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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
 רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Vayelech

"Hashem Wants the Heart"

Questions

1 – Our *parasha* teaches us (30:11-14) that the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot is not in Heaven, nor across the sea. Rather, it is close to us; in our mouths and in our hearts. What does this mean? How is observing the Torah made easier since it depends on man's mouth and heart? It appears that the Torah is telling man that even though he has a *yetzer hara* which lures him to follow his desires, which run contrary to the Torah, nevertheless, since the Torah is not in Heaven, nor across the sea, it will be easier. How does this make it easier – it still seems very hard!

2 – Furthermore, what exactly are we to make of this parable "not in the Heaven, nor across the sea?" Would anyone even think that the Torah would command an individual to do something which is impossible for him to do? It would seem, then, that this parable is extraneous!

The Nation's Prayers

We will begin by stating that sadly, when most people pray in present times, they lack concentration. Man's mind is focused on what is going on around him, and he barely knows what he is saying, all the more so, to actually have *kavana*. This is especially true in our times, the generation of technology and media, where man is relentlessly pursued everywhere he goes and is totally enslaved to the little black box which rings every second. Those on a higher level will turn off the volume, but his phone still vibrates. Once it vibrates, he must immediately look at see what he was sent. Much to my sorrow, I have even seen individuals who were unable to refrain themselves even while in middle of *Shemona Esrei*, as if it were a life threatening issue. We will not even mention *Kriat Shema*, *Birkat Hamazon*, the rest of the *tefilah*, or a *shiur*. [Incidentally, a good piece of advice is not to carry one's phone during *tefila*, so at least during prayer no one will be able to call him. This is the way it used to be in the past, before the phones became cellular, and man had peace of mind during prayer. This excludes life-threatening situations, such as if one's wife is imminently expecting, for example.] While his body might be here, his head is in the sky. Therefore, the Torah is teaching us that there is no value to his deeds as long as his heart is removed from them. This is because, "*Rachmana liba bayei*, Hashem wants the heart," as we will soon explain.

Explanation of the *Maharsha* and the *Torah Temima*

We will begin by quoting the words of our Sages (*Eirubin* 54a), who expound upon the *pasuk* in our *parasha*, "For the thing [- the Torah] is very close to you; it is in your mouth and heart to do it." On this they teach, "When is it close to you? When it is in your mouth and heart to do it." These words require explanation. The *Maharsha* explains this to mean that when the words of the Torah are able to be spoken in a clear and organized fashion, then it will be guarded in your heart, and you will carry it out. However, if this is not the case, it will be forgotten and will not be carried out. The *Torah Temima* (*Devarim* 30, *he'ara* 16) offers an additional explanation, namely, that the *pasuk* is excluding one who learns Torah to know it but not to fulfill it. Someone who learns in such a manner does not merit having the topics properly ingrained in his mind. They are therefore not "close to him." According to his explanation, our Sages are referring only to one who learns to fulfill the *halacha*, but not someone who learns only to amass Torah knowledge.

Hashem Does Not Level Unfair Claims Upon His Creations

I believe we can also explain this as follows: When Hashem tells each and every individual that the Torah is not in Heaven, He wishes to teach us that one should not err in thinking that only someone who is entirely spiritual, removed from the mundane world, and "in the Heavens," as it were, could fulfill the Torah and mitzvot. Rather, the Torah tells us that the matter is in our mouths and hearts. This means that Hashem does not demand more from an individual than he is capable of. Rather, each individual is measured according to his own abilities, his



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own "mouth and heart," and not according to the capabilities of anyone else. Our Sages are adding that the Torah is close to us when our mouths reflect what is in our hearts. See the *Rabbeinu Bachaya* (*Nitzavim* 30:14) who explains this to mean that we must agree to something in our minds, make a firm decision in our hearts, and then confess with our hearts. In other words, he cannot be the type of person who thinks one way but says another – he must be consistent through and through [Also see the Ramban's commentary on the *parasha* 30:6]. Well known is the famous statement of Rebbe Zusha, that when he leaves the world, he is not afraid that he will be asked in Heaven why he was not like Moshe Rabbeinu or R' Shimon bar Yochai. Nor will he be held accountable for not becoming the Rambam or *Maran* the Beit Yosef. Rather, he is afraid that he will be asked why Zusha was not the Zusha that he could have been. Hashem does not demand from man more than he is capable of, and He levels no unfair claims. This is especially true in our generation, the generation of technology and media, when yielding to the lure presented by a given device could gain man access to every impurity and make him stumble to his *yetzer hara*. It is clear that man will not be compared to the levels of the previous generations, and every good deed in our times is worth ten times as much as it was in the past, and his reward will be very great.

The Days of Elul

This is especially true during the month of Elul, a month whose name is hinted to in the *roshei teivot* of the words from our *parasha*, "*Es le'avvcha ve'es le'avv zarecha* [את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך], Your heart and the heart of your descendants." This is a time when everyone's hearts are filled with emotion over the Days of Judgment which are soon to arrive. Certainly, at this time, every person has the opportunity to exert effort to the best of his ability. He should not fall into the trap of his *yetzer hara*, who causes man to try and accept things upon himself which are far beyond his capabilities. Once having done so, man suddenly realizes that he is not capable of doing that which he accepted upon himself, and he despairs entirely. Rather, he must accept a small thing upon himself to improve his deeds. Once having done so, he can gradually build upon what he accomplished. The aforementioned *roshei teivot* is mentioned by the *Baal Haturim* in our *parasha*. He then writes, "Therefore, we are accustomed to rise early and pray *Selichot* from Elul and onwards." He also mentions that there is an allusion to Elul in the prayer *Le'david Hashem uri ve'ishi*, which, from the beginning of Elul, we begin to recite at the end of our prayers. The *pasuk* there states, *Lulei he'emanti lirot be'tuv Hashem. Luli* [לולא] has the same letters as Elul [אלול]. See there further for his explanation of the allusion.

Praying Like a Foolish Villager

However, many individuals race through their prayers, without even realizing what they are saying. The *ba'alei Mussar* have compared this to a villager who married a girl from the big city. The *shadchan* explained to the villager that in the city, everything was conducted with manners and politeness. "For example, in the morning we say, 'Good morning,' and at night we say, 'Good night.' When we eat, we say that we hope they enjoy their meal, and when we meet someone during the day, we say, '*Shalom aleichem*, how are you feeling?' When someone is not feeling well, we extend him our wishes that he recovers soon. When he sneezes, we say, 'Bless you,' and the like." The villager listened to what the *shadchan* said, but there were simply too many things for him to remember. Therefore, when he arrived in the city and met his in-laws, he immediately began to speak foolishly. He started saying all the various expressions he had learned, at one time, "Good morning. Good night. Bless you. Wishing you a speedy recovery..." His wife's parents did not know whether to laugh or cry – what a foolish *chatan* their daughter had been matched up with. The explanation of the parable is as follows: When we pray, we quickly recite the *viduy* as well as *Avinu Malkeinu*. We say them speedily, just like the villager, without understanding what we are saying. We do not take care that our prayers should be recited like the supplications that they truly are. There is no doubt that prayers such as these are not accepted. All the more so, does this apply to the Ten Days of Repentance. Well known is the teaching of the *Arizal* that Hashem granted us seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to correct all the days of the previous year. With each prayer he recites, he rectifies the prayers that he prayed on that day of the week, throughout the entire year. Similarly,



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each day he should contemplate the sins that he stumbled with and make efforts to rectify them. But it is clear that only if he actually intends to rectify his deeds will it be considered as if he actually rectified them.

A Special Aspect of Sounding the *Shofar*

Let us ask a number of questions regarding blowing the *Shofar*: 1) We must understand the special aspect of the *Shofar*, that it is able to confuse the *Satan* and to make Hashem rise, as it were, from the Throne of Strict Judgment to that of Mercy. How does blowing the *Shofar* accomplish this? 2) Furthermore, the *Navi* states, "Does a *Shofar* sound in the city and the nation not tremble?" Why should we tremble when hearing the *Shofar*? Shouldn't we rejoice?

The answer is that it is not the actual sounding of the *Shofar* which is the main aspect; rather, it is the effect that it has on the individual. This is the intention of the *Navi*, namely, that hearing the *Shofar* blast is meant to stir us to self-introspection. It must move man to contemplate his deeds in preparation for the Day of Judgment. The *Shofar* arouses man's heart to *teshuvah* and makes him tremble from the word of Hashem; then his mouth and heart no longer contradict each other – **this** is the special power of the *Shofar*. This is what makes Hashem rise, as it were, from the Throne of Strict Judgment to that of Mercy. I saw in the *Drashot* of the *Ben Ish Chai* that this idea of the mouth and heart being in unison is alluded to in the *Shofar*. He writes that the word *Shofar* has the numerical value of 586. When the words *peh*, mouth and *lev*, heart are spelled out fully [פ"י"ה-ה"י"י-למ"ד-ב"י"ת], they also have the numerical value of 586. This teaches us that the main aspect of the *Shofar* is to improve man's deeds, so that his heart and mouth reflect one another. However, when his mouth speaks one way and his heart feels another way, Heaven forbid, then the words of the *Navi* (*Yeshaya* 29:13), "Its mouth and lips honor Me; but its heart is distant from Me" apply.

