

# חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

# Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

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## Parashas Eikev

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#### I

### **Birkas Hamazon and Krias Shema: the Torah's two prescribed tefillos**

We generally think of tefillah in terms of the fixed daily tefillos of Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv. According to all opinions, however, the times and texts of these fixed tefillos were established by Chazal. In this week's parashah, the Torah obligates us in two daily tefillos: Birkas Hamazon and Krias Shema (the second paragraph).

Tefillah appears prominently throughout our parashah. Moshe Rabbeinu describes his impassioned tefillah on behalf of Klal Yisrael following the *chet ha'Eigel*: וָאֶתְפַּלֵּל אֵל ה' "And I prayed to Hashem" (Devarim 9:26). Moshe uses the Hebrew root פלל, from which the word tefillah is derived. The formal text of the tefillos were instituted later by Chazal, but Parashas Eikev already contains some daily obligations of tefillah that are mandated by the Torah.

What is particularly striking is that these two mitzvos share a remarkable commonality. Both focus on Eretz Yisrael. Birkas Hamazon teaches us to thank Hashem for the gift of Eretz Yisrael, while Krias Shema teaches us how we merit to retain our hold on Eretz Yisrael. Together, the two tefillos mandated by

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the Torah define our daily relationship with the Land Hashem promised to our forefathers.

## **Birkas HaMazon: Gratitude for the gift of Eretz Yisrael**

The Torah commands:

וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ

“You shall eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He has given you” (Devarim 8:10).

This *pasuk* is the Torah source for the obligation to recite Birkas Hamazon after a satisfying meal. A careful reading, however, reveals that the Torah is teaching us something much deeper. It does not simply command us to bless Hashem for the food we have eaten. Rather, it commands us to bless Him *עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ*, “for the good Land that He has given you.” The satisfying meal merely provides the occasion to bless Hashem for the Land. The focus is upon His great gift, Eretz Yisrael.

נוֹדָה לָךְ... עַל שֶׁהִנְחַלְתָּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ חֲמֻדָּה טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה... וְעַל בְּרִיתְךָ  
שֶׁחֲתַמְתָּ בְּבָשָׂרֵנוּ, וְעַל תּוֹרָתְךָ שֶׁלֹּמְדָתָנוּ...

“We thank You... for granting our forefathers a desirable, good, and spacious land... for Your covenant that You sealed in our flesh, and for Your Torah that You taught us....”

In Birkas Hamazon we thank Hashem not only for our physical sustenance, but also for the covenant He established with our forefathers, for the gift of a desirable, good, and spacious land, and for the Torah He taught us. After all of this, the blessing concludes: *בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה*. “Blessed are You, Hashem, for the Land and for the food.” The Land precedes the food, precisely echoing the Torah’s own words: *וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ*. You shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good Land that He has given you.”

From this perspective, Birkas Hamazon is far more than a blessing recited after a meal. Every meal becomes an opportunity of thanksgiving and to reaffirm that our physical sustenance is not separate from our spiritual mission as Hashem’s people. Remarkably, the Torah does not define the mitzvah as blessing Hashem

for the food. Instead, it defines it as blessing Hashem **עַל הָאֶרֶץ הַטֹּבָה** “for the good Land.” The food satisfies our bodies, but the blessing directs our attention to the Source of all blessing and to the gift of the covenant through which Hashem sustains His people.

### **Krias Shema: Preserving the gift of Eretz Yisrael**

The second daily tefillah mandated by the Torah is Krias Shema. Unlike Birkas Hamazon, which is recited after a meal, Krias Shema accompanies us at the beginning and end of each day: **וּבְשׁוּכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ** “When you lie down and when you arise” (Devarim 6:7).

The first verse of Krias Shema declares Hashem’s absolute unity and sovereignty: we thereby accept the yoke of Heaven. We are then commanded to love Him with all our hearts:

**וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ**

“You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Devarim 6:5).

