

The Path To Follow

Devarim

452

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SOUL-SEARCHING TO PREPARE FOR LEARNING TORAH

It is written, “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel” (Devarim 1:1).

Once the Torah had been given by Moshe and he remained on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights to annul himself before Hashem, he knew that the Torah does not lead to pride, but on the contrary to humility. After the giving of the Torah, the verse testifies that Moshe “was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3). Hence the present verse says *eleh ha-devarim* (“these are the words”), for everywhere the term *eleh* appears, it disqualifies what came before it (Bereshith Rabba 12:3). Thus Moshe told the Children of Israel, “In the past I said, ‘I am not a man of words,’ for since I had not tasted of Torah, I feared that I might grow proud. Yet now I have tasted of Torah, ‘these are the words that Moshe spoke’ – and words of Torah lead man to humility, which is not what I thought at first.”

How do words of Torah lead to humility? By words of admonishment! If you do not listen to admonishment, the Torah will lead you not to humility, but to pride. It is said, “G-d says to the wicked, ‘For what purpose do you recount My decrees...for you hate admonishment and you threw My words behind you’ ” (Tehillim 50:16-17). Which evildoer does G-d abhor? It is the proud, as the Sages teach: “Of every arrogant man, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: ‘I and he cannot both dwell in the world’ ” (Sotah 5a). Since that is the case, he has no part in the holy Torah. Why not? Because he detests admonishment.

Earlier it was written, “I am not a man of words” (Shemot 4:10). How is this possible? Initially, before the Torah was given, Moshe said: “I am not a man [ish] of words” – am I someone who can bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt? Here the term *ish* designates an important man. Moshe annulled the “I” (*anochi*) – he did not want the Torah to be given through him – for he wanted to be like all other Jews who listen to their teacher. This is because he feared that he would grow proud through the knowledge of Torah. Hence Hashem told him to send Aaron, for he also wanted to hear Torah from the mouth of Aaron.

I have seen in a short pamphlet from Rav Elimelech of Lizensk Zatzal that everyone must completely repent before learning Torah.

I once went to see my teacher Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, and he told me that he was busy writing a book on Shev Shematata by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller Zatzal, the author of *Ketzot HaChoshen*. He added, “Know that whenever this holy Rav began to study, before opening a book he would isolate himself and begin to search his soul, saying: ‘G-d says to the wicked, “For what purpose do you recount My decrees?”’ He did this because he believed, according to his level, that he was not worthy of studying the holy Torah. Hence each time that he began to study, he admonished himself, reflecting upon his deeds and repenting in order to infuse himself with humility. He was therefore able to grow and write important books such as *Ketzot HaChoshen* and *Shev Shematata*, for he studied Torah with tremendous humility.” (Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller’s

fear of Heaven led him to write an introduction to *Shev Shematata* that is filled with zeal.)

How to Attain True Humility

My teacher Zatzal told me that if such was the case for the author of *Ketzot HaChoshen*, how much more should we search our souls before learning, in order for the Torah to manifest itself in us! Yet because of our many sins, the opposite takes place, and we see that when people go to the study at the Beit HaMidrash, before making their way inside they make a few telephone calls, smoke a cigarette or two, and then enter and chat a little with their chavruta about current issues, what is happening at work and at home. Only then do they open a book to study, leaving just half the time or less which they had set aside for learning. That is how we prepare ourselves for learning: Instead of concentrating with zeal, we spend our days in useless pursuits, and nobody watches out for it.

If people really cared about reflecting upon their deeds before learning Torah, annulling themselves before Hashem as the author of *Ketzot HaChoshen* did, they would not neglect Torah or grow proud through learning, for one who annuls his entire being is incapable of directing his focus on things other than Torah. When we focus on useless pursuits because we have not annulled ourselves before learning, the Torah that we study will lead us to failure.

In general, one cannot attain humility through Torah if it is not accompanied by admonishment and Mussar. When someone studies Torah without admonishment, not only will his Torah not lead to humility, it will lead him to pride. Our Sages have warned us against learning Torah in order to derive honor from it: “Rabbi Tzadok said, ‘Do not make it a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an axe with which to cut.’ So too Hillel used to say, ‘He who exploits the crown [of Torah] shall perish. Indeed, you have learned from this: Whoever derives personal gain from words of Torah removes his life from the world’ ” (Pirkei Avoth 4:5).

