



Bet Haraah

בית הוראה

Shaare Ezra

שערי עזרא

Parshat Nitzavim

Zmanim for New York:

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART: SILENT DEVOTION

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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There are various aspects to the relationship we share with Hashem: at times it is compared to that of a child and father, at other times to a servant and master, and in yet another dimension to a husband and wife. Each of these reflects a different facet of our bond with Him.

The difference between the relationship of a son and that of a slave is that a father desires the good of his son and asks him to do things for the son's own benefit, whereas a slave works solely for the benefit of the master.

We also explained that in the relationship of husband and wife, the wife does not act solely for her husband's sake nor for her own sake. Rather, her actions are for the sake of the shared whole. Since husband and wife are considered one unit, everything one does is for the benefit of that unity itself—not for either side alone, but for both together as one. Thus, when a wife does something for her husband, she experiences pleasure as if she had done it for herself. This is because their relationship is one of true unity. As Chazal said: "A man's wife is as his own body," and as the pasuk states: "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," and: "Therefore a man shall cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." These teachings show that husband and wife are not two separate entities but one. Therefore, whenever one does for the other, it is felt as though he is really doing for himself.

In the tefillah on Rosh Hashanah, immediately after the sounding of the shofar, we say to Hashem: if we are like children, then have mercy on us as a father has mercy on his sons; and if we are like servants, then our eyes are lifted toward You, awaiting Your verdict.

It seems that the request of the slave is based on the pasuk in Tehillim (123:2): "As the eyes of slaves follow their master's hand, as the eyes of a maidservant follow the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are toward

Hashem, awaiting His favor."

We need to clarify the difference between these two modes of relating. In the case of the son, we ask that Hashem should have mercy on us, as a father has mercy on his child. By contrast, in the case of the

slave, there is no request at all—only the description of looking upward, awaiting the master's will.

This also raises a question: why is there no mention here of the third form of relationship, that of husband and wife, which we previously discussed?

Let's begin by explaining the difference between a son and a slave. A son has no hesitation in

asking his father for what he wants, because that is the nature of their relationship. From the moment he is born, the son is accustomed to requesting things—he cries for food, and if it is not given to him immediately, he screams. The father, in turn, provides what the child needs, and through this the child learns that whatever he requires, he can ask for and receive. As he grows older, he no longer cries, but he still feels no resistance to asking politely for what he needs.

The slave, on the other hand, knows he cannot request anything. He has no rights, and the master is not concerned with the slave's benefit but with his own. Therefore, the slave has no standing to ask for his needs. All he can do is look toward his master in silent hope that the master will grant him food or other necessities.

Then there is a third relationship—that of husband and wife. Rav Leib Mintzberg (בן מלך חכמה ומוסר) explains that in this relationship, the wife desires to do her husband's will and is constantly seeking ways to make him happy. But an important condition defines this bond: it must be carried out without the husband demanding it. The wife wishes to fulfill her husband's will willingly, and the husband likewise seeks to fulfill his wife's will without her needing



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to ask. If one side were to demand or request directly, it would disrupt the natural flow of giving—shifting it from a willing desire to fulfill the other's wishes into a mere obligation or demand. Therefore, the wife is always searching for what will bring joy to her husband, making his desires her goal to fulfill—and the same is true in reverse with the husband toward his wife.

Reb Mintzberg points out that while our tefillot often use terms such as children and slaves, we never find tefillot phrased as requests in the relationship of a spouse. For example, we say *Avinu, Malkeinu, Adoneinu*, or *Avinu Malkeinu*, we have sinned before You, but we never use the term "spouse," because it carries the special connotation of a quiet, unspoken relationship of love.

That is the essence of the Torah Sheba'al Peh, the Oral Law. The mefarshim ask where in the Torah we find the obligation to follow the laws of Chazal, and they answer that it is not explicitly written anywhere. Rather, Chazal understood intuitively that this is what Hashem desires, and we follow because we wish to fulfill His will.