The second paragraph, which appears in our parashah, continues this theme and describes the covenantal relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael:

**וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעְתֶּם תְּשִׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֶנִּי מֵצִוְהָ אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם, לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם**

“If you diligently heed My mitzvot, which I command you today, to love Hashem your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Devarim 11:13).

This passage teaches that our relationship with Hashem is expressed not only through faith and love but also

through the faithful observance of His mitzvot. Like Birkas Hamazon, the second paragraph of Krias Shema places Eretz Yisrael at its center. First, the Torah warns against turning away from Hashem and following idolatry, and describes the severe consequences:

**וְאִבַּדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאֶרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן לָכֶם**

“You will swiftly perish from the good land that Hashem is giving you” (Devarim 11:17).

The passage concludes with Hashem’s promise regarding the observance of His mitzvot:

**לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיְמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָשָׁבַע ה' לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לְחַת לָהֶם, כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאֶרֶץ**

“So that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged upon the land that Hashem swore to your forefathers to give them, like the days of Heaven on earth” (Devarim 11:21).

These *pesukim* reveal that Eretz Yisrael is not merely the place where the mitzvot are observed and fulfilled. The Land itself forms part of the covenant between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven. Our continued possession of the Land depends upon our faithfulness to Hashem and His Torah. Birkas Hamazon teaches us to thank Hashem for the gift of Eretz Yisrael, while Krias Shema teaches us how to preserve that gift. The first expresses gratitude for the Land that Hashem has given us, and the other renews our acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and our commitment to the mitzvot through which we hold fast to the Land. These are the two tefillos that the Torah requires each day. One looks back in gratitude; the other looks forward with commitment. Every day, they remind us that our relationship with

Eretz Yisrael is sustained both through gratitude and through faithful observance of Hashem's covenant.

Moshe's timeless message, with its repeated emphasis upon Eretz Yisrael, is one of the central themes of Sefer Devarim. Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the generation preparing to enter Eretz Yisrael for the first time. His words, however, are not intended for that generation alone. The sefer opens:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

"These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel" (Devarim 1:1).

Moshe is addressing Klal Yisrael throughout all generations, including every generation that will ever live in Eretz Yisrael or yearn to return to it. Throughout Sefer Devarim, he teaches that Eretz Yisrael is far more than the place of residence of the Jewish people. It is the place where the covenant between Hashem and His people finds its fullest expression.

This idea is discussed by the Ramban (Vayikra 18:25; Devarim 11:18). Although we are obligated to observe the mitzvos wherever we may be, their fullest fulfillment is realized in Eretz Yisrael. Certain mitzvos, such as *terumos* (agricultural gifts for the kohen), *maasros* (tithes), and *Shemittah*, are intrinsically dependent upon the land. Yet even the mitzvos that are not dependent upon the land carry far greater power in Eretz Yisrael than they do outside it. Eretz Yisrael is the natural setting for the covenantal life of Klal Yisrael. It is there that the Torah lives in its fullest national expression.

This understanding casts new light upon the two daily tefillos established by the Torah. Birkas Hamazon teaches us to

thank Hashem for the gift of Eretz Yisrael. Krias Shema teaches us that the privilege of continuing to dwell in Eretz Yisrael depends upon the faithful observance of His mitzvos. Together, they summarize Moshe's message throughout Sefer Devarim.

Eretz Yisrael is both a priceless gift and a sacred responsibility. It is granted through Hashem's kindness, but our continued enjoyment of it depends upon our remaining faithful to the covenant He established with our forefathers.

Even during periods of exile, these two daily tefillos preserve our connection to Eretz Yisrael. Every time we recite Birkas Hamazon, we acknowledge Hashem's gift of הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה "the good land." And every time we recite Krias Shema, we affirm our faith and renew our commitment to the mitzvos through which we merit to dwell in that land. It is therefore fitting that in Birkas Hamazon we conclude with our heartfelt tefillah: וְבָנָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ. אָמֵן "Rebuild Yerushalayim, the holy city, speedily in our days. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who rebuilds Yerushalayim in His mercy. Amen."

