

“If You Live by My Precepts” Means that You Should Labor in Torah-study

The Amazing Connection between: “I labored and I found”—you should believe” and: “They should request mercy from He Who possesses chochmah”

On the Shabbas Kodesh which approaches auspiciously, we will read parshas Bechukosai. We have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 31b) that Ezra HaSofer instituted that Yisrael read the curses found in parshas Bechukosai before the holiday of Shavuos and the curses found in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh HaShanah:

“תניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר, עזרא תיקן להן לישראל, שיהו קורין קללות שבתורת כהנים קודם עצרת, ושבמשנה תורה קודם ראש השנה, מאי טעמא, אמר אביי ואיתימא ריש לקיש, כדי שתכלה השנה וקללותיה.”

— it was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Ezra decreed that Yisrael should read the curses found in sefer Vayikra prior to Shavuos and those in sefer Devarim prior to Rosh HaShanah. For what reason? Abayei said, while some say that Reish Lakish said it: So that the year may end along with its curses.

Then, the Gemara asks: “בשלמא אלא שבתורת כהנים אטו עצרת” —the concept of “let the year end along with its curses” is understood regarding the institution of reading the curses in sefer Devarim prior to Rosh HaShanah, but what is the relevance of this concept to the festival of Shavuos? Is Shavuos the beginning of a new year? The Gemara answers: “אין עצרת נמי ראש השנה היא” — indeed, Shavuos is also a type of New Year . . . with respect to the fruits of the trees.

Here is how the Tiferes Shlomo (Ki Savo) explains the matter:

“יש לתת טעם בענין התוכחה, מה שאנו קוראים בעת הזאת שתכלה שנה וקללותיה, והוא כמו שאומרים (הושע יד ג) ונשלמה פרים שפתינו, שאם חס ושלוש נגזר אשר לא טוב, הנה יצאנו ידי חובתינו בקריאת הדברים האלה, וממילא יתהפכו לנו כולם לברכה.”

This body of curses, known as the Tochachah, the Rebuke, accomplishes the goal of “let the year end along with its curses,” based on the principle of (Hoshea 14, 3): **— ונשלמה פרים שפתינו — and let our lips substitute for bulls.** In other words, reciting a corresponding passage of the Torah acts as a substitute for the act described in that passage — such as bringing a particular korban or, in this case, realizing the punishments recorded as curses.

The message here is crucial. This Shabbat, during the Torah-reading, each and every one of us is obligated to focus with extreme reverence and yirat-shamayim. By having in mind that the recitation of the passage of the Tochachah should act as a substitute for our having actually received the punishments described therein, we hope to fulfill the dictum of “let the year end along with its curses.” By having received our just punishments, we can merit having a blessed Shavuos with respect to the anticipated fruits of the trees.

Tosafos (ibid.) explain the rationale behind the accepted practice of reading parshas Bamidbar as a buffer between parshas Bechukosai and Shavuos and similarly reading parshas Nitzavim as a buffer between parshas Ki Savo and Rosh HaShanah: “לפי שאנו רוצים להפסיק ולקרות שבת אחת קודם ראש השנה, בפרשה שלא תהא מדברת בקללות כלל, שלא להסמיך הקללות לראש השנה, ומטעם זה אנו קורין במדבר סיני —because we wish to interrupt and have a Shabbat prior to Rosh HaShanah on which we read a portion not mentioning curses at all; so that the curses are not juxtaposed to Rosh HaShanah. And it is for this reason that we read parshas Bamidbar prior to Atzeres (Shavuos); so as not to juxtapose the curses in parshas Bechukosai with Atzeres.

Let us add a pleasant insight regarding HKB”H’s choice to open this week’s parsha with the passuk: **אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם, ונתנה הארץ יכולה, ועץ**

“If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit. Rashi comments: “If you will follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what does “if you follow my decrees” refer to? It implies that you should occupy yourselves in laborious Torah-study.