This brings us back to the Rosh Hashanah prayers, when we ask Hashem for mercy as children and declare that our eyes are lifted toward Him like a slave, while intentionally omitting the third relationship. This omission is understood as a profound, silent hint. By mentioning the first two relationships and purposely ignoring the third, we are signaling to Hashem that we are His spouse. Just as in a husband-and-wife relationship no words are needed to convey care, so too here we remain silent, trusting that He will act on our behalf. Moreover, His care should not be for us individually, but for

the special unity we share with Him. He should act not for us as separate entities, but for the bond that unites us—Him and us as one.

Another similar idea is found concerning the *simanim* we eat at the Rosh Hashanah meals. What is the purpose of the *simanim*? Why can't we simply ask for what we want without using these items, and why are there different types of food? According to the Gemara, one simply eats the items and does not need to say anything. Also, why are they called *simanim*—or "hints" in English?

The answer is that everything we do on Rosh Hashanah is meant to hint at our desires, just as we explained before in the relationship of a spouse. We are not asking directly. Just as when a husband comes home, his wife intuitively knows what he needs—whether to eat, relax, or have coffee or a cold drink—so too, with the *simanim*, we hint rather than request. This is the essence of the relationship: no asking is necessary, because asking diminishes the subtle power of the bond—the ability to sense the other's needs without words.

The same idea is reflected in the shofar. Chazal say that the sound of the shofar expresses crying, as we learn from the mother of Sisera, who cried. But why do we cry with the shofar? Chazal explain that this crying reminds Hashem of the Akedat Yitzchak, and when He remembers it, He judges us with mercy. Once again, this is all done without words—just through the act of crying.

Let us pray that Hashem will answer our needs and grant us all a good, healthy, and successful year.

LOVE AND ATTACHMENT: THE CORE OF DIVINE SERVICE

At the end of our parasha, we find a mitzvah that many people may not realize is a mitzvah de'oraita: the Torah commands us to attach ourselves to Hashem. We are more familiar with mitzvot such as loving and fearing Hashem. One must realize that this is a positive mitzvah just like any other positive mitzvah, such as reading Shema or praying, but what does the Torah mean by "attaching" ourselves to Him?

Chazal (Ketubot 111b) already raised this question and asked further: since Hashem is called "a consuming fire," how can one attach himself to fire without being burned? They concluded with an insightful answer—that one should

attach himself to *talmidei chachamim*. By being close to Torah scholars, it is considered as if one is attached to Hashem Himself.

If one wonders how to attach himself to Torah scholars, Chazal also gave guidance, saying:

"כל המשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם, והעושה פרקמטיא לתלמידי חכמים, והמהנה תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו—מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה."

"Whoever gives his daughter in marriage to a Torah scholar, engages in business on behalf of Torah scholars, or benefits Torah scholars from his possessions—the pasuk considers it as if he has cleaved to the Shechinah."

Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (mitzvah 8) explains that the purpose of attaching oneself to the rabbis is to learn from their ways.

Sefer HaChinuch goes further, stating that the purpose is not only to learn from their conduct but also to be taught by them how to properly perform the mitzvot and to acquire the correct *hashkafat haTorah*. He teaches that one should not think he can learn the

mitzvot of the Torah on his own; rather, he must learn them from the *talmidei chachamim*. The same applies to one's outlook on the Torah—one should not rely on his own understanding for proper *hashkafah*, but must learn it from the rabbis.

The gemara explanation was adopted as halacha by the Rambam (הלכות דעות פרק ו, א). Although this is obviously true

according to all opinions, since it is a Gemara, still the Ramban (דברים יא ב) wanted to explain the *peshat* of the mitzva without the insight of Chazal. The simpler way to understand the essence of this mitzvah is that one should indeed attach himself to Hashem in his mind. He writes:

"תכלול הדביקה לומר שתהיה זוכר השם ואהבתו תמיד, לא תיפרד מחשבתך ממנו בלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך, עד שיהיו דבריו עם בני אדם בפיו ובלשונו ולבו איננו עמהם, אבל הוא לפני ה'."