Our gratitude for the gift of Eretz Yisrael naturally leads to our longing for its complete rebuilding. Even while we are scattered throughout the world, our daily tefillos continually direct our hearts toward Yerushalayim and remind us that we will never lose Hashem's promise to our forefathers.

### **From physical sustenance to spiritual elevation**

Earlier in the parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us:



hope. And they remind us that every meal, every recitation of Krias Shema, and every heartfelt tefillah is another step toward strengthening our relationship with Hashem, His Torah, and His eternal gift of Eretz Yisrael. וְבִנְנָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ. "And rebuild Yerushalayim, the holy city, speedily in our days. Amen."

## II

### The two faces of the Luchos: stones and covenant

Later in the parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu describes his ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Luchos, his descent from the mountain, and their subsequent shattering. Particularly striking is that he repeatedly refers to them by two different names. Sometimes he calls them לוחות האבנים "the tablets of stone," and sometimes לוחות הברית "the tablets of the covenant." In two places, he even combines both names in the same *pasuk*:

וַאֲעַל הַהָרָה לִקְחַת לֶחֶם הָאֲבֹנִים, לֶחֶם הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת ה' עִמָּכֶם

"I ascended the mountain to receive the **tablets of stone**, the **tablets of the covenant** that Hashem had made with you" (Devarim 9:9).

וַיָּמַן ה' אֵלַי אֶת שְׁנֵי לִוְחֹת הָאֲבֹנִים, כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים, וַעֲלִיָּהֶם כָּכָל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַקָּהָל

"Hashem gave me the two **tablets of stone**, inscribed by the finger of G-d. Upon them were all the words that Hashem had spoken with you on the mountain, from amid the fire, on the day of assembly" (Devarim 9:10).

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, נָתַן ה' אֵלַי אֶת שְׁנֵי לֶחֶם הָאֲבֹנִים, לֶחֶם הַבְּרִית

"At the end of forty days and forty nights, Hashem gave me the two **tablets of stone**, the **tablets of the covenant**" (Devarim 9:11).

וַאֲרִד מִן הָהָר, וְהָהָר בֵּיעַר בְּאֵשׁ, וְשְׁנֵי לִוְחֹת הַבְּרִית עַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי

"I descended from the mountain, while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two **tablets of the covenant** were upon my two hands" (Devarim 9:15).

וַאֲתַפֵּשׁ בְּשְׁנֵי הַלְּחֹת וְאֶשְׁלַחֵם מֵעַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי, וְאֶשְׁבְּרֵם לְעֵינֵיכֶם

"I grasped the **two tablets**, cast them from my two hands, and shattered them before your eyes" (Devarim 9:17).

Why are the Luchos described by two different names? Why does the terminology alternate, sometimes using one name, sometimes the other, and twice using both together in the same *pasuk*?

### The physical dimension and the spiritual dimension

It seems possible to explain this, *b'eizras Hashem*, as follows: The luchos possessed two dimensions. Their external, physical dimension was represented by לוחות האבנים "the tablets of stone." Their inner dimension was represented by לוחות הברית "the tablets of the covenant," which symbolizes the profound love expressed in the strong and mighty and unbreakable covenant between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Knesses Yisrael. As we will explain, even the external dimension of the "tablets of stone," contains profound depth.

Moshe knew and understood the complexity of the Luchos in all their

dimensions. That is why before ascending the mountain, he said that he was going to receive *לוחות הברית*, *לוחות האבנים*, "the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant" (Devarim 9:9).

Moshe then specifies that Hashem gave him *לוחות האבנים*, "the tablets of stone," referring to the revealed dimension of the Luchos. It is specifically upon the "tablets of stone" that we see that they were *כתובים* "inscribed by the finger of G-d," because this was the external dimension of the Luchos that could be perceived by the eyes (Devarim 9:10). We will explore this more deeply below.

Moshe then confirms that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the Luchos in all their dimensions: both *לוחות האבנים* "the tablets of stone" and *לוחות הברית* "the tablets of the covenant" (Devarim 9:11).

