

# The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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## UNIFORMITY AND DIVERSITY OF MITZVOS

This week's *parshah* begins with the words "*Vehayah eikev tishmi'un*." Rashi explains this to mean that we must fulfill even those mitzvos "upon which a person treads with his heels."

Seemingly, the perception that certain mitzvos are of less significance is incorrect. However, we find that Torah itself recognizes various denominations within mitzvos. This is attested to by the various types of punishment prescribed in the Torah, which reflect a difference in the severity of the various transgressions. However, notwithstanding these disparities, *Chazal* tell us that "one should be *zahir*—careful—with a minor mitzvah as with one that is significant." *Chazal* themselves recognize that certain mitzvos are "minor" and others "significant," yet they exhort that they must be given equal consideration.

### TWO SIDES TO A MITZVAH

The Rebbe explains that mitzvos consist of two elements. On one hand, every mitzvah is equally the command and will of Hashem, and on the other hand, each mitzvah accomplishes something specific.

The Gemara states that the 248 *mitzvos asei* correspond to the 248 limbs of the human body. On a deeper level, the Zohar explains that they match the 248 "limbs" of *Adam Ha'elyon*. Correspondingly, the limbs contain these two elements as well.

Each limb is a conduit through which the will of the soul is expressed; hence, as soon as a person desires to move a given limb, it will act accordingly. This aspect is found within each limb equally. Additionally, each limb expresses a certain faculty of the soul: the eye is the vessel for the power of vision; the ears—for hearing; and so on.

Similarly, each mitzvah is the command and will of Hashem; to quote the Alter Rebbe, if Hashem would command us to perform a task devoid of meaning such as chopping wood,

we would perform his will with enthusiasm. Additionally, each mitzvah effects a specific refinement within a person and elicits a distinct *hamshachah* above.

### THE PRIMARY FOCUS

This is the meaning of *Chazal's* directive, "Be careful with a minor mitzvah as with a significant one." *Chazal* recognize that each mitzvah achieves a distinct accomplishment, yet they tell us that this should not be a Yid's focus. What is of primary importance is that a mitzvah is Hashem's will and we connect to Him through fulfilling it.

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*mitzvos* in such a way,  
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Ordinarily, a person will find more satisfaction in fulfilling a mitzvah he understands than one he does not understand. Accordingly, one will typically aspire to feel the same enjoyment when performing *chukim* as when performing *mishpatim*. However, the Frierdiker Rebbe says that the opposite is true. One should seek to perform *mishpatim* with the same enthusiastic *kabbolas ol* as when performing *chukim*, because it is this

aspect of mitzvos that is most important.

### WHY THE DIVERSITY?

This can provide us with a deeper understanding of the Mishna, "Hashem desired to refine the Yidden, and therefore he increased Torah and mitzvos."

According to the simple explanation, Hashem increased the number of mitzvos so that we can become more refined. This begs an explanation. Why would a smaller number of mitzvos have otherwise been in order?

The Rebbe explains that the Mishna is not coming to tell us why Hashem gave us a numerous *quantity* of mitzvos, but to explain why the mitzvos are abundant in *quality*.

As stated above, a mitzvah must be performed primarily because it is the will of Hashem Himself, as He is higher than *sefiros* and

any type of description or explanation. When a person performs mitzvos in such a way, he views each mitzvah as exactly the same. There aren't 613 mitzvos, there is only one! The diversity of mitzvos is the result of a "descent" into a level where each mitzvah carries a unique content.

In general terms, this diversity can be seen with regard to *mitzvos aseï* and *mitzvos lo saaseh*. An analogy is given from a house that is being prepared for a king. First, it must be cleaned from any trace of dirt; once this has been accomplished, royal furniture must be brought inside. Similarly, we must ensure that no "dirt" accumulates in Hashem's "residence" by avoiding *mitzvos lo saaseh*, and we must beautify His abode by performing *mitzvos aseï*. Then, each category (*mitzvos aseï* and *mitzvos lo saaseh*) itself comprises myriads of details.

This, then, is the underlying question of the Mishna. Why is there a *qualitative* increase in mitzvos? Why do some mitzvos remove the "dirt" and others bring in "furniture," when they can all be an expression of a single idea—to fulfill the will of Hashem?

The same question applies to Torah. Torah is divided into the four categories of *pshat*, *remez*, *drush*, and *sod*, representing the four supernal worlds and the four letters of Hashem's name. There are six orders of Mishnayos, corresponding to the six attributes of *z"á*. Why all the multiplicity? What's wrong with keeping to a single theme, that Torah is *chachmaso shel Hakadosh Boruch Hu*?

## BITTUL VS. REFINEMENT

The answer, says the Mishna, is because "Hashem desired to *refine* the Yidden."

If mitzvos would consist simply of being the Divine Will, it would produce *bittul*, but not refinement. This can be compared to a servant who fulfills the will of his master. Although he may understand and feel otherwise, he is subservient to his owner and does what he is told. However, he remains a lowly, base individual, and his perspectives and sentiments reflect his depraved character.

Hashem wanted to *refine* the Yidden. For this reason, He restricted Himself and took on the form of *Adam Hatelyon* with

248 "limbs," so that each mitzvah will refine its corresponding portion of the human makeup.

## SHMIAH WITHIN THE HEEL

The Rebbe adds another element to this idea.

Even once a person understands these two aspects within mitzvos, he may assume that they are two defined methods of *avodas Hashem*. One must develop *bittul* to Hashem by impressing upon himself that mitzvos are His will, and he must refine his character by focusing on the individual accomplishment of each mitzvah.

The choice of terminology employed by *Chazal* gives us an additional insight. "Be *zahir* with a minor mitzvah as with one that is significant." In addition to meaning "careful," *zahir* is related to the word *zohar*, radiance. The supernal *sefiros* are divided into *oros* and *keilim*, and the unifying factor of mitzvos is associated with the *oros*, the radiance that transcends the multiplicity of the *keilim*. *Chazal* are teaching us that one must invest

the radiance of uniformity within the diversity of "minor" and "significant" mitzvos.

In other words, even refining one's character must be based on *bittul*. It is obvious that the actual performance of mitzvos must be founded on *bittul* and not on intellect. But there is more to it than that: even when one is working on creating an emotional attachment to Hashem by developing a love and fear of Him, he must do so because this is what Hashem desires.

This is the meaning of "*Vehayah eikev tishmi'un*." *Shmiah* in this context means to heed Hashem's will with a *bittul* that defies intellect. This *bittul* must be incorporated within *eikev*. Even when focusing on the individuality of each mitzvah—where certain mitzvos are on the level of *eikev* and others are more significant—one must realize that this itself is the will of Hashem.

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"Even creating an emotional attachment to Hashem must be done because this is what Hashem desires."

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