This is why Moshe repeated all these mitzvot to the Children of Israel here, beginning with words of admonishment. It is therefore written, “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel,” as Rashi explains: “Since these are words of admonishment...” Moshe wanted to hint to them how the Torah would lead them to humility, given that they would examine their deeds before learning. If they acted in this way, they could rest assured that Torah would lead them to humility and the fear of Heaven.

Guard Your Tongue!

Obligated to Admonish

If by some unavoidable circumstance you find yourself in the company of people who are speaking *Lashon Harah*, and you believe that admonishing them will help them to stop, then you are certainly obligated by the Torah to do so.

– Chafetz Chaim

Like the Tefillin of the Arm

It is written, “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel” (Devarim 1:1).

The tzaddik Rabbi Yehudah Leib of Ger, the author of Sefat Emet, used to say: “Sefer Devarim is like tefillin shel yad [tefillin of the arm], in which all the passages are placed together in a single compartment. The four other books of the Torah are like tefillin shel rosh [tefillin of the head], in which the four passages are placed in four compartments.

“The fifth book of the Torah is called Devarim because of the many admonishments found at its beginning and end, the goal of which is to draw and bind the hearts of the Children of Israel to the Torah. This is like the tefillin of the arm, with which we fulfill ‘you shall bind them,’ opposite the heart.”

Admonishment and Teshuvah

It is written, “On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moshe began explaining this Torah” (Devarim 1:5).

This is surprising: The mitzvot of the Torah only begin in Parsha Ve’etchanan with the Ten Commandments, and until now there have only been words of admonishment. Therefore only in Parsha Ve’etchanan should it have said, “Moshe began explain this Torah.” Why is it written here?

The book Maor VaShemesh explains by saying that one of the principles of Judaism is for a person to repent before learning Torah. As the Chozeh of Lublin Zatzal said, whoever studies Torah without repenting beforehand, of him the verse says: “G-d says to the wicked, ‘For what purpose do you recount My decrees?’” (Tehillim 50:16).

In light of this idea, we can perfectly understand why this is written within the passage on the admonishments: “Moshe began explaining this Torah.” That is, since Moshe wanted to explain the mitzvah of admonishment to the Children of Israel, he admonished them beforehand in regards to sin. He could therefore lead them to teshuvah, for the two are intimately connected.

A New Entity

It is written, “Take for yourselves anashim” (Devarim 1:13).

It seems that the plural form of the term ish (man) should be ishim. However we always encounter the term anashim, the only exception being the verse: “To you, O men [ishim], do I call” (Mishlei 8:4).

The reason for this, explains Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky Zatzal, is that a large number of people is not simply a collection of individuals. Rather, they constitute a new and different entity, hence the term anashim. It is only in Sefer Mishlei, where the concept of a community is not addressed – but rather each individual in particular – that we find the term ishim.

More Than Words Alone

It is written, “Hashem heard the voice of your words” (Devarim 1:34).

Why does it say “the voice of your words,” rather than just “your words”? Rabbi Yitzchak Landau Zatzal replies by noting that earlier in the chapter we read, “They took of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us. They brought back word to us and said, ‘Good is the land...’” (v.25). The spies responded correctly! They said that the land was good.

In regards to the spoken word, it is important to know how things have been said, meaning how they were voiced, with what tone and facial ex-

pressions. When the spies said, “Good is the land” – adding in the same breath, “A people greater and taller than we, cities great and fortified up to the heavens, and even children of giants have we seen there” (v.28) – it is clear that they said “good is the land” ironically, as if they were saying: “Take a look how ‘good’ this land really is!”

That is why Moshe said, “Hashem heard the voice of your words” – He perceived your intonation, how you voiced these words.

In the Light of the Parsha

By the Merit of Constant Review

It is written, “Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: ‘Enough of your dwelling by this mountain’” (Devarim 1:6).

We need to understand this. Why is the term “Horev” used, rather than the usual name “Sinai”? In every account of the giving of the Torah, the mountain is never called Horev, but rather Sinai. For example, it is written: “All of Mount Sinai was smoking” (Shemot 19:18), “Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai” (v.20), and “The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai” (v.23).

Moshe told the Children of Israel: You have a mitzvah to discover new Torah teachings. The word horev is formed by the same letters as rahav (broad), as it is written: “I shall walk in rehava [broad pathways]” (Tehillim 119:45). Rashi explains that King David advanced in Halachah, which spread in Israel. By the fact that a person studies Torah and reviews it numerous times, he can discover new teachings in it that he did not initially find, as the Gemara states: “One who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times” (Chagigah 9b). Furthermore, the Mishnah states: “Learn it over and over, for everything is in it” (Pirkei Avoth 5:21). The more a person reviews the Torah’s words, the more new teachings he will merit to find in them.

