

Near the end of *Parashat Acharei Mot*, in the middle of listing various abominable practices that are forbidden to us, the Torah states (18:4), "You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live -- I am Hashem." The *Midrash Torat Kohanim* interprets this verse as an exhortation regarding Torah study. "Make it primary, not secondary," says the *Midrash*. "Occupy yourself with it and do not mix foreign things into it. Do not say, 'I have finished learning the wisdom of the Jews; now I will learn the wisdom of other nations.' There is no end to one's obligation to study Torah." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Avraham Yoffen z"l (1887-1970; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of the Novardok Yeshiva in Bialystok, Poland; New York and Israel) writes: Certainly, this *Midrash* is teaching an important lesson regarding Torah study, but what does it have to do with our *Parashah*?

He explains: The *Midrash* is teaching that Torah is not just something to be studied; it is something to be lived, a way of life. The *Midrash* is not disparaging other areas of study. They, too, contain wisdom, but it is not wisdom that touches a person's soul. Nor is the *Midrash* prohibiting a person from studying the wonders of nature, so long as that study is secondary to one's Torah study. When one makes Torah study primary and views the Torah as a guide for life itself, he will never be at risk of committing the abominations described in our *parashah*. (*Ha'mussar Ve'ha'da'at*)

## Bitachon

*This year--a Shemittah year--we will iy"H devote this space to discussing the related subject of Bitachon / placing one's trust in Hashem.*

*Before Pesach, we discussed the ten benefits of Bitachon identified by Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (Saragossa, Spain; early 11<sup>th</sup> century). Following that discussion, R' Bachya defines what it means to "trust" another (whether that other is Hashem or a human being).*

Trust is the tranquility of the soul of the one who trusts. In his heart, he relies on the one in whom he trusts, sure that the latter will do what is right for him regarding the thing about which he is trusting. The one who trusts is confident that the other will use all of his ability and knowledge for the benefit of the one who trusts. But what lies at the root of his trust and gives rise to it, and without which there can be no trust, is the truster's confidence that the one he trusts will keep his word and do what he promised; more than that, that he has in mind to benefit the one who is trusting even regarding things he did not commit himself or undertake to do, out of pure generosity and kindness.

(*Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, ch.1)

R' Baruch Aryeh Halevi Fischer *shlita* (rabbi and educator in Brooklyn, N.Y.) asks: Why does R' Bachya write that "Trust is the tranquility of the soul"? Seemingly, tranquility of the soul is the result of trust, but it is not trust itself!

R' Fisher answers: Trusting in something does not guarantee security. For example, a person may purchase insurance, but a data entry error by a clerk may cause him to remain uninsured or under-insured. In contrast, one who trusts in *Hashem* has real security, for *Hashem* does not make mistakes. A person who trusts in man feels tranquility, but it is an illusion. In contrast, a person who understands the difference between trusting in *Hashem* and trusting in man has true tranquility. (*Lev Ha'Ari* p.58)

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and in memory of Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah ben Zev Ha'Kohen Anemer z"l*

**“You shall safeguard My charge not to do any of the abominable traditions that were done before you and not contaminate yourselves through them; I am Hashem, your Elokim.” (18:30)**

*Rashi z”l* writes, quoting the *Midrash Sifra*: “If, however, you do defile yourselves, I shall no longer be your *Elokim*, since you will have cut yourselves off from following after Me. Of what use will you be to Me then? Consequently, you will deserve annihilation! Thus the verse concludes, ‘I am Hashem your *Elokim*.’”

R’ Yerucham Levovitz z”l (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) explains: Our relationship with Hashem is based on mutual love. In turn, the foundation of love is *Hishtavut* / shared ideals or a common language. What Hashem loves, we love; what He hates, we hate. That is why the *Mitzvah* of reciting *Shema*, which includes accepting the yoke of Heaven, is followed immediately by the command to love Hashem--“*Ve’ahavta*.” Doing His Will is loving Him. They are one and the same. And, the relationship is two way. Therefore, the blessings before *Kriat Shema*--“*Ahavah Rabbah*” and “*Ahavat Olam*”--speak of Hashem’s love for us.

*Hishtavut* leads to unity. Without *Hishtavut*, there is division. It follows, *Rashi* is teaching, that if we defile ourselves and distance ourselves from Hashem, He will no longer have any use for us. That necessarily will result in annihilation, G-d forbid, because the Jewish People cannot exist under the natural order. The secret to our continued existence is *Kedushah*, which brings about Divine Providence.

