

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS VE'ESCHANAN

The Wicked are more beloved than the Righteous

And I pleaded to Hashem... (Deut. 3:23). Rashi explains that the term “plead” (*chinun*) is an expression of asking for a free (*chinam*) gift. The *Chiddushei HaRim* (cited by *Yalkut Yebuda*, in the beginning to Parshas Ve’eschanan) explains that through his prayers, Moshe ensured there be a Divine modality of “free gift”. He explains that once there is a Heavenly “treasure trove” of “free gifts”, any person can tap into it and receive from it, all he has to do is ask Hashem for a “free gift” and realize that Hashem doesn’t actually “owe” him anything. Of course, this only applies to a person who truly believes that he deserves nothing, so he can ask for a free gift. But the moment a person starts thinking that he deserves something good from Above, then he is no longer asking Hashem for a “free gift” but is demanding reward for his good deeds, which entails more scrutiny. He further notes that a person who is not a righteous man, but realizes that Hashem doesn’t “owe” him anything and he doesn’t actually deserve anything, is fulfilling the commandment of clinging to Hashem in the most optimal way — even though he is low and disgraceful in other actions, as the Lubliner Rebbe explained to Rav Bunim of Pshischa (also cited by the *Sefas Emes, Sukekos*).

The aforementioned allusion to the Lubliner Rebbe refers to him saying that Hashem loves a wicked person who knows that he is a wicked person more than a righteous person who knows that he is a righteous person. When he was queried as to why this is true, the Lubliner Rebbe explained that when a righteous “knows” that he is righteous, he is, after a fashion, clinging to a sort of falsehood because there is no such thing as a *truly* righteous person. On the other hand, when a wicked person knows that he is wicked, then he is attaching himself to the truth (because he walks around with a true and accurate assessment of himself). Because Hashem is wholly Truth and He loves the truth, then He will love this wicked person more than the arrogant righteous person. This is also the meaning of the cryptic Zohar (Vol. 1, 122b) which says, “He who is great is [really] small.” If a person looks at himself as somebody great, he automatically loses some of his stature in Hashem’s eyes and becomes small, because he is perpetuating a false perception of himself.

I would add that perhaps this is the meaning of what *Chazal* say that Moshiach will only come through *hesach badaas*. *Hesach badaas* refers to somebody who is not paying attention, and would seem to suggest that it means that the Moshiach will only come when people have given up on his arrival and will no longer actively anticipate him coming. What *Chazal* mean is that if a person keeps in his mind that we *deserve* Moshiach to come and therefore he expects him - then he will not come, because, as the Lubliner

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Rebbe said, there is nobody, even a righteous person - who really *deserves* anything from Hashem. However, if we get that idea out of our mind that we *deserve* Moshiach, but rather we simply hope and wait that Hashem will send us the Moshiach as a “free gift” because of His great love for us—whether we deserve it or not—then Hashem will finally send us the Moshiach because we too are clinging to Hashem’s trait of Truth and not demanding that which does not truly belong to us. Thus, only when we are not “expecting” Moshiach to come, will he come.

It's just the beginning...

You began to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong arm... (Deut. 3:24). *Abavas Dodim* (written by a student of the Baal Shem Tov) writes that when a person becomes satisfied with his level of serving Hashem, then he has reached the point when he will no longer be able to grow and he will ultimately perish with that false perception of himself, and will never attain true wisdom. This is because no matter what this person has accomplished in terms of worshipping Hashem, he has really only *begun* that endeavor. A righteous person, on the other hand, knows the truth and realizes the exaltedness of Hashem such that he understands that as much as he seeks to worship Hashem, and ascends various levels in his worship of Hashem, he is only reaching the tip of the iceberg, as there is always more and more to grow. As no less than Moshe Rabbenu himself at the end of his life, “You began to show Your servant...” in which he acknowledged that everything Moshe had achieved in his lifetime and all the great Divine revelations which he experienced were only the *beginning*, yet he still had ways to go before achieving true perfection. With this said, *Abavas Dodim* offers an exegetical interpretation of another verse, “And the lost ones will come in the Land of Assyria, and those pushed away in the Land of Egypt” (Isa. 27:13). He expounds on the name Assyria (אשור) as though it referred to the people who were “happy” and “satisfied” (מאושר) with their place in life, and explains that those people are actually “lost” because they will never attain true greatness because they think they are already there. On the other hand, those who look at the potential growth in worship of Hashem as vast as “the borders of the ocean” (מצר ים), alluded to in the word Egypt (מצרים), are only considered “pushed away” because they have not yet attained their goals, but are not completely “lost” in that they will *never* attain their goals.

