



“And the matter that is too difficult for you, bring it to me and I shall hear it”

The Solutions to Life’s Quandaries Can Be Found in the Torah You Learned That Day

The upcoming, auspicious Shabbas is called **Shabbas Chazon**. We begin reading from sefer Devarim annually on this special Shabbas. In this essay, we will explain the rationale for always reading parshas Devarim on the Shabbas preceding Tishah B’Av. Thus, we always read parshas Vaeschanan on the Shabbas following Tishah B’Av. In the words of the Tur and the Michaber (O.C. 428, 4): **Tishah B’Av precedes Vaeschanan.**

Chazal teach us in the Gemara (Megillah 31b) that Ezra HaSofer arranged the cycle of weekly Torah readings with specific intent. Hence, it is worthwhile considering why he arranged for us to always read parshas Devarim on the Shabbas prior to Tishah B’Av.

Here is the enlightening explanation of the Levush (O.C. ibid.): **The reason is so that they will read the rebukes of Moshe prior to Tishah B’Av, in order to read the Haftarah of Chazon, which is a rebuke related to the churban.** This name of this Shabbas comes from the opening passuk of this Haftarah (Yeshayah 1, 1): **“חזון ישעיהו: בן אמוץ אשר חזה על יהודה וירושלים—the vision of Yeshayahu the son of Amotz, which he saw concerning Yehudah and Yerushalayim.** Moshe’s rebuke in parshas Devarim expresses his torment and plea for help (Devarim 1, 12): **“איכה אשא לבדי טרחכם ומשאכם וריבכם”—how can I bear your trouble and your burden and your quarrels alone?** Thus, the parashah and the Haftarah are connected thematically; they both contain rebukes of Yisrael.

Had You Heeded the Initial Rebuke the Second Rebuke Would Not Have Been Necessary

This association can be explained based on Chazal’s statement in the Midrash Rabbah (Eichah, Introduction, 11): **Had you been meritorious, you would have recited from the Torah, “How can I bear alone?” Now that you were not meritorious, you are required to recite** (Eichah 1, 1): **“How is it that she sits alone?”** They state explicitly that because Yisrael failed to heed Moshe’s rebuke—**“איכה אשא לבדי”—**they caused the churban, which we lament with the words of the divine poet—**“איכה ישבה בדד”**.

We can now understand the rationale of Ezra HaSofer to arrange for parshas Devarim to always be read on the Shabbas preceding Tishah B’Av. Had we been meritorious and heeded the tochachah of Moshe Rabeinu—**“איכה אשא לבדי”—**it would have sufficed to only read that rebuke from the Torah. Now, however, we are obliged to read the tochachah of Yeshayah HaNavi warning Yisrael about the reality of the approaching churban: **“חזון ישעיה בן אמוץ”**. And then on the following Shabbas, after Tishah B’Av, sadly, we must lament the actual churban with the heartfelt words: **“איכה ישבה בדד”**.

The Sefas Emes (5659) provides us with a pertinent insight. We are taught in the Gemara (Yoma 9b) that the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of **“sin’as chinam”—**baseless, brotherly hatred. Therefore, HKB”H arranged for Aharon HaKohen to pass away on Rosh Chodesh Av, at

the start of the nine days on which we mourn the churban of the Beis HaMikdash, so that he will influence us from heaven to emulate his admirable, righteous behavior—to love every Jew. This is taught in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 12): **“הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידי של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את ה'”**. Hillel says: **Be among the disciples of Aharon—love peace and promote peace, love your fellow creatures and bring them closer to Torah.**

This provides us with a better perspective of Moshe’s heartfelt rebuke: **“How can I bear your trouble and your burden and your quarrels alone?”** He was informing all future generations of Yisrael that as long as his brother Aharon was still alive, he was instrumental in helping me resolve the disputes and quarrels between our fellows and brothers, since he **loved shalom and promoted shalom**. But now that he has passed away and has left me alone, I am incapable of dealing with and resolving your disputes and issues resulting from “sin’as chinam.”

