

## The First Two Commandments Were Heard Directly from the Almighty because They Encompass All the Taryag Mitzvos

This week's parsha, parshas Yitro, describes the magnificent spectacle of Matan Torah. It elevated us, the children of Yisrael, to the status of "the chosen people." Only we were privileged to receive the Torah from HKB"H, Who descended onto Har Sinai, as it is written (Shemos 19, 20): "וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר" — Hashem descended on Har Sinai to the top of the mountain. Then and there, He gave us the "Aseres HaDibros," which constitute the basis for the entire Torah.

Hence, it is fitting that we consider why HKB"H began the "Aseres HaDibros" with the two commandments (ibid. 20, 2): "אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים. לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי" — "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery" and "You must not have any other gods in My place." These two "dibros" possess a unique status; Yisrael heard them at Har Sinai directly from HKB"H Himself and not via Moshe Rabeinu. We learn this fact from the Gemara (Makkos 23b):

"דרש רבי שמלאי, שש מאות ושלוש עשרה [תרי"ג] מצוות נאמרו לו למשה, שלש מאות וששים וחמש [שס"ה] לאוין כמנין ימות החמה, ומאתים וארבעים ושמונה [רמ"ח] עשה כנגד איבריו של אדם. אמר רב המנונא, מאי קרא [מאיפה למדנו שיש תרי"ג מצוות], [דברים לג-ד] תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה, תורה בגימטריא [תרי"א מצוות ששמענו ממה, אבל שתי המצוות] אנכי ולא יהיה לך, מפי הגבורה שמענום."

Rabbi Simlai presented the following elucidation: Six hundred and thirteen Mitzvos were said to Moshe—365 prohibitions corresponding to the days of the solar calendar and 248 positive commandments corresponding to a human being's limbs. Rabbi Himnona said: Which passuk teaches this? The passuk: "The Torah (תורה) which Moshe commanded us is the heritage . . ." The word תורה has a numerical equivalent of 611 (indicating that we heard

611 Mitzvos from Moshe); "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh lecha," we heard directly from the mouth of the Almighty (giving us a total of 613).

Thus, Rabbi Simlai teaches us that the Torah's "taryag Mitzvos" are divided up into two categories. In the first group are the first two "dibros": "אנכי ולא יהיה לך"—which we heard directly from HKB"H Himself. Whereas the remaining 611 Mitzvos—equaling תורה—we only heard from Moshe Rabeinu. It is evident, therefore, that the last eight "dibros" fall into the second category.

In our parsha (Shemos 20, 1), Rabeinu Yosef Bechor Shor (one of the elite students of Rabeinu Tam) brings clear-cut proof of this division in the name of Rabbi Yosef Kara (mentioned by Rashi on Mishlei 18, 22):

"רבתינו אמרו, כי אנכי ולא יהיה לך שמעו מפי הגבורה, והשאר ממה, ופירש רבי יוסף קרא ז"ל שהמקראות מוכיחים בן, דאנכי ולא יהיה לך מדברים כאילו הוא עצמו מדבר אליהם [אנכי ה' אלקיך וגו', לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני], ומלא תשא ואילך כאילו מדבר על ידי שליח, דכתיב (שם ז) כי לא ינקה ה', ולא כתיב, כי לא ינקה, וכתיב (שם יא) כי ששת ימים עשה ה', ולא כתיב עשיתי, וכתיב (שם יב) אשר ה' אלקיך נותן לך, ולא כתיב, אשר אני נותן לך."

Rabbi Yosef Kara, z"l, explains that the pesukim themselves prove this point. The language of the commandments "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh lecha" reflect the fact that the Almighty was speaking to them directly. The first states: "I am Hashem, your G-d . . ."; while the second states: "You must not have any other gods in My place." From the third commandment, "Lo Sisa," onward, it is as if He is speaking via a messenger; Hashem is referred to in the third person as opposed to the first person.

