

Parshat Va'etchanan

Gesher Newsletter

5:21 PM Candle Lighting

6:20 PM Shabbos Ends

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In Parshas Va'eschanan, the Torah commands:

"וְלֹא תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתּוֹ רֵעֲךָ וְלֹא תִתְאָוֶה בֵּית רֵעֲךָ... וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֲךָ" - "You shall not covet your fellow's wife. You shall not desire your fellow's house... or anything that belongs to your fellow." (Devarim 5:18)

At first glance, this mitzvah is puzzling. How can the Torah command an emotion? It's understandable to forbid an action, but how can someone be commanded not to feel desire?

The Ibn Ezra famously addresses this. He compares it to a poor man who sees a beautiful princess. He doesn't desire her, not because she isn't appealing, but because he understands she is completely out of reach. Similarly, a person with understanding and faith realises that possessions, status, and opportunities are not determined by effort or intelligence alone, but by the will of Hashem. If something isn't his, it's because Hashem has decided it shouldn't be. Just like the villager and the princess, the person of emunah doesn't desire what was never meant to be his.

This perspective doesn't just apply to jealousy. It's the foundation of bitachon: Trust in Hashem. Life often presents us with challenges: Things we lack, opportunities we miss, and situations we wish were different. But the true test of bitachon is to recognise that everything comes from Hashem. What we have is what we are meant to have. And what we don't have is equally part of His plan.

This idea connects to another verse in the parsha: "וַעֲשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב" - "And you shall do what is right and good" (Devarim 6:18). According to the Ramban, this is a general mitzvah to live with integrity and good middos, even in areas not explicitly governed by Torah law. The Torah gives us principles, but it also expects us to internalise them, so that we naturally choose what is upright and just.

Chavakuk in the Gemara in Makkos (24a) explains that the Torah can be reduced down into a single principle: "וְיָחִיהָ בְּאֵמֻנָתוֹ יְהוָה" - "The righteous person shall live by his faith" (Chavakuk 2:4).

Why condense the Torah into one middah: Emunah? Because a person can keep every mitzvah and still miss the point. One can go through the motions without ever connecting their actions to Hashem. Emunah ensures that our observance has direction and purpose. It's the anchor that gives meaning to our mitzvos, and the perspective that shapes our character.

Ultimately, emunah is not just about belief. It's about how we live. When we internalise that everything comes from Hashem - our successes, our failures, our challenges, and our gifts - we begin to shed jealousy, entitlement, and anxiety. We begin to live with gratitude, peace, and purpose.

Perfecting our middos is a lifelong avodah, but when we go to the root, we find that everything else becomes clearer and more manageable. May we strengthen our trust in Hashem and live each day with the clarity that all is from Hashem, and all is for the good.

Good Shabbos,
Asher Nagel

Parshas Hashavuah Summaries Parshas Va'eschanan R' Gidon Moskow

• 118 Pesukim - 12 Mitzvos (8 Positive & 4 Negative)

Rishon (Perek 3, pesukim 23-29; Perek 4, pesukim 1-4)

- Moshe begged Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael, describing Hashem's greatness and mighty hand. Hashem refused Moshe's request due to His decree and instead told him to go up to the top of the cliff to view the land from afar.
- Moshe was commanded to strengthen and encourage Yehoshua, who would lead Bnei Yisrael into the land.
- Moshe urged Bnei Yisrael to listen to the mitzvos so they would live and merit entering the land. He warned them not to add to or subtract from the Torah's commandments. Moshe reminded them of what happened at Ba'al Pe'or, where those who followed idolatry were destroyed by Hashem. Those who cling to Hashem are alive today.

Sheni (Perek 4, pesukim 5-40)

- Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael the mitzvos as commanded by Hashem, which they were to observe in Eretz Yisrael. He explained that keeping the Torah would display their wisdom and understanding to the nations.
- Moshe praised the closeness of Hashem to Bnei Yisrael and the righteousness of the Torah. He warned them to guard themselves and not forget what they saw at Har Sinai, commanding them to teach their children and grandchildren about the day Hashem revealed Himself at Har Sinai. He described how Hashem spoke from within the fire, with no visible form, only a voice.
- Bnei Yisrael were given the Aseres HaDibros on two stone tablets and Moshe cautioned them not to make any form of image or idol, whether human, animal, bird, or heavenly body. He warned them that worshipping the sun, moon, and stars is forbidden. Hashem took them out from the iron crucible of Egypt to be a nation, a heritage to Him, until this very day.
- Moshe shared that he would not enter the land due to Hashem's anger and told Bnei Yisrael to be careful not to forget the covenant. He declared that Hashem is a consuming fire, a jealous G-d.
- Moshe foretold that if they sinned and served idols, they would be exiled, but in exile, if they sought Hashem sincerely, they would find Him. Hashem is merciful and would not forget the covenant with the Avos.
- Moshe reminded them of the uniqueness of their experience, hearing Hashem's voice and surviving and Hashem redeeming them from Egypt with signs and wonders. Hashem is the only G-d in Heaven and Earth, and there is no one else.