"The mitzvah of cleaving includes that you should constantly remember Hashem and His love, never letting your thoughts separate from Him—whether when walking on the way, lying down, or rising up. So much so that when you speak with others, your



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words may be with them, but your heart is not with them; rather, it is before Hashem."

Similar approach is also found in the Rambam, though under a different mitzvah—that of loving Hashem. He writes (הלכות תשובה (י, ג):

"וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה? הוא שיאהב את ה' אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאוד עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה', ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד כאלו חולה חולי האהבה שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה, והוא שוגה בה תמיד בין בשבתו בין בקומו בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה. יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ה' בלב אוהביו, שוגים בה תמיד, כמו שצונו: 'בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך'. והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל: 'כי חולת אהבה אני.'"

Translation: And what is the proper love? That one should love Hashem with an exceedingly great and intense love until his soul is bound in the love of Hashem, and he is constantly preoccupied with it—like one who is lovesick, whose mind is never free from the love of that woman, and he is always absorbed in it, whether sitting, rising, eating, or drinking. Even more so should the love of Hashem be in the hearts of those who love Him, constantly absorbed in it, as we were commanded: "with all your heart and with all your soul." And this is what Shlomo said allegorically: "For I am lovesick."

While the Rambam and the Ramban differ as to under which mitzvah this intense feeling falls, the *Sefer Charedim* explains that according to Rabbeinu Bechaye the mitzvah of clinging to Hashem

and the mitzvah of loving Him are truly one: "It is a positive commandment to cling to Him, as it is written, 'and to Him you shall cling' (Devarim 10:20). This means a powerful love, never separating from Him even for a moment. The pasuk distinguishes between love and clinging, as it is written: 'to love Hashem, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him.' The author of *Chovot HaLevavot* (Introduction to the Gate of the Love of Hashem) writes that clinging means faithful love and a complete heart, as it is said, 'there is a friend who clings more than a brother.'"

Mesilat Yesharim explains a bit different, as that attachment is a branch of the mitzvah of loving Hashem: "The branches of love are three: attachment, joy, and zeal. Attachment means that a person's heart clings so strongly to Hashem, that he turns away and pays no attention to anything else besides Him."

Connecting this to our previous discussion about having a relationship with Hashem like that of a husband and wife, this concept takes on new depth. Hashem desires a profound connection with us and waits for us to cultivate the same bond toward Him. It is no coincidence that the Rambam uses the analogy of marital love to describe our relationship with Hashem. It is not far-fetched to suggest that Hashem created human marriages so that we could learn from them the intensity, devotion, and closeness He expects us to feel toward Him.

PREPARING SIMANIM WITH CARE: A BUG-CHECKING GUIDE

On Rosh Hashanah we eat various foods as *simanim*, many of which require checking for insects. Let us begin with a basic overview of the halachot of bugs:

A. Size of bugs – Even the smallest insect is prohibited if it can be seen by the human eye, even if one must look carefully or use a magnifying glass to clarify that the tiny speck is indeed a bug. If it can only be detected under a microscope, it is permitted. Therefore, even if one sees only a dot without identifying what it is, as long as movement reveals it to be a living creature, it is considered a bug (Rashba 275). The poskim write that the halachic threshold of visibility is approximately 0.2 mm (R. Elyashiv).

B. Dead or alive – Many mistakenly think that only live bugs are forbidden, and therefore assume it is permitted to buy a bag of frozen strawberries or similar items. This is incorrect. Insects are prohibited whether alive or dead. Cooking or freezing an infested food does not solve the problem, as the bugs remain prohibited in any state.

C. Categorizing food items – There are three levels:

Heavily infested foods – Items that are commonly infested with bugs. Such foods are forbidden to eat *mide'oraita* until they are thoroughly checked and cleaned. Examples of this first category, which do require checking, include strawberries, blackberries, lettuce, and parsley.