Now, it is our obligation to explain and comprehend why HKB"H chose to deliver only two out of the entire "taryag Mitzvos" to Yisrael directly. After all, all of the Mitzvos are

important to HKB”H. Rabeinu hakadosh expresses this fact as follows (Avos 2, 1): “זהו זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע: מתן שכרן של מצוות—**be as scrupulous with a trivial mitzvah as with a serious one; for you do not know the reward associated with each mitzvah.**

### “אנכי” and “ולא יהיה לך” Are the Basis of All the Mitzvos

We will begin to shed some light on the matter by introducing the remarks of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh on our parsha (Shemos 20, 1). He explains why HKB”H delivered these first two “dibros” to Yisrael directly. For, the first commandment--“אנכי”--encompasses all of the 248 Mitzvos aseh; while the second commandment--“לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים”--encompasses all of the 365 Mitzvos lo sa’aseh. The Tikunei Zohar expresses this phenomenon as follows (Tikun 22, 64a): “אנכי ולא יהיה לך, “אנכי ולא יהיה לך”--all positive commandments and prohibitions are related to these two commandments. Here are the holy words of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh:

“וראיתי לתת טוב טעם בהשמעת ה’ לישראל ב’ דברות, אנכי ולא יהיה לך, כי הם ב’ שרשים לב’ כללות המצוות, מצוות עשה, ומצוות לא תעשה, אנכי היא עיקר ושורש כל מצוות עשה, לא יהיה לך וגו’ היא עיקר ושורש כל מצוות לא תעשה, לזה נטע ה’ בהם מפי אל עליון שרשי ב’ עיקרי המצוות, שבזה לא תימוט תורה מזרעינו לעולם ועד.”

These two “dibros” represent the foundation for all of the other Mitzvos. By inscribing them in the neshamot of Yisrael directly with His own heavenly mouth, so to speak, Hashem was ensuring that the Torah would not vanish from our children forever.

I would like to elaborate on the deeper significance of the concluding remark of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh: **“For this reason, Hashem instilled in them, from the mouth of the Supreme G-d, the two essential Mitzvos; so that the Torah will not vanish from our children forever.”** Let us endeavor to explain how the mere fact that HKB”H implanted these two essential Mitzvos in our beings guarantees that **“the Torah will not vanish from our children forever.”**

First, let us introduce an insight that the author of the Tanya discusses at length in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 18). He explains a curious phenomenon. During times of religious oppression and crisis, even the most non-observant Jews and the biggest sinners, who could not withstand the temptations

of the yetzer, nevertheless refused to reject their religion and convert to Christianity. They sanctified the name of Heaven by their willingness to sacrifice their lives and accept various forms of torture and suffering. This is truly mystifying! They were not successful in withstanding the temptations of the yetzer, even though no suffering was involved. Yet, they somehow withstood various difficulties and suffering so as not to abandon their religion.

So, the author of the Tanya explains that every Jew, even the least affiliated and the biggest sinners, possess in the depths of their hearts, a tremendous love for Hashem; it emanates from their neshamah and is beyond intellectual comprehension. It is a heritage from the holy Avot: ועל הן המרכבה, ועל כן זכו להמשיך נפש רוח נשמה לבניהם אחריהם עד עולם... לכל אחד ואחד כפי מדרגתו וכפי מעשיו... אפילו לקל שבקלים ופושעי ישראל. **For the Avot are the chariot for the Shechinah. As such, they were able to endow their children after them with a “nefesh,” “ruach” and “neshamah” (the three aspects of the soul) forevermore . . . to each and every one according to his spiritual level and according to his deeds . . . even the most non-observant and the biggest sinners of Yisrael.**

So, how do we explain the fact that these sinners fail to observe Hashem’s Mitzvos? It is because this love they possess is concealed and dormant—it is in a state of hibernation. It is obscured and cloaked by their shameful transgressions. Nevertheless, when this non-observant Jew is subjected to the ordeal of renouncing his faith and denying his belief in Hashem, this hidden love awakens from its slumber in the depths of his heart. It bursts forth like a holy flame, which even copious quantities of water cannot extinguish. As a result, even the most non-observant and unaffiliated Jew is suddenly willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of “kiddush Hashem”; for he refuses to damage and uproot the deep-seated love for Hashem that he inherited from the holy Avot.

### The Kedushas Levi’s Explanation

The Kedushas Levi (Yitro) provides us with a different explanation as to why even the most non-observant Jew is willing to perform acts of “kiddush-Hashem.” This willingness to sacrifice his life emanates from the fact that we heard the first two “dibros”--“אנכי” and “ולא יהיה לך”--from the mouth of HKB”H Himself, in His full glory. Here is what he writes (Shemos 20, 17):

“כי לבעבור נסות אתכם בא האלקים. פירוש, כי זה שאמר הקב“ה בעצמו אנכי ולא יהיה לך, גרשם ונחקק בלב כל איש ישראל, עד שאפילו הקל שבקלים מוסר נפשו על קידוש שמו יתברך, וזה לבעבור נסות, שתעמדו בניסיון”.