This is why Moshe gave the Children of Israel several new passages in this book, which we call Mishneh Torah, meaning a “repetition” of the Torah. It was to teach them that the more a person learns Torah and reviews his studies, the more flavor he will find in it, for no one is exempt from a “repetition” of the Torah. No person should say, “I’ve studied this passage two or three times – why should I go back to it? Better to learn something new, something that I’ve never studied before!” The Sages have already responded to such an attitude by saying, “Whosoever studies Torah but does not review it, he is like one who plants without harvesting” (Sanhedrin 99a).

It is said, “One can study Torah for ten years and forget it in two. How? If someone studies for six months but does not review it, he will end up saying that the pure is impure and the impure is pure. For twelve months without review, he will mix up the Sages. For eighteen months without review, he will forget the main passages. For twenty-four months without review, he will forget the main tractates” (Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan 24).

Not only that, but a person will not fall into sin if he constantly reviews what he has learned, for his every thought will cleave to the words of the holy Torah. Indeed, the Children of Israel only sinned with the daughters of Moab because they did not review what they learned, as it is written: “Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab” (Bamidbar 25:1). What pushed them to do this with the daughters of Moab? It was the fact that they settled down and rested without reviewing their studies. People would say, “I’ve studied again and again, so why should I continue to study? I’ve already learned everything, and now I want to rest a little.” The daughters of Moab were able to entice them at that very instant, and they sinned.

A Few Pearls from the Midrash on Sefer Eicha In Exiles' Garments

It is written, "Alas, she sits in solitude" (Eicha 1:1).

Rabbi Berekiah said in the name of Rabbi Abdimi of Haifa, "This may be compared to a king who had a son. As long as he obeyed the will of his father, he clothed him in garments of fine wool. Yet when he disregarded his will, he clothed him in exiles' [bedadin] garments. Likewise with Israel: As long as they obeyed the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is written: 'I clothed you in embroidered garments' [Ezekiel 16:10]. (Rabbi Sima said, "The term means 'in purple garments.'") Yet when they disregarded the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, He clothed them in exiles' garments, as it is written: 'Alas, she sits in solitude [badad].'"

– Eicha Rabba 1:1

I am Jeremiah

It is written, "Alas, she sits in solitude" (Eicha 1:1).

Rabbi Shemuel said, "The letters of eicha [alas] are the initials of Ani Yirmiyahu Kohen Ha-anatot [I am Jeremiah, priest of Anatot]."

– Seder HaDorot

Jerusalem

It is written, "The city that was filled with people" (Eicha 1:1).

Rabbi Shemuel said, "There were 24 thoroughfares in Jerusalem: Each thoroughfare had 24 side-turnings; each side-turning had 24 roads; each road had 24 streets; each street had 24 courts; and each court had 24 houses, with each court having residents who numbered twice as many as those who left Egypt."

– Eicha Rabba 1:2

Repayment

It is written, "She is like a widow" (Eicha 1:1).

The Sages have said that the Mishkan (Sanctuary) derives its name from the fact that G-d took it as moshkon (collateral) for the sins of the Children of Israel. In other words, He took it as collateral when they sinned, and just as collateral is returned to its owner when he repays his debt, likewise the Sanctuary was returned to them at Nob, Gibeon, and Shiloh when they repented, until the Temple was built.

However the Mikdash (Temple) was not taken as moshkon (collateral), but as collection for their sins. Since they sinned, they no longer had any claim over it. Because of our numerous sins, their glory was not returned to them even after many years, since our city was destroyed and our Temple lay in ruins. Now in regards to a widow, the law is that collateral for a debt is not taken from her. Instead, an object is taken from her as outright collection for her debt.

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz Zatzal explains that this is why the prophet laments, "She is like a widow" – which is why no collateral was taken from her. Rather, the Mikdash was taken from her as outright collection, which is why she sits solitary. From Alon Bachut

Day and Night

It is written, "She weeps bitterly at night, and her tears are on her cheeks" (Eicha 1:2).

Since Israel's abductors prevented them from weeping during the day, they and Jeremiah agreed that he would weep during the day and they would weep at night (Eicha Zutah).

