



THANK YOU HASHEM

For Shabbos Kodesh!

Parshas Va'eschanan

HaMeor Shebah

A Short Burst of Relevance

אָנכי עמד בין ה' וביןכם...

And I stood between Hashem and you...

IN THIS PASUK, Moshe Rabbeinu is recounting the way he relayed Hashem's words to the Jewish nation at Har Sinai. R' Michel of Zlotchov zy"a, one of the early Chassidic masters, saw a deeper message hinted to in these words. Our tzaddikim saw the Torah as a guide to closeness with the Author of existence. The Zohar refers to the mitzvos as "Atin", the Aramaic rendering of the word "Eitzos", 613 pieces of advice gifted by Hashem for how to draw His presence into our lives by doing certain things and refraining from doing others. When one acts against the Torah, he is closing one of the channels through which Hashem's energy had filtered through to his life. Aveiros cause walls to go up around our soul, preventing the rays of Hashem's ever-shining Light and Love from reaching us. However, there is one underlying malady which serves as the single greatest barrier blocking Hashem out of our lives: pride. Chazal tell us that if one's pursuits - including his efforts in avodas

Hashem - are saturated with ego inflation and self-aggrandizement, Hashem says, "Ein ani v'hu yachol lidor" - I cannot dwell with such a person. When one fills his entire field of vision with himself and his consuming pursuit of personal gain, there is no room for Hashem and His will. Pride and arrogance are the primary barrier that stand between a Jew and his Maker. Before anything else, we must work on attaining the realization that "Ein od milvado"; we are in this world solely to serve Hashem and everything we are able to accomplish is only due to His infinite kindness, completely undeserved. When we lose this awareness, our lives fall into chaos and disarray. In place of a life-giving channel, we have constructed a fearsome barrier between Hashem and ourselves, shutting out His Light and transformational spiritual Energy from our lives. The holy Zlotchover sees this hinted to our verse. "Anochi": when a Jew considers himself to be an independent entity, worthy of recognition and praise, "omeid bein Hashem uveineichem": this mindset stands as a concrete barrier between Hashem and his soul, shutting out true vitality, energy, joy, and divine assistance from his life. Surrendering any illusion of control and putting Hashem front, right, and center in our consciousness is the golden key to a true relationship with Him and a yiddisheit that is bursting with life! 🙏

Parsha Roundup

A 60-second Review

- 🙏 Moshe continues his speech, recounting how he pleaded with Hashem to allow him to enter into Eretz Yisrael. Still, Hashem refused, allowing him only to ascend a mountain and gaze at the Holy Land.
- 🙏 Moshe describes Yetziyas Mitzrayim and matan Torah and declares them unprecedented events in human history. "Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . and live?"
- 🙏 Moshe predicts that future generations will turn away from Hashem, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered amongst the nations. But from there they will seek Hashem once more and return to obey His commandments.
- 🙏 Va'eschanan also includes a repetition of the Asseres HaDibros and the Shema, which declares the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: Hashem's unity, the mitzvot to love Hashem, to study His Torah, and to bind these words in tefillin on our arms and heads, and inscribe them in mezuzos affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

A Quick Mayseh

A Story to Warm the Heart

THE HOLY SEFAS Emes once asked a relative to take his two sons, Avraham Mordechai (the future Gerrer Rebbe) and Moshe Betzalel, to a certain Jew in Warsaw to receive a blessing.

The relative set out for Warsaw with the two boys, excited to meet this great tzaddik. Upon his arrival, he began asking the locals where he might find this tzaddik. To his surprise, it took a very long time and multiple inquiries before he was able to track the man down.

When he finally arrived at the address and was invited into the house, he was even more surprised to find that the man seemed to be nothing more than a simple Jew! When he explained the reason for his visit, the man seemed equally bewildered by the request. Nevertheless, the Rebbe's relative was determined to fulfill his mission.

"Even if you know nothing about all this, please bless the children as the tzaddik has requested."

Reluctantly, the man did so. Closing his eyes, he placed his hands on the boys' heads and blessed them.

The whole way back to Ger, the relative was consumed with curiosity over this strange episode. Who was this man, and why did the Sefas Emes want his children to receive his blessing? Could it be that this man is one of the thirty-six hidden tzaddikim in whose merit the world stands?

When the carriage pulled up outside the Gerrer Beis Midrash, the relative ran straight to the tzaddik and begged for an explanation over what had just occurred.

"Yes," the tzaddik replied, "he is a simple Jew. But one time, when he found that he had not even a penny to spend on a meal in honor of his son's bris, he sold his pillow and blanket so he could make a seudas mitzvah. This act of devotion and love performed by a simple Jew made a tremendous impression in Heaven. It was decided to grant him a reward in this world as well - a blessing issuing forth from his mouth would always be fulfilled.

"The man himself," concluded the Sefas Emes, "has no idea that he possesses the power to give blessings that come true."

