

עזריהו

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

Self-Defense

וְהִגַּבְלֹתָ אֶת הָעָם סָבִיב לְאֹמֶר הַשְּׁמָרוּ לָכֶם עֲלוֹת בְּהָר וּנְגַע בְּקַצְהוּ - *You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout, saying, "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge..."* (Shemos 19:12)

Rashi comments on לאמר - saying, that the boundary itself would proclaim, "Beware not to ascend further." Simply, this means that the barricades signified this message to Bnei Yisrael. But the *sefer Tzeidah Laderech*¹ understands it literally: the boundary would announce its warning for all to hear.

Tzeidah Laderech asks a question on this. Chazal² enumerate ten things that were created during *bein hashem-ashos* of the first Erev Shabbos, including the mouth of Bilaam's donkey. If enabling an animal to talk needed a special act of creation, certainly a fence, which is not even a *ba'al chai* (animal life) but a *domem* (inanimate object), must need its own creation in order to talk. Why do Chazal not mention such a creation?

Clearly, there is an essential difference that makes these two events not comparable. The conversation between Bilaam and his donkey had no connection at all to *kedushah*; certainly, nature wouldn't step aside for their sake without a special creation. But it is only natural that a boundary around *Har Sinai* could speak, since the purpose of Creation itself is to spread *kevod Shamayim*. As the pasuk (Yeshayah 43:7) states, כָּל הַנִּקְרָא, בְּשִׁמִּי וְלִכְבוֹדִי בְּרָאתִיו יִצְרַתִּיו אֲךָ עָשִׂיתִיו - *Everyone who is called by My Name and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have fashioned, even perfected.* There is nothing novel about any natural creation— *domem*,

tzome'ach (plant life), or *ba'al chai*— bending for Hashem's glory. This concept is expressed by Chazal's statement³ that in the future (*l'asid lavo*), a fig will verbally object to being picked on Shabbos. All of Creation

wants to honor Hashem's word, and will protest any disobedience.

That is how it was at the time of *Mattan Torah*. The *madreigah* of Klal Yisrael was such that even a *domem* would warn them against transgressing Hashem's will, and their ears were capable of hearing the warning. A message of this type could accomplish that (19:23) לֹא יוֹכֵל הָעָם לָעֹלֹת - *The people cannot ascend.* But this lofty *madreigah* is lost; today, it appears as if we can choose how we want to lead our lives, and the natural world only seems to draw man away from

Hashem. How can we resist this pull and be victorious over our *yetzer hara*?

The Torah commands (20:3), לֹא יְהִי לָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי - *You shall not have other gods in My presence.* Rashi comments: "In My presence – as long as I exist." This sounds bizarre; could there be a time when Hashem does not exist? Hashem is the only true Existence, above all time and essence. What does Rashi mean? *Tzemach Hashem L'Tzvi*, by R. Tzvi Hirsch, the Maggid of Nadvorna, explains that Hashem must exist in our thoughts, in our hearts. As long as Hashem exists in our consciousness, we will not have other gods. Yes, the *Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah* abolished the *yetzer hara* for idol worship, but we are all vulnerable to the *yetzer hara*, the foreign god that resides within us⁴ – the *yetzer hara*. How can we be on guard against him? *As long as I exist* – as long as Hashem

“
**There is nothing novel
about any natural
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Hashem's glory**

1 On Rashi, by the author of *Be'er Sheva*

2 Avos 5:6

3 *Midrash Tehillim* 73

4 See Shabbos 105b; Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:1

לעילוי נשמת
מרת
עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל

maintains a presence in our hearts, the ‘foreign god,’ the *yetzer hara*, won’t be able to overpower us.

As the Rambam says,⁵ negative thoughts can only occupy a heart devoid of wisdom. But wisdom itself is not enough; we’ve seen very intelligent people who acted with great wickedness. It is the wisdom of Torah – preceded and accompanied by *yiras Shamayim*⁶ – that fills a Yid’s consciousness

5 End of *Hilchos Issurei Biah*

6 As the pasuk (Tehillim 111:10) states, – ראשית חִכְמָה יִרְאַת ה' – *The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem.*

with awareness of Hashem and brings Hashem’s existence into his heart. Although we do not have barricades or figs that audibly warn us against transgressing *aveiros*, when Hashem exists in our hearts, we can overcome the *yetzer hara*, the ‘foreign god’ inside of us, fulfilling לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּךְ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי.

May Hashem help us learn Torah with *yiras Shamayim* and fulfill mitzvos with joy, with the *Ribbono Shel Olam* present within our hearts.

