

FORTIFYING ONE'S BELIEF IN G'D

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Fortifying One's Belief in G'd

The Torah states, "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse." The Midrash explains, "It is as if G'd is stating, 'I am presenting before you the path of life and the path of death.' It is also written in Yirmiya, 'Give ear My People to My Torah...' The verse in Psalms states, 'Maskil by Asaph, Listen My people to My Torah, incline your ear to the words of My mouth.'...It is to teach us that the one who removes himself from the Torah it is the equivalent of denying G'd's existence. It is because the Torah was given to the Jewish people to engage in it day and night. As it states in Yehoshua, 'The Torah should not depart from your lips and you shall engage in it day and night.'...One who engages in the Torah and fulfills its dictates it is as if that individual received the Torah at Sinai. Therefore, one must share with one's children and one's grandchildren the event that occurred at Sinai." If one only observes the dictates of the Torah but does not engage in its study, it is the equivalent of denying G'd's existence. Why is this so? It is understood that if one does not engage in Torah study, he has neglected his obligation and thus is in violation. However, why should it be considered the equivalent of denying G'd's existence?

The verse states in the Portion of Eikev, "Moshe said to the Jewish people, 'You should observe the mitzvos of Hashem, your G'd, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.'" Baal HaTurim writes that the numerical value of the phrase "to walk in His ways" is the equivalent of "to study Torah (lilmod Torah)." The only way one can truly walk in the way of G'd and have a sense of His Will is to engage in Torah study. It is only when one studies Torah can one perceive existence as G'd wants it to be understood. Life itself is the equivalent of a mine field that is fraught with unlimited danger. The only way one can have a sense of its pitfalls and opportunities is when one studies the Torah sufficiently. This is because G'd created existence to be the setting for the study of Torah. However, if one does not engage in Torah study sufficiently he will lose that sense of reality and will consequently fall prey to the evil inclination.

The value of engaging in Torah on a continuous basis goes beyond the realm of eternal reward. It gives one a clarity and sense of truth to allow the individual to walk in the way of G'd. If one does not have this sense that comes through Torah study, he will become conflicted with his own desires and needs. Although this individual believes in G'd and performs the mitzvos, as prescribed by the Torah, because of his lack of engagement in Torah study, he will not be sensitized to spirituality. When one has a sense of his own spirituality he is cognizant of G'd's Presence- thus not allowing him to sin.

Consequently, if one does sin, it is an indication that he had a lapse of cognizance at that moment. As the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states that Adam, who had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge was classified as a "heretic." The basis for this classification was that he had violated the Will of G'd and had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. Adam, because he was the handiwork of G'd Himself, had the ability to see from one end of the world to the other. With this level of clarity, how is it possible to violate the word of G'd? It was only because at the moment he chose to act as he desired, G'd did not exist for him. This is because one cannot transgress and simultaneously be cognizant of G'd they are mutually exclusive. Therefore, Adam was the equivalent of a heretic when he had eaten of the fruit.

The Midrash tells us that when one does not engage in Torah study it is the equivalent of denying G'd's existence. It is not to say that the individual is actually disavowing his belief in G'd but rather, he is conducting his life in a manner that could ultimately bring him to a state of denial. As the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "Whoever becomes angry, it is the equivalent of worshipping idolatry." Why is this so? When one is in a state of anger, one is under the influence of the evil inclination. Under this influence, one could even be seduced to do idolatry. This is the reason that anger is the equated to idolatry. It is not to say that when one becomes angry he is engaged in idolatry, but rather, his inclination at that moment may lead him to idolatry. When one detaches himself from Torah study he loses cognizance of His being. Thus, he is put in a precarious position that could lead to the denial of G'd. This is the reason that if one does not engage in Torah study it is the equivalent of denying His existence.