Moshe then hints at a wonderful matter. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells him: *רד מפהר מזה, כי שחת עמך* "Descend quickly from here, for your people have acted corruptly" (Devarim 9:12). Moshe was literally driven from Heaven because of the sin of the Jewish people. Yet, despite descending the mountain as a result of Bnei Yisrael's sin, he emphasizes: *ושני לוחות על שתי ידי* "the two tablets of the covenant were upon my two hands" (Devarim 9:15).

Moshe's intention was to say: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in His abundant love and mercy, did not remove the dimension of the covenant between Himself and Knesses Yisrael despite Bnei Yisrael's sin, the very sin that caused Moshe to be sent down from Heaven to earth.

Moshe then mentions the Luchos with no qualifying terms:

*ואתפש בשני הלוחות ואשלכם מעל שתי ידי, ואשברם לעיניכם* "I grasped the **two tablets**, cast them from my two hands, and shattered them before your eyes" (Devarim 9:17).

This can be understood in accordance with what we have explained elsewhere (see *Chamudei Shai* on Bereishis, the essay for Simchas Torah, and *Nechamos Shai*, the essay for the Seventeenth of Tammuz). Moshe wanted to shock the Jewish people and instill fear within them so that they would return in complete teshuvah. He wanted them to fear that, G-d forbid, the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people had been severed. Nevertheless, he hints through the words *ואשברם לעיניכם* "I shattered them before your eyes," that only the dimension visible to the eyes was shattered. In the moment, however, Moshe shocked the Jewish people, causing them to fear as though the covenant had been severed, something that in reality could never occur.

### **The deeper meaning of the "stones" of the Luchos**

Even the dimension of the Luchos as "tablets of stone" contains profound meaning, for they are holy. Chazal tell us that "the broken pieces of the Luchos were kept in the Aron." From this, we learn to be careful regarding the honor of a Torah scholar even if he has forgotten his learning due to old age or illness (*Berachos* 8b. See also *Menachos* 99a, where this teaching is attributed to Rav Yosef; *Chamudei Shai* on Bereishis, Chanukah essay). For they are indeed the external vessels containing within them the depth of the covenant.

As we have developed in *Chamudei Shai* on Bamidbar, *Likkutim*, this deeper meaning is concealed within the very word אֲבִימִן "stones," which brings to mind אב "father" and בָּנִים "children." The two Luchos were physically separate, yet together they symbolized the bond between the Father, our Father in Heaven and His children, אֲנִימִן לֵה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, "You are children of Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 14:1).

### Two Luchos of אב-בָּנִים "av-vanim" ("father-children")

|                                               |                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ב</b>                                      | <b>א</b>                                                        |
| <b>בָּנִים</b>                                | <b>אב</b>                                                       |
| Five commandments                             | Five commandments                                               |
| Between man and his fellow                    | Between man and Hashem                                          |
| In other words, among the children themselves | In other words, between the children and their Father in Heaven |

The connection between the two Luchos, like the connection between a father and his children, is not physical. They are therefore two separate Luchos, yet a spiritual bond unites them. In their inner essence, they are therefore לְחֻט הַבְּרִית "the tablets of the covenant." The covenant was forged within the innermost depths of the hearts of the Father and His children. This unites them in an eternal, unbreakable bond. The stone Luchos were not merely engraved stones. They were vessels containing the invisible, eternal covenant that unites the Father and His children. We have discussed this at length elsewhere (see *Chamudei Shai* on Bamidbar, *Likkutim*).

### What Moshe really shattered

Moshe shattered the Luchos with the intention of breaking the hearts of Bnei Yisrael, bringing them to complete teshuvah, and saving them spiritually and from destruction. For this, he received a *yasher ko'ach* (a "thank you" blessing of approval) from Hakadosh Baruch Hu (see *Shabbos* 87a). When Moshe shattered the Luchos, he destroyed only their visible form, as he emphasizes: וְאַשְׁבֵּרם לְעֵינֵיכֶם "And I shattered them before your eyes" (Devarim 9:17).