**The fact that HKB”H Himself said “אנכי” and “ולא יהיה לך”, left an indelible mark and imprint in the heart of every Jew; consequently, even the most non-observant Jew sacrifices his life for the sake of “kiddush-Hashem.” This is the meaning of the words “in order to test you”—to enable you to withstand an ordeal.**

It appears that we can enhance our understanding of his words based on a statement in the Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1, 3):

“בשעה ששמעו ישראל אנכי ה' אלקיך, נתקע תלמוד תורה בלבם, והיו למדים ולא היו משכחין, באו אצל משה ואמרו, משה רבינו תעשה את פרוזביון - שליח בינותינו, שנאמר (שמות כ-כז) דבר אתה עמנו ונשמעה ועתה למה נמות, ומה הנייה יש באבידה שלנו, חזרו להיות למדים ושוכחים.

אמרו, מה משה בשר ודם עובר אף תלמודו עובר, מיד חזרו באו להם אל משה, אמרו לו, משה רבינו, לזואי יגלה לנו פעם שניה, לזואי (שיר השירים א-ב) ישקני מנשיקות פיהו, לזואי יתקע תלמוד תורה בלבנו כמות שהיה. אמר להם, אין זו עכשיו, אבל לעתיד לבוא הוא שנאמר (ירמיה לא-לב), ונתתי את תורתך בקרבם ועל לבם אכתבנה”.

When Yisrael heard “אנכי ה' אלקיך”, talmud-Torah became permanently fixed in their hearts; they would learn and not forget. They approached Moshe Rabeinu and requested that he serve as an intermediary for them; so that they would hear from him and they would not die. As a consequence, they once again would learn and forget. They realized that just as Moshe is made of flesh and blood and will pass away, so, too, will his teachings pass away. Immediately, they returned to Moshe and said: “Hopefully, He will reveal Himself to us a second time . . . hopefully, the teachings of the Torah will be fixed in our hearts the way they were previously.” He responded to them: “That is not the current situation; but it will be le’atid la’vo” . . .

We learn that had Yisrael heard the entire Torah directly from HKB”H, the Torah would have been imprinted within them such that they would never forget what they learned. However, since they requested that Moshe speak to them, so that they would hear the Torah from him rather than from HKB”H directly, they were susceptible to forgetting the Torah. Therefore, Yisrael beseeched HKB”H (Shir HaShirim 1, 2): **“Let me be kissed with the kisses from His mouth”**—may we once again have the privilege of hearing the Torah directly from HKB”H, so that we will never forget the Torah we learn.

Accordingly, the first two “dibros”--“אנכי ה' אלקיך” and “לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים”—the foundations of our emunah, which we heard directly from HKB”H, remain etched inside every Jew, and are never forgotten. Thus, the words of the Kedushas Levi make perfect sense. Even the most non-observant Jew is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of “Kedushas-Hashem,” because what he heard directly from HKB”H is etched and embedded within him.

This now illuminates for us the concluding remark of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh: **“For this reason, Hashem instilled in them, from the mouth of the Supreme G-d, the two essential Mitzvos; so that the Torah will not vanish from our children forever.”** This is precisely the message of the Kedushas Levi. This is the reason HKB”H delivered these two “dibros” to Yisrael directly. He wanted the foundation of all the Mitzvos to be etched indelibly within the souls of Yisrael and to never be forgotten. He adds, however, that this guarantees that they will never forget the Torah, seeing as these two “dibros” that we heard from HKB”H encompass all the Mitzvos of the Torah.

Let us compare the explanation of the author of the Tanya with the explanation of the Kedushas Levi. After all, we have a principle (Eiruvin 13b): **“אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים”**—both opinions represent divine truth. It was only due to the fact that they had inherited the three aspects of their souls—the “nefesh,” “ruach” and “neshamah”—from the holy Avot that all of Yisrael were privileged and worthy to hear the first two “dibros”--“אנכי ולא יהיה לך”—directly from HKB”H. As a result, an intense, everlasting emunah in Hashem was instilled in their beings. Thus, the two explanations complement each other magnificently.

