiritually from the materialistic enticements of those aspects of the outside world that have yet to be rectified, and since every spiritual reality finds expression in physical reality, the *mezuzah* serves to protect us from physical harm, as well. (Torah Ohr 42c; Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat, vol. 5, pp. 48-49) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

BESTOWING BOUNTY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"In order that your days may increase... as the days of heaven above the earth." (11:21)

Just as the heavens bestow their goodness upon the earth, as it says (Yeshayahu 55:10), "As the rain and snow descend from heaven... unless it has satiated the earth and fructified it, and furthered its growth" - so too we should strive to emulate this quality, to bestow upon everyone.

This is what the present passage alludes to when it says, "In order that your days may increase... as the days of heaven above the earth," implying that we should bestow the bounty upon everyone.

INFINITE POTENTIAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"For if you safeguard all these commandments that I am commanding you, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him." (11:22)

The sages of the Talmud explain that this phrase means that we are intended to imitate G-d's goodness: "Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He performs acts of loving-kindness, so should you perform acts of loving-kindness." But inasmuch as G-d's goodness is infinite, how can we be expected to imitate Him?

The answer is that it is for this very reason that G-d created us in His image. As such, we indeed possess G-d's infinite potential to do good. (Hitva'aduyot 5746, vol. 2, p. 387) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

We are taught that "walking in His ways" means imitating G-d's mercy and kindness and following His commandments.

But rather than simply telling us to imitate G-d's ways, the Torah tells us to "walk" in them, which means to progress in them, constantly enhancing the quality and increasing the quantity of our merciful and kind deeds and the performance of the commandments. This progression is meant to continue without end: Just as G-d is infinite, so

are His mercy, His kindness, and His Torah, so "walking in His ways" means increasing our mercy, kindness, and observance of the commandments infinitely.

The way that we finite creatures can do all this is by doing it because these are "His ways," rather than because we are naturally inclined to be merciful, be kind, or do anything else that the Torah requires of us. As such, we are not bound by the limitations imposed upon us by our finite natures. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1130-1136) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HAFTORAH

WE JUST KEEP COMING BACK

Chiddushei HaRim

"Thus says G-d, 'Where are your mother's divorce papers with which I sent her away?'" (Yeshayahu 50:1)

We read in Yirmiyahu (3:8): "I had sent her (Israel) away and given her a bill of divorce."

However, according to Jewish law, divorce can be valid only if the wife "is sent away and doesn't return." A woman who is insane cannot be divorced because she will return to her husband even after he has sent her away.

Israel is like that insane woman regarding her relationship to G-d. Even if G-d were to send Israel away a thousand times, she will always return to Him because she has no one else to whom to turn. After all, the Most High is her life's sole purpose. Therefore, according to the law, the divorce is invalid, and the prophet cries out in G-d's name: "Where are your mother's divorce papers?" I have handed them to her, but they are invalid.

UNBREAKABLE BOND

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Can a woman forget her baby or not have mercy on the child of her womb? Even these may forget and I will not forget you." (Yeshayahu 49:15)

Yeshayahu HaNavi evokes a powerful image in the *haftorah* that is consistent with this week's parshah. He describes Hashem as being like a mother who cannot possibly abandon or forget her children. Nothing that we will do, or that might occur, can result in Hashem forsaking us.

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