The people witnessed the stones shatter. What they did not see was that the covenant itself remained whole. By shattering the external Luchos, Moshe preserved the inner covenant. Had the people received the Luchos immediately while still immersed in the sin of idolatry, the covenant itself would have been endangered. By sacrificing the visible manifestation of the covenant, Moshe saved its eternal essence. The stone dimension was shattered, but the covenant remained intact, as we have explained at length elsewhere (see *Nechamos Shai*, the essay for the Seventeenth of Tammuz, and *Chamudei Shai* on Bereishis, the essay for Simchas Torah).

### An unbreakable bond

The covenant forged at Sinai lives and breathes whenever the Jewish people proclaim with faith: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' "Hear, O Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One" and accept upon themselves the yoke of Heaven. Immediately following the acceptance of this yoke, comes the command: וְאַהֲבָתָה אֶת ה' "אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ" "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Love of Hashem is not merely an emotion. It is the living



expression of the covenant, of the ongoing bond built on the kindness Hashem swore to the Avos. Therefore, immediately after promising, at the beginning of the parashah, to preserve the covenant, וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֵת the Torah declares: וְהִרְבֵּךְ וְהִבְרָכָךְ וְהִבְרָכָךְ וְהִבְרָכָךְ "He will love you, bless you, and multiply you" (Devarim 7:12,13). The love and blessings of Hakadosh Baruch Hu flow from this eternal covenant. The stone Luchos visible to the eyes could be shattered, but the covenant they contained can never be broken.

As long as the Jewish people believe in Hashem, accept His sovereignty, and live according to His Torah, the covenant remains intact. It is a bond of covenant and kindness that will neither depart nor falter. This is an eternal relationship forged by Hashem and our forefathers for the sake of their children, as embodied in the mystery of אֲבֹתֵינוּ "stones," which brings to mind אָב "father" and בְּנֵי "children." Moshe shattered the tablets of stone, and by doing so he actually saved the covenant and kindness that our Father in Heaven preserves for His children forever.

### III

#### **Yiras Hashem: A gateway to Ahavas Hashem**

The Torah states in Parashas Eikev:

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמּוּךְ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֵת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְלַבֵּת בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָהוּ אֹתוֹ וּלְעַבְדוֹ אֵת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ

And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you, except to fear Hashem your G-d, to walk in all His ways, to love Him,

and to serve Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul." (Devarim 10:12)

What does Hashem ask of us? כִּי אִם לִירְאָה Only *yirah*, fear and reverence of Him. How should we understand this request? Is *yirah* really such a small matter?

#### **Rashi: A relationship that endures**

Rashi addresses the opening words of our pasuk, "And now Yisrael":

"ועתה ישראל" - אף על פי שעשיתם כל זאת עודנו רחמי וחסדי עליונים ומכל מה שחטאתם לפניו אינו שואל מכם כי אם ליראה וגו'

"Even after all that you have done, Hashem's mercy and love remain upon you. Despite all the sins committed before Him, He asks of you only that you fear Him."

Rashi explains that the emphasis is not upon punishment, but upon the relationship. Even after repeated failures through sin, Hashem does not turn away from His people. He asks only that they reconnect to Him through *yirah*.

The question remains: What exactly is this *yirah*?

#### **The Abarbanel: Yirah as moral responsibility**

The Abarbanel devotes a lengthy discussion on this question how to define *yirah*. He rejects two common explanations. First, he rejects defining *yirah* merely as fear of punishment. Such fear may restrain a person temporarily, but it is not the ideal form of *avodas Hashem* (Divine service). Second, he rejects the view that the *yirah* refers to a profound philosophical awe arising from contemplation of Hashem's infinite greatness. Such a level of understanding, he argues, is attainable only by exceptional individuals.

Instead, the Abarbanel defines *yirah* as moral vigilance. A person reflects upon the countless kindnesses Hashem bestows upon him and realizes that it would be wrong to rebel against such a Benefactor. According to the Abarbanel, *yirah* means guarding oneself from sin because one does not wish to anger the One Who continually sustains him and showers him with goodness.

This understanding naturally connects *yirah* and *ahavah*. Both emerge from the same recognition of Hashem's kindness. *Ahavah* inspires positive service, while *yirah* restrains a person from acting in a manner unworthy of his relationship with Hashem.

### **The Malbim: Living in Hashem's Presence**

The Malbim offers a different perspective. He explains that *yirah* refers to what Chazal call בּוֹשֶׁה, a sense of shame and reverence that arises when one recognizes that Hashem constantly observes every action. A person who truly believes in *hashgachah pratis*, Divine Providence, understands that he never stands alone. Hashem watches, guides, and oversees every aspect of his life. The verse that captures this idea is: שׁוֹיִתִּי ה' לִנְגִדִּי תָמִיד "I have placed Hashem before me always" (Tehillim 16:8).

The Malbim explains that this awareness transforms a person's behavior. Just as one would never act improperly while standing before a great king, so too one refrains from wrongdoing because he recognizes that he stands constantly before the King of kings. This is reverence that arises from feeling Hashem's continual presence.

Once a person lives with that awareness, he naturally seeks to imitate

Hashem's ways. He observes Hashem's kindness, compassion, generosity, and mercy, and strives to emulate those attributes. From that imitation emerges a deep love of Hashem.

### **The Kli Yakar: Why is Yirah a small matter?**

The Kli Yakar on our pasuk opens with the question from the Gemara: אֲטוּ יִרְאָה? מִלֵּתָא זִוְטְרָתָא הִיא? "Is fear of Heaven really such a small matter?" (Berachos 33b).

The Kli Yakar explains that the answer lies in the opening word of our pasuk: וְעַתָּה "And now." Moshe is speaking to this unique generation. These were the people who witnessed the Ten Plagues, the splitting of the Sea, the Revelation at Sinai, the *mahn*, the Clouds of Glory, and forty years of open Divine Providence.

Had Moshe been speaking to future generations who had not personally witnessed these miracles, *yirah* would indeed have been a far greater challenge. But for this generation, *yirah* should have come naturally. They had seen Hashem's power with their own eyes. They had experienced His guidance every day of their lives. For them, *yirah* was truly a "small matter."

The Kli Yakar teaches that *yirah* grows through awareness of Hashem's involvement in our lives. The more clearly we recognize His hand, the more naturally reverence for Him follows.

### **The Ohr HaChaim: The doorway to Ahavah**

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh offers perhaps the most profound insight. He explains that there are two primary levels in the service of Hashem: אַחַת הִיא הִירָאָה וְלַמַּעֲלָה "The first is *yirah*, above it stands

*ahavah*." When the Torah says: מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, שְׁאֵל מֵעַמּוֹ כִּי אִם לִירָאָה, it means that Hashem asks only that we begin with *yirah*. Why? Because *yirah* inevitably leads to everything else. A person who fears Hashem will guard himself from sin. He will be careful in his observance of mitzvos. He will strive to walk in Hashem's ways. And eventually, that *yirah* will blossom into *ahavah*.

The Ohr HaChaim summarizes this idea with a remarkable phrase: הרי שהיראה היא: "Yirah is the doorway through which one enters the gate of love."

According to this approach, Hashem calls *yirah* a small request because it is only the first step. Relative to the lofty goal of *ahavas Hashem*, *yirah* is the attainable beginning of the journey.

### **Krias Shema: From Yirah to Ahavah**

The essay we introduced in Parashas Va'eschanan, showing how *yiras Hashem* leads to *ahavas Hashem* within the structure of *Krias Shema*, beautifully reflects the Ohr HaChaim's teaching. We will now review and develop this idea further.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d,  
Hashem is One." (Devarim 6:4)

We cover our eyes and focus our thoughts. At that moment we accept *Ol Malchus Shamayim*, the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. We acknowledge that Hashem governs the universe. We recognize that He directs every aspect of our lives. We stand before Him with reverence.

In many ways, this moment contains the various dimensions of *yirah* described by the commentators we have reviewed. It contains the Malbim's awareness of Hashem's Presence. It contains the

Abarbanel's recognition of all that Hashem does for us. It contains the Kli Yakar's awareness of Hashem's mighty acts and providence. Most importantly, it as the Ohr HaChaim explains, this moment serves as the foundation upon which something greater can be built.