The Years of Prophecy

You began... (Deut. 3:24). Rabbi Nosson Nota Shapiro writes in *Megaleh Amukos* (Ranav Ofanim Parshas V'eeschanan, ofen 228) based on the work *Sodi Razi* of Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Worms that prophecy was in existence for 1,345 years—from the

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day that Yaakov Avinu was born until the last prophecies of Chaggai, Zecharia, and Malachi in the beginning of the Second Temple period. If one counts the years of prophecy from the birth of Yitzchak (who was 60 years old when Yaakov was born) then it comes to a total of 1,405 years. This, Rabbi Shapiro explains, is alluded to in the word “You” (אתה), whose first letter (א) represent the number 1,000 and whose second two letters equal in *gematria* the rest of the amount of years (תה = 405).

Born of Illicit Relationship

It is too much for you, do not continue speaking to Me more about this matter (Deut. 3:26). The Chida, writes in *Pnei David* (2) that the *Megaleh Amukos* says that the reason why Hashem was so adamant about Moshe and Aharon not entering the Holy Land is that they were born of the union between Amram and his aunt Yocheved, and the Torah later forbade a man from marrying his aunt. Because Moshe and Aharon were born from this illicit relationship, Hashem did not want them to enter the Holy Land. Similarly, the Chida cites the work *Amudeha Shivah* who quotes the Gemara in *Shabbos* which says that when Moshe Rabbenu ascended the Heavens to receive the Torah, the ministering angels said, “What is a woman-born [person] doing amongst us [angels]?” He explains that the angels’ question was why Hashem had allowed a person born from a woman’s illegal marriage enter the Heavenly realm. This particular source explains that the illegal marriage in question refers to the fact that after Amram divorced Yocheved (when Pharaoh decreed that all baby boys be cast into the river), she married Elizaphan ben Parnach and gave birth to Eldad and Meidad (as Targum Yonason says), before she remarried Amram and gave birth to Moshe. This latter marriage to Amram was thus illegal, because according to Halacha if a divorced woman marries somebody else, then she is no longer allowed to ever return to her first husband, yet Yocheved was divorced from Amram, married Elizaphan ben Parnach, and then later remarried Amram. According to said Gemara, Hashem answered the angels by saying that Moshe had come to accept the Torah, as if to say that since the Torah had not yet been given, then these laws are not yet in effect.

Accordingly, the Chida explains that when Moshe says “You began to show Your servant Your greatness...” this refers to Hashem allowing Moshe to play an important role in giving the Torah, even though he was born of an illicit marriage. The explanation behind this, of course, is that since that illegal marriage happened before the Torah was given, then it doesn’t matter that Moshe’s parents were forbidden from marrying each other. Based on this, Moshe argued that once it doesn’t matter that his parents were forbidden from marrying each other, then there should be no reason to bar him from entering the Holy Land. In response, Hashem said, “It is too much for you” meaning

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it's enough to use this reasoning to allow Moshe to receive the Torah, but not enough to extend this reasoning to allow him to also enter the Holy Land.

The Chida explains that when it comes to the Land of Israel, there is greater sensitivity to the letter of the law, even from before the Torah was given. This is why, for example, when Yaakov married two sisters, immediately upon him entering the Holy Land, one of the sisters (i.e. Rachel) died, so that he would not be violating the Torah's ban on marrying two sisters while he lived in the Holy Land (see also *Meshech Chochmah* to Gen. 48:7). Based on this, the Chida explains that when Hashem replied "It is too much (רב) for you", it could also be read as "There is a master (רב) for you" i.e. a precedent in your master Yaakov whose story should have taught you that the Holy Land is extra sensitive when it comes to illicit marriages, even if contracted before the Torah was given.