### Rabbi Akiva’s Neshamah Departed on “Echad”

I was struck by a wonderful idea to help us explain why HKB”H chose to deliver only the first two “dibros”--“אנכי ה' אלקיך” and “לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים” - to us directly at Matan Torah on Har Sinai. I would like to begin by addressing the heavenly exchange that took place between the holy Tanna Rabbi Akiva and his students, while the wicked Romans combed his flesh with iron combs. They were punishing him publicly for violating the regime’s decree prohibiting Torah-study. In defiance, he gathered together groups of students and continued to teach them Torah. The Gemara describes the events as follows (Berachos 61b):

“תנו רבנן פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה, בא פפוס

בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהילות ברבים ועוסק בתורה... אמרו לא היו ימים מועטים עד שתפסוהו לרבי עקיבא וחבשוהו בבית האסורים... בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה זמן קריאת שמע היה, והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים.

אמרו לו תלמידיו, רבינו עד כאן, אמר להם כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה, (דברים ו-ה) בכל נפשך, אפילו נוטל את נשמתך, אמרתי מתי יבוא לידי ואקיימנו, ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו, היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד, יצתה בת קול ואמרה, אשריך רבי עקיבא שיצאה נשמתך באחד.

The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: Once, the wicked regime (Rome) decreed that the Jewish people should not engage in Torah-study. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva as he was convening public assemblies and engaging in Torah-study . . . They reported that it was not very long until they apprehended Rabbi Akiva and imprisoned him . . . When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was the time to recite “Krias Shema.” They were combing his flesh with iron combs, yet he was accepting upon himself the yoke of heavenly sovereignty.

His students said to him, “Our teacher, even to this extent?” He said to them, “All my days, I was troubled by this verse—‘with all your soul’—even if he takes your soul. I said to myself: When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this verse? Now, that I have the opportunity, should I not fulfill it?!” He lingered on the word “echad” until his soul departed with “echad.” A heavenly voice called out and proclaimed: “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul departed as you said ‘echad.’”

We shall endeavor to explain the following: (1) What did Rabbi Akiva’s students mean when they asked him: “Our teacher, even to this extent?” This question seems incomprehensible. (2) What chiddush did the heavenly voice reveal to us with the proclamation: “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul departed as you said ‘echad’”? This fact is obvious even without the proclamation of the heavenly “bat-kol.” So, we can rest assured that the “bat-kol” came to teach us something we did not know. What is the chiddush?

### A Great Chassid Is Permitted to Sacrifice His Life for Any of the Mitzvos of the Torah

It appears that we can explain the ruling based on a halachic ruling in the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 157, 1): “כל העבירות שבתורה, חוץ מעבודת כוכבים וגילוי עריות ושפיכת דמים, אם אומרים לו לאדם שיעבור Regarding all of the transgressions in the Torah—with the exception of idol-

worship, sexual immorality and murder—if a person is told to transgress the Mitzvos or be killed, if he is in a private place, he should transgress rather than be killed. The source for this ruling comes from the Gemara (Yoma 85b). There they deduce that saving a human life—“pikuach nefesh”—trumps all the Mitzvos of the Torah except for the three most critical Mitzvos. They derive this from the passuk (Vayikra 18, 5): “ושמרתם את חקותי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם אני ה’ - “וחי ושמרתם את חקותי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם—“You shall observe My decrees and My judgments, which man shall carry out and live by them; I am Hashem.” The Torah specifies that a person should “live by them,” implying that he should not die on their account.

The poskim are divided with regards to this ruling as it pertains to the other Mitzvos. Is a person permitted to accept upon himself the stringency of being killed rather than transgressing them or not? The Rambam rules (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5, 4): “כל מי שנאמר בו יעבור ולא יהרג, ונהרג ולא עבר הרי זה: “if anyone about whom it is said: “Transgress and do not sacrifice your life,” sacrifices his life and does not transgress, he is held accountable for his life. Tosafot, however, write (A.Z. 27b): “If a person wishes to accept this stringency upon himself even with regards to the other Mitzvos, he is permitted to do so.” They cite the case of Rabbi Abba bar Zimra who was instructed by a goy to eat meat that was not slaughtered or to die. He was willing to die rather than to transgress; he was being stringent. It is presumed that this occurred in a private setting.

The famous posek, the Shach (Y.D. 157, 2), rule in accord with the opinion of the Rambam—that it is prohibited to sacrifice one’s life for the sake of the other Mitzvos. If the person in question, however, is an eminent person, a chassid and G-d-fearing then he is permitted to sanctify the holy name and sacrifice his life, even for a minor mitzvah. The great author of the Yismach Moshe (Ki Sisa) is confounded by this ruling: “ולכאורה יש להפליא, הכי בשביל שהוא חסיד וירא שמים ישתנה דינו, הלא כתיב “וחי בהם—what difference does it make if the person is a chassid and G-d-fearing, the passuk states explicitly: “וחי בהם”? We are all instructed to “live by them.”