Immediately after accepting *Ol Malchus Shamayim*, we proclaim:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ  
You shall love Hashem your G-d with all  
your heart, with all your soul, and with all  
your might." (Devarim 6:5)

The sequence in Krias Shema is clear: *yirah* comes first, followed by *ahavah*, precisely as the Ohr HaChaim explains.

### **The daily renewal**

The same theme appears in the second section of *Shema*, which is recorded in our parashah:

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ אֵל מְצֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצִיָּה אֶתְכֶם  
הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל  
נַפְשְׁכֶם

If you will surely listen to My"  
commandments that I command you today,  
to love Hashem your G-d and to serve Him  
with all your heart and all your soul."  
(Devarim 11:13)

The second paragraph of *Shema* emphasizes הַיּוֹם, "today." Our pasuk begins with the same idea of immediacy: וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל. "And now, Yisrael." Both expressions convey the same message: our relationship with Hashem must be renewed and experienced in the present, not as a memory of the past.

Each day invites a renewal:

- to accept *Ol Malchus Shamayim* anew;
- to deepen our *yirah*;

- and to grow in *ahavah*.

This idea is reflected in the blessing we recite each morning: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', נוֹתֵן תּוֹרָה: "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who gives the Torah." The blessing is phrased in the present tense because the giving of the Torah is not merely a historical event. The giving of the Torah is renewed every day.

### Hashem asks only for connection

We may now return to where we began. After recounting the many failures of the generation of the wilderness, Moshe Rabbeinu could have focused on punishment. Instead, he speaks about our relationship with Hashem. As Rashi teaches, despite everything that had occurred, Hashem's love and mercy remained intact. Hashem does not demand perfection from us, just that we begin with

*yirah*. He seeks a connection with us, to recognize His Presence, accept His sovereignty, guard ourselves from sin, and walk in His ways.

The destination is *ahavas Hashem*, but the journey begins with *yiras Hashem*. As the Ohr HaChaim beautifully teaches:

הָרִי שְׁהִירָאָה הִיא פֶּתַח לְפָנִים לְשַׁעַר הָאַהֲבָה

"Yirah is the doorway through which one enters the gate of love."

Perhaps that is the meaning of Moshe's words:

וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמּוֹךְ כִּי אִם לִירָאָה...

Hashem asks only that we take the first step to *yirah*. The journey to *ahavas Hashem* will naturally follow: וְלֹאֲהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וְלָעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּכָל לְבָבְךָ וְכָכָל נַפְשְׁךָ

## ב-י-ל-א ואמן Maharaḥ Tzintz

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

### How great is Hashem's love for the Jewish people!

Rabbeinu, the Maharaḥ Tzintz, delivered this discourse at length in his *beis midrash* on Shabbos Parashas Eikev. We present a portion of it here.

At the beginning of the parashah, the Creator, blessed be His name, promises a reward to those who observe and fulfill the mitzvos.

If you fulfill the mitzvos – וְהָיָה עָקֹב תִשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וְשָׁמְרָתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם – "And it will be, because you heed these ordinances and observe and perform them" – then you will receive reward: וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם: "Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers." The Torah then proceeds to describe the reward at length: וְאַהֲבָה וּבִרְכָה וְהַרְבָּה... בְּרוּךְ תִּהְיֶה... "He will love you, bless you, and multiply you... you will be blessed..." (Devarim 7:12-14).

Rabbeinu, however, cites a Midrash that on the surface appears very difficult to understand. The Midrash asks:

What is the meaning of וְשָׁמַר, "He will safeguard"? Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: "Everything the Jewish people enjoy in this world comes by virtue of the blessings the wicked Bilaam bestowed upon them. The blessings the Avos gave them, however, are being preserved for the future, as it says, וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, "Hashem

your G-d will safeguard for you" (Devarim Rabbah 3:4).