The only way one can have a sense of G'd's Will and walk in His ways is to study Torah. Vilna Gaon had said that if one wants to have relevance to "daas Torah (a mind imbued with Torah to be able to appreciate and elucidate issues as G'd wants them to be)" one needs to study Torah for a period of six uninterrupted hours and then engage in the issue. Only then will he merit the clarity to process the subject matter at hand and decide properly. This is the reason one should consult with the Torah sages of our generation, in order to be a beneficiary of that special level of clarity. It is only because they are continuously engaged and immersed in Torah study that they are endowed with this level of clarity.

2. Relinquishment of the Material is the Ultimate in Giving

The Torah states, "When Hashem, your G'd will broaden your boundary..." The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, "A man's gift broadens his way..." Based on what one gives of his own, G'd will broaden on his behalf (based on the principle of measure for measure). To whom does this verse refer? It is Avraham, our Patriarch. He had pursued the five kings and captured the King of Sodom. He had said to Avraham after his defeat, 'Give me the people and take for yourself the possessions (spoils).' Avraham responded by swearing, 'I will not take from you as much as a thread or a bootstrap...' G'd said to Avraham, 'Because you had sworn not to take as much as a thread or a bootstrap (from the pagan king), I swear that I will apply this (giving) to your children.' As King

Solomon writes, '(G'd says) How beautiful are your paces in shoes, O daughter of the benefactor (giver)."

The Gemara in Tractate Chagiga explains the verse, "How beautiful are your paces in shoes..." to mean that when the Jewish people would ascend the Temple mount at the time of the festivals, G'd will gaze upon them and say, "How beautiful are your paces in shoes..." The shoes allude to the "bootstrap" that Avraham refused to take from the King of Sodom. The phrase, "daughter of the benefactor (giver)" refers to the Jewish people who are the offspring of Avraham who had given of his heart to G'd. Meaning, despite the fact that the world was of pagan belief, he acknowledged G'd as the Master of the Universe. As a result, in kind, G'd valued every pace of the Jewish people when they ascended the Temple mount to perform the mitzvos of the festival. This is because Avraham had refused to take as much as a "bootstrap" from the King of Sodom. Avraham's giving was in fact that he had not taken. His refusal of the wealth that was rightfully his was a sanctification of G'd's Name. He refused to take the spoils because he had said, "It is G'd who has made me wealthy, not the King of Sodom." Since the King of Sodom personified evil, even taking what was rightfully his would have been considered a desecration of G'd's Name. Therefore, Avraham's refusal was the equivalent of his giving (of himself). As a result of this sanctification, G'd broadened his eternity/children.

The Midrash continues, "Another interpretation of the verse, 'A man's gift broadens his way...' is referring to when the Jewish people had contributed their wealth towards the building of the Mishkan. When G'd had asked them to donate the materials that were needed for the Mishkan they continued to bring gifts until they were told to stop. Because of their unlimited giving, what did they merit? G'd broadened their boundary. Another interpretation, it is in the merit of accepting the Ten Commandments that G'd broadened their boundary." Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash explains, "The broadening of boundaries refers not only to the expansion of the land that was given to them but also to the broadening of the capacity of each portion that each of them had received."

Maharal of Prague explains that concept of limitation exists only within the physical realm. Anything that assumes a spiritual context is unlimited because limitation has relevance only to the physical. One who lives his life purely as a physical being with a perspective that the objective of existence is for the sake of the material, will be relegated to the limitations of physical existence. On the other hand, if one lives his life with a perspective that material is only a means to facilitate his spirituality, because the objective of existence is purely for spiritual advancement, he will not be bound by limitation and will have relevance to the infinite/G'd. His context will not be dictated by the norms of physical existence. As the Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, "Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple...They stood crowded but had ample space in which to prostrate themselves." When the Jewish people stood in the Temple there was barely sufficient room for each to stand. They stood pressed against one another. However upon hearing the Name of G'd being pronounced by the High Priest, they would bow and prostrate themselves with sufficient space.