### Therefore He Provided Them with a Preponderance of Mitzvos

It appears that we can resolve the difficulty raised by the Yismach Moshe based on what the great author of the Noda B’Yehudah writes in Drushei HaTzlach (Drush 4). He

addresses the following Mishnah (Makkos 23b): רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר, רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, שנאמר (ישעיה מב-כא) ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר—**Rabbi Chanania ben Akashia says: HKB"H desired to confer merit upon Yisrael; therefore, He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in abundance. As it is said: "Hashem desires for the sake of its righteousness, that the Torah be expanded and strengthened."** We should endeavor to understand the precise language employed by the Mishnah: **"Therefore, He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in abundance."**

To explain this phrase, he refers to the Gemara (Kiddushin 40a): מחשבה טובה [הקב"ה] מצרפה למעשה, מחשבה רעה אין הקב"ה מצרפה—**a good thought, He (HKB"H) associates with an actual deed... a bad thought, HKB"H does not associate with an actual deed.** In the case of "avodah zarah," HKB"H regards even a bad thought as a deed, as it states explicitly (Yechezkel 14, 5): למען תפוש את בית ישראל בלבם אשר נזרו מעלי בגלוליהם כולם—**in order to seize the House of Yisrael for what is in their heart, although they have withdrawn themselves from Me with their idols, all of them.** Here even iniquitous thoughts are viewed as transgressions.

The Noda B'Yehudah asks: We learned from the Tikunei Zohar that all of the 365 Mitzvos lo sa'aseh are included in the commandment: לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים—**you shall not have other gods.** It stands to reason, therefore, that the thought pertaining to any of the the Mitzvos lo sa'aseh, should be viewed by HKB"H as actual deeds; after all, they all fall into the category of "avodah zarah."

To resolve this difficulty, the Noda B'Yehudah proposes a wonderful chiddush. Yes, it is true that from HKB"H's perspective all of the Mitzvos are included in the first two "dibros." Due to His infinite mercy and kindness, however, He did not inform Yisrael as to how the particular Mitzvos are included in those two "dibros"; so that they would not be punished for bad thoughts, as well. This is implied by the precise language employed by Rabbi Chanania ben Akashia: **"HKB"H desired to confer merit upon Yisrael."** In other words, He wanted to view them as being meritorious and not punish them for misguided thoughts. **"Therefore, He gave them Torah and Mitzvos in abundance."** In other words, He gave Yisrael a preponderance of Torah and Mitzvos, so that it would be unclear to them how all of the Mitzvos are included within the categories of "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh lecha." He proves his point from the passuk cited by the

Mishnah: **"Hashem desires for the sake of its righteousness, that the Torah be expanded and strengthened."** Hashem, specifically, the name connoting "rachamim," wishes to find merit and righteousness in Yisrael; therefore, He provided them with an abundance of Torah and Mitzvos.

### For Tzaddikim All of the Mitzvos Are Included in "אנכי" and "ולא יהיה לך"

Following this line of thought, we can explain why specifically a person who is esteemed, a chassid and G-d-fearing is allowed to sacrifice his life for any of the Torah's Mitzvos. For the majority of Yisrael, HKB"H does not view a bad thought as an actual deed, seeing as it was for them that: "הרבה להם תורה ומצוות". He found it necessary to provide them with an abundance of Torah and Mitzvos, so that they would not comprehend how exactly each of the Mitzvos is associated with the first two "dibros." Consequently, they are not required to sacrifice their lives for any of the Mitzvos other than the three cardinal sins.

Pertaining to a person who is distinguished, a chassid and G-d-fearing, however, this is not the case. Such a person perceives how each mitzvah relates to the two "dibros" of "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh lecha." For him to transgress even a minor seemingly trivial mitzvah is tantamount to transgressing the first two "dibros." Hence, it is precisely as if he is worshipping "avodah zarah"; as such, the law dictates that he should sacrifice his life rather than transgress. Therefore, when he senses that a minor transgression violates the categories of "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh lecha," he is permitted to sacrifice his life.