We can suggest that HKB”H knew that Ezra HaSofer was destined to institute this practice for the benefit of Yisrael: the reading of this portion prior to the holiday of Shavuos, which is the Rosh HaShanah for the fruits of the tree, so that “the past year should end along with its curses.” Now, we know that the holiday of Shavuos is also known as **“זמן מתן תורתנו”**—**“the time of the giving of our Torah”**; therefore, HKB”H chose to begin this parsha with the passuk: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”**—encouraging us to occupy ourselves in laborious study of the Torah, which HKB”H gave us on the holiday of Shavuos. Then, the passuk continues: **“ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם”**—admonishing us to observe and fulfill the mitzvos of the Torah. In this merit, we are promised that on the holiday of Shavuos—the Rosh HaShanah of the fruits of the tree—we will be blessed as follows: **“ונתתי גשמיכם”**—**“then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit.**

The Forty-nine Days of the Sefirah Correspond to the Forty-nine Kelalos in Parshas Bechukosai

I was struck by an intriguing idea as to why HKB”H provided us with the forty-nine days of the “sefirah” prior to giving us the Torah annually on Shavuos. First, however, let us address the matter of the curses—the “Kelalos.” In parshas Bechukosai, HKB”H describes the punishment awaiting a person who transgresses all the teachings of the Torah; He enumerates forty-nine “Kelalos,” specifically. This contrasts with the ninety-eight “Kelalos” listed in parshas Ki Savo—which according to the Gemara (Megillah 31b), Moshe uttered of his own accord via “ruach hakodesh”—as explained by Tosafos there.

Let us suggest an explanation based on what we have learned in the Gemara (R.H. 21b): **“חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה: חסר אחד, שנאמר (תהלים ח-1) ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים”**—**“fifty levels of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated (Tehillim 8, 6): “Yet You**

have made him only a little less than the divine.” According to this passage, we learn that even Moshe Rabeinu, the foremost of all the prophets, was only able to perceive and ascertain forty-nine of the fifty levels of “binah.” Now, we are familiar with the statement from the wisest of men (Kohelet 7, 14): **“ראה גם את זה לעומת זה עשה—G-d has made the one as well as the other”—**in other words, the Almighty created the world with equal and opposite counterparts. Hence, we can deduce that just as forty-nine levels of “binah” exist on the side of kedushah; similarly, forty-nine levels of tumah exist correspondingly. These forces of tumah are aimed at persuading a person to transgress the teachings of the Torah, which consist of forty-nine levels of kedushah.

Now, the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 150b) teaches us that the fire of Gehinom stems from the fire and enthusiasm generated by a person when he commits “aveiros.” Here is a Hebrew translation of the passage in the Zohar: **“אמר רבי יהודה, הדין של עונשי הגיהנם כבר למדנו, שהוא כדי לדון שם את הרשעים. למה הם נידונים באש הגיהנם, אלא גיהנם הוא אש הבער יומם ולילה, כמו שהרשעים מתחממים באש היצר הרע לעבור על מצוות התורה. בכל חימום וחימום שהם מתחממים ביצר Rabbi Yehudah said: We have already learned the purpose of the decree of the punishments of Gehinom; they are to judge the evildoers there. Why are they judged in the fires of Gehinom? Gehinom is a fire that burns day and night, just like the wicked are incited by the fire of the yetzer hara to transgress the mitzvos of the Torah. As they are inflamed by the yetzer hara, so, too, the flames of Gehinom are fueled.**

This is also the message conveyed by the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh in parshas Acharei (Vayikra 16, 7):

“תנן במשנת חסידים (אבות פ”ד מ”א) וזה לשונו העושה מצוה אחת קונה לו סניגור אחד, והעובר עבירה אחת קונה לו קטיגור אחד עד כאן. ומפורשים הדברים באר היטב על פי דברי הזוהר הקדוש, ובהשכלת מושכל עליון על פי האריז”ל לבאי בהיכלי מלך, כי מהעבירה עצמה יולד דבר רע שהוא עצמו העוון שעשה ובידו נמסר עושהו, כאומרו (ירמיה ב-יט) תיסרך רעתך.”

We learn in the Mishnah (Avos Chapter 4): “A person who performs a single mitzvah acquires a single advocate for himself; one who commits an ‘aveirah’ acquires a single prosecutor for himself.” This can be understood based on the words of the Zohar hakadosh and the interpretation of the Arizal. For, the “aveirah” itself generates negative consequences.

Based on what we have learned, we can better understand the matter of the forty-nine “Kelalos” mentioned in this week’s parsha, which await a person who transgresses all the teachings

of the Torah. He followed the misguided advice of the forty-nine forces of tumah, which encouraged him to transgress the teachings of the Torah, which are comprised of forty-nine levels of “binah.” As a consequence, forty-nine prosecutorial forces were generated, taking him to task for his wrongdoings. Therefore, HKB”H delivers this sinner into their hands of tumah in the form of the forty-nine “Kelalos ” mentioned in parshas Bechukosai .

We can now better appreciate why HKB”H gave us the forty-nine days of “sefiras haomer” prior to receiving the Torah on Shavuos. For, the Zohar hakadosh (Emor 97a) explains that the days of the “sefirah” are days of “taharah”—purification. During this period of time we purify ourselves in anticipation of receiving the Torah on Shavuos. This notion is reflected by the formula recited after the counting of the omer: **רבונו של עולם, אתה צויתנו על: “ידי משה עבדך לספור ספירת העומר, כדי לטהרנו מקליפותינו ומטומאותינו”**—**Master of the Universe, you commanded us through Your servant Moshe to count “sefiras haomer,” in order to purify us of our klipos and our tumos (impurities).**

Let us propose an explanation based on what we have learned. We are purifying ourselves during the forty-nine days of the “sefirah” of the forty-nine “Kelalos ” enumerated in parshas Bechukosai —which resulted as a consequence of the damage we caused to the forty-nine levels of “binah” in the Torah. Now, by following the ingenious practice instituted by Ezra HaSofer—reading parshas Bechukosai prior to the holiday of Shavuos, so that “the year should end along with its curses”—we will merit arriving at Shavuos free of any flaws and impurities, worthy and ready to receive the Torah. Seeing as the reading of this parsha constitutes a preparation for “zman matan toraseinu,” it is only fitting that we elaborate on the opening passuk of the parsha conveying the need to engage in and labor in the study of Torah.

From Where Did They Derive that It Is Essential to Labor in the Study of Torah

In this week’s parsha we read: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו: If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit.** We already presented Rashi’s comment: **“If you will follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what**

does “if you follow my decrees” refer to? It implies that you should occupy yourselves in laborious Torah-study.

This deserves further explanation. Clearly, **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”** cannot be interpreted as referring to the performance of the mitzvos. Nevertheless, how do they derive that it implies: **“שתהיו עמלים בתורה”—laboring in the study of Torah?** Maybe it simply implies that we should engage in Torah-study even without laboring and exerting ourselves. It appears that we can explain the matter based on the well-known principle concerning the distinction between “mishpatim” and “chukim.” The term **“משפטים”** refers to mitzvos that are logical and sensible; whereas the term **“חוקים”** refers to mitzvos that are beyond simple human comprehension. The source for this distinction is found in parshas Acharei (Vayikra 18, 4): **“את משפטי תעשו ואת חוקותי תשמרו ללכת בהם: Carry out My “mishpatim” and observe My “chukim” to follow them; I am Hashem.** There Rashi comments:

“את משפטי תעשו, אלו דברים האמורים בתורה במשפט, שאילו לא נאמרו היו כדאי לאומרן. ואת חוקותי תשמרו, דברים שהם גזירת המלך, שיצר הרע משיב עליהם למה לנו לשומרן, ואומות העולם עובדי אלילים משיבין עליהם, כגון אכילת חזיר ולבישת שעטנז וטהרת מי חטאת, לכך נאמר אני ה' גזרתי עליכם, אי אתם רשאים להיפטר.”

“Carry out My ‘mishpatim’”: These are matters that are stated in the Torah in judgment (“mishpat”)—i.e. laws that accord with human reason; for, had they not been stated, it would have been worthwhile to state them. “And observe My ‘chukim’”: These are matters that are a decree of the King, concerning which the yetzer hara reacts by inquiring why we should observe them. Likewise, the nations of the world, those who worship idols, react concerning them. For example, the eating of pork, the wearing of “shaatnez” and the purification of the waters of the sprinkling. Therefore, the passuk concludes: “I am Hashem”—implying that My decree is upon you; you are not allowed to exempt yourselves from it.

Now, in our passuk here, it merely states: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו.”** Why does HKB”H only mention the “chukim”—whose rationales are not apparent—while omitting any mention of the “mishpatim”—whose rationales are apparent? This led our blessed sages to conclude that the words: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”**—convey the message: **“שתהיו עמלים בתורה”**. In other words, a person should labor to study and comprehend even those parts of the Torah categorized as “chukim.” For, although their rationales are not readily apparent or grasped by simple, human intelligence;

nevertheless, in the merit of arduous study, a person will be privileged to gain insight into them. As we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 6b): **אם יאמר לך אדם, יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא**: “**I labored and did not succeed,**” **do not believe him; “I did not labor and I succeeded,” do not believe him; “I labored and I succeeded,” believe him.** This notion is also reflected by the following teaching (Berachot 63b): **“מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין: אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר (במדבר יט-יד) זאת התורה אדם כי ימות—from where do we know that Torah-knowledge is only retained by someone who sacrifices himself on its behalf? For, it states: “This is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent.”**

They Should Request Mercy from Him to Whom Chochmah Belongs

Now, it is essential for every Jew to understand that it is impossible to attain Torah-knowledge without exerting oneself in the study of Torah—in keeping with the statement: **“יגעתי”**—**“I labored and I succeeded,” believe him.** Yet, in addition, it is essential that a person pray that HKB”H influence him and grant him the chochmah of the Torah. Expressing this point, the Gemara (Niddah 70b) teaches us that the people of Alexandria asked the divine Tanna Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya the following:

“מה יעשה אדם ויחכם, אמר להן ירבה בשיבה וימעט בסחורה. אמרו הרבה עשו כן ולא הועיל להם, אלא יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו, שנאמר (משלי ב-ו) כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה. תני רבי חייא, משל למלך בשר ודם שעשה סעודה לעבדיו, ומשגר לאוהביו ממה שלפניו, מאי קא משמע לן [רש"י]: “למה ליה למימר להו ירבה בשיבה, הואיל וברחמים הדבר תלוי”, דהא בלא הא לא סגי”.

What should a person do to become wise? He answered them: **He should spend more time in a yeshivah and spend less time in business. They responded: But many have done so and yet this has not helped them. He said to them: They should plead for mercy from Him to whom wisdom (“chochmah”) belongs, as it states: “For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth comes wisdom and understanding.”** Rabbi Chiya taught a Baraisa: **This is analogous to a king who held a banquet for his servants and sends to his friends whatever is before him. What is Rabbi Yehoshua teaching us?** [Rashi explains: Why does Rabbi Yehoshua say that it is necessary to spend more time studying in a yeshivah if the matter ultimately depends on divine mercy?] **That one without the other is not enough.**

Rabbi Yehoshua’s lesson is quite clear. In order to attain the crown of the Torah, two criteria are necessary. On the one hand, it is necessary to labor in the study of Torah: **“He should spend more time in a yeshivah and spend less time in business.”** In addition, however: **“They should plead for mercy from Him to whom “chochmah” belongs”**; it is necessary to plead for mercy from HKB”H that He should influence a person with the wisdom of His Torah.

We find a similar message in the Gemara (Berachos 8a) expounding on the passuk (Tehillim 32, 6): **“על זאת יתפלל: כל חסיד אליך לעת מצוא - רבי נתן אומר, לעת מצוא זו תורה, שנאמר (משלי כ-ו) “Regarding this let every devout man pray to You, at a time, a finding.” . . . Rabbi Natan says: “At the time, a finding” refers to the study of Torah, as it is stated: “for he who finds me finds life, etc.”** Thus, we find it stated explicitly that it is necessary to pray for Torah. With this in mind, we can appreciate the formula instituted in the Shemoneh Esreh: **“אתה חונן לאדם דעת ומלמד לאנוש בינה”**—**You favor a person with knowledge and teach mankind understanding.** This berachah specifically addresses the acquisition of Torah-knowledge. This point is emphasized by a comment found in Rashi (A.Z. 8a): **“אם היה משכח תלמודו מאריך—כחונן הדעת—if a person should forget what he has learned, he should focus at length on the berachah of “חונן הדעת.”**

An allusion to this message can be found in the words of the wisest of all men (Kohelet 4, 9): **“טובים השנים מן האחד אשר יש: two are better than one, for they get a better return for their labor.** In other words, **“טובים השנים”**—it is more advantageous to both engage in Torah-study and plead for mercy from the source of chochmah; **“מן האחד”**—than to rely solely on Torah-study without requesting mercy; **אשר יש להם**—in the merit of the two together, a person is rewarded with success in his labors in Torah-study.

A Wonderful Explanation regarding the Berachos of the Torah from the Great Rabbi Yosef of Slutzk, ztz”l

This concept is applied by the great, genius, Rabbi Yosef of Slutzk, ztz”l [one of the preeminent students of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, ztz”l] in Derashot Rabeinu Yosef of Slutzk (Drush for Simchas Torah). He provides a magnificent explanation for the order of the formula of the berachot of the Torah instituted by our blessed sages. Initially, we recite: **אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו—Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and**

commanded us to engage in words of Torah. As to why the formula employs the term “לעסוק” (to engage in) rather than “ללמוד” (to study), let us refer to the Turei Zahav (47, 1). He explains that it is essential to study specifically in the form of dialectic and labor characteristic of business transactions and negotiations. For, as we know, Torah is only retained by one who is willing to sacrifice himself on its behalf.

Yet, since in addition to laboring and expending effort in the study of Torah, it is essential to also pray to Hashem, as we learned from Rabbi Yehoshua above: “יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”; therefore, a special berachah was instituted to the One to Whom chochmah belongs regarding the attainment and sweetness of the Torah: “ה' הערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו ובפיות עמך בית ישראל, ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי צאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל, כולנו יודעי—שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה—and please, Hashem our G-d, let the words of Your Torah be pleasant in our mouths and in the mouths of Your people, the house of Yisrael; and let us and our descendants, and the descendants of our descendants, and the descendants of Your people, the house of Yisrael, all be among those who know Your name and study Your Torah l'shmah (sincerely, for its own sake).

After addressing these two essential ingredients for the successful attainment of Torah-knowledge, a third berachah was instituted, which Chazal describe as the elite of the berachos (Berachos 11b): “אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו”—**Who chose us from among all of the nations and gave us His Torah.** In the merit of satisfying these two requirements—laboring in the study of Torah and praying to HKB”H—He chose us to be the recipients of His Torah. This concludes his magnificent explanation.

A Powerful Question concerning the Statement:
“I labored and I did not succeed,”
do not believe him”

Now, however, we are obliged to address the powerful question posed by the Nezer HaKodesh on the Midrash (B.R. 1, 1). How can Rabbi Yehoshua claim that in addition to laboring in the study of Torah, it is also essential to request mercy from the Almighty—the source of chochmah? This seems to contradict the statement in the Gemara cited above: **אם יאמר “--לך אדם, יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן”** **if a person claims: “I labored and did not succeed,” do not believe him.** According to that Gemara, it would appear that effort alone is sufficient to succeed in attaining Torah-knowledge. For, if we posit that it is

also necessary to plead for mercy, then why do we not believe a person who claims: “**יִוְעָתִי וְלֹא מִצָּתִי**”? It is quite possible that he did indeed exert himself in the study of Torah, but did not achieve the desired goal, because he neglected to seek mercy.

Before presenting the Nezer HaKodesh's answer, it is fitting that we present the incredible words of the Ktav Sofer in his Responsa (O.C. end of 18). From his response, a definitive answer to this question is apparent. He scrutinizes the interchange between the men of Alexandria and Rabbi Yehoshua described in the Gemara: **”מה יעשה אדם ויחכם, אמר להן ירבה בישיבה וימעט בסחורה. אמרו הרבה עשו כן ולא הועיל להם, אלא יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו.”**

Why, in fact, did Rabbi Yehoshua initially only give them a single answer: “**וירבה בישיבה וימעט בסחורה**” and only subsequently did he give them the second answer: “**יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה**” “**שלו**”? He could have very easily combined both answers into one. The Ktav Sofer provides a reasonable answer based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 6b):

“אם יאמר לך אדם, יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן, הני מילי בדברי תורה אבל בממשא ומתן סייעתא הוא מן שמיא, ולדברי תורה לא אמרן אלא לחדודי, אבל לאוקמי גירסא סייעתא מן שמיא היא.”

The matter of whether or not to believe a person's claim with regards to whether or not he labored and succeeded only applies to "divrei-Torah." Regarding business transactions, divine assistance is necessary. And even regarding "divrei-Torah," this rule-of-thumb only applies to fine-tuning one's viewpoint and understanding; however, to reach a definitive conclusion requires divine assistance.

Regarding the very last part of this quote, Rashi comments: **“לאוקמי גירסא”**—so that it will not be forgotten from him; **“סייעתא”**—in matters that require divine assistance, there are those who labor and do not succeed. Other Rishonim, however, explain that **“לאוקמי גירסא”** refers to arriving at the correct halachic decision based on the teachings of the Torah. In fact, both explanations are correct. For, **“סייעתא דשמיא”**—divine assistance—is necessary to prevent a person from forgetting what he has learned; and, as a result of his not forgetting, he will succeed at reaching the correct halachic conclusion.

This helps explain very nicely Rabbi Yehoshua's initial response to the men of Alexandria: "מה יעשה אדם ויחכם, אמר להן ירבה בישיבה וימעט" (בסחורה). Since they simply asked what a person should do to acquire the chochmah of the Torah; he replied that they should labor in the study of the Torah—spending more time in the yeshivah and

less time occupied with financial and commercial concerns. This coincides with the dictum: “יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן”—if a person claims that he labored and yet did not succeed, do not believe him.

