

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
*with Reb Yoel Kahn*



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## THE TWO CROWNS

The Gemara states: "When the Jews prefaced *naaseh* (we shall do) to *nishma* (we shall listen), the *malachim* came and gave two crowns to every Jew, one for *naaseh* and one for *nishma*."

This text is difficult to understand. The beginning implies that the Jews were rewarded for *the order* in which they spoke—*naaseh* before *nishma*. Yet, it concludes that they received two crowns, one for *naaseh* and one for *nishma*, implying that they were rewarded (not for prefacing *naaseh* to *nishma*, but) for each individual utterance!

### RATIONAL SUBMISSION

To understand this, we must first explain the meaning of prefacing *naaseh* to *nishma*.

*Naaseh* means to obey, while *nishma* means to comprehend. These represent two models of serving Hashem: *kabalas ol*—to follow Hashem's commands obediently, without regard for whether we understand them or not; and *sechel*—to serve Hashem based on intellect. Both methods are necessary. The question, however, is which comes first: *naaseh* and then *nishma*, or *nishma* and then *naaseh*.

Let's start with the opposite order, *nishma venaaseh*. What does this mean?

This can be explained with an analogy. Let's take a child who receives guidance from an adult, with consistently positive results. Whenever he follows the adult's directions, he sees tangible benefits. Then, one day, the mentor gives him an instruction which appears to the child to be utterly inexplicable and outrageous.

If the child is not that clever, he'll say that it was probably a mistake, and he won't obey. However, if he is intelligent, he'll conclude that the advice from his wise counselor must make sense, albeit perhaps on a deeper level. The fact that he doesn't understand it doesn't pose a problem; after all, it is to be expected that a young child won't always understand a wise adult! In other words, the child's very intellect concedes its own limitations.

Super-rational *mitzvos* like the *parah adumah* can similarly be observed on an intellectual foundation, without ever being understood. How so? You can calculate as follows:

"The Torah contains Hashem's wisdom, the likes of which cannot be found elsewhere. Since

there is so much of Torah that I can appreciate and comprehend, it is reasonable to conclude that everything it contains is supported by some deep rationale, even if I am not capable of understanding it. After all, it is to be expected that the limited human intellect cannot fathom Hashem's wisdom!"

In this case, you seemingly have *kabalas ol*, as you perform even those *mitzvos* you do not understand. However, your actions aren't predicated purely on Hashem's authority, but on your own *intellect*. It is your intellect that leads you to conclude that you shouldn't expect to comprehend everything. This is *nishma venaaseh*, where the conclusion may be *naaseh, kabalas ol*, but the basis is *nishma*, one's own intellect and understanding.

### FREE FROM THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND

However, this is not the correct attitude. A rational submission such as this is something even the Greeks were able to consent to.

In *Ve'al Hanissim* we say that the Greeks desired "to make [the Jews] forget Your Torah and transgress the *chukim* of Your will." The Frierdiker Rebbe explains this to mean that the *Greeks* had no problem with Torah study as an intellectual pursuit, but their aim was to make the Jews forget that the Torah is "*Your Torah*," the wisdom of Hashem. Similarly, they weren't against rational *mitzvah* observance, but they declared war against *chukim*, those *mitzvos* that are performed solely because they are "Your will"—the will of Hashem.

Seemingly, the word *retzonecha*, "Your will," is repetitious. The definition of *chukim* are *mitzvos* we don't understand and are performed solely because they are the Divine will. Why add the word *retzonecha*?

Based on this, the Rebbe adds another point: The Greeks didn't even mind if the Jews performed *chukim*, as long as it was based on a rational calculation, by ascribing it to our limited intellectual capacities. It was specifically "*retzonecha*," doing things purely because Hashem wants us to, that irked them.

*Nishma venaaseh* means that it is our own existence that is the starting point. That's not *Yiddishkeit*; that's something even the *Greeks* could agree to.

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Refusing to do something you do not understand isn't a sign of freedom; to the contrary, it demonstrates you cannot break free from your ego.

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The Jewish approach is one of *naaseh*; we are Hashem's servants, ready to fulfill His command just as a slave obeys his master. Slaves don't obey their master based on a logical rationale, by considering that the master must be smarter than them, and it makes sense to serve him even if they do not understand. Similarly, we obey Hashem not because of any calculation, but simply because this is what Hashem wants us to do.

In Mitzrayim, the Jews were slaves not only to the Egyptians, but also to their own ego. Refusing to do something because you do not understand is not a sign of freedom; to the contrary, it demonstrates you are subservient to your ego and cannot break free from it. (Never mind that we typically mimic what we see others doing, even when we know that it doesn't make any sense!) When we left Mitzrayim, we were freed from this slavery and became Hashem's servants, ready to do whatever Hashem commands—*naaseh*.

## KABALAS OL OF THE MIND AND HEART

Now, if *kabalas ol* would be based on understanding, we can see why *nishma* is necessary. But since the foundation of Yiddishkeit is *naaseh*, there would seem to be no need for *nishma* altogether.

However, this is incorrect. In addition to *naaseh*, there is also *nishma*; the difference is that it does not come before *naaseh* but after it.

What does this mean?

Even when *nishma* isn't the basis for our actions, there is still a need to study and understand. *Matan Torah* demands that *naaseh* result in *nishma*, that we ultimately achieve understanding as well. Because as obedient servants of Hashem, just as we observe *tefillin*—a physical act—because He wants us to, we also study and contemplate for the same reason.

The Arizal states that just as the intention underlying an act like *tefillin* is that we're performing a particular *mitzvas aseh*, the same applies during the *mitzvos* of meditating on Hashem's unity and experiencing love of Hashem. We meditate on "*Shema...Hashem echad*" with the intention of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *achdus Hashem*, and we go on to experience

"*Ve'ahavta*" with the intention of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Hashem*.

This sounds strange. Such intentions seem more appropriate for actions, which have no self-worth if not for the fact that they are a Divine command. On the other hand, when a person has an intellectual or emotional experience, it is typically because that is how he understands and feels.

But this is the meaning of *nishma* following *naaseh*. Our subservience to Hashem extends beyond our hands into our hearts and minds, so that they, too, are harnessed to serve Him. *Naaseh venishma* places *kabalas ol* at the foundation of our actions, and furthermore—at the foundation of our intellect and feelings as well.

## WHICH CROWN IS GREATER?

We can now understand the Gemara cited above.

A crown is placed above the head, the seat of intellect. The "crowns" of the Gemara thus represent those elements that lie beyond intellect. And these crowns were only awarded since we prefaced *naaseh* to *nishma*.

In we would have said *nishma venaaseh, chas veshalom*, there would have been no grounds for receiving even a single crown. *Nishma* certainly

doesn't warrant a crown; but even *naaseh* doesn't deserve it, because the starting point is intellect, and the so-called *kabalas ol* is based on it.


But since we said *naaseh venishma, we were deserving of two crowns*. One was for *naaseh*, for transcending the mind and subjugating ourselves to Hashem with *kabalas ol*, and the second crown was for *nishma*, because the understanding is also being done solely to fulfill Hashem's will.

In fact, the second crown is even greater than the first. To submit yourself in the realm of action is not a novelty; what's truly incredible is to apply that *kabalas ol* to your understanding and love of

Hashem, indicating that your entire *metzius* is permeated with *kabalas ol*, and it is this submission that elicits a crown even more special than the first.

For further learning see לקוטי שיחות חלק ד' שבועות א'.

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