Thus, we have shed some light on Chazal’s profound statement in the Midrash: **Had you been meritorious, you would only be reading from the Torah: איכה אשא”** לבדי טרחכם ומשאכם וריבכם. Moshe was urging the people to set aside their “sin’as chinam” and stop quarreling with one another. Had we heeded his rebuke and started to love every Jew, the Beis HaMikdash would not have been destroyed. **Now, since we were not meritorious—**meaning that we did not address and correct the tragic flaw of “sin’as chinam”—**we are obliged to read: איכה”** יסבה בדד—lamenting the churban of the Beis HaMikdash that resulted from this serious sin.

Moshe’s Incredible Advice for Jews after the Churban

It now gives me immense pleasure to present to our royal audience a precious gem. In his parting remarks and testament to Yisrael, knowing that he will not be entering Eretz Yisrael with them to build the everlasting Beis HaMikdash, Moshe Rabeinu says (Devarim 1, 17): **“והדבר אשר יקשה מכם תקריבון אלי ושמעתי”**—and the matter which will be too difficult for you, present to me and I will

hear it. Let us interpret this based on the fact that in the Beis HaMikdash, HKB”H rested His Shechinah between the two staves of the Aron; from there, the Torah was transmitted to all of Yisrael. As it is written (Shemos 25, 22): **“ונועדתי לך שמה ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים אשר: על ארון העדות את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל”**—it is there that I shall arrange audience with you, and I shall speak with you from atop the “Kapores,” from between the two “keruvim” that are on the Aron of the Testimony, and it is all that I shall command you pertaining to Bnei Yisrael. Yisrael would bring all of their uncertainties in all matters to the Mikdash, and their issues would be resolved. This is the message of the passuk (Devarim 17, 8): **“כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט בין דם לדם בין דין לדין ובין נגע לנגע דברי ריבות בשעריך, וקמת ועלית אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך בו.”** If a matter of judgment will be hidden from you, between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, or between affliction and affliction, matters of dispute in your cities, you shall rise and ascend to the place that Hashem, your G-d, shall choose.

Hence, Moshe Rabeinu, Yisrael’s trustworthy shepherd, advised them what to do after the churban of the Beis HaMikdash, when the Shechinah would be in galus. To this end, he advised Yisrael: **“And the matter which will be too difficult for you, present to me and I will hear it.”** In the sefer Keser Shem Tov (6) from the holy Ba’al Shem Tov, zy”a, he presents a wonderful interpretation of this passuk that the Ramban taught his son. He said that this passuk conveys a fundamental message concerning the service of Hashem; it instructs a Jew how to deal with uncertainties concerning how best to serve Hashem. Here are his enlightening words:

If you are uncertain about how to perform a certain act, when there are arguments for both ways, or you are unsure whether or not it is a mitzvah, should you do it or refrain from doing it. Regarding something that a person derives pleasure from, it is possible to find a rationale to permit that which is prohibited.

Therefore, the first thing to do is to remove from this endeavor any personal benefit or honor. After that

you can evaluate the options. Then, Hashem, blessed be He, will show you the right thing to do, and you will proceed with certainty. This is what “the matter which will be too difficult for you” is referring to—when you do not know whether to do something or refrain. The uncertainty stems “from you”—from the fact that it is beneficial to you. Therefore, remove your benefit from the matter “and present it to Me.” Thus, what you do will be l’shem Shamayim without any ulterior motives or benefits. Then, “I will hear it”—I will give him a better understanding of how to act (proceed). In Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Eikev), the devoted disciple of the holy Ba’al Shem Tov discusses this idea at greater length.

A Bribe Will Blind the Judgment of the Wise

Let us explore the matter further by examining the following passuk (ibid. 16, 19): **“ולא תקח שוחד כי השוחד יעור עיני חכמים ויסלף דברי צדיקים”**—and you shall not take a bribe, because bribery will blind the eyes of the wise and distort the words of the righteous. If a Jew is uncertain whether to act one way or another in order to best serve Hashem, he cannot remain unbiased if his honor or financial gain are involved. There is no greater form of bribery, because of this conflict of interest.

Therefore, the Ba’al Shem Tov cites the Ramban to teach us what to do. First, the person should discern which side of the uncertainty he is more partial to due to its inherent personal advantages. If he realizes that he is biased in one direction, he should disqualify himself immediately from making this determination. Instead, he should present his doubts and uncertainties to Hashem through tefilah—in words or thought—in the berachah of **“אתה חונן לאדם דעת”** in Shemoneh Esrei as follows:

Master of the Universe, Holy Creator, it is difficult for me to determine this matter, since I am not impartial. Therefore, please illuminate the matter for me, so that I may act appropriately. This is the message conveyed by the passuk: **“והדבר אשר יקשה מכם”**—if you cannot make a correct determination, because you are not impartial—**“תקריבון אלי”**—set aside your biases and prejudices and

approach Me, Hashem, through tefilah. Hashem will provide you with the proper knowledge—**“ושמעתי”**—and guide you. In this manner, you will make the correct decision and follow the illuminated path—i.e., act appropriately.

Seek Counsel from the Torah

As a loyal servant and student in the presence of his mentors, I would like to explore the message conveyed by this passuk in greater depth: **“והדבר אשר יקשה מכם תקריבון אלי ושמעתי”**. We find a wonderful passage in the Midrash Pesikta D’Rabbi Kahana (12, 12): **If you intend to seek counsel, take it from the Torah. David said: When I sought counsel, I would look in the Torah and take counsel, as it says (Tehillim 119, 15): “Of Your precepts I will speak, and I look at Your ways.” And he says (ibid. 104): “From Your precepts I acquire understanding.”**

The illustrious Rabbi Tzi Elimelech of Dinov, zy”a, enjoys referring to this passage often. In his sefer Agra D’Pirka (133), he brings this down in the name of the Ba’al Shem Tov, zy”a, in Likutei Yikarim (12). He writes that prior to any act, one should always be connected with Hashem, blessed is He. Here is a loose translation:

Say a person studied a subject in the Torah on a given day. Afterwards, on that same day, he had the opportunity to do something and did not know whether or not to do it. He can know what to do based on what he just learned. It is essential, however, that he is always connected with Hashem, blessed is He. Then, Hashem will always provide him with guidance based on the teachings of the Torah. In my opinion, this is explicit in the passuk (ibid. 24): “Indeed, Your testimonies are my preoccupation.” He is saying that by being preoccupied with Hashem’s testimonies, one is connected with Hashem. Thus, they are my counsellors that guide my behavior in all matters.

In Agra D’Kallah (Bereishis), he adds the following:

To know what to do, one should look at the pesukim of the Torah. For (Chagigah 12a), with the primordial light, Adam could look and see from one end of the world

to the other. It (the light) is stored (for safekeeping), and it is stored in the Torah. Hence, by looking in the Torah, a person can know future events . . .

**“Ask your father, and he will tell you”
the Torah Is Like a Father**

We find precious insights related to this subject in the Ma’or Einayim (Supplements to Parshas Nitzavim):

The Torah is called “counsel,” as it states (Mishlei 8, 14): “Counsel is mine and Toshiyah.” For, all counsel is written in the Torah concerning how a person should behave. Therefore, it is written (Devarim 32, 7): “Ask your father, and he will tell you.” This is a reference to the Torah, which is called a “father.” For, HKB”H created the world with the Torah; and all of the creatures including man, the essential one, were created with the Torah. Thus, the Torah is called a “father,” since it facilitated their birth. Every Jew has a place in the Torah. So he should attach himself and be connected with the Torah. She will guide him and advise him how to come closer to Hashem, blessed is He. This is the implication of “ask your father,” which is the Torah; she “will tell you.” We find that the entire Torah in general is always applicable, at all times, in keeping with the changing times and generations; it offers counsel on how to connect with Hashem.

In Ruach Chaim, the brilliant Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, ztz”l, provides the following interpretation of the statement of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma (Avos 6, 10): **When a person passes away, he is not accompanied by silver, nor gold, nor precious stones and pearls, but only by Torah and good deeds. As it is said (Mishlei 6, 22): “When you walk it shall lead you; when you lie down it shall watch over you; when you shall awaken it shall talk with you.” “When you walk, it shall lead you”—in this world; “when you lie down, it shall watch over you”—in the grave; “when you awaken, it shall talk with you”—in Olam HaBa**

He interprets this based on the statement by David HaMelech (Tehillim 119, 105): **“Your word is a lamp**

for my feet.” Regarding all uncertainties and questions a person has concerning how to act, he will find all the answers in the Torah. If he acts accordingly, he will not fail or stumble. This is the meaning of David’s statement; he held the Torah like a lamp to guide him on the proper path, step by step. And this is the meaning of **“when you walk, it shall lead you.”** If you accept upon yourself to act based on the Torah, and you follow it, then she will lead you . . . and you will be assisted by Hashem.

The Torah Toils on One’s Behalf

Following this path, we will continue to delve into the wise advice of Moshe Rabeinu: **“וזהדר אשר יקשה מכם תקריבון אלי ושמעתי”** In the Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b), they expounded on the passuk (Mishlei 16, 26): **“נפש עמל עמלה לו כי אכף עליו”**—**“If a person toils (to acquire Torah-knowledge), then it (the Torah) will toil on his behalf, because he has saddled his mouth to it.”** He toils here and his Torah toils for him elsewhere. Rashi comments: **Because he toiled in Torah-study, the Torah toils on his behalf . . . It (the Torah he has learned) beseeches G-d to grant him a special insight into the Torah’s deeper meanings and secrets. Why? Because he inclined his mouth to acquire words of Torah.**

It appears that we can embellish this thought based on a wonderful teaching in the Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu Rabbah (Chapter 18) focusing on the passuk (Eichah 2, 19): **“שפכי כמים לבך נוכח פני ה'”**—**pour out your heart like water before Hashem: From here, they said that every “talmid-chacham” who sits, reads, reviews, and studies Torah, HKB”H sits opposite him and reads and learns with him.** This is what Chazal meant when they said (Berachos 6a): **“שאפילו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה שכינה”**—**even one who sits and studies Torah alone, the Shechinah is present with him.**

Based on this, I would like to propose an explanation for what Yitzchak remarked when giving the Berachos to Yaakov (Bereishis 27, 22): **“הקול קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו”**—**the voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav.** They expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 65, 20):

When the voice of Yaakov is found in the synagogues, the hands are not the hands of Esau (they are ineffective), **but if not, “the hands are the hands of Esau”—you can overcome them.** We can interpret Yitzchak’s meaning in keeping with our current discussion. He was teaching Yaakov that if he and his children occupy themselves with the study of Torah—with the **voice** of the Torah scholar and the **voice** of HKB”H studying opposite him—they are guaranteed that the hands of Eisav will not prevail.

Now, let us analyze the specific language Yitzchak employed: **“הקול קול יעקב”**. He was hinting to his son to study with the attitude of an **“עקב”**—a lowly heel—with humility. Otherwise, chas v’shalom, if one studies alone with a single **voice**, because he is too proud or even arrogant, HKB”H will not want to be near him. In that situation, the hands of Eisav will prevail in keeping with the berachah Yitzchak bestowed upon him (ibid. 40): **“ועל חרבך תחיה”**—**and you will live by your sword.**

This explains fabulously what they expounded in the Gemara above: **If a person toils** (to acquire Torah-knowledge), **then it** (the Torah) **will toil on his behalf.”** **He toils here and his Torah toils for him elsewhere.** Rashi comments: **Because he toiled in Torah-study, the Torah toils on his behalf . . .** It (the Torah he has learned) **beseeches G-d to grant him a special insight into the Torah’s deeper meanings and secrets.** Since HKB”H is sitting opposite a person and studying Torah with him, the Torah asks its Creator to reveal its deeper meanings and secrets to the scholar.

The Importance of Having a Teacher

Based on what we have discussed, we can gain a better understanding of the following Mishnah (Avos 1, 16): **“רבן גמליאל אומר, עשה לך רב והסתלק מן הספק”**—**Rabban Gamliel said: Establish a teacher for yourself and remove yourself from uncertainty.** The Maggid of Kozhnitz provides us with a marvelous interpretation of this Mishnah in Avodas Yisrael (Avos, ibid.). He asserts that this Mishnah is talking about a Jew who is engrossed in learning or prayer. He should imagine that HKB”H is present there

with him, teaching him, and helping him. HKB”H is the Rav and teacher implied by the Mishnah. Then the Mishnah goes on to say that you should have no uncertainty in your mind as to HKB”H’s presence. He is certainly there with you, as if He is standing in front of a friend.

Apropos our discussion, we can suggest that Rabban Gamliel intended to teach us a proper method of learning Torah with kedushah and taharah. To this end, he states: **“Establish a teacher for yourself”**—when you are engaged in Torah study, make HKB”H your Rav; make sure that He is sitting there opposite you and learning Torah together with you as described by the Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu. In this manner, you will succeed in eliminating all uncertainty: **“והסתלק מן הספק”**. You will resolve all of your questions and uncertainties related to your Torah study, because you will learn novel interpretations and insights coming directly from the Torah emanating from HKB”H’s mouth—Who is there learning with you—in keeping with the depiction: **“המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל”**.

This also explains beautifully another teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 8a): **“מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקב”ה”**—**“since the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, HKB”H only has four cubits of halachah in His world.** After all, the primary function of the Beis HaMikdash is to serve as a dwelling place for the Shechinah in the Kodesh HaKodashim, between the two Keruvim atop the Aron. As we know, the two luchos encompassing the entire Torah were placed there. From there, all of the teachings of the Torah were transmitted from the mouth of HKB”H to Moshe Rabeinu and all of Yisrael.

In similar fashion, after Moshe Rabeinu passed away, when the first and second Batei Mikdash were built, the Torah was transmitted from there. This is taught in the Gemara (Ta’anis 16a): **“מאי הו”ה המוריה . . . הר שיצא ממנו הוראה”**—**“Why was it called Har HaMoriah? . . . Because it was the mountain from which instruction went out to Yisrael.** Rashi explains: **The instruction refers to the Torah.** This concurs with the passuk (Michah 4, 2): **“כי”**—**“מציון תצא תורה”**—**for Torah will come forth from Tziyon.**

Tosafos add that this refers to the **“lishkat hagazit,”** the place in the Beis HaMikdash where the Sanhedrin assembled to disseminate Torah to the entire world.

This then is the interpretation of the Gemara: **“Since the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed,”** and the partnership and union of HKB”H, the Torah, and Yisrael came undone—**HKB”H only has four cubits of halachah in His world**—in other words, HKB”H rests His Shechinah there to teach Torah to Torah scholars. As a benefit, when a Jew sets fixed times devoted to the study of Torah

with devotion and self-sacrifice, he will find unrivaled, impeccable guidance and counsel in the Torah he studied that day; he will no longer have any doubts regarding the proper thing to do. This was the message delivered by Moshe Rabeinu to all of Yisrael—present and future: **“And the matter which will be too difficult for you, present to me and I will hear it.”** By following his wonderful advice, we will restore the integrity of the incredible partnership and union of the three-ply cord of HKB”H, Torah, and Yisrael.



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