- Moshe urged them to keep His mitzvos, so they and their children would live long in the land Hashem was giving them.

Shlishi (Perek 4, pesukim 41-49)

- Moshe set aside three arei miklat (cities of refuge) on the eastern side of the Yarden for someone who unintentionally killed another. The cities designated were Betzer in the territory of Reuven, Ramot in Gilad for Gad, and Golan in Bashan for Menasheh.
- The lesson that Moshe presented to Bnei Yisrael, recounted the laws and mitzvos given to Bnei Yisrael after they left Mitzrayim. This lesson was given in the area east of the Yarden, in the land of Sichon, king of the Emori, whom Bnei Yisrael had defeated. This land had been taken from both Sichon and Og, kings of the Emori, whose territory spanned vast areas on the eastern side of the Yarden.

Revii (Perek 5, pesukim 1-18)

- Moshe gathered all of Bnei Yisrael and reminded them to listen to the laws and observe them carefully. He repeated that Hashem made a covenant at Har Sinai, and not only with their ancestors but with the entire generation present as well.
- Moshe recalled how Hashem spoke to them face-to-face at Har Sinai from within the fire, that the people became afraid and asked Moshe to speak on their behalf, fearing they would die if Hashem continued to speak directly to them, and that Hashem agreed and commanded Moshe to teach the people His mitzvos.
- Moshe then enumerated the Aseres HaDibros:
 - "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim."
 - "You shall have no other gods before Me" and the prohibition of idol worship.
 - "You shall not take Hashem's Name in vain."
 - "Safeguard the Shabbos day," with a reminder of slavery in Mitzrayim as the reason for the Shabbos day.
 - "Honor your father and mother" to merit long days in the land that Hashem gives you.
 - "Do not murder."
 - "Do not commit adultery."
 - "Do not steal."
 - "Do not bear false witness."
 - Do not covet" anything that belongs to your fellow.

Chamishi (Perek 5, pesukim 19-30; Perek 6, pesukim 1-3)

- Moshe continued recounting how Hashem spoke the Aseres HaDibros to Bnei Yisrael with a great voice and then wrote them on two stone tablets.
- The leaders and elders of the nation approached Moshe in fear, asking him to receive the rest of the Torah from Hashem and relay it to them. They said they feared dying from hearing Hashem's voice directly again. Hashem agreed with their request and praised them for their fear of Heaven, wishing that it would remain with them always. Hashem told Moshe to tell them to return to their tents, and He would teach Moshe the rest of the mitzvos, which Moshe would then teach Bnei Yisrael. Moshe concluded that Bnei Yisrael should be careful to follow the mitzvos and do what is good and right in Hashem's eyes, in order to live long in the land.
- Moshe declared that these are the mitzvos, chukim, and mishpatim Hashem commanded him to teach, to be kept in Eretz Yisrael, stressing the importance of fearing Hashem and observing all His mitzvos, so that Bnei Yisrael and their children would merit long life and prosper and multiply in the land flowing with milk and honey, as Hashem promised their forefathers.

Shishi (Perek 6, pesukim 4-25)

- "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad" is brought as a declaration of Hashem's unity.
- Bnei Yisrael are commanded to love Hashem with all their heart, soul, and resources. These words were to be placed on the heart, taught to children, and always spoken, at home and on the way, when lying down and upon rising. The words were to be bound as tefillin on their arms and between their eyes and written on the mezuzos of their homes and gates.
- Moshe warned them not to forget Hashem when they would inherit a prosperous land with houses, wells, vineyards, and olive trees that they did not build or plant.
- Bnei Yisrael were to fear Hashem, serve only Him, and swear only in His Name. Moshe cautioned them not to follow other gods, as Hashem is a jealous G-d, and doing so would bring destruction. They were told not to test Hashem, as they had at Massa, but to keep His mitzvos and do what is right and good in His eyes. If they did so, Hashem would drive out their enemies and bring them into the land He promised.
- Moshe instructed them to explain to their children the reason behind the mitzvos that Hashem took them out of Mitzrayim with signs and wonders, gave them the land, and commanded them to observe the Torah for their benefit and survival.

Shevii (Perek 7, pesukim 1-11)

- Moshe taught that when Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, He would drive out seven mighty nations before them. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to destroy these nations and not to make covenants or show mercy to them. They were forbidden to intermarry with them, as such unions would lead their children away from Hashem toward idolatry. Moshe warned that Hashem's anger would flare, and He would destroy them if they strayed. Bnei Yisrael were to destroy their idols, break their altars, cut down asheiros (idolatrous trees), and burn their carved images.
- Bnei Yisrael are a holy nation, chosen by Hashem to be His treasured people from amongst all the nations. Hashem did not choose them because they were numerous, but because He loved them and kept His promise to the Avos. Hashem redeemed them from slavery in Mitzrayim with a strong hand. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael must know that Hashem is trustworthy and keeps His covenant and kindness to those who love Him and keep His mitzvos. But He repays those who hate Him instantly and directly.
- Moshe concluded that Bnei Yisrael must carefully observe the mitzvos, laws, and statutes that Hashem commanded them.