From the words of the Midrash, it follows that it is important to weep continuously, both day and night. Hence the Children of Israel and Jer-

emiah established shifts, with them weeping in prayer at night and him weeping in prayer during the day. Why was it necessary to weep both day and night?

The Sages have said that Jerusalem was not destroyed – even when seven courts of justice had sanctioned idolatry (Gittin 88a) – until the Children of Israel neglected the study of Torah. After the destruction of the Temple, they realized that all their misfortunes resulted from the sin of neglecting the study of Torah, which they sought to rectify.

In repayment for neglecting the study of Torah, whose fixed time is "day and night," they sought to weep "day and night." Yet since their abductors prevented them from weeping during the day, lest G-d take pity on them, they could only weep at night, when they could not be seen. Hence in order for their sins to be rectified, they asked Jeremiah to weep for them during the day.

– Alsheich

A Double Sin

It is written, "Jerusalem has greatly sinned [chet chatah]" (Eicha 1:8).

Why does the prophet use the double expression chet chatah, and why does he mention Jerusalem here? In all the preceding verses, and especially in the previous verse, Jerusalem is specifically mentioned, meaning that it is obvious that chet chatah refers to it!

There is a fundamental difference between the sins of the nations and the sins of Israel. Among the nations of the world, only sinful acts in and of themselves are considered sins, whereas such is not the case for Israel. Not only are sinful acts imputed to them, but also the fact that they – the community of Israel, Hashem's chosen people – have fallen into sin. Their sin is therefore double: On one hand there is the sinful act itself, and on the other hand there is the one who commits it, one for whom it is not fitting to sin.

Hence it is written, "Jerusalem has greatly sinned" – that is, from the fact that it was Jerusalem, the city that was Hashem's glory, her sin is double.

– Bina LaIttim

The Real Tragedy

It is written, "See, O Hashem, my suffering, for the enemy has magnified himself" (Eicha 1:9).

The prophet Habakkuk says, "You remain silent when a wicked man swallows up one more righteous than he" (Habakkuk 1:13). In his sermons, Rav Padava explains that although G-d is not suspected of acting unjustly, meaning that it is certainly our sins that have caused all the misfortunes which have come upon us, the real tragedy is that we are certainly more righteous than the evildoers oppressing us. Thus why does Hashem "remain silent when a wicked man swallows up one more righteous than he?"

The prophet Jeremiah also laments by saying: "Her impurity is on her hems" (Eicha 1:9) – it is certainly true that we are sinners and deserve to be punished, but the real tragedy is "my suffering, for the enemy has magnified himself" – meaning that the enemy is certainly worse.

– Shoel U'Meshiv

The Third Temple

It is written, "Your ruin is as vast as the sea" (Eicha 2:13).

The Sages speak of a poor woman who would go and wash her clothes by the sea. The waves came and carried away her garments not just once, but twice. The third time, the sea returned everything to her.

Thus the prophet Jeremiah compares the destruction of Jerusalem to a disaster "as vast as the sea," meaning the destruction of the First and Second Temples, just as the sea carried away the poor woman's garments twice. However the next time, when the Third Temple will be built, speedily and in our days, its glory will be even greater than that of its predecessors.

The book Kav HaYashar (ch. 79) cites the Zohar in stating that when a tzaddik leaves this world and his soul ascends, it approaches the supernal worlds that are before the Throne of Glory. The Holy One, blessed be He, then says to our father Jacob: “My beloved son, you who suffered so much in raising your children, here is So-and-so, a tzaddik who has come to the World of Judgment. He is adorned with numerous Torah ornaments, mitzvot and good deeds. It is proper that you go out and meet him, welcoming him with joy and cheerfully greeting him. I will also go with you to welcome him, for his face shines with Torah and the fear of Heaven.” Of him the verse says, “Mevakshei [Those who seek] your presence, O Jacob” (Tehillim 24:6). It does not say mevakesh (“he who seeks”), but mevakshei (“those who seek”), meaning the Holy One, blessed be He, along with Jacob.

