

Psalm 119

ס

Verse 6

Then –יִס– I will not be ashamed, upon beholding all Your commandments.

The word יִס is composed of an *alef* and a *zayin*, which is numerically equivalent to eight. Seven relates to the seven-day cycle of time, while “the one that rides on seven” refers to that level that totally transcends time.¹

In Chassidic terminology,² seven refers to the seven emotive attributes of *Atzilus*, which served as the building blocks of all creation, while one refers to the level of *Binah* of *Atzilus*, the “mother” of the emotions, the intellectual *Sefirah* that encompasses them.

During the time prior to Moshiach’s arrival we only merit the *zayin*, the immanent level of G-dliness, the emotive attributes that relates to the world.³ The time of Moshiach, however, is the level of יִס, the level of eight,⁴ with the one riding on seven, for creation will then have attained its loftiest state. At that time, we will be able to view G-d’s commandments not as individual, limited entities, but in a manner of יִס, enabling us to view “*all of Your commandments,*” as they exist in a single, undivisible and transcendent entity, deriving from the level of unity of G-d’s wisdom, the *alef* that “rides” on the *zayin*.

As a consequence, the entire world will then be tremendously uplifted, for which reason,⁵ “the entire world will be solely occupied in gaining knowledge of G-d.”⁶

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Verse 12

Blessed are You, G-d; teach me Your statutes.

There is something unique in this verse of *Tehillim*, in that it consists not only of an expression of praise and supplication, but it also is a formal blessing.

¹ See *Kli Yakar*, beginning of Torah portion *Shemini*.

² See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5653, p. 280ff.

³ See *Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim*, 42d.

⁴ See *Arachin* 13b and commentary of the *MaHarSha* there.

⁵ *Rambam, Hilchos Melachim*, 12:5 – the concluding passage of *Yad HaChazakah*.

⁶ Adapted from *Hisvadyos* 5751, Vol. 1, p. 259ff.

The following tale, related by the *Rebbe Rayatz*,⁷ will be accordingly understood: His father, the *Rebbe RaShab* was wont to recite many blessings, to the extent that he would try to recite a blessing every hour. If that was not possible, he would then recite the verse, “Blessed are You, G-d; instruct me in Your statutes,” for this verse too is related to reciting a blessing.

This is understood to be so from the following law:⁸ If one began reciting a blessing and said “Blessed are you, G-d” and then realized that he is not obligated in reciting that particular blessing, he should then conclude it by reciting the latter part of our verse, “instruct me in Your statutes.” In this manner it will not be considered as a blessing that was recited in vain. Thereby demonstration that the above verse contains the unique quality of also serving as a formal blessing.⁹

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Verse 18

Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah.

In explaining this verse the *Tzemach Tzedek* employs a curious formulation:¹⁰ He first explains that David is requesting that his eyes be “uncovered” so that he can merit to see the “soul of Torah,” i.e., the inner dimension and “wonders” of the Torah.¹¹ He then goes on to cite the comment of the *Shelah*¹² who states that the verse is referring to revealing the “secrets of the *mitzvos*,” not the “secrets and soul of the *Torah*. After which he goes on again to state that the “wonders of Your Torah” refers to the inner dimension of *Torah*, the “soul of Torah.”

Evidently, the “secrets of the *mitzvos*” is a necessary preparatory step in enabling the individual to “gaze at the wonders of Your Torah.” But how is this so?

The ultimate purpose and goal of revealing the inner dimension of *Torah*, the “soul of Torah,” is for this revelation to permeate the revealed world around us as well as the revealed aspect of Torah. Understandably, this is best accomplished through revealing the “secrets of the *mitzvos*,” whose performance is related to purifying and refining the world, thereby making it possible to

⁷ *Sefer HaSichos* 5704, p. 117.

⁸ See *Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZaking*, 206:13.

⁹ Adapted from *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 36, p. 54.

¹⁰ *Yahel Or*, p. 459ff.

¹¹ See Introduction of the *Rambam* to his *Peirush Hamishnayos*, where he states that this was David’s request in this verse, and this should be our request of G-d as well.

¹² At the beginning of *Shnei Luchos HaBris*.

reveal within the world, the “secrets of the Torah” – that the essence of the world and all that is within it is truly G-dly.¹³

7

Verse 26

I have recounted my ways, and You have answered me; instruct me in Your statutes.

The *Tzemach Tzedek* comments on the words “instruct me in Your statutes” and notes¹⁴ that David was asking G-d that there be drawn down within his Torah study below, in this world, the Torah as it exists above, in the realm of *Atzilus*.

Chassidus explains¹⁵ that this is the meaning of the phrase recited in Grace After Meals,¹⁶ “For Your Torah which You have taught us” – that the Torah as it exists in all its holiness in the world of *Atzilus* be drawn down into the lower worlds of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and even into the lowest world, our world of *Asiyah*.

Although it goes without saying that one must fully comprehend the Torah that he studies, nevertheless, the learner must also always be permeated – even after he understand the subject matter thoroughly – with the feeling that it is G-d’s Torah, *Your Torah* of *Atzilus*. This is accomplished through the study of the inner portion of Torah, connecting as it does the inner aspect of one’s soul, with G-d’s essence. When one does so, he will always be cognizant of the fact that what he is learning is truly G-d’s Torah of *Atzilus*. And it was this that David was beseeching when he implored, “instruct me in Your statutes.”¹⁷

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Verse 33

Teach me, O G-d, the way of Your statutes, and I will cherish it to the last.

There are three levels with regard to the obligation of Torah study:

¹³ Adapted from *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 5, p. 271ff.

¹⁴ *Yahel Or*, p. 35.

¹⁵ *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5700, p. 68, *et al.*

¹⁶ In the blessing of *Nodeh Lecha*.

¹⁷ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 3, p. 26.

a) The obligation to learn and know the actual applicable laws of the Torah, the laws as they apply to his personal life, so that he may know “the deeds that he is supposed to do;”¹⁸ This level of learning relates to the body animal soul as well, since it is through them that he is able to perform these laws and obligations.

b) The obligation to learn and know the entire Torah, including those matters that do not apply to one’s life. This is a more “soulful” degree of Torah study. This level is still subject to limitations, since the laws, *Midrashim*, etc., are limited.¹⁹ Indeed, there were many individuals who knew the entire Torah.²⁰ Nevertheless, since this obligation devolves on the individual, that *he* know the Torah, and people are inherently limited, this loftier “soulful” degree of Torah study is limited as well.

c) Then there is the third and highest level, that of “You shall delve in it day and night,”²¹ which applies even after one is knowledgeable in the entire Torah. This aspect of Torah study involves studying Torah for the sake of Torah itself. Now, since the Torah transcends all limitations – “Its measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea”²² – it follows that the *mitzvah* of studying Torah for the sake of Torah itself involves constantly studying Torah, day and night, during every free minute, beyond any and all limitations.

This was David’s request in this verse – that he attain the most supreme level of Torah study, “carrying on [its study] at all times.”²³

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Verse 45

And I will walk in an expansive manner (וְאַתְהָלַכְתָּ בְּרִחְבָּהּ), for I seek Your precepts.

Although Torah is to be studied with *bittul*, with self-effacement – “let my soul be as dust before all, [whereby,] open my heart to Your Torah”²⁴ – nevertheless, Torah is also to be studied expansively, in a broad manner.

But how do those two opposite feelings come together; how can one be *battul* and yet at one and the same time be broad and expansive, when *bittul* implies narrowness and shrinkage of self?

¹⁸ After *Shemos* 18:20.

¹⁹ See the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, 1:5.

²⁰ See *Menachos* 98b.

²¹ *Yehoshua* 1:8.

²² *Iyov* 11:9.

²³ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer Hamaamarim* 5711-12, p.43ff.

²⁴ *Elokai Netzor* prayer, following the *Shemoneh Esreh*.

This can be accomplished when one realizes that he proudly possesses a soul, a veritable part of G-d above.²⁵ Moreover, not only does he possess a soul, but the soul is truly who he is; the body is merely an adjunct to the soul.

This realization will produce an infinite degree of pride in self and a great measure of expansiveness, so that he will sally forth in his Torah study in a broad and expansive manner (ואתהלכה ברחבה). At the same time, this expansiveness will in no way impact his *bittul*, for his expansiveness is actually a result of his *bittul* – because his expansiveness results from the fact that his true being is not his own self, independent of G-d, but is actually “a part of G-d above,” he will study Torah in an expansive manner *because* of his inherent *bittul*, a *true* degree of *bittul* that in no way negates the endless expansiveness of G-d’s Torah and the manner in which it is to be studied.²⁶

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Verse 54

Your statutes have been music to me in the house of my wanderings.

When David triumphantly brought back the Ark from its captivity in the hands of the Philistines,²⁷ it was placed on a wagon. David had momentarily forgotten the stipulation of the Torah: “On the shoulder shall they carry it.”²⁸ Commenting on this episode, our Sages²⁹ teach that David's forgetfulness came as a punishment for his having referred to the laws of the Torah as song, as our verse stated here: “Your statutes were songs for me in my place of terror.” Why should this expression be regarded as an offense? And in what way is it related to its punishment?

The Alter Rebbe explains in *Tanya*³⁰ that David’s offense lay in labeling Torah as mere songs, when in truth “all the worlds, the exalted and the lowly, are dependent on the meticulous performance of a single *Mitzvah*.” Thus Torah is much greater than the level of “song,” i.e., the external level of G-dliness that directly relates to creation.

The Alter Rebbe offers two examples of the exactitude that is required in the performance of *mitzvos*: sacrificial offering and *tefillin*. The reason he specifically cites these two³¹ is because each of these *mitzvos* signifies a different aspect – sacrificial offerings symbolize elevating the

²⁵ *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 2.

²⁶ Adapted from *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 3, p. 572.

²⁷ *Shmuel* II, 6.

²⁸ *Bemidbar* 7:9.

²⁹ *Sotah* 35a.

³⁰ *Kuntres Acharon*, Essay Six.

³¹ See *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak*, on this essay.

physical world to holiness, while *tefillin* is the aspect of drawing down G-dliness from above into this world.³²

Why didn't David, who surely knew of the essential quality of Torah not mention its intrinsic loftier quality? Because at that time he was in "a place of terror," seemingly subject to the vicissitudes of his enemies. He therefore sought to comfort himself with the realization that the very world itself, as G-d's creation, is truly His song, and no harm will befall Him, for G-d constantly watches over him, as He does over all of creation.³³

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Verse 59

I considered my ways, and returned my feet to Your testimonies.

The *Midrash*³⁴ comments on the verse "It was evening, it was morning – one day,"³⁵ and notes: evening refers to the deeds of the wicked, morning refers to the deeds of the righteous. We are not sure which of them G-d desires. However, when the verse states, "G-d saw that the light was good,"³⁶ we know that he desires the deeds of the righteous. Now this is truly puzzling; why would it even enter our minds that G-d would desire the deeds of the wicked?

The *Baal Shem Tov* explains³⁷ that the advantage of light is specifically appreciated when contrasted with darkness, as is the quality of the righteous when compared to the wicked. Thus the deeds of the wicked serve as a starting point from which one can truly appreciate the deeds of the righteous. The *Baal Shem Tov* accordingly explains our verse as well: Upon reflecting on his natural tendencies, David more fully appreciated separating himself from them and "returning his feet to Your testimonies."

This is particularly relevant to David, since it was David who "established the preciousness of *teshuvah*."³⁸ The previously quoted Torah of the *Baal Shem Tov* emphasizes this: "I will return and change my normal ways and habits [translating the Hebrew word *ragli*, my feet, as relating to the Hebrew word *ragil*, habit] – combating one's inborn nature and habits, and returning to G-d."³⁹

³² See *Likkutei Torah, Shelach* 40a ff.

³³ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 416; *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 43, p. 389. See also there why David was punished, when he had a perfectly good reason for referring to the Torah as "songs."

³⁴ *Bereishis Rabbah*, 2:8.

³⁵ *Bereishis* 1:5.

³⁶ *Ibid*, verse 4.

³⁷ Quoted in *Tzafnas Pa'aneiach* (104b); *Ben Poras Yosef* (46c).

³⁸ *Mo'ed Kattan* 16b.

³⁹ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 358ff.

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Verse 66

Teach me the edifying reasoning and wisdom [of the Torah], for I believed in Your commandments.

David is asking G-d that he be taught the reasons and knowledge of Torah because of his possessing the quality of belief in G-d. But belief in G-d is a quality and trait in all Jews, even the simplest Jew believes in G-d with full faith, since all Jews are “believers, the sons of believers.”⁴⁰

It can ostensibly be argued that the statement “for I believe in Your commandments” refers to the degree of belief that follows understanding; belief and faith beginning after a person’s logic achieves the most the person is capable of understanding at a given time. Accordingly, the greater degree of one’s understanding, the greater will be his subsequent faith. Thus David’s belief, coming as it did after his great degree of understanding, was far superior to the belief of the common man.

However, this is not at all so, for the truest quality of belief is specifically found among the simple folk. Thus the *Baal Shem Tov* famously states⁴¹ that the artless simplicity of the service of simple folk is the true vessel for receiving G-d’s essential simplicity. For an intellectual will endeavor to first and foremost understand all matters intellectually, and he must toil long and hard to attain the simple faith of the simple man.

In essence, David was really saying that he had indeed striven arduously to gain the level of simple faith, not the faith that arrives after understanding is exhausted. Because of this accomplishment he beseeched G-d that He reveal to him the very essence of Torah, which also truly transcends understanding, the essential pleasure of Torah that cannot be palpably felt nor understood, which is called “*tuv tam*,” the most edifying and non-comprehensible aspect of Torah.⁴²

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Verse 80

⁴⁰ See *Shabbos* 97a.

⁴¹ See *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5696, p. 13.

⁴² Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer Hamaamarim* 5722, p. 5ff.

May my heart be *tamim* (תמיים - perfect, complete and artless, employing simple faith) in Your statutes, so that I not be shamed.

The term *tamim* is used regarding our Patriarch, Avraham, when G-d says to him, “Go before Me and be *tamim*.”⁴³ This term, say our Sages,⁴⁴ was only used subsequent to his performing the *mitzvah* of circumcision, which produces the effect of *temimus*.

The Alter Rebbe addresses in Tanya⁴⁵ the concept of circumcision as it refers to excising and circumcising the obtuseness of one’s heart, as the verse states: “And you shall excise the foreskin of your heart.” Now, just as in the act of physical circumcision there are two stages: “excision” and “uncovering,” which remove respectively the coarse foreskin and the thin membrane.

So, too, with respect to the foreskin of the heart: there are a person’s coarse desires, the coarse foreskin, and a person’s subtle desires, which corresponds to the thin membrane, which while thin, still acts as a concealment on G-dliness.

With regard to excising the foreskin itself the verse tells us that we, ourselves shall excise our heart’s foreskins. However, removing the thin membrane is too difficult for man to accomplish prior to Moshiach’s arrival, at which time “G-d will circumcise your heart ... so that we love him with all our hearts and souls.”

David asked G-d to assist him in becoming *tamim* – complete, artless and employing simple faith – the complete level of excising the foreskin of the heart, including the second stage, which is accomplished through the service of repentance, thereby assuring that he would “not be shamed” by any remnants or vestiges of personal desires.⁴⁶

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Verse 81

My soul yearns for Your salvation; I yearn for Your word.

David’s spiritual dimension is that of *Malchus* of *Atzilus*, the level of *Knesses Yisrael*, the entire Congregation of Israel. As such, his prayers, yearnings and longings, were not only personal expressions, but expressed on behalf of all of us. The same holds true for our verse, and the longing and yearning expressed therein.

⁴³ *Bereishis* 17:1.

⁴⁴ *Nedarim* 32a.

⁴⁵ *Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 4.

⁴⁶ Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 30, p. 44ff; *Sichos Kodesh* 5734, Vol. 2, p. 396.

The soul descends in this world for the sake of a subsequent even higher upward ascent than it enjoyed prior to its initial descent. This ascent, an ascent from below to above, which involves leaving its earthbound existence and becoming incorporated within G-dliness, takes place during prayer.

Thus the *Baal Shem Tov* states⁴⁷ that the fact that a person is still alive after praying is entirely unnatural; the person's great intentions during prayer should have brought the person to *kalos hanefesh*, the "expiration of his soul." The fact that the person is still alive after praying is a result of G-d's great kindness.

It is therefore related about various *tzaddikim* that before commencing their prayers, they would take leave of their families, since they were unsure whether their souls would actually return to their bodies following the prayers. The *Baal Shem Tov*, himself, expressed his doubts about whether his soul would return to his body after prayer, as a result of his *kalos hanefesh* during prayer.⁴⁸

The reason why these intentions during prayer naturally lead to *kalos hanefesh* is because of the above: Prayer involves the soul's elevation, losing its self-identity and becoming completely subsumed in G-dliness, similar to a sacrificial offering – whose place is presently substituted by prayer⁴⁹ – which was entirely consumed in the heavenly fire that rested upon the altar.⁵⁰

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Verse 89

Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the heavens.

The Alter Rebbe states at the beginning of his *Shaar HaYichud VahaEmunah*,⁵¹ that the *Baal Shem Tov* explains this verse, elucidating that it means that the utterance "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters..." these very words and letters through which the heavens were created, stand firmly forever within the firmament of heaven and are forever clothed within all the heavens to give them life, For if the creative letters were to depart even for an instant, G-d forbid, all the heavens would become naught and absolute nothingness, and it would be as though they had never existed at all.

He goes on to state that the same is so regarding all created beings: if the letters of the Ten Utterances by which the earth was created during the Six Days of Creation were to depart from

⁴⁷ *Tzava'as HaRivash*, Section 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* and section 42.

⁴⁹ See *Likkutei Torah*, Pinchas 78a.

⁵⁰ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 374; *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 18, p. 159.

⁵¹ P. 76b.

them for but an instant, it would revert to naught and absolute nothingness, exactly as before the Six Days of Creation.

However, this gives rise to the following question: Since the letters and words must constantly be found in all of creation in order for them to continue to exist, why did David state, “Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the *heavens*,” when he should have stated “Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in *all of creation*”?

Although we may posit that David is referring to the expression used to create the heavens, but this does not answer the main question – since this is true of all of creation, not only of the heavens, why single out the heavens?

The answer lies in David’s usage of the term “stands firm,” which implies that it stands in a manner that firmly reveals G-d’s creative power.⁵² This revelatory aspect of G-d’s creative word – “stand firm” – is much more readily observed in the heavens, for their prayerful movement in a westward direction⁵³ and their singular unvarying, relentless existence⁵⁴ readily points to G-d’s creative force within them. This is not at all the case with earthly beings. There, not only is G-d’s creative force not readily discernible, but they may even serve to conceal G-dliness.⁵⁵

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Verse 98

Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

A more literal translations of the verse would read: “Make me wiser *from* my enemies” – that is, from the negative leanings that a person senses in his own undeveloped character traits, he can gain wisdom and know how to tackle his tasks of self-refinement, and how to harness his personal strengths to G-d’s service.

The animal soul mimics the G-dly soul like an ape mimics a man. According to this teaching, there is a correspondence between the undesirable elements of the animal soul and the positive potential of the G-dly soul. By candidly recognizing our faults, we can also understand the proper direction that our Divine service must take.

Moreover, an individual can learn to identify his main personal mission in life by noting which one of his tasks encounters the most challenging obstacles. The explanation is that since this

⁵² See also *Yahel Or*, on this verse.

⁵³ See *Bava Basra* 25a-b.

⁵⁴ See *Akeidas Yitzchak, Bo*, Section 38.

⁵⁵ Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 39, pp.212-213.

particular task is his unique mission, the Evil Inclination works overtime to obstruct its successful fulfillment.⁵⁶

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Verse 105

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light to my path.

The *Rambam*, cites our verse and explains it thusly:⁵⁷ “The *mitzvos* in and of themselves are not worthy of honor. Instead, honor is due G-d, blessed be He, who commanded us to observe them and [thereby] saved us from groping in darkness and thus granted us a lamp to straighten those who go on crooked paths and a light to illumine the upright ways.”

Seemingly, since G-d created the world in the most complete manner, how it is at all possible that there be “those who go on crooked paths”? But that is the very theme of *creation* – that G-d created the world in a manner that we are enjoined to rectify it.⁵⁸ By doing so “we partner with G-d in the act of creation”⁵⁹ and enjoy the fruits of our labors, rather than it being handed to us on a silver platter, without exerting effort or toil and merely eating “bread of shame,” an unearned reward.

We “straighten the crooked” through our service of Torah and *mitzvos*, which are a “lamp” and “illumination,” “a lamp to my feet and light for my paths,” so that we may follow along the righteous path of Torah and *mitzvos*. We begin small, with a mere “lamp,” but then continually increase the measure of light and illumination, until we illumine the world with the brilliant light of the sun, illuminating the entire world with a massive degree of holiness.

Moreover, we not only illuminate our lofty levels of “heads,” but even the lowly levels of “feet.” Furthermore, we accomplish this task not only with regard to broad roads and highways, but even the small, narrow paths are illumined with the greatest measure of light. Empowered by the light of G-d’s “words”, we thus fulfill our task of transforming the world into a permanent dwelling for G-d’s very essence.⁶⁰

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⁵⁶ Adapted from *Hayom Yom*, Nissan 8; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 2, p. 347.

⁵⁷ Conclusion of the Laws of *Shechitah* and the Order of *Kedusha*.

⁵⁸ See *Bereishis Rabbah*, 11:6.

⁵⁹ *Shabbos* 10a.

⁶⁰ Adapted from *Sefer HaSichos 5747*, Vol. 2, pp. 417-418.

Verse 117

Sustain me, and I will be saved, and I will be forever be engrossed in Your statutes.

The verse has been interpreted according to the *Metzudas David*, who explains this verse in this manