

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT EIKEV

### DVAR TORAH: CARVE OUT YOUR OWN TABLETS

The Grodno Rosh Yeshivah, Harav Shimon Shkop, 1939-1860) זצ"ל, in the introduction to his classic Shaarei Yosher, was bothered by an obvious question: 'Why did Moshe break the Luchot right away when he saw Israel sinning at the Golden Calf? Why didn't he just put them aside, wait until the People of Israel repent from their sin, and then give them the Luchot?'

He answers based on a striking comment of the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer on the expression "חרות על הלוחות", that Hashem engraved the Torah on the Luchot (Shemot 32:16): "Had the Luchot not been broken, Israel would never have forgotten the Torah" (Eruvin 54a). In other words, a Jew would have been able to learn Torah once and never forget it. Words of Torah would always be permanently etched on a Jew's heart.

Moshe knew this, but also knew the source of this wondrous quality – that Hashem Himself carved out the Luchot and their presence granted Israel an unconditional ability to attain and hold on to Torah. But when Moshe was face-to-face with the sin of the Golden Calf he realized what a horrifying phenomenon this could create. If Torah would never be forgotten, a person could learn the Torah once, retain it and be fluent in it, yet be disgustingly immoral and live as a 'talmid chacham' acting totally against the Torah. Moshe understood that this was intolerable and the Luchot had to be broken.

Hashem not only agreed with Moshe's assessment but specifically approved of his breaking of the Luchot (telling him "יִישַׁר כַּחךְ שִׁשְׁבֵּרֶת" – Reish Lakish, Shabbat 87a). He also addressed Moshe's problem. Along with the second Luchot Hashem created a new process of attaining Torah, modeled by Moshe. In the new way of gaining Torah the phenomenon Moshe worried about, a Jew simultaneously being both a true talmid chacham and a true evildoer, would not get off the ground. How would this work?

The first Luchot were carved out by Hashem, making forgetting Torah impossible. But Moshe carved out the second Luchot himself and only then did Hashem write on them. This serves as a model for how a Jew can attain Torah. First he must improve himself, prepare himself for the Torah, and only then will the Torah be able to be engraved on his heart. Every Jew must carve out his own personal Luchot before Hashem writes the words of Torah on his heart.

How do we carve out our own Luchot? We look to Pirkei Avot (6:6) for the 48-item list of ways to acquire Torah. To allow the words of Torah to be engraved on our hearts we must work on humility, patience, and moderation. We must combine seriousness with joy, love with awe, and peacefulness with truthfulness. We must connect to Rebbeim, friends, and talmidim. We must be dedicated to hard work and be willing to help and encourage others. We must be intellectually honest, people of integrity, and willing to take constructive criticism. Our connectedness with Torah will increase relative to our preparedness for Torah. The Divine word will then be etched on our hearts. This new process was enabled by Moshe breaking the Luchot.

## SOURCE GUIDE: CLINGING TO G-D

Five times in the book of Devarim the Torah speaks of clinging to G-d; two out of the five appear in our parshah. This source guide focuses on a passage in the Midrash (Sifrei) on our parshah. We'll ask: 1. What exactly does clinging to G-d mean? 2. How does a person do it? 3. How is it possible to cling to G-d if He is, as the verse (Devarim 4:24) says, "consuming fire"?

### A. 5 Verses

Here are the five verses in Devarim (the expression דבקות בה, clinging to G-d, does not appear earlier in the Chumash, even though the root דבק does):

<p><b>1. Devarim 4:4 – Vaetchanan</b> And you, <b>who cling to Hashem your G-d</b> are all alive today.</p> <p><b>Devarim 10:20 – Eikev</b> Hashem your G-d you should fear; Him you should serve; <b>to Him you should cling</b>; and in His Name you should swear.</p> <p><b>Devarim 11:22 – Eikev</b> For if you keep this command that I command you to do, to love Hashem your G-d, to walk in His ways and <b>to cling to Him</b>.</p> <p><b>Devarim 13:5 – Re’ei</b> After Hashem your G-d you should go; it is He that you should fear; His commandments you should keep; in His voice you should heed; He you should serve; and <b>to Him you should cling</b>.</p> <p><b>Devarim 30:20 – Nitzavim</b> To love Hashem your G-d, to listen to His voice and <b>to cling to Him</b>, for He* is your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the land that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to give to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov.</p>	<p><b>דברים ד:ד – ואתחנן</b> ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם חיים כלכם היום.</p> <p><b>דברים י:כ – עקב</b> את ה' אלקיך תירא אתו תעבד ובו תדבק ובשמו תשבוע.</p> <p><b>דברים יא:כב – עקב</b> כי אם שמר תשמרון את כל המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם לעשותה לאהבה את ה' אלקיכם ללכת בכל דרכיו ולדבקה בו.</p> <p><b>דברים יג:ה – ראה</b> אתרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו ואתו תיראו ואת מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקו.</p> <p><b>דברים ל:כ – נצבים</b> לאהבה את ה' אלקיך לשמע בקלו ולדבקה בו כי הוא חייך וארץ ימך לשבת על האדמה אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לתת להם.</p>
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\*This translation, "for He is your life ..." follows Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni; but see the Sforno, Or Hachaim, and Haamek Davar, who would translate it "for **this** is your life ..." (one of the Targumim on this verse supports this reading).