Therefore, they inquired further: “אמרו הרבה עשו כן ולא הועיל להם.” In other words, many did as you advise; their efforts enabled them to find explicit answers to their queries; however, their efforts did not help them retain this acquired knowledge and arrive at a correct halachic decision. Addressing this matter, Rabbi Yehoshua replied: “אלא יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”—to remember and to arrive at the correct halachic decision, a person must plead for divine mercy. This concludes his answer.

Rashi’s comment cited above seems to support this notion: “אם היה משכח תלמודו מאריך בחונן הדעת”—according to Rashi, the prayer of “חונן הדעת” concerns the issue of forgetting the Torah one has learned. In any event, the Ksav Sofer has provided us with a definitive answer to the question posed by the Nezer HaKodesh. When they state: “יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן”—this applies to finding the correct answer and clarification regarding the inquiry the person labored on. Yet, the statement: “יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”—divine assistance and mercy are required to retain one’s knowledge and to arrive at the correct Torah-based, halachic decision.

“יגעתי ומצאתי” Applies to the Revealed Torah “יבקשו רחמים” Applies to the Hidden Torah

We can now present the magnificent solution of the Nezer HaKodesh. He reconciles the apparent contradiction between the statement: “יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן” and Rabbi Yehoshua’s response: “יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”—that in addition to laboring in Torah-study, it is also necessary to pray for G-d’s assistance. He refers to the Midrash (S.R. 28, 1) concerning the passuk related to Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 3):

“ומשה עלה אל האלקים, הדא הוא דכתיב עלית למרום שבית שבי... עלית למרום, שלא שלטה בריה מלמעלה כשם ששלט משה, אמר רבי ברכיה, הלוחות היו ארכן ששה טפחים, כביכול היו ביד מי שאמר והיה העולם שני טפחים, וביד And Moshe של משה שני טפחים, ושני טפחים היו מפרישין בין יד ליד.”
No creature had dominion above as Moshe did. Rabbi Berachya said: The “luchot” were six cubits long; seemingly, two cubits were in the hand of the Creator, two cubits were in the hand of Moshe and there were two cubits separating between their two hands.

The Nezer HaKodesh finds this Midrash puzzling (B.R. 1, 1): “לכאורה יפלא, מדוע באמת עשה ה' ככה לתת הלוחות בשיעור מכוון כזה, להיות השליש בידו ושליש ביד משה ושליש באמצע, הלא דבר הוא ולא נפל במקרה.” This is astonishing! Why did HKB”H create the “luchos” with these precise dimensions—so that one third would be in His hand, one third in Moshe’s hand and one third in the middle? This was certainly not a mere coincidence! Therefore, he concludes that the “luchos”—the root and basis of the entire Torah—were indeed comprised of three separate parts.

The lower third which Moshe Rabeinu grasped was the revealed part of Torah she’b’chsav—the simple, straightforward understanding of the Torah available to everyone. The upper third which HKB”H grasped contained the secret, mystical aspects of the Torah; they are not accessible to everyone; instead, they remain in Hashem’s hands; the Almighty decides benevolently to share this portion with those who are worthy, the spiritual elite, as it is written (Tehillim 25, 14): “סוד ה' ליראיו”—the secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him, and His covenant to inform them.

The middle third, on the other hand, lies between HKB”H’s hand and Moshe’s. This portion represents the area of Torah she’b’al peh characterized by extensive debate concerning matters of Torah and deeper study and analysis. This portion of the Torah is not as accessible to everyone as Torah she’b’chsav; it is also not concealed and stored away solely in the hands of Hashem, like the mystical aspects of the Torah. Rather, it represents an intermediate status between the two extremes—between Torah she’b’chtav in Moshe’s hands and the mystical Torah in HKB”H’s hands. For, by virtue of hard work and effort, man can access this part of the Torah.

In this manner, the Nezer HaKodesh provides a reasonable solution to the apparent contradiction. When the Gemara states: “יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן”—it is referring to the revealed part of the Torah originating in the third located between HKB”H and Moshe. Accessing this part of the Torah depends on man’s efforts. Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement: “יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”—refers to the concealed part of the Torah, originating in the third located in HKB”H’s hands. Achieving this level of Torah-knowledge is not dependant on man’s efforts alone; collaboration with tefilah is also required. Emphasizing this point, Rabbi Yehoshua informed the men of Alexandria: “יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו”—this demands HKB”H’s assistance and mercy. For, this type of “chochmah” resides in the upper third, the domain of HKB”H.

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