(יתרו תשפ"ב – ס"ג מאמר ג)

Deeds Before Wisdom

Many of us have prepared for the *kabbalas haTorah* of Parshas Yisro with uninterrupted Torah learning, perhaps Thursday night. But is that all we need? What is the proper approach to *kabbalas haTorah*?

The Mishnah (Avos 3:17) teaches: “One whose wisdom is greater than his deeds, to what is he comparable? To a tree with many branches but few roots: the wind comes, uproots it, and turns it on its face... But one whose deeds are greater than his wisdom, to what is he comparable? To a tree with few branches but many roots: even if all the winds of the world come and blast it, they cannot move it from its place.” It is puzzling that the Mishnah adds a seemingly unnecessary detail to the picture of the uprooted tree. An uprooted tree will wither away and die, so what is the added significance in being “turned on its face”?

Rabbeinu Yonah raises another difficulty. How can a person’s deeds possibly be greater than his wisdom? It is impossible to perform deeds that one doesn’t know about.⁷ Certainly, this isn’t advocating for one to perform mitzvos more times than he is obligated; there’s no sense in reading *krias shema* and shaking the *lulav* multiple times, or eating numerous *k’zeisim* of matzah.

7 See *Sfas Emes*, Acharei Mos 5644, Shavuot 5652, Korach 5646 and 5664, Pinchas 5634. See also *Sfas Emes* to Avos, letter at the end of *perek 3* ד"ה ואכתוב

At the end of our parshah, the pasuk (Shemos 20:21) states, וְזָבַחְתָּ עֲלֵיו אֶת עֹלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת שְׁלַמֶיךָ, אֶת צֹאנְךָ וְאֶת בְּקָרְךָ - *and you shall slaughter near it your Olah-offerings and your Shelamim-offerings, your sheep and your cattle.* The pasuk first mentions the *Olah* and *Shelamim*, so why does it reiterate “your sheep and your cattle”? Rashi explains that the pasuk means to specify which animals are used for *Olos* and *Shelamim*.

Perhaps we may add that the pasuk is hinting at two distinct mindsets people have when bringing a *korban*. Certainly, a *korban* eaten by its owner can be brought with purer or less pure intention; the Gemara (Nazir 23a) says one person may eat it for the mitzvah, while another person eats it gluttonously. But let’s discuss the *Korban Olah*, which is completely burned.

When bringing an *Olah*, one person might think: *Ribbono Shel Olam, I am giving up for You my own sheep, which could have otherwise enriched me;⁸ my own cattle, which I could have worked and earned money with. Perhaps I would have otherwise sold them at a large profit.* It is his sheep and cattle that he is giving up for Hashem. Perhaps this makes him feel haughty, or maybe he sees it as a financial loss.

But someone else might bring an *Olah* with a different perspective. He rejoices at the opportunity to fulfill his mitzvah, his עֹלֹתֶיךָ. He isn’t

8 See Chullin 84b, which explains (Devarim 28:4) מעשרות את בעליהן וְעֵשְׂתֵרֹת צֹאנְךָ

thinking about ‘his sheep and cattle’ – it all belongs to Hashem anyway⁹ – only about bringing *nachas ruach* to Hashem with his *korban*, which is the purpose of the *korban*. He lives with a powerful recognition that it is for this reason that he is alive – to bring pleasure to Hashem with all his resources, whether his family, his livestock, or any of his possessions – and he is delighted to be accomplishing that with his *korban*.

One whose “deeds are greater than his wisdom” is one who performs mitzvos with such fineness and inner feeling that they surpass his understanding of the mitzvah. But when one’s “wisdom is greater than his deeds,” he does not humble himself and his intellect to the mitzvos he performs. His ‘roots’ – his mitzvos – will not be able to support his ‘tree,’ and it will topple over. Not only that, but it will fall on its face, ruining whatever he may have been able to gain from it; his mitzvos, performed out of haughtiness, will only bring him harm, further distancing him from Hashem.

The Sfas Emes teaches that even when one’s ‘tree’ possesses many roots – deeds – he must still ensure that they outnumber the branches. His connection to *ruchniyus* must always outweigh his intellect and *gashmiyus*. In fact,

9 As the pasuk (Divrei Hayamim I 29:14) says, כִּי לָּךְ מִמֶּךָ הִכָּל וּמִיָּדְךָ נָתַנּוּ לָּךְ - *For everything is from You, and from Your hand have we given to You.*

one's mitzvos themselves must be made of connection to Hashem more than of the outer act of their performance. In this way, his “deeds are greater than his wisdom,” and he becomes close to Hashem Who commanded him, his very physicality becoming influenced by the mitzvah.