How is that possible? It is because the location of the Temple was a spiritual one. Its context was not something that had any relevance to the material, and thus was not bound by the finite/limit. When the Jewish people accepted upon themselves the Ten Commandments at Sinai, they quantified themselves as being spiritual. Consequently, G'd not only broadened their boundaries within the physical, He also increased the capacity of each portion beyond its limited reality.

3. The Land of Israel the Location for Spiritual Advancement

The Torah states regarding the Jewish people entering into the Land, "When Hashem, your G'd, will cut down the nations where you come to drive them away before you...and settle in their land..." The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, " 'You should have faith in Hashem, your G'd, and keep His ways...' The Jewish people believed that they would enter into the Land immediately; however, Moshe addressed them saying, 'You are under the impression that you will inherit the Land. When you will have faith in G'd and keep His way, He will elevate you to inherit their land and He will cut down the nations before you.' Why does the Torah use the expression, 'When...'? It is because it is conditional. If the Jewish people observe the Torah, only then G'd will allow them to enter into the Land. He will only destroy the nations of Canaan if the Jewish people keep the Torah and observe its mitzvos...The Land of Israel is beloved by G'd because He chose it for Himself. When He created the world He divided all locations on earth among the archangels of the nations; however, He chose the Land of Israel for Himself...G'd chose the Jewish people from among the nations for Himself...G'd said, 'The Jewish people should come into My portion.' The Land was desired and valued by the Patriarchs because it is G'd's portion..." G'd will destroy the enemies of the Jewish people and allow them to dwell in the Land only if they adhere to the Torah. Since the Land is G'd's portion and He has chosen them for Himself, they must behave accordingly in order to be worthy of the Land.

The Torah states in the Portion of Eikev, "Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others...Then the wrath of Hashem will blaze against you...and you will be swiftly banished from the Land that Hashem gives you." Rashi cites Sifri that states, "(If the Jewish people become seduced by idolatry) G'd will bring suffering upon them in the Land, which will ultimately cause them to be exiled from the Land that caused them to sin." When will the Jewish people sin? If they become successful and come to say, "My strength and the power of my arm have brought about this success." This will cause them to defy G'd. Rashi continues, "This is analogous to a father who forewarns his son before he goes to a celebration. Before the son departs the father says, 'Do not eat or drink excessively so that you should return home in a clean state.' The son did not heed the warning of his father and overindulged in food and drink. This caused him to regurgitate all that he had eaten and drunk, thus soiling himself and the location of the celebration. The attendees of the banquet picked up the son and threw him out behind the banquet hall." Rather than the son benefiting from the setting of the celebration, he defiled himself and brought damage upon the location. Consequently, he was removed from the banquet hall due to his irresponsible behavior. Similarly, G'd gave the Land of Israel, which is His chosen location, to the Jewish people to utilize it in

a manner that would advance their spirituality and cause them to cleave to Him. However, if the location is abused and defiled as a result of the blessing that G'd provided, they will be exiled.

In all other locations of the world, the Jew is not under the same level of scrutiny as he is in the Holy Land because it is considered to be the palace of the King. For the Jew to behave inappropriately in the presence of the King, in His palace, and defile himself, it is considered to be an outrage. Therefore, G'd will exile the Jewish people from the Land if they utilize it to transgress. Exiling the Jewish people from the Land is in fact a kindness because allowing them to sin in the Land that was intended for their advancement will bring upon them tragedy rather than blessing, regression rather than advancement. Although it pains G'd to banish His children from the Land, he does so as a father who does not want to have his child destroy himself. G'd's wants the Jewish people to benefit from the Land in order to cleave to Him and not have it be the setting for their destruction.