We must never underestimate the awesome power of a simple Jew's sacrifice for Hashem. 🙏

Tohameha

Tasting the Depth of Shabbos Kodesh

BASED ON A novel application of the rabbinic dictum “one’s speech on Shabbos should differ from that of the week” to tefillah, the Chernovitzer described a number of distinctions between the avodah of tefillah during the week and that of Shabbos Kodesh. In addition to the distinction between a time of war and a time of celebration, the tzaddik outlines another difference: the distinction between obligatory and voluntary praise. Standing with both feet planted in the mundanity of the workweek, it is easy to view davening as an obligation, something we wouldn’t do if it wasn’t mandatory. However, on Shabbos, the praise bursts forth from our hearts as if on its own, riding the gushing flow of our deep rejoicing in Hashem’s closeness and love. To a conscious Jew, the Nishmas of Shabbos morning is an expression of a deep desire and want to engage in praising Hashem for all His kindness. Because it is the day of the King’s celebration, the gifts of an elevated Shabbos experience spill over into the days of the week, “*ki hi mekor haberacha*,” “for she is the source of blessing.” Indeed, just as a king does not discriminate in his gift-giving on the day of his rejoicing, the blessings of Shabbos are available to every single Jew, whether one is deserving or not. Shabbos is always a gift, never earned. Therefore, as Chazal teach, even an idol-worshiper who keeps Shabbos properly is forgiven for all his sins. The Chernovitzer teaches that this is what we refer to when we say on Shabbos morning that Hashem is “*oseh nifla’os gedolos levado*”: because “*levado*”, the gift of Shabbos is bound with Hashem’s personal celebration, therefore, “*oseh nifla’os gedolos*”, the most awesome wonders become available to each and every Jew, just waiting to be harnessed for true spiritual elevation. 🕎

This section is adapted from the sefer “Sidduro Shel Shabbos” by R’ Chaim of Chernowitz zy”a (1760-1816)

P’nimiyus Ha’Halacha

The Inner Dimension of Jewish Law

ALONGSIDE THE RECITATION of the Shema each morning one recites three *berachos*, two before *Shema* and one following. (*Berachos* 11a) The two *berachos* made before *Shema* are “*Yotzer Ohr*” and “*Ahavah Rabbah - (Ashkenazim)/Ahavas Olam - (Sephardim)*.” The Shulchan Aruch rules that these *berachos* are not *me’akev*, imperative, to the mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema* - although *lechatchilah* the *Shema* must be recited with the *berachos*, *b’di’eved* one fulfills the mitzvah of *Shema* even if it was not preceded by the *berachos*. (OC 60:3) Still, in such a situation, the obligation to recite the *berachos* remains. When one recites the *berachos*, *Shema* should be repeated. (OC 60:2) In addition to the *machlokes* over whether *birchas kriyas shema* are *d’Oraysa* or *d’Rabbanan*, there is a dispute with regard to the nature of the second *beracha*, *Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavas Olam*. Some *poskim* (Beis Yosef and others) hold that this *beracha* is considered a *birchas hamitzvos*. They bolster their opinion with the Rambam’s ruling that it is forbidden to interrupt between the end of the second *beracha* and the beginning of *Kriyas Shema*. Others (Rashba, Meiri, Rosh) see this *beracha* as a *birchas hashevach* because it is not formulated as a *birchas hamitzvos* (beginning with the words “*asher kedeshanu*”). Several reasons are given for why the second *birchas kriyas shema* doesn’t begin with the words “*Baruch Atah Hashem*,” among them: A] It’s a *beracha hasemucha l’chaverta*, connected to the previous *beracha* (Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah, Tur) B] It is a short *beracha* and ends with the words “*Baruch Atah etc.*” (Shu”t haRashba). The practical difference between these reasons emerges in regard to a case where the *berachos* are said out of order or only the second *beracha* recited so that the reason of “*semucha l’chaverta*” is no longer applicable. Indeed, the Meiri says that in such a case, one would need to begin the *beracha* with “*Baruch Atah etc.*” (See, however, *Igros Moshe* OC 3:81.)

The *beracha* of *Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavas Olam* ends with a plea to return to Eretz Yisrael, “Please hurry and bring us blessing and peace. Break the yoke of the nations from upon our neck and speedily lead us upright to our land.” In *Likutei Moharan* (155), Rebbe Nachman explains the reason for the placement of this request by exploring the relationship between Eretz Yisrael and *Eminah*.

The tzaddik writes that just as the viability of a seed depends on the quality of the earth in which it is planted, a person must see to it that the roots of his consciousness are planted in good, fertile ground. That fertile ground is *Eminah*, faith. When a person lives with *Eminah* and the ever-present awareness that Hashem fills all circumstances, difficulties, and challenges, he will be like a mighty tree with deep and powerful roots. Come what may, he will be able to hold tight to *Eminah* that everything is for the best and carry on with calm, joy, clarity, and patience. Rebbe Nachman refers to this trait as “*Erech Apayim*”, the ability to overcome the natural tendency to be dragged down into the murkiness of existential darkness and confusion and proceed with faith. It was because he desired to attain this special trait, explains the tzaddik, that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted so badly to enter Eretz Yisrael. For it is only in Eretz Yisrael that it is possible to attain this level of *Eminah*, to lay down powerful roots in the fertile ground of faith that will allow a person to withstand even the greatest storms of the human experience.

Using this idea, Rebbe Nachman explains the juxtaposition between our request to return to Eretz Yisrael at the end of the second *birchas kriyas shema* and the recitation of *Shema*. The only way one can attain the fullest experience of the faith declared in the *Shema* is after expressing one’s yearning for the Holy Land, the headquarters for the *middah* of *Erech Apayim*. 🕎