

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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WHAT SHOULD MOTIVATE ME?

In Tanya Chapter 41, the Alter Rebbe quotes a statement from Zohar, specifically mentioning that the citation is from the Zohar on Parshas Behar.

Everything about Tanya is precise. There are plenty of statements from Chazal cited throughout; many lack specific attribution, while others are accompanied by a general reference to the work they're found in, but without identifying the exact location. Here, however, the Alter Rebbe makes a point of saying that the statement he's about to quote is in the Zohar of Behar.

The Rebbe learns that the specificity of this reference actually contributes to our understanding of the issue at hand.

THE ZOHAR IN PEREK MEM-ALEPH

In this chapter of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe explains that we must have both *ahavah* and *yirah*. These two sentiments are generally described as the foundations of the observance of the positive and negative commandments, respectively: love leads us to get involved in things which bring us closer to Hashem, while fear motivates us to avoid committing transgressions (as explained earlier in Tanya, in Chapter 4).

Now, in Chapter 41, the Alter Rebbe adds that even *asei tov*—positive activity—requires *yirah* and accepting the yoke of Heaven. It is in this context that he writes at length about how crucial *yirah* and *kabbolas ol* are. He bases this on the fact that the Torah instructs us to serve Hashem ("Va'avad'tem"), just as a slave serves his master. This relationship is predicated on fear of the master, whereas being observant out of love does not meet the requirement of *avodas eved*. This emphasizes the need for *yirah* and *kabbolas ol* in our service of Hashem.

It is in this context that the Zohar in Behar is introduced. The Zohar there states that "just as an ox has a yoke placed upon it

first so that it will bring benefit to the world, we must similarly accept the yoke of Heaven first, or else holiness cannot dwell within us."

WHY IS YIRAH NECESSARY?

How does the Zohar—and the fact that it is in Parshas Behar—add to our understanding of the topic? To explain this, we must first elaborate a bit on the *chiddush* being made in this chapter.

Superficially, the reason why *ahavah* alone isn't enough is because without *yirah*, there is the potential for sin. If this possibility exists, a person obviously won't be a welcome habitat for holiness.

This can be explained with a parable: In order to prepare a residence for a human king, the area must first be purged of even the slightest trace of dirt. Then, the space must be filled with tasteful furnishings that are fit for a king.

Similarly, when creating a *dirah* for Hashem, we must firstly avoid sinning completely—which is the result of fearing Him—and then we must follow up with the good deeds which furnish His *dirah*, which are the result of a loving urge to be connected to Hashem. Both aspects are equally vital in creating a *dirah* for Hashem.

However, this idea (that *yirah* is necessary to stay clear of sinning) is quite simple, and has already been discussed in the previous chapters. The *chiddush* of this chapter is something else entirely.

THE OX'S YOKE

A person might think that it is enough to have *yiras shamayim* as the basis for *sur mei'ra*—avoiding sin, and *ahavah* as the basis for *asei tov*—learning Torah and performing *mitzvos*. However, in this chapter, the Alter Rebbe is *mechadesh* that this is insufficient.

Although such a person will certainly avoid even the slightest

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trace of sin, it is not enough for the fear to be concentrated solely on *sur mei'ra*, while *asei tov* is addressed only by love. The fear must be present in the *asei tov* as well.

This is the point the Alter Rebbe is bringing from the Zohar. The Zohar states that an ox is harnessed first “so that it will bring benefit to the world.” The purpose of the yoke is not only to prevent the ox from kicking, but also to assist in plowing and sowing—“to bring benefit.” Similarly, *yirah* must be present not only to prevent sinning, but also to fuel our positive acts.

THE NEED FOR BITTUL

Why indeed is it necessary to have *yirah* for *asei tov*?

The foremost prerequisite to receiving *giluy Elokus* and developing a connection to Hashem is *bittul*, submission. As the Alter Rebbe explained earlier (in Chapter 6), Hashem only dwells in an entity that is *battel* to Him.

This is why *ahavah* alone is not enough. When you love someone, it's not *bittul* that's playing a role; *ahavah* is about your expression of affection and your desire to connect to him. So *asei tov* that is motivated by love alone and not by fear is lacking, because there is an absence of *bittul*. Although you may express *bittul* elsewhere (in the *yirah* apparent in *sur mei'ra*), right now the feeling is that of *ahavah* and not of *bittul*. And since holiness can only dwell where there is submission, the *kedushah* is missing as well. In order for “holiness to dwell within us,” as the Zohar says, we must “accept the yoke of Heaven” even for *asei tov*.

A PARADIXICAL MOUNTAIN

This discussion seemingly leaves us with the conclusion that *ahavah* has no place in *avodas Hashem*, as even *asei tov* should be based on *yirah*. But this is obviously not the case. Doing *mitzvos*

is ultimately associated (not with acting under duress, but) with passion and delight. When learning Torah and performing *mitzvos*, *ahavah* is and should be clearly involved.

This leaves us with a paradox. We are saying that our acts should be driven by love, yet at the same time, it is important for the role of *yirah* and *kabbolas ol* to be expanded into the domain of *asei tov*. How do these two ideas coexist?

It is to answer this question that the Alter Rebbe mentions the source of the Zohar—Parshas Behar. The word *behar* means “mountain.” The Gemara states that Sinai was chosen for the giving of the Torah because it is the lowest of all the mountains, alluding to the concept of *bittul*. But in that case, why use a mountain altogether? Hashem should have given the Torah on a flat plain, or perhaps even in a valley!

The answer is that a mountain *is* necessary, yet it must remain small. To translate this in our *avodas Hashem*: We must set out to develop love for Hashem; however, the love should not simply be our *own* instinctive reaction to the realization of Hashem's greatness. Instead, it should be a feeling we are striving to develop due to Hashem's *command* that we love Him. In this way, the *ahavah* itself is founded on *kabbolas ol*.

This is the message of this chapter of Tanya. A true slave is submissive to his master in all areas: when he is told to perform an act with his hands, he does so, and when he is told to arouse a feeling of love in his heart, he does so as well! Similarly, *bittul* and *kabbolas ol* are the driving force behind *asei tov* and *ahavah*, and it is only then that *kedushah* can dwell within us.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 7, pp. 180ff.

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merkazanash.com
info@merkazanash.com
347.471.1770

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