4. Love, the All-Consuming Catalyst and Motivator

The Midrash states, "The Land of Israel is beloved by G'd because He chose it for Himself. When He created the world He divided all locations on earth among the archangels of the nations; however, He chose the Land of Israel for Himself...G'd chose the Jewish people from among the nations for Himself...G'd said, 'The Jewish people should come into My portion.' The verse in Yirmiyah states, 'But I (G'd) said, 'How am I to put you among the children, and give you a desired land, a land that was desired by the forefathers of the world (Patriarchs)....' Avraham desired the Land. As the verse states, 'How will I know that they (my children) will inherit it?...' Yitzchak desired it. As it states, 'Dwell in this Land and I will give it to you...' Yaakov desired it. As the verse states, '...I should be able to return in peace to my father's household....' Reb Yehudah says that Moshe desired the Land. As it states, 'I implored Hashem...Let me now cross and see the good Land...' King David desired the Land. As it states, 'I prefer to stand at the threshold (histofeif) of the House of my G'd than to dwell (securely) in the tents of wickedness.' What is the meaning of the word 'histofeif'? ... One opinion says that King David had said to G'd, 'Master of the Universe, even if I should have palaces and citadels outside of the Land of Israel, I would prefer the threshold (histofeif) of a house in the Land of Israel.' Another opinion says, King David had said, 'Even if I only had the dregs of the carob to eat in the Land, I would prefer it to anything outside of the Land of Israel.' This is the meaning verse in Yirmiyah '...give you a desired land' It was desired by the holy Patriarchs." Why did the Patriarchs, Moshe, and King David have such a desire and love for the Land of Israel?

G'd chose the Land of Israel for Himself and He wants His chosen people to dwell in His portion. The Land of Israel is the appropriate location in the world to serve G'd and cleave to Him because it is His location. The Patriarchs desired the Land not because of its topography or its bounty but rather because it facilitated their service of G'd and spirituality at the most advanced level.

Rambam writes in the last chapter of Laws of Repentance, "One who serves G'd out of love will engage in Torah and mitzvos. He walks the pathways of wisdom not for any reason...not that he

should merit goodness. But rather, he pursues truth because it is true...This is a special level of love that not every wise man is worthy of meriting. This was the unique quality and status of Avraham who was quantified by G'd as 'My beloved'The special level of service was commanded through Moshe as it states, 'You shall love Hashem, your G'd with all your heart...' If one truly loves G'd properly, it will manifest itself immediately. He will perform all of the mitzvos out of love for Him...What is considered a proper level of love? It should be an intense love and desire to cleave to G'd. As one who is consumed with the love and desire for worldly success, the one who loves G'd should be totally consumed by that love for Him. Everything that he pursues and desires stems from his love for G'd. It should be as one who becomes sick from the intense love and desire that he has for a woman. Just as this individual is obsessed with the object of his desire; he thinks about her continuously when he sits, when he walks, and when he eats; so too must one be consumed with the love for G'd. As it states, 'You shall love Hashem, your G'd with all your heart...' As King Solomon writes, 'I am lovesick (cholas ahava ani).' The love expressed in the Song of Songs is an allegory of how one must love G'd."

The Patriarchs desired the Land because it is the location in which one could express his love for G'd in the most perfect manner. Moshe, who was the ultimate servant of G'd, desired the Land because it is the location in which he could serve Him and express his unique level of love for G'd. King David desired the Land because his love for G'd was so intense that there was no other location in the world in which he could express it as there.

King David writes in Psalms, "One thing I asked of Hashem, that I shall seek, I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the delight of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary." Chofetz Chaim points out that verse should have stated, "One thing that I will ask of Hashem..." Why does it state, "One thing I asked of Hashem (in the past tense)?" He explains it with an allegory. When one is at the beginning of his career one has certain aspirations and desires that are within his means at the time. As he advances financially his interests increase and expand to match his financial capability to attain them. King David began as a lowly shepherd who was without renown. At that time he desired to dwell in the House of G'd and to behold His delight. Ultimately, David became a general, victor, and king of Israel with great wealth and palaces. Regardless of his advanced level of financial success and fame, King David's only desire remained to dwell in the House of G'd and to behold His delight as he desired when he was a lowly shepherd. This is the reason the verse states, "One thing I asked..." Meaning, what King David desired as a shepherd he continued to desire as the king. Because of King David's exceptional level of love for G'd, all he desired was to bring about a sanctification of His Name and to cleave to Him. This is the same reason he desired the Land of Israel.

5. The Uncontestable Prophecy of Moshe (from Va'eschanan)

The Torah states, "Moshe called all of Israel and said to them...Face to face did Hashem speak with you on the mountain, from amid the fire..." Why was it necessary for Moshe to remind the Jewish

people that G'd had communicated to them at the level of face to face at Sinai? Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "Reb Brechya says, 'Moshe said to the Jewish people, 'Do not think for a moment that I am deceiving you. (A broker's primary interest is to facilitate the transfer of goods from the seller to the buyer in order to collect his fee.) Do not regard me to be the equivalent of a broker, who may have an interest to deceive the buyer, because the seller has spoken to you directly face to face.'" The Jewish people were not able to consider for a moment that Moshe was misleading them regarding the Word of G'd because they themselves had heard the first two of the Ten commandments directly from Him. Baal Haturim writes that the connotation of "face to face" not only indicates the direct communication between G'd and the Jewish people but also the context of that communication. It was with a positive countenance and an embrace.

The Torah tells us that a mortal being cannot survive a direct encounter with G'd in which one would perceive His essence. This is because man is a finite and limited being and G'd is infinite. Something that is limited does not have the capacity to contain something that is unlimited. If this is so, then how was Moshe able to have a face to face relationship with G'd? The Torah tells us that when Moshe had asked to comprehend His essence, G'd responded by saying, "You can only see My back." Chazal explain this to mean that G'd had shown Moshe the knot of His tefillin which is located on the back of the head. Moshe was only able to fathom and comprehend a limited understanding of G'd. Despite his limitation, the communication was direct to Moshe when he was in a wake state and not in a sleep-state. All prophets, other than Moshe, were only able to receive their prophetic vision while in a sleep/dream state. This is because Moshe had spiritualized his physicality to the point that it had assumed a spiritual character. Thus, it was the spiritual communicating with the spiritual. However, other prophets, whose physicality was not sufficiently spiritualized were only able to prophesize in a sleep state because the communication was through their soul and not through their body. When one is in a state of sleep one's physicality is negated. In order for the Jewish people to be able to relate to and believe that it is possible for a human being to ascend to such a unique spiritual state, despite his physicality, Sforno explains, that at Sinai G'd had communicated to all of the Jewish people in a wake state. Although they were not qualified to receive this level of communication because of their physicality, it was necessary in order to establish Moshe as the person who he truly was. As it states, "They said, 'Behold! Hashem, our G'd...we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; this day we saw that Hashem will speak to a person and he can live.'" Had the Jewish people not experienced this level of prophecy themselves, they would have believed that it was not possible for Moshe to be able to prophesize in a wake-state.

Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were all prophets who received their prophecy in a sleep state. Prior to Sinai, when they would communicate the word of G'd to the masses there was no way to truly prove that the origin of their message was in fact Divine. The only one who knew this was the prophet himself. The Torah tells us that in order for a prophet to be established as a true prophet he must firstly perform a miracle as well as predict a future (positive) event. If one meets these criteria that are set forth by the Torah, he is established as a true prophet. Rambam explains that although

there is a possibility that this individual was able to bring about a supernatural event through witchcraft and forecast the future through some other means, he is nevertheless established to be a true prophet because he met the criteria set forth by the Torah. It was not until Sinai when the entire Jewish people experienced prophecy in a wake state did they know that G'd truly communicates with man.

When Moshe told the Jewish people that G'd had spoken to them "face to face" he was telling them that they did not need to rely on their own estimation and evaluation of his prophetic abilities. Their experience at Sinai was a confirmation that Moshe was a true prophet of G'd. It was necessary that Moshe's level of prophecy be established at an uncontestable level in order to ensure the eternity of the transmission of the Torah. Therefore, despite the fact that the Jewish people were not qualified to receive that level of communication, G'd allowed them to experience prophecy in a wake state. Text Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

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