The pasuk (12:34) states: מְשֻׁאֲרֵתָם בְּשִׂמְלֹתָם – their leftovers bound up in their garments. Rashi cites Chazal¹⁰ that they didn't load their leftovers onto their animals, for love of the mitzvah. The Sfas Emes¹¹ explains that the purpose of a mitzvah is to leave its mark on a person. When performed with joy and enthusiasm, its spiritual light and holiness become imprinted on his body. Since one's body clothes his soul, the *kedushah* of his mitzvos – which are stamped onto his body – becomes a garment for his soul. It illuminates and connects him to his Source – completely transforming him and his desires and thoughts. When such a person has more ‘roots’

10 Mechilta

11 Bo 5659

than ‘branches,’ he is nourished entirely from Above.

We are now past Tu B'Shevat, the Rosh Hasha-

connected to the *Ribono Shel Olam*. When fulfilled properly, the mitzvos protect us against “all the winds of the world.” These winds are the

The Torah and mitzvos are the strong roots that will anchor us and hold us steadfast against the winds and abandon of the wide world

nah of trees. It is clear from the Gemara and *Rishonim* that for a tree to be considered a fruit tree, it must have roots and a trunk which lasts from year to year. When we perform mitzvos, which are comparable to fruits, with a connectedness to their ‘roots,’ then we are imprinted with their *kedushah* and become eternally

very atmosphere we live in. Our world is so cold, so distant from Hashem, so full of foreign winds. The Torah and mitzvos are the strong roots that will anchor us and hold us steadfast against the winds and abandon of the wide world.

(יתרו תש"פ – ס"ג מאמר א)

Of Heavenly Justice

Immediately before the *Aseres HaDibros*, the Torah states (Shemos 20:1), וְיַדְבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאַמֵּר, *saying*. Rashi cites Chazal¹² explaining that אֱלֹהִים is a term for ‘judge,’ as in (22:27) לֹא תִקְלַל אֱלֹהִים, which Targum renders as לֹא תִקְיֵל. Rashi explains that whereas regarding some positive mitzvos, one who does not fulfill them is not punished; one who fails to keep the *Aseres HaDibros* will be judged and punished.

R. Elyahu Mizrachi comments that only when it is not a time of Divine wrath (*idan ris'cha*) does one escape punishment for not fulfilling a mitzvah, but during an *idan ris'cha* one is punished. He proves this from the following Gemara (Menachos 41a): A *malach* found Rav Katina dressed in a *sadina* (which is exempt from *tzitzis*). He addressed him: “Katina, Katina, a *sadina* in the summer and a *sarvala* (which is also exempt from *tzitzis*) in the winter; what will be with *tzitzis* of *techeiles*?” Rav Katina responded, “Do you punish for not fulfilling a positive mitzvah?” The *malach* replied,

12 Mechilta

“When there is Divine wrath, we do punish.” Clearly, says R. Elyahu Mizrachi, there is punishment for any mitzvah, during a time of wrath.

Tosafos on the above Gemara says that Rav Katina's question — “Do you punish for not fulfilling a positive mitzvah?” — was only referring to a mitzvah like *tzitzis*, which one need not purchase if he does not have. But with a mitzvah one is obligated to fulfill, even an earthly *beis din* would physically force compliance. The implication of *Tosafos* is that since a *beis din shel mattah* would force compliance with a positive mitzvah, certainly there is heavenly punishment for one who does not fulfill it. It is only a mitzvah like *tzitzis* – which is not technically mandatory – that is punished only during a time of wrath. The Taz makes this point in *Divrei Dovid*: according to *Tosafos*, any mitzvah one is obligated to fulfill incurs punishment if it is not fulfilled, and not only during an *idan ris'cha*.¹³

13 See *Iyun Yaakov* to above Gemara

*Pnei Yehoshua*¹⁴ writes that any positive mitzvah is not punished unless during an *idan ris'cha* but points out that this is subject to disagreement between Rashi and *Tosafos* in *Ein Yaakov*.¹⁵ However, *Kli Chemdah*¹⁶ cites *Pnei Yehoshua* as saying simply that one is not punished for a positive mitzvah if not during an *idan ris'cha*. He cites *Teivas Gomeh*¹⁷ that R. Yonasan Eibschutz contested *Pnei Yehoshua* from *Tosafos*, who says that this is only true of a mitzvah like *tzitzis*. *Kli Chemdah* then attempts to defend *Pnei Yehoshua*, explaining his intention in answer of R. Yonasan Eibschutz's question. In truth, however, had these *Acharonim* seen *Pnei Yehoshua*'s comments inside, the discussion would not have started, since he clearly states that he writes in accordance with Rashi's interpretation, not with that of *Tosafos*.

In any case, it is clear from these *Acharonim* that in their understanding, *Tosafos* holds that one is punished for non-compliance with obligatory positive mitzvos; since its compliance is enforced by an earthly *beis din*,¹⁸ certainly the *beis din shel ma'alah* – which exercises stricter justice¹⁹ – punishes non-compliance. Only a non-mandatory mitzvah like *tzitzis* is not punished outside of an *idan ris'cha*.

However, some *Acharonim* appear to have understood *Tosafos* differently. In R. Eliyahu Mizrachi's above explanation of Rashi, his opinion is clear that even mandatory positive mitzvos do not incur punishment unless during a time of wrath. The same is true of *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh*; he makes the same point as R. Eliyahu Mizrachi.²⁰ *Tosefes Yom Hakippurim*²¹ proves that non-compliance of a negative mitzvah is more stringent than that of a positive mitzvah, since a positive mitzvah is punishable only during an *idan ris'cha*. Since these *Acharonim* do not mention that *Tosafos* argues, they seem to have a different understanding of *Tosafos*.²²

14 Shabbos 55a

15 Menachos ibid

16 Vayeira 2; see *Pardes Yosef*, ibid, who repeats this

17 Vayeira 3

18 Kesubos 86b

19 As explained by Maharsha to *Tosafos*

20 See also *Ohr Hachaim* to Devarim (28:47), who says that the only positive mitzvos which incur punishment are *pesach* and *milah*.

21 Yoma 83a

22 See *Divrei Dovid*. However, it is possible that R. Eliyahu Mizrachi did not see our *Tosafos*. The *Acharonim*, however, do question why he omitted *Tosafos*' opinion; see *Bris Yaakov* (Sofer) no. 2, p. 55. See, however, *Pesach Einayim*, Yoma 10a. See *Mishnas Chachamim* (beginning of Introduction) who asks this question on *Tosefes Yom Hakippurim*.

In *Pesach Einayim*, the Chida cites *Yashresh Yaakov* in the name of *Binah L'ittim*,²³ that obligatory mitzvos are punishable even when it is not an *idan ris'cha*. The Chida wonders why *Yashresh Yaakov* cites this in the name of *Binah L'ittim*, and not in the name of *Tosafos*, who maintains this opinion. Seemingly, *Yashresh Yaakov*, too, understood *Tosafos* differently; in his understanding, *Tosafos* agrees that even obligatory positive mitzvos do not incur punishment. What was these *Acharonim*'s understanding of *Tosafos*?

Perhaps, in their understanding, *Tosafos*' statement was only meant to address Rav Katina's question, "Do you punish for not fulfilling a positive mitzvah?" *Tosafos* wondered about this: how could Rav Katina entertain the idea that there is no heavenly punishment at all for positive mitzvos, since even an earthly *beis din* – whose justice is more lenient – forces compliance? *Tosafos* therefore explained that Rav Katina was only wondering about *tzitzis*, which is not mandatory; other mitzvos are certainly punishable. However, once the *malach* replied that there is indeed heavenly punishment at times of wrath, this is true of all positive mitzvos; an *idan ris'cha* is the prescribed time for heavenly punishment.

In another approach, perhaps – as above – *Tosafos* only assumed that there is punishment for obligatory mitzvos according to Rav Katina's question, since there must be heavenly justice where there is earthly compulsion. But once the *malach* said that there is punishment during an *idan ris'cha*, it became clear that Heaven does not force compliance, but rather punishes non-compliance, after the fact. Since the *beis din shel ma'alah* punishes non-compliance, but does not force compliance like an earthly *beis din*, the two modes of justice cannot be compared.²⁴ Thus, although an earthly *beis din* forces compliance for all obligatory mitzvos, there is no proof to *beis din shel ma'alah*; there, punishment is only dealt during an *idan ris'cha*.

Alternatively, perhaps *Tosafos* was only making its point in response to Rav Katina's question because it implied that if there were no punishment, one would not be compelled to fulfill a mitzvah. *Tosafos* therefore proved that an obligatory mitzvah is punishable. But once we know that all mitzvos can incur punishment during an *idan ris'cha*, we are always forced to fulfill mitzvos, since it may presently be an *idan ris'cha*. Thus, *Tosafos* concedes that even obligatory mitzvos are punishable only during an *idan ris'cha*.

(בנאות דשא – יתרו תשפ"א)

23 Shabbos Shuvah, *drush* 5

24 See *She'elos U'Teshuvos Panim Me'iros*, vol. 1 no. 26 ד"ה וראיתי להזכיר

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By Talmidim of Rabeinu, the Rosh Yeshiva of Gur, R' Shaul Alter Shlit"a, son of the Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem of Gur zy"a



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