We can utilize this concept to explain the juxtaposition between the emunah in the oneness of Hashem and the mitzvah to love Hashem found in the first passage of "Krias Shema" (Devarim 6, 4): שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל—**Hear, O Yisrael: Hashem our G-d, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your possessions.** We find the following elucidation in the Mishnah (Berachos 54a): ובכל נפשך, אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך—**"And with all your soul" means even if He takes your life.** Based on what we have discussed, let us suggest an interpretation. A person should merit loving Hashem to such a degree that he can sacrifice his life for the fulfillment of any of the Mitzvos, just as he would be required to sacrifice his life for the emunah in the oneness of Hashem. This is the case when a person is on such a high level

that he perceives how each of the Mitzvos relates to the first two “dibros,” which affirm the oneness of Hashem.

This explains very nicely the elucidation in the Gemara (Yevamos 121b) regarding the passuk (Tehillim 50, 3): “**וְסִבִּיבוֹ**” “**and His surroundings are exceedingly turbulent**” teaches us that **HKB”H is exacting with those who surround Him to the utmost degree** (literally, “like the width of a hair”). Seeing as those tzaddikim who are closest to Him and surround Him have achieved such a high level of perception, they understand how all of the Mitzvos are included in the first two “dibros.” Thus, it turns out that every minor transgression of theirs is tantamount to “avodah zarah”—in which case HKB”H considers the thought as an actual deed. Therefore, HKB”H is so exacting with them as to punish them for even a minor infraction in thought.

### Rabbi Akiva Sacrificed His Life for the Sake of Torah-study

We have now successfully shed some light on the enigmatic, sacred exchange that took place between Rabbi Akiva and his students. Let us return to the words of the Gemara: “**בְּשַׁעָה**” שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה זמן קריאת שמע היה, והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים.” He recited “Krias Shema” in order to demonstrate that he was sacrificing his life for the sake of the oneness of Hashem: “**ה' אלקינו ה' אחד**”. For, a person who denies the oneness of Hashem is committing an act of “avodah zarah”; he must sacrifice his life in such a case.

His students, however, who failed to understand this, were surprised that Rabbi Akiva would sacrifice his life in order to teach Torah publicly. After all, the study of Torah is not one of the three cardinal sins for which a person is obligated to sacrifice his life. This prompted them to ask in amazement: “**רבינו עד כאן**”. Is a Jew obligated to sacrifice his life even to this extent, even for the sake of learning Torah?

In response, Rabbi Akiva replied: “**All my days, I was troubled by this verse—‘with all your soul’—even if he takes your soul. I said to myself: When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this verse?**” In other words, I was troubled throughout my life as to whether or not I would ever

achieve this high level—to be able to truly fulfill the words of the passuk: “**ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך**”—to love Hashem with all of my heart and all of my soul. As we have learned, this implies loving Hashem, even if He confiscates your life. This demands that I sacrifice my life for all of the Mitzvos, seeing as I perceive how they relate to the first two “dibros,” that assert the oneness of Hashem. “**Now that I have the opportunity**”—that I have succeeded in achieving this level—“**shall I not fulfill it?!**” An ordinary person, however, who has not achieved this level, is prohibited from sacrificing his life for any of the Mitzvos other than the three major ones.

Our blessed sages inform us: “**He lingered on the word ‘echad’ until his soul departed with ‘echad.’**” In other words, even though he sacrificed his life merely for teaching Torah publicly; nevertheless, he lingered “**באחד**”—on the passuk: “**שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד**”. For, he felt that he was sacrificing his life for the oneness of Hashem, which is included within the scope of the three cardinal sins. Hence it was fitting to sacrifice his life rather than deny the oneness of Hashem. Indeed, his neshamah departed for the sake of the “Echad.”

As a result: **A heavenly voice called out and proclaimed: “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul departed as you said ‘echad.’**” In other words, the heavenly “bat-kol” attested to the fact that Rabbi Akiva’s neshamah departed for the sake of the “Echad.” He did indeed sacrifice his life appropriately for the sake of the mitzvah of the oneness of Hashem. For, he sensed that due to his immense kedushah, a failure to sacrifice his life for the sake of teaching Torah publicly would be tantamount, chas v’shalom, to sacrilege—to denying the oneness of Hashem. This was the import of the “bat-kol”’s proclamation: “**Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul departed as you said ‘echad.’**”

Thus, we have gained a better understanding as to why HKB”H chose to deliver the first two “dibros”—“**אנכי**” and “**ולא**” “**ולא יהיה לך**”—to us directly. He wanted to teach us that the ultimate goal is for all of Yisrael to achieve the level of perception and devotion of Rabbi Akiva—to understand and appreciate how all of the Mitzvos are included within the umbrella of “**אנכי**” and “**ולא יהיה לך**”.

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