The Student Becomes the Master

And Hashem said to me, 'It is too much for you, do not continue speaking to Me more about this matter' (Deut. 3:26). Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas writes in *Sifsei Kohen* that when Hashem replied "It is too much (רב) for you", it could also be read as "There is a master (רב) for you" and this master is Yehoshua. He cites the following Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 821): Moshe said, "If it is because Yehoshua that I will die [i.e. so that he will become the next leader], so I will go and become his student [i.e. so he will become the next leader without me having to die]." So Moshe Rabbenu woke up early the next morning and came to the entrance of Yehoshua's tent, and Yehoshua was sitting and expanding on the Torah, while Moshe bent his stature before Yehoshua, and he placed his hand over his mouth and he was hidden from Yehoshua, who did not see that Moshe had come to learn from him. Then, all of the Jewish people came to the entrance to Moshe's tent, and saw that he was actually at Yehoshua's tent, and that Yehoshua was sitting and teaching while Moshe stood. They asked Yehoshua, "What are you thinking that Moshe Rabbeinu should stand and you should sit?" Yehoshua at once lifted his eyes and saw Moshe, whereupon he immediately rent his clothes and began to scream out crying, "My master, my master, my father, my lord" and the Jewish people said, "Moshe our Master, teach us Torah." And Moshe said, "I do not have permission." They said to him, "We will not leave you alone" until a Heavenly voice called out "Learn from Yehoshua." The Jewish People finally accepted Yehoshua then as their leader, and he sat at the head, with Moshe sitting to his right, and Elazar the Kohen Gadol sitting to his left. Yehoshua sat and expounded in front of Moshe, and Moshe did not understand what Yehoshua was saying. Finally, the Jewish People got up and said, "The Torah is being hidden from us" and Moshe said,

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“I don’t know what to respond to you” and Moshe was seen as falling and stumbling in his Torah prowess. Finally, at that moment, Moshe said, “O Master of the Universe, until now I requested life, [but] from now on, my soul is given before You [i.e. he agrees to die]”. The Midrash concludes by saying that Hashem arranged for all of this to happen so that death would not be too difficult for Moshe, and that he himself would actually choose to willingly die.

Rabbi Zadok HaKohen of Lublin (*Tzidkas HaTzaddik* 81) writes that sometimes Hashem decrees that a person must die not because of anything wrong with him, but simply because He has deemed it time for the next leader to ascend and there is a rule that “one ruler’s regime cannot encroach upon another ruler’s regime - not even by a hair’s breadth, so since the two regimes must be separated, the previous leader must die, so the next leader can take over. However, Rav Zadok notes that one could escape this fate by eliminating any sense of jealousy that one might have for his successor, such that he would even agree to lose his position of leadership in his own lifetime and see that position taken up by successor. This is what we find with Moshe and Yehoshua, in which Moshe’s life was slightly elongated by him agreeing to see Yehoshua take over his position without Moshe experiencing any jealousy over the transfer of his power to his student.

Moshe is good

And Hashem said to me, ‘It is a lot for you, do not continue speaking to Me more about this matter’ (Deut. 3:26). Rashi explains that “It is a lot for you” refers to the fact that much good is already hidden away for Moshe’s benefit. What is this “good” to which Rashi refers? It seems that the “good” actually refers to Moshe himself, as the Torah reports when Moshe was born, “And she [Yocheved] saw him that he is good, and she hid him three months” (Ex). This means that Moshe himself is the “hidden good” and indeed we find the expression in the *Tzafnas Paneach* that Moshe is “etzem haTorah,” the essence of Torah. Just as the Torah was given in the desert, so was Moshe buried in the desert. And just as the Torah does not explicitly tell us on what day the Torah was given and there is some disagreement about what the exact day was, so does the Torah report that the whereabouts of Moshe’s grave is also unknown. Now the Torah which is called “good” is the spiritual corollary of the Holy Land which is also described as “good”. This is why “the four cubits of Torah Study” carry within them the holiness of the Land of Israel, and why places of prayer and study are considered to be as though they are in the Land of Israel, even if physically they are not. Accordingly, since Moshe Rabbenu himself embodies all that is good about the Holy Land on a spiritual plane, there is no advantage of him physically entering the

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Holy Land with his body; he is already a sort of walking Eretz Yisrael. With this in mind, we can explain why the story of Miriam speaking ill of Moshe is juxtaposed to Ten Spies speaking ill of the Holy Land; the latter were expected to learn from Miriam's mistake because Moshe and the Holy Land are so closely linked.