Mi'ut ha-matzui – Foods that are not usually infested, but infestation occurs often enough to be halachically significant. These

are *rabbinically forbidden* to eat without checking, and one is obligated to inspect them carefully. There are differing opinions among the poskim as to what percentage of infestation qualifies as *mi'ut ha-matzui* and obligates checking. Examples of this category include items like corn on the cob, pistachios, and sunflower seeds.

Foods that are generally clean – Items that are normally free of infestation and almost never contain bugs do not require checking. Still, some poskim recommend glancing at such foods before eating, to ensure there is no visible bug or a hole indicating that a bug may have entered. Examples of this category include fruits like apples, peaches, bananas, and the like.



Let's now discuss the food items we eat on Rosh Hashanah.

Dates: Many people are not aware that dates fall into the second category, which is may have bugs and therefore must be checked before eating. Some packages are worse than others—I have seen packages in which most of the dates were infested. Even in cleaner packages, bugs may occasionally be present.

The proper way to check dates is to slice them in half, remove the pit, and hold them up to the light. Sunlight by a window is ideal, but indoor lighting also works. Those who wish can even use a phone flashlight for better visibility. Here's a combined and polished version of your text:

Once held up to the light, the date becomes translucent, mak-

THE CONCLUDING COUNTDOWN: PERFECTING SHABBAT BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH

ing any bugs clearly visible. Sometimes there are no bugs present, but bug eggs can be seen, which may appear as small white or black specks inside the fruit. This can be misleading, as spherical sugar crystals that form naturally in dates are sometimes mistaken for insect eggs.

Black-eyed peas (For Rubia): These peas can be heavily infested and must be cleaned before use. According to Rav Vaya, the proper method is to boil them in water. Since the peas expand while cooking, use three times as much water as peas. After bringing the water to a boil, reduce the heat to low for five minutes, then turn off the heat and leave the peas in the water for five hours.

This process allows the peas to expand and become somewhat translucent, making it easier to see if any bugs are hiding under the skin. Now, take a handful of dates and inspect one side carefully for any bugs. Once that side is clean, flip the dates and check the other side as well.

Be careful not to mistake the natural black dot on top of the pea — it is part of the bean and not a bug.

Leek (Karti): Leeks are also considered commonly infested, so they must be cleaned before cooking or eating. Simply washing the leaves is not sufficient, as bugs often hide between the folds.

The proper way to clean leeks is as follows:

Cut off the bottom root end and the top portion just before the leaves start growing.

Remove the outer leaves.

Split the stalk lengthwise so that the inside is fully exposed.

Soak the leek in soapy water for 3 minutes, rubbing gently with your fingers to dislodge any hidden insects.

After washing, carefully inspect the leek to ensure it is completely clean, paying special attention to the small, inner leaves and folds where bugs may be hiding.

Spinach: Spinach is commonly used for *silka* and must be thoroughly cleaned.

• Cleaning method:

1. Soak the leaves in soapy water for 3 minutes, agitating them gently in the water.

2. Rinse the leaves thoroughly under running water.

Place the leaves in a bowl of clean water for a few minutes, then remove them and inspect the water for any insects.

This checking requires skill, as small bugs can be difficult to see and identify. If the water is free of bugs, the leaves are considered clean. If one or two bugs are found, the process can be repeated to ensure the next batch is clean. However, if many bugs are discovered, the leaves are considered heavily infested and should be discarded.

Fish Head: If one uses a fish head and plans to eat it, it should be inspected for long worms called *Anisakis*.

Anisakis are parasitic roundworms that can be mistaken for fish muscle tissue due to their color and shape, making them difficult to spot. The larvae are semi-transparent and whitish-pink, with a cylindrical shape. When coiled, they are only about half an inch long, which makes them hard to distinguish from the surrounding flesh.

Location in the fish: While *Anisakis* larvae are often found on the surface of the internal organs, they can migrate into the fish's muscle tissue.

One should also pay attention to fish lice, which appear on a fish's head as small, disc-shaped, nearly translucent parasites, often greenish or grayish, attached to the head or body of the fish. Other *simanim*, such as apples, pomegranates, and carrots (for those who use them), are generally considered clean and do not require checking.

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