### B. The Sifrei

The Sifrei raises the difficulty – how is it possible to cling to G-d?

<p><b>2. Sifrei Eikev 13</b> To cling to Him – How is it possible for a person to rise up on high and to cling to Him? Doesn't the verse already say, "For Hashem your G-d is consuming fire" (Devarim 4:24), and it also says, "His throne (on His chariot) is sparks of fire, and its wheels are blazing fire" (Daniel 7:9)?</p>	<p><b>ספרי פרשת עקב פסקא יג</b> ולדבקה בו – וכי היאך אפשר לו לאדם לעלות במרום ולהדבק בו? והלא כבר נאמר, "כי ה' אלקיך אש אוכלת הוא" דברים ד:כד, ואומר, "כורסיה שביבים דנור יגלגלוהי נור דליק" (דניאל ז:ט)?</p>
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- Compare this midrash with Rashi's comment. He seems to be quoting this passage, but abridges the question to "It is possible to say this? Isn't He consuming fire?" What did the Midrash have in mind when it says, "How is it possible **for a person to rise up on high** and to cling to Him?"
- What does the quote from Daniel add?

The Sifrei's answer:

<p><b>3. Sifrei Eikev 13</b> Rather, cling to the wise and their disciples and I will consider it as if you rose up on high and took it – not only that you went up and took it peacefully, but even as if you waged war and took it. Thus it says, "You went up on high, took a captive, and took gifts to be among men" (Tehillim 68:19).</p>	<p><b>ספרי פרשת עקב פסקא יג</b> אלא הדבק בחכמים ובתלמידים ומעלה אני עליך כאלו עלית למרום ונטלת' ולא שעלית ונטלת בשלום אלא אפילו כאלו עשית מלחמה ונטלתה וכן הוא אומר, "עלית למרו' שבית שבי לקחת מתנות באדם" (תהלים סח:יט).</p>
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Once again Rashi presents an abridged version of the answer. Rashi's comment answers the difficulty on the verse and just says "Rather, cling to the wise and their disciples and I will consider it as if you clung to Him." But the Midrash elaborates. What is the meaning of all the extra material here? What is "it" that the midrash refers to in the expression "went up on high and took it"? And why is one who clings to the wise considered as if he took "it" through war?

One possible direction:

"It" is the Torah. There was angelic opposition to Moshe taking the holy Heavenly Torah down to lowly Earth. The Gemara (Shabbat 89a) and several midrashim (Shemot Rabbah 28:1, Tanchuma Vayikra 4:4 and Ki Tissa 17) explain the verse in Tehillim 68 as referring to Moshe capturing the Torah from Heaven:

<p><b>4. Midrash Tanchuma Ki Tissa 17</b>          "He gave it (the Tablets) to Moshe when He finished ..." (Shemot 31:18). This is what the verse means when it says, "You went up on high, took a captive ..." (Tehillim 68:19). Normally, a person would steal (capture) from another silver, gold, or clothing. Is it possible to steal that which is within what is in another's heart? Yet you (Moshe) took as a captive the Torah that was in My heart. This is: "You took a captive, and took gifts to be among men" (Tehillim 68:19).</p>	<p><b>מדורש תנחומא כי תשא פרק יז</b>          "ויתן אל משה ככלתו" (שמות לא:יח) – זש"ה "עלית למרום שבית שבי" (תהלים סח:ט). בנוהג שבעולם אדם שובה מחברו כסף וזהב ובגדים. שמה יכול לשבות מה שבלבו? ואתה שבית את התורה שבתוך לבי הוי "שבית שבי לקחת מתנות באדם."</p>
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How can we cling to G-d? Through the Torah – that was "within the Divine heart" and that Moshe captured and brought down to earth from Heaven – it is possible to cling to G-d. How this works is described in the Tanya (Chapter 5) and Nefesh Hachayim (4:10): the Divine Will is expressed through the Torah and through learning Torah properly we unite with the Divine Will and thereby with Hashem Himself.

But one who clings to talmidei chachamim – the sages who have internalized the Torah and are connected to Hashem through it – is considered as if he himself went up to Heaven like Moshe, opposed the angels' opposition, and took the Torah captive. Clinging to G-d is thus open to all, not only those who are able to be constantly focused and connected to G-dliness through their minds and spirits:

<p><b>5. Haktav Vehakabalah</b>          Lest you say: This (the ability to cling to G-d) is a gift from G-d to those who fear Him and is not within the grasp of every person. [This is not the case.] All you must do is to cling to the wise and their disciples – with their physical beings – and make your house a congregating place for the wise. Through that you will merit the Divine light and cling to It. For through the one who is prepared for it, it becomes accessible even to the one who was not prepared.</p>	<p><b>הכתב והקבלה על דברים פרק יא פסוק כב</b>          ושמה תאמרו מתת אלקים הוא ליראיו ואיננו ביד כל אדם להשיגה, אין לך לעשות אלא להדבק בחכמים ותלמידיהם דביקת גוף, ויהי' ביתך בית וועד לחכמים ועי"כ תזכה לאור אלהי' ותדבק בו, שבאמצעות המוכן יקבל הבלתי מוכן ...</p>
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### C. Looking Further

- See the Ibn Ezra, the Ramban, and Sforno on our verse, for three approaches to the meaning of דביקות to G-d, clinging to G-d.
- See the remainder of our passage in the Sifrei that seems to explain clinging to G-d as 'getting to know Him' (see the Netziv's commentary on the Sifrei): "Do you want to know the One Who spoke and the world came into being? Learn Haggadah (Aggadta, the non-halachic portions of Torah), for through it you will get to know the Holy One, blessed be He, and cling to His ways." It ends with a blessing: "If you do what is incumbent upon you, I will do what is incumbent upon Me (the following verse speaks of how Hashem will enable Israel to live in the Land of Israel)."

## WE NEED NOT BE AFRAID AT ALL BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

Rebbi Nachman teaches, "וידע, שהאדם צריך לעבר על גשר צר מאד מאד, והכלל והעקר שלא יתפחד" – "The whole world is a very, very narrow bridge," fraught with grave spiritual dangers. "The principle, the main thing is that one should not fear" (Likutei Moharan II 48). As we shall see, even everyday activities such as eating, even sublime spiritual activities such as learning Torah can be dangerous.

The Meshech Chochmah (Devarim 8:10) takes note of the fact that of the many berachot, blessings, which a Jew must make – ideally no less than a hundred a day – only two are mandated מדאורייתא, by the Torah itself. The blessing after eating a meal, taught in this week's parshah, and the blessing before learning Torah. Asks the Meshech Chochmah: Why is it that we pronounce the blessing over our physical activity, eating, after we eat, whereas the blessing over our spiritual endeavor, learning Torah, is to be done before we begin to learn?

And he explains: These blessings are given to us to help us avoid spiritual pitfalls associated with these activities. In pesukim 12 through 14 of Chapter 8 we read, "Lest you eat and be satiated and your heart becomes haughty and you forget Hashem." Before we eat, we more naturally direct our thoughts to the source of blessing and sustenance. However, the satisfaction of our hunger can lead us to lose sight of our dependence on the Divine for our sustenance. We did it, and we see no reason why we can't continue to do it. Being thus cut off from our Creator is a slippery slope to spiritual demise. Therefore, we are taught, bless G d after we eat.

On the other hand, Torah, when learned improperly, has its pitfalls as well. The rabbis taught that Torah, the elixir of life, can possibly cause our souls to imbibe the poisons of pride and conceit. Proper learning, לשמה, for the sake of wisdom and connection to G d, protects. Improper learning, for the purposes of gaining material power and position, kills. Therefore, we are instructed to bless G d before we learn, to internalize proper values, to make sure we do it right.

The whole world is indeed a very narrow bridge, but we have given examples of how G d, in His goodness, gave us the tools to face these challenges with confidence. And then, we need not be afraid at all.

Dedicated in memory of  
David ben Avraham, ז"ל

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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