Upon seeing these two going out, who will not go to greet this tzaddik as well? Thus legions will gather together, each emerging from a gate by which the soul of the tzaddik passed. They will all open their mouths and say, “Shalom [peace] – you are peace and your Torah is peace. Happy are you and happy is the one who gave birth to you. Come to your dwelling place. Beautiful chuppahs have been prepared for you.” During that entire day, it will be proclaimed throughout the Heavens that no one should study anything other than what this tzaddik learned during his lifetime. All the commentaries that he gave will be read before him, just as a ketubah is read before bride and groom as they stand beneath the chuppah. It seems to me that this is what the Sages meant when they said, “the Torah is his” (Kiddushin 32b). The most important students on high take his novel Torah interpretations, proclaim them to other legions and groups of tzaddikim, and mention this tzaddik’s name as everyone opens their mouth to bless him. His mother and father are then called forth, adorned with several crowns on account of their son the tzaddik.

I Have Three Young Children

The gaon Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Dushinsky Shlita (the brother of the gaon Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky Zatzal, the Av Beit Din of Jerusalem), recounted the following story about the passing of his eldest brother, Rabbi Matityahu Zatzal:

When Rabbi Matityahu fell ill, my brother Rabbi Yosef Tzvi went to visit him. The doctor taking care of him said that he was suffering from a temporary condition that stemmed from his exhausting journeys, and that in principle he should start getting better and be completely healed by the following day. However the heart knows its own suffering, and I felt in my heart that despite the doctor’s reassuring words, something terrible was about to happen. In fact I couldn’t stop myself from crying.

As Rabbi Yosef Tzvi stood by his bedside, he began to feel a little better. However by the third day, his condition deteriorated to such a point that there was no hope of recovery. We stood by his bedside, trembling and stunned, as we saw him overcome by deep sleep. My brother Rabbi Yosef Tzvi, whose soul was deeply connected to that of Rabbi Matityahu, stood praying for him.

After about three hours, Rabbi Matityahu awoke from his sleep and called Rabbi Yosef over to tell him of his dream.

He said, “I clearly saw a few elders from the Celestial Court calling my name, and I answered them. They said to me, ‘Know that your

time has come to leave this world.’ I objected: ‘But I’m a young man! I haven’t neglected Hashem’s Torah in any way, nor have I merited anything great!’ They replied, ‘If you do not know, you may ask, for the Celestial Court has decided that your time has come. You have already studied from Hashem’s Torah what an elder can only learn in 28 years, and you will not remain in this world any longer.’

“I wanted to continue living, and so I protested further: ‘I have three young children. Who will raise them? Who will teach them Torah and lead them to the chuppah and good deeds?’

“I then heard them saying, ‘This is indeed a very good argument!’ However I heard and saw nothing more. All of a sudden, the scene was replayed in precise detail, exactly as before. They said, ‘This is what we have decided at the Celestial Court, and you have no right to appeal the verdict, for your time has come to leave this world. As for your argument about your children, it is your wife who will raise them, as well as your brother whom you love. He will help raise them in the best way possible. And now, if you want, you may recount to us the new commentary that you discovered in regards to pure things.’

“I began a great pilpul, and the judges said to me: ‘You have judged correctly, you have spoken well!’”

When Rabbi Matityahu finished recounting his dream, he repeated his chiddush for Rabbi Yosef Tzvi. He asked him to watch over his children, ensuring that they continue to walk in the right path. He then closed his eyes and passed away.

Ah, Now You Understand!

The gaon Rabbi Hillel Kagan Zatzal, one of the most influential figures from the Ponevezh yeshiva, noticed that one of his students failed to attend a class given by the gaon Rabbi Shemuel Rosowski Zatzal. When he asked him about it, the student replied that he did not understand the subject. Rabbi Hillel then brought him into his office and thoroughly reviewed Rabbi Shemuel’s class with him.

“This is the question that Rabbi Shemuel raised in today’s class,” Rabbi Hillel fervently explained to him for a long time. “Is the question clear to you?” The student nodded his head in agreement and asked to hear the answer.

Rabbi Hillel then said, “No, you don’t understand! If you did, you would certainly be happy. I’ll explain the question once more.”

“So, now do you understand?” asked Rabbi Hillel.

“Absolutely,” the student responded. In fact he wanted to repeat the question to prove that he understood it.

Rabbi Hillel cut him off: “No. You don’t understand. Why aren’t you happy?”

This scene repeated itself several times, until finally a faint smile appeared on the student’s face. At that point Rabbi Hillel said, “Ah, now you understand!”

The Joy of Torah

The gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky Zatzal used to say, “One who studies often, reviews his learning often, and increases his understanding is constantly experiencing great joy, the true joy of Torah!”

One day he told a gaon who was very close to him, “You know why such a person constantly experiences great joy? I say that this isn’t surprising, for he sees all of Shass before him in all his learning!”