(*Shevivei Da’at: Moadim* No.25)

**“I will shoot three arrows in that direction as if I were shooting at a target. Behold! I will then send the lad, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I call out to the lad, ‘Behold! The arrows are on this side of you!’ then you should take them and return, for it is well with you and there is no concern, as Hashem lives. But if I say this to the boy, ‘Behold! The arrows are beyond you!’ then go, for Hashem will have sent you away.” (Shmuel I 20:20-22--from the Haftarah for Erev Rosh Chodesh)**

Why this complicated scheme for notifying David whether Shaul still wanted to kill him? Since Yehonatan’s sole intention was to save David’s life, Yehonatan seemingly would have been permitted to notify David directly, even if it involved saying *Lashon Ha’ra* about Shaul!

R’ Moshe Sternbuch *shlita* (*Rosh Av Bet Din* of the *Eidah Ha’charedit* of Yerushalayim) writes in the name of R’ Zvi Hirsch Farber z”l (1879-1966; rabbi in London, England): We learn from here that even when speaking *Lashon Ha’ra* is permitted, or even required--for example, in certain circumstances, to advise another person regarding a potential business or marriage partner--one should minimize the *Lashon Ha’ra* spoken. If at all possible, one should merely hint, as Yehonatan did.

(*Ta’am Va’da’at: Kedoshim* 19:16)

R’ Yitzchak Zilberstein *shlita* (rabbi in Bnei Brak, Israel) notes that one cannot argue that Yehonatan devised this scheme because he was afraid to be seen speaking to David, since Yehonatan did, in the end, send his servant away and meet with David face-to-face (see verses 40-41).

(*Chashukei Chemed: Sanhedrin* 11a)

**“Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon’s two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died.” (16:1)**

The *Gemara* (*Eruvin* 63a) teaches that Nadav and Avihu died because they issued a *Halachic* ruling in the presence of their teacher, Moshe. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Avraham Elkanah Kahana Shapira z”l (1914-2007; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel) asks: How is it possible that these individuals, whom the Torah describes as holy, acted disrespectfully toward Moshe Rabbeinu?

R’ Shapira answers: The *Gemara* does not mean that they blatantly issued a *Halachic* ruling in disrespect of Moshe. Rather, in their enthusiasm to come close to Hashem, they mixed into something that was not their business (*i.e.*, bringing *Ketoret* / incense into the Holy of Holies). We find, notes R’ Shapira, that well-intentioned people seeking genuine “religious experiences” sometimes engage in behavior that violates societal norms. Such behavior is equivalent to a person issuing a *Halachic* ruling in disregard of the community’s teachers.

(*Imrei Shefer* p.145)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 14a) teaches: If one holds a *Sefer Torah* “naked” (*i.e.*, with his bare hands, not through a cloth), he will be buried “naked” -- bereft of reward for whatever *Mitzvah* he was performing at the time (*e.g.*, learning Torah or *Gelilah* / rolling the Torah). To discourage people from touching *Sifrei Torah* bare-handed, the Sages decreed that hands that touch a *Sefer Torah* are *Tamei* / ritually impure and impart *Tum’ah* to sanctified food that they subsequently touch. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Yehuda Loewe z”l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) writes: One might ask, “It is laughable [*Maharal*’s word] that something that has no *Tum’ah* (a Torah scroll) can impart *Tum’ah*!” However, we find a precedent for this in the case of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. The *Midrash Rabbah* states that they entered a holy place without the proper garments, they died, and they were *Tamei*. We see that whenever a person approaches something that he should not approach, he creates *Tum’ah* in himself. The *Tum’ah* does not come from the *Sefer Torah* or from the holy place.

(*Chiddushei Aggadot*)

What is wrong with touching a *Sefer Torah* bare-handed? *Maharal* explains:

A person’s physical body is merely a “garment” that conceals his true self--the spiritual soul. Likewise, the Torah as we know it -- a book of *Mitzvot* that we perform with our physical bodies in a physical world -- is merely a “garment” concealing deep and lofty inner meaning. The only way we can “grab hold” of the Torah is through a “garment,” *i.e.*, through the physical manifestation of *Mitzvot* performed with our physical bodies in a physical world. We can never “touch” the essence of the Torah and, paralleling this, we may not touch a *Sefer Torah* bare-handed.

(*Tiferet Yisrael* ch.13)