A Story About the Mouth and Heart Not Contradicting One Another

This idea can be illustrated by a story that occurred in the time of the *Admor*, Rebbe Shalom of Belz *zt"l*. Amongst the *chassidim* of Belz was a tailor, who initially began his career in righteous fashion. Every day he prayed and recited all of the *Tehillim*. Then he would go to work, and *baruch Hashem*, was very successful. One day, he had a heated argument with one of the prominent gentile officers, and as a result, this gentile stopped buying from him. Since the tailor was a total ignoramus, unknowledgeable in Torah, he decided that since Hashem had punished him, by causing this gentile to stop patronizing him, he was now going to punish His Creator in return. He therefore stopped saying one of the chapters of *Tehillim* that he normally said. However, shortly thereafter, a different gentile commander stopped buying from him. So the tailor stopped saying more *Tehillim*. He continued to say less and less *Tehillim*, and he eventually lost all of his customers. At that point, he entirely stopped saying *Tehillim* and praying. He even fell to the level where he decided to desecrate the Shabbat. In the meanwhile, his store closed, since he had no more customers. He had nothing to do and nothing to eat. That day was *Motzei Shabbat*, the first night of *Selichot*. On this night, it was the custom of the Rebbe to lead the *Selichot*. That night, about an hour before the *Selichot*, he called his attendant, Elimelech, and requested him to prepare the wagon for a journey. They began to travel until they reached the house of the tailor. They peered into the window from outside and saw the tailor sitting down, looking very sad. Suddenly, he rose, opened the closet and pulled out a bottle of whiskey. He brought two cups and poured into both of them. He lifted the cups, said, "*Le'chaim*," and drank. He refilled the cups and drank once more. He drank both cups, and it appeared like the second cup was meant for someone else. He repeated this act several more times. At that point, the Rebbe said, "We have seen enough, let us go back to the *Beit Midrash*." The attendant did not understand what was going on. The tailor was an ignoramus, and he had not come to pray for a long time. Why, then, did the Rebbe need to see how he got drunk?

They returned to the *beit midrash* and the Rebbe prepared for *Selichot*. Suddenly, the tailor appeared, his face totally flushed from the whiskey. Then the Rebbe came out of his room and began reciting the *Selichot* with great fervor. Following the *Selichot*, the attendant approached the tailor and asked him what had happened that day; why had the Rebbe had gone to see him? He asked him to explain his actions. The tailor began to tell him



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his entire story and about how he had stopped praying. However, on that particular night, he was struck with a wave of inspiration to repent. He decided to mend his ways, and he regretted what he done, acting improperly and getting angry at Hashem. He remembered that he had once made peace with another party by drinking a *le'chaim* together, so he decided to do the same with Hashem. He therefore lifted the cups and drank *le'chaim*. But since Hashem is not a human being who drinks, the tailor himself drank the second cup instead. This repeated itself a number of times until he felt that peace now reigned, and he, therefore came to *Selichot*. Elimelech then approached the Rebbe and asked him why he had gone to see the drunken tailor. He then told the Rebbe the story that the tailor had related. The Rebbe replied, "You should know, that at that time, the entire Heavenly Assembly descended to see how a man sincerely makes peace with his Creator and repents." Once the Rebbe had perceived this with *ruach ha'kodesh*, how could he not go and see it himself?

Words of Mussar

We have learned that the Torah is very close to us; it is in our hearts and mouths to fulfill it. Man is not required to resemble an angel or the *tzaddikei ha'dor* – he does not need to ascend to Heaven. He also does not have to cross the sea, i.e., by afflicting himself, pushing himself beyond his abilities. Hashem's ways are those of pleasantness; he is demanded only to perform according to his capabilities and do *teshuvah*. However, it is on condition that his mouth and heart do not conflict with one another. His prayers must be recited while thinking about what comes out of his mouth. He must pray from the depths of his heart, and then he can merit having his prayers accepted with mercy and favor. This also applies to the *Shofar* blowing. For this is the entire message of the *Shofar*; to internalize the lessons and take them to heart. Even if it is a small act, like that of the tailor we mentioned. His was a simple act, but it was performed wholeheartedly, according to his level. It was so great that Hashem invited the entire Heavenly Assembly to see it. For one who comes to purify himself will be assisted from Heaven. All the more so, when an individual prays wholeheartedly and focuses his mind and intentions when he prays, Hashem will certainly hear his prayer. It will be accepted with mercy and favor, and he will be written and sealed for a good life and peace. *Amen*.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka