

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

PARSHAS NITZAVIM

Touching Beis with One's Ideas

וְהָיָה בְּשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת דְּבָרֵי הָאָלָה הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לִי כִּי בִשְׂרָרוֹת לִבִּי
אֵלַי

And it will be, when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, "Peace will be with me, for I will go as my heart sees fit."¹

The commentators wonder how it is meaningfully possible for a person to hear the curses of the Torah for one who violates its mitzvos and still assure themselves that all will be with them when they do as they please! Perhaps one answer can be found in the concluding verse of this section, which reads:

הַנְּסֻתוֹת לַה' אֵלֵינוּ וְהַנְּגִלֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת

The things that are hidden are for Hashem, our God, and the things that are revealed are for us and our children forever, to do all the words of this Torah.²

What is the meaning of this verse? What are “the things that are concealed” and “the things that are revealed,” and how does this constitute the conclusion of Moshe’s address to the Jewish people?

A fascinating explanation of this verse is presented by Rabbeinu Bachye, in the name of the Rambam.³ He writes that although we may investigate the reasons for the mitzvos, ultimately, they remain “concealed” from us and are known only to Hashem, while what is “revealed” to us are specifically the practical aspects of the mitzvos in order to perform them. It emerges that the individual in our verse may feel that if he perceives the reason for the mitzvah, he will no longer need to actually perform it – a notion from which the concluding verse disavows him. According to this approach, the word “שְׂרָרוֹת” derives from the word “שׁוֹר” which means “to see”, and refers to the person’s assertion that *his vision* regarding the meaning of the mitzvos will guide him and absolve him of the obligation to perform them. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the root letter *reish* in the word שְׂרָרוֹת is doubled over – something which generally denotes

¹ Devarim 29:17-18.

² Verse 28.

³ Rabbeinu Bachye cites this explanation as coming from the Rambam’s commentary on the Torah. Aside from this reference, I am not aware of any other mention of this commentary.

intensity.⁴ In our instance, it reflects his self-assurance regarding the penetrating and profound nature of his vision: while most people see with one *reish*, he sees with two!

Taking this idea a little further, we note that in the verse's two references to the heart, the first has two letter *beis*'s (בְּלִבּוֹ), while the second has only one (לִבִּי). What is behind this shift? The Sages inform us that when the word for heart has two *beis*'s, it refers to both parts of a person's make-up: his *yetzer tov* (positive inclination) and his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). This then, is the full depiction of this individual. He is sure that his moral compass and vision alone will steer him right because he is convinced that he sees only with his *yetzer tov*, hence he uses the term לִבִּי with just one *beis*. This gives us a fascinating form of conservation of "Torah letter matter", whereby one whose vision uses only one *beis* of his heart, can see with two *reish*'s. The reality, however, is that his vision, like that of everyone else, derives from both *beis*'s of his heart, so that it only really has one *reish* and hence is prone to error and incomplete understanding.

The terrible irony of this whole situation comes when we recall that the verse's first reference to the heart, which is where the person's notion of "super-vision" comes from, has two *beis*'s (וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ). In other words, the very idea that the person can see only with his *yetzer tov* is itself being fed to him by his *yetzer hara*! The one "virtue" the *yetzer hara* can lay claim to is that of modesty, whereby it is fully prepared to allow others to take credit for its best ideas. To this end, the Torah insists that we "quote our sources" and recognize ideas that come from the *yetzer hara*, even as he is directing all our attention toward the *yetzer tov*!

⁴ In Parshas Vayetzei, when Yaakov arrives at the well in Charan, the verse says that all the shepherds would assemble, "וַיִּגְלְלוּ" and they would roll off the enormous stone that was on the mouth of the well (Bereishis 29:3). The root letter *lamed* is doubled over to denote the intense effort involved in removing the stone. In contrast, when Yaakov steps forward to remove the stone, the verse says "וַיִּגַּל" with just the one *lamed* (ibid. verse 10), indicating the ease with which he did so, as mentioned in Rashi there (R' Yehuda Adel of Slonim, *Iyei Hayam*, Megillah 15b).