



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

Early Friday Night Minyan Resumes

The early Friday night Minyan resumes this week and there will be two Minyanim, 6.55pm and 7.40pm.

Holiday Time!

The holiday season is in full flow, we remind those in town to please support the Shul Minyanim.

Limiting Beliefs

Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier (Torah.org)

"And now Yisroel, what is HASHEM, your G-d asking of you? Merely to fear HASHEM, to go in all of His ways, to love Him, and serve Him with all of your heart and soul." — Devarim 10:12

In this posuk, Moshe Rabbeinu set before the Jewish people the categories of human growth and accomplishments.

1. To fear HASHEM
2. To go in all of His ways.
3. To love HASHEM.
4. To serve Him with all of you heart and your soul.

Each category is a world in and of itself and would take man a lifetime to accomplish. Together these four groupings comprise all of service to HASHEM and are the measure of the perfection of the human.

Yet amazingly, when Moshe introduces these concepts to the Jewish nation, he begins with an expression of, "What does HASHEM ask from you but this?" It's as if to imply that it is but a small request.

The Gemara in Brachos is troubled by this and asks, "Is fear of HASHEM a small thing?" The Gemara answers, "Yes, to Moshe it was a small thing. To a poor man, even small items seem valuable. However, to a wealthy man even vast sums seem small." Since Moshe had attained such spiritual perfection, these things seemed simple to him; hence, he used the expression, "What does HASHEM want from you but this?"

Why would Moshe Rabbeinu compare himself to the average person?

The difficulty with this Gemara is that it implies that Moshe was using himself as the standard of measurement for the average person. It's as if he were implying, "If I can reach this, then so can you." Yet we know that Moshe towered over every other human ever created. He reached dizzying heights of perfection that no other human before or after will attain. After 80 years of unparalleled growth, he spent 40 days without food, drink, or sleep, and was taught the entire Torah by HASHEM. For the next forty years, he was engaged in teaching that Torah to the Jewish people. At this point in his life, he is a giant of a man, and in no way can he be compared to the typical person. So while these things may not have seemed lofty to him, to his audience they were gargantuan! Why would Moshe use his own experiences as the measuring rod against which the average person should compare himself?

The answer to this question is based on a different perspective on human capacity. To gain that viewpoint, let us take a look at an interesting phenomenon.

In parts of Asia, the elephant remains the beast of choice for lugging heavy loads. As part of its work day, an adult elephant will pull logs weighing thousands of pounds through long stretches of forest undergrowth. Yet at night, that same elephant will be controlled by being tied to a small peg in the ground.

While it would be clear to you and me that a 14,000 pound creature can easily break away from the light ropes holding it, the reality is that it cannot. It cannot escape — not because it isn't motivated, and not because it doesn't want to, but because in the elephant's understanding, it just can't be done.

In this part of the world, shortly after birth, the baby elephant is tied to a peg in the ground. At that stage in its development, it might weigh 250 pounds and isn't strong enough to break the rope that holds it. From that point forward, every day of its life, the elephant will be tied to that peg in the ground. Even when the animal has reached maturity and will be called upon to lug felled trees weighing over 4,000 pounds, it will remain tied to a small peg. The understanding is firmly fixed in its mind: it can't escape.

Many times we are tied to pegs in the ground. There are many situations where we don't reach up for greatness because we are contained — not by ropes, but by limiting beliefs that prevent us from breaking away from the habits and lifestyle choices that stunt our growth.

Moshe Rabbeinu was providing an invaluable lesson to us. He was demonstrating the capacity of the human. He was showing us how great a person can be. At the end of the day, Moshe was made of the same substance as you and I. He was a person with drives, desires, and inclinations.

He overcame them. He made himself great. He took the natural strengths and weaknesses that he was given, and by constantly making the right choices, he changed his inner nature.

Finally, he reached the point that he could look at the absolute heights

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת עקב

1st Mincha / Candle Lighting	6.55pm / not before 7.12pm
2nd Mincha / Candle Lighting	7.40pm / 7.46pm - 8.00pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.28am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
Ovos uBonim	5.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	8.36pm
Rov's Shiur	Following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	9.41pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tue / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.00pm

of perfection and say, "So what? This isn't a big deal. It can easily be done."

The lesson to us is that we too have that capacity. All of life is but an opportunity to make choices. If from this moment forward, every decision that I made were the proper one, if I were to put away all of my self-interests and ask myself, "What do I think is the right way to act? What do I think HASHEM wants me to do in this situation? Not what do I want, not what do I desire, but what is the proper way?," I have the intuitive sense to be able to answer correctly and the ability to find the right path.

By attuning myself to that part, and by using role models who reached such plateaus, I too can reach the dizzying heights of greatness for which I was created.

A Single Word

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein (Torah.org)

A single word, unexplained.

Libraries of meaning sometimes attach to one word, powerful because it both need not be explained, and at the same time defies explanation.

Devekus, clinging to Hashem, is one such word.

The staccato presentation of four commands in one verse trumpets an announcement of signal importance. "Hashem your G-d you shall fear, Him shall you serve, to Him you should cling, and in His Name you shall swear."¹ We can sense that the brevity with which these items are mentioned belies the place they play in our lives.

Devekus is important enough that we will see it again in our parshah. It will make two more appearances before our Chumash presents its last verse. After emphasizing that no mortal can literally "cling" to the overpowering presence of Hashem, Chazal² emphasize that the mitzvah of devekus must offer some sort of functional clinging that is within the realm of human possibility.

Indeed, they find the perfect *modus vivendi* for us. We can attach ourselves to those people who are so far ahead of ourselves in their connection to Hashem, that they are human refractions of His greatness. Clinging to *talmidei chachamim*, to genuine Torah scholars, fulfills the obligation of devekus for us.

And yet it really doesn't. *Toldos Yaakov Yosef*, accompanied by a plurality of great commentators, tells us that in regard to this verse as well, the simple *pshat* cannot be ignored. Devekus remains a mitzvah in the plain, ordinary sense that it is usually understood. We are to attach ourselves to Him. *Talmidei chachamim* offer us a commonly available modality for finding Him and fastening ourselves to Him. They have already achieved devekus; when we attach ourselves to them, we connect with Hashem through them. The real goal, however, remains devekus to Hashem Himself.

It is a mitzvah that is indeed important enough to be mentioned by the Torah several times. (Devekus does not enjoy a monopoly on repetition. The Torah calls us to *kedushah* – another one of those compact but all-important words – a handful of times as well.)

How are we to understand the nature of this mitzvah? We can start by recalling the would-be convert who asked to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one leg. His challenge was no match for Hillel, who responded, "what you find distasteful, do not do to *chaverchah*, to your friend. The *Avodas Yisroel* reports what he heard in the name of his teacher. The word *chaverchah* should be understood as *chavusecha*, the relationship of closeness between you.

Hillel, then, telescoped the entirety of Jewish life into one all-important preoccupation: devekus with Hashem. Do not do anything that could disturb or impede your relationship with your Creator. All the affirmative obligations bring us closer to that goal, while all the prohibitions seek to distance us from what could drive a wedge between Hashem and ourselves. The rest is all commentary – go forth, and study it.

His rebbi went on to find an allusion to this in the words "One thing

G-d spoke; these two I have heard." Torah seems to vacillate between two unrelated poles – telling us what to do, and what not to do. In truth, these two are different facets of the "one thing" about which He spoke. He asks of us that we forge a relationship that is close and intimate. To accomplish this, He legislates for us activities that will bring us closer, while proscribing those that will move us further away.

Once we grant the centrality of devekus in Torah life, we understand as well why the Torah includes so many references to it. As a central pillar of our conduct, devekus is no simple acquisition. You cannot really answer the question of whether you have achieved devekus with a simple "yes" or "no." Devekus is complex and nuanced. It includes many different levels. The sundry references to devekus in the Torah are not repetitions for the sake of emphasis. Rather, each one of them refers to a different gradation or level of devekus.

Looking more closely, you will see that devekus is sometimes paired with *yirah*, fear of Hashem while other references link it to *ahavas Hashem*, or love of Hashem.

These differences do not simply suggest that there are several access points to the universe of devekus. Rather, they stem from devekus' complexity. *Yirah* and *ahavah* generate different forms of devekus, which occupy different positions on the vertical scale that links heaven and earth.

In much the same way, the Torah exhorts us to *kedushah* in several places. *Kedushah* is the real linchpin of devekus. To whatever extent a person lacks some subtlety of *kedushah*, to that extent he misses out on devekus. This means that *kedushah* as well is not a simple, uncomplicated quality, but a constellation of values. The multiple references to it reflect many points on a continuum, many forms of *kedushah*.

Important as devekus is, we still have a difficult time understanding the Torah's prodding us about it, treating it as an independent quality. We achieve devekus when we properly address two related obligations: *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*.

The Torah itself links them, implying an organic relationship between them. Indeed, how else could it be? A person contemplating the greatness of Hashem, standing in awe of His exalted grandeur, has little choice but to be drawn close to Him and long to become part of Him. Having instructed us independently in the obligations of *ahavah* and *yirah*, why does the Torah make separate mention of devekus elsewhere?

The Ramban provides an answer. Devekus, he says, implies that we never avert our gaze from Him, that we never lose our focus on our love for Him. Devekus is constant and uninterrupted. Episodes of elevation and attachment to Him are important, but they do not describe the *madregah* that Hashem asks us to achieve. True devekus means a bond so strong, that it cannot be severed, whether for long periods of time or short ones. The Maharal puts it quite succinctly. "If devekus is erratic, by chance alone, it is not devekus at all.

We seem to have set our sights at too elevated a position. Having explored the implications and interconnectedness of *ahavah*, *yirah*, and devekus, we cannot help but be impressed. We also cannot fail to realize that none but a special, small group of individuals can hope to achieve them as they have been defined. If devekus is the touchstone of Torah living and its single most important goal, of what value are our own lives? We can toil for decades, without coming close to achieving what Torah is all about! How depressing!

This is a misunderstanding. In regard to all the mitzvos of the inner person (even including the mitzvah of loving another as oneself), the essential obligation is to strive. The fulfillment of the mitzvah is in the concern, the concentration, the will to accomplish – not in the accomplishment itself.

We must see these lofty qualities as part of our personal universe, not the domain of the special others. When we do, the effort we expend is itself our success.