Another way of explaining the “good” that was hidden away for Moshe is that it refers to the fiftieth level of understanding. The *Lachmei Todah* (p. 85b) writes that the word “for you” (50 = לך) in the phrase “It is a lot for you” alludes to the fact that Moshe wanted to enter the Holy Land so that he could finally attain the fiftieth gate of understanding. However, Hashem rebuffed that endeavor saying “it is a lot for you”—the fiftieth level is too lofty and too abstract for any living person to comprehend or achieve, so He was denying Moshe's request. Nonetheless, the Arizal teaches that in his death, Moshe Rabbenu did finally reach the fiftieth level of understanding at the moment of his death, as is alluded to in the name of his burial place Mount Nebo (נבו = נ' בו) which can be read as “50 on it”. Thus, by saying “It is a lot for you”, Hashem told Moshe that anyways He had the “good” hidden away for after his death, and he did not have to enter the Holy Land in order to get there.

“Please” – the Magic Word

And Hashem said to me, ‘It is a lot for you, do not continue speaking to Me more about this matter’ (Deut. 3:26). Rabbi Uri Chaim (son of Rabbi Betzalel HaKohen of Vilna) writes in *Boneh Yerushalayim* (p. 9b) that he heard in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this passage can be explained based on what the *Zohar* (3:156a) says that Moshe Rabbenu had a tradition about prayers that if somebody uses the word “na” (נא) twice in a prayer, then it will certainly be accepted. He relates this to another source in which the Talmud (*Shabbos* 89a) says that the Angel of Death taught Moshe Rabbenu the secrets of how prayer can be used to cheat death¹ and that is to use the word “na” (נא) twice in a prayer. Because of this idea, when Moshe prayed for Miriam's recovery from leprosy, the Torah reports, “And Moshe called out to Hashem saying, ‘God, na heal her na’ (Num. 12:13), and since he used the word “please”, his prayers were answered. Turning to the verse at hand, the Vilna Gaon explains that in praying to enter the Holy Land, Moshe had already once used the word “na”, as he said, “I shall na cross over [the Jordan] and see the Good Land...” (Deut. 3:25). Accordingly, if he would have used the word “na” one more time, then his prayers would have been answered, even though for whatever reason Hashem did not want Moshe to enter the Holy Land. In response, Hashem said, “It is a lot for you, do not continue speaking to

¹ Although, see the Gemara there which says that the secret involves offering the incense (*ketores*) sacrifices.

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Me more about this matter”, meaning, He told Moshe not to use the word “*na*” again in asking to enter the Holy Land.

Acting Weird

See that I have taught you statutes and laws like Hashem has commanded me to do so in the midst of the land that you are coming there to inherit it (Deut. 4:5). Abarbanel explains that when a person acts in an abnormal, out-of-the-ordinary way, those who see him doing so will generally look at the person as a complete imbecile; unless they can see him gain some great benefit from this counter-intuitive action. However, if a person has a reputation as deeply wise, then others will assume that he is doing something so effective that nobody else knows about, just as when a doctor uses his expertise to offer advice that a patient might never have considered. The verse is telling us that the gentiles will look at the strange seeing practices of the Jewish people will declare “there surely is deep wisdom in whatever these Jews are doing”. This indicated the great esteem in which the Jewish people and their way of life will be held.

Looking to the Heavenly governors

And lest you lift up your eyes to the Heavens, and you will see the sun and the moon and the stars—all the Heavenly legions—and you will be pushed astray and you will bow to them and you will worship them, which Hashem your God had divided them to all the nations under the entire Heavens (Deut. 4:19). Ibn Ezra writes that it’s a famous Jewish teaching that every nation has its own star and *mazal* in the Heavens, as does every place, yet Hashem put the Jewish People on a higher pedestal by not relegating them to any astral force or *mazal*. Rather, the Jewish People are under Hashem’s direct purview, for the Jewish People are His inheritance. See also Ramban (here and to Lev. 18:25) who elaborates on the idea that the Jewish People and the Holy Land are not governed by any *mazalos* or stars; they answer to a higher authority.

Understanding the Conversos

And you shall seek out from there Hashem your God and you will find [Him], for you have sought Him out with all your heart and all your soul (Deut. 4:29). The Abarbanel explains that this verse serves as an assurance that Hashem will accept the repentance of those Jews who were forced to convert to other religions. He explains that as part of the cycle of punishment which are to befall the Jewish People, they will eventually be exiled from their land and experience great amounts of suffering. Because of all that suffering, many Jews will altogether leave the religion and begin to worship

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man-made images of the heavenly stars, not out of a particular belief in their veracity, but out a mistaken belief that worshipping these images will somehow save them from certain death (even though they recognize that these idols have no senses, cannot see or hear or eat or smell). Meaning, many Jews will be forced to worship idolatry by threat of death, and they will acquiesce to those demands and worship idolatry. This is not the sin, this is the punishment. In other words, when the Jewish People forsake Hashem, one of the punishments He will bring upon them is that the gentiles will *force* them to worship idolatry with the threat of being killed if they do not. So even though they will end up worshipping idolatry, this doesn't mean that they will believe in it. Nonetheless, here the Torah promises that if one seeks out Hashem "from there" –i.e. from this downtrodden situation while he is in the midst of being forced to worship other gods — and he still wants to believe in Hashem and His Torah, then the Torah assures that if he truly seeks out Hashem with all his heart and soul, then he will find Him. To do so, the person being forced to worship idolatry must be wholeheartedly devoted to Hashem, and he cannot be somewhat ambivalent or wavering about his devotion to Hashem and give some credence to the idolatrous cults. If a person gives all his heart and soul to Hashem, then Hashem in His overabundant mercy will console him and help him completely return to Him and do a proper *teshuvah*.

Rabbi Moshe Chagiz (in *Mishnas Chachamim, Eimab and Yirab* 220) records the incredible story about these conversos which happened in the time of the Arizal. R. Moshe Chagiz heard this from an old man who he considered reliable and was alive in Tzfas at the time the story happened. One of these people from Portugal who was forced to convert to Christianity came to the holy city of Tzfas, and heard the rabbi of a congregation there sermonizing about the bread which was offered in the Holy Temple every Shabbos. The rabbi apparently mentioned during his lesson that it is a pity that nowadays we don't have any way of offering such a sacrifice in a way that could bring the influx of Hashem's influences into the world. This former Converso heard the rabbi and in hi inspiration told his wife to make two loaves of bread out of flour that was sifted many times, and was kneaded while she was pure, and baked well in the oven in his house, because he wanted to bring it in front of the holy ark in the shul. Every Friday, he would bring these two loaves of bread to the synagogue and pray that Hashem would accept them with His goodwill and eat them and be tasty for Him. He would then leave these loaves in the synagogue, and the local *shames* (*shammes*) would take them and eat them up with gusto, without inquiring after their origins and why they brought there. He was just happy to get free bread. Every Friday night, the ex-

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Converso would check inside the Ark and see that the loaves were gone and thank Hashem for accepting his sacrifice.

One time, the Rabbi of the synagogue was in the shul on Friday afternoon practicing his speech for the next day, when this ex-Converso came in to bring the loaves of bread and offer his prayers. The Rav silently watched as this person offered the loaves and left them in the Ark, while pouring out his heart in prayer that Hashem accept his sacrifice and it be tasty for Him. Finally, the Rav could not hold himself back, and he screamed at the ex-Converso, “You fool! Does our God eat and drink? Certainly it is the *shames* who takes the loaves, and you think Hashem accepts them? It is a grave sin to attribute any physicality to Hashem who has not body and no form of a body...” and so the Rav continued and rebuked the ex-Converso for his actions, until the *shammes* showed up to take his free bread. When the Rav saw the *shammes*, he told him to admit that he was the one eating this bread weekly. At this point, the ex-Converso realized that it was true that Hashem did not really eat his bread and that it was the *shammes* who always took it, and he began to cry. The ex-Converso begged the Rav to forgive him, he explained that he misunderstood something that the Rav said in one of his sermons about the bread and he thought he was doing a big *mitzvah*, while really he was doing a big sin.

In the meantime, a messenger from the Arizal arrived and told the Rav that he better give instructions to his family and sort out his affairs because the next day at the time that he is supposed to give his sermon, he will die. The Rav went to the Arizal and asked him why he deserved this horrible punishment, and the Arizal told him that he heard that this Rav took away a certain *nachas ruach* from Hashem, for since the day that the Temple was destroyed, Hashem never had any *nachas ruach* as great as when this ex-Converso would innocently offer these breads to Him each Friday, because of this he was to die. Indeed, the next day on Shabbos at just the time that this Rav would usually give his sermon, he died, as the Arizal had predicted.

Finding God “there”

And you shall seek out from there Hashem your God and you will find [Him], for you have sought Him out with all your heart and all your soul (Deut. 4:29).

The Rebbe of Chernobyl (*Meor Einayim*, *Parshas Titzaveh*) writes in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that when the Torah says “...from there...” this means that one whatever level a person is at, he can find God “from there” and can cling to Him.

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Running to Do Half-Mitzvos

Then Moshe will separate three cities across the Jordan from where the sun shines [i.e. the east] (Deut. 4:41). The Mishna (*Avos* 4:2) relates that Ben Azzai said that a person should run to perform a “light” *mitzvah* like a “heavy” *mitzvah*, and should run away from any sin, for one *mitzvah* drags along another *mitzvah*, and one sin drags along another sin, for the reward for a *mitzvah* is another *mitzvah*, and the “reward” of a sin is another sin. Maimonides (in his commentary to the Mishnah there) notes that the rabbis have pointed out an extraordinary act of devotion on the part of Moshe who made a point of separating out the three cities of refuge east of the Jordan in his lifetime, even though their designation will only go into effect after the other three cities west of the Jordan will be chosen (which will anyways happen after Moshe’s death). Nonetheless, Moshe still saw to it to separate out the three cities on the east of the Jordan because of his extraordinary commitment to the fulfillment of *mitzvos*, such that when he realized that there was here an opportunity for him to take part in another *mitzvah*, he jumped at the chance and did whatever he could. Maimonides says that we see from this that even if something is only a “half a *mitzvah*” one should still run to do it. Rabbenu Bechaya (here) writes that Moshe’s devotion to even performing a half-*mitzvah* or “light” *mitzvah* is alluded to elsewhere: when Hashem tells Moshe to engrave the Second Tablets himself, He says, “You shall chisel for yourself” (Ex. 34:1), and the Talmud (*Nedarim* 38a) focuses on the words “for yourself” to explain that Moshe was allowed to keep “byproducts” of his chiseling (i.e. the parts of the stone which came out when he engraved the words of God) and from that he became rich. As Rabbeinu Bachaya has it, this does not literally refer to riches and wealth, but to Moshe accruing many “easy *mitzvos*” (which are analogous to the byproduct, while the actual *mitzvos* are compared to the product itself) which led to Moshe racking up the large number of *mitzvos* that allowed him to attain whatever lofty levels he reached.

Loving Hashem like the Avos

And you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your ability (Deut. 6:5). The *Sifri* explains this passage as follows: Rabbi Meir says that it means you shall **love Him with all your heart like Avraham Avinu**, as it says about Avraham, “For I have known him that he will command his sons and his household after him...” (Gen. 18); you shall **love Him with all your soul like Yitzchak Avinu** who was willing to sacrifice himself on an altar for Hashem’s sake; you shall **love Him with all your ability like Yaakov Avinu** who said about himself “I am made small by all the kindness and all the truths which You have done to Your servant...” Chazal elsewhere explain that loving Hashem with all one’s “abilities” refers

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to all of one's financial means, as Yaakov Avinu worshipped Hashem through everything that he owned, and was even prepared to risk his life for small jugs because he recognized them as part of what Hashem gifted him and thus as part of his way of relating to and serving Hashem.

Only Speaking Words of Torah

And you shall speak in them [i.e. the words of Torah] (Deut. 6:7). The Talmud asserts (*Yoma* 19b) that if a person speaks secular (i.e. non-holy) words, then he has violated the positive commandment of “And you shall speak in them.” The Vilna Gaon (cited by *Shaar bas Rabim, Parshas Metzora*) explains that the Written Torah begins with the letter ב (i.e. בראשית ברא of Gen. 1:1), and the Oral Torah (i.e. Mishnah) begins with the letter מ (i.e. מאימתי קורין of *Brachos* 1:1). Accordingly, he explains that the word “in them” (בם) can be viewed as an acronym for these two elements of the Torah (בם = בראשית \ מאימתי), and that a person is only allowed to speak in one of these two frameworks, such that if he talks about something else, he has violated a positive commandment.

The *Bnei Yissaschar (Maggid Taaluma to Brachos 2a)* writes that he heard from remarkable exegetes an explanation as to why the Mishnah begins with a regular letter מ (i.e. מאימתי קורין of *Brachos* 1:1) and ends with a closed letter ם (את עמו בשלום in the end of *Uktzin*). He explains that when a person pronounces the name of the letter *mem* (the *m*-sound) he does so using his lips, he first uses his lips to open his mouth, and then closes his mouth. Accordingly, the letter *mem* connotes this dynamic of opening and closing the mouth. This phenomenon is meant to allude to the idea that the Talmud (*Yoma* 19b) says that one should only speak in Torah “and not in frivolous matters”, such that a person should only “open” his mouth to speak Torah, and when he finishes learning Torah, he should close it. Similar to the Vilna Gaon, he explains that that the word “in them” (בם) can be viewed as an acronym for the two elements of the Torah (בם = בראשית \ שלום), but he adds that the מ is a final ם in allusion to the idea that it should be “the end” after which one should close one's mouth instead of continuing to talk.²

² See also *Zera Kodesh* (to *Parshas Vaera* and to *Parshas Emor*) who takes note of the fact that not only does the Mishnah begin with the letter ך and ends with the letter ך. but so does the word Egypt (מצרים). He explains that in the middle of the word Egypt is the letters of the word יצר – the Evil Inclination. With this in mind, he explains that the lesson being conveyed here is that a person must keep to the *mem* from beginning to end, without ever

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Fearing Torah Scholars

You shall fear Hashem your God (Deut. 6:13). *Likkutei basar Likkutei (Voeschanan, p. 58)* gives an explanation of this in the name of Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin (son of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin). The Talmud (*Shabbos* 34a) says that if prostitutes who are competing with one another help each other out (Rashi explains that this means that they do each other's hair), then certainly Torah Scholars should also do so. Yet, he notes, we find that in general the opposite is true, Torah Scholars actually can hate each other and do not tend to help each other out. Similarly, the *Likkutei basar Likkutei* cites the *Yisdos Ohalim* to our verse who explains that Rabbi Akiva in particular expounded on the word *es* (which is invisible in our translation, but is part of the verse quoted) as including Torah Scholars—i.e. one must fear Hashem and also fear Torah Scholars—because Rabbi Akiva had first-hand experience with the sort of disrespect and hatred that Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin spoke about (because many of his students died because they did not respect each other, see *Yevamos* 62a). Because of this, Rabbi Akiva of all scholars, used this passage a springboard for rebuking his students and telling them that they must “fear” or “respect” one another.

And you shall safeguard the commandment, and the statutes and the law which I am commanding you today to do them (Deut. 7:11). Chazal (see Rashi) explain that “today to do them” means that today is only for “doing” the commandments, but “tomorrow” (i.e. in the World to Come), one will receive the rewards for said commandments. The Mishnah says “Do not be like servants who serve the master on condition to receive reward, and the fear of heaven will be upon you” (*Avos*). The *Yalkut HaGershuni (Tinyana, Parshas Eikev, p. 9b)* explains that the difference between somebody who serves his maser to receive reward and one who serves without the hopes of receiving reward is that the latter is not highly motivated to Hashem's commandments and worshipping Him, rather he might push it off for hours or days because he knows that he still has time anyways until he will receive the reward. But when a person worships Hashem without thought of the reward, then he will not push off performing the commandments or worshipping Hashem, because he is doing so out of love for Hashem, and it doesn't matter to him that the reward won't come for a while. Accordingly, when the Torah makes a point of teaching us that that today is only for “doing” the commandments, but “tomorrow” (i.e. in the World to Come), one will receive the rewards for the commandments, the crux of the lesson is that one should

allowing the צַר to interrupt in the middle. If a person does interrupt his study of Torah with the צַר that he can fall into the places of impurity typified by Egypt.

*Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com*

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Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
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not be thinking about the reward when doing the *mitzvos* because the reward is so far away. Rather, one should do the *mitzvos* out of love of Hashem, which will motivate him to do the *mitzvos* right now, and not procrastinate until a later time.