The Midrash interprets the words וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ "Hashem your G-d will safeguard," as meaning that no reward will be received now; rather, the blessings will be preserved for the future. This is puzzling, because the Torah immediately proceeds to give a detailed description of the reward that will be received in this world. On the face of it, this is indeed a bewildering Midrash. Once we study Rabbeinu's illuminating explanation, however, we will discover a rare and precious gem.

Rabbeinu begins with a fundamental question. How is it possible that here, as well as in Parashas Bechukosai, Hakadosh Baruch Hu elaborates on the reward for the mitzvos yet mentions only material blessings? Is this truly the reward for the mitzvos, the material world?

Rabbeinu then related a parable. There was once a father who loved his son dearly. Because of his great love, he enjoyed indulging him with expensive, dignified clothing, and seeing to it that he was comfortable and happy. The son, however, did not take care of his clothing. He soiled and ruined it, forcing his father to dress him in simple garments made of worn rags. Whenever the father saw his son wearing these inferior clothes, he would strike him for not being dressed in respectable garments. We understand that although the father himself had dressed him in those poor garments, he was nevertheless angry because the son's behavior had made it impossible for him to treat his son generously.

Upon deeper reflection, we see that the son received two punishments for his wrongdoing: one for soiling his clothes and one for causing his loving father to punish him and bring him pain.

Conversely, when the son improves his behavior and stops soiling his clothes, the father will once again dress him in dignified clothing. The father will also reward him abundantly, both for his good conduct and for making it possible for his father to treat him generously.

The meaning of the parable is clear. When the Jewish people transgress Hashem's mitzvos and, *chas veshalom*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu punishes them, they are not punished only for the transgression itself. Their punishment is doubled because, so to speak, they also cause Hakadosh Baruch Hu pain by the very fact that they are compelling Him to punish them. This idea appears in the Gemara in *Berachos* 3a: "Woe is to the children who have been exiled from their Father's table." The Gemara implies that "woe is to them" not only for the transgressions they committed but also for the fact that they were punished and exiled, because their punishment causes pain to the Shechinah. This resembles a mother who wants to nurse her child. If the child does not nurse, she experiences great pain. So too, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves us and is pained when He cannot bestow goodness upon those He loves.

If follows that the reverse is also true. When the Jewish people conduct themselves properly and Hakadosh Baruch Hu bestows goodness upon them, they receive two "candies": one for fulfilling Hashem's will, and another for receiving the first candy and not preventing Hakadosh Baruch Hu from fulfilling His desire to bestow goodness upon them. (It was said in the name of one of the great Torah authorities of the last generation that the second candy is much sweeter than the first.)

Based on this explanation, Rabbeinu resolves the question concerning the Torah's promises of material reward. We now understand that Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires to bestow goodness upon those He loves. He is, so to speak, merely waiting for there to be no reason preventing Him from doing so. It follows that all the material blessings described by the Torah, both in our parashah and in Parashas Bechukosai, are not considered "reward" for the mitzvos. Hakadosh Baruch Hu bestows goodness upon us because He loves us and wishes to benefit us. By performing the mitzvos and "not soiling our garments," we merely "enable" Hakadosh Baruch Hu, so to speak, to fulfill His desire and bestow goodness upon us. The true reward for the mitzvos is in Olam Haba. All the goodness of this world is merely the result of our "allowing" Hashem to bestow goodness upon us.

We can now clearly understand the Midrash's explanation of the *pesukim*. The true reward for the mitzvos, the spiritual and eternal reward, is described by the words וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ "Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you." Hashem will preserve that reward for us for the future. The *pasuk* then continues, וְאַהֲבָה "He will love you" – because Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves us and, so to speak, delights in our living peacefully, therefore, וַיְבָרֶכֶךָ וַיְהַרְבֶּכָה "He will bless you and multiply you." He will shower us with abundant goodness in this world because He wishes to benefit us. This goodness, however, is not the reward for the mitzvos but rather flows from Hakadosh Baruch Hu's desire that things be good for us. The reward itself remains preserved in its entirety for the future.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves to give and bestow goodness upon the Jewish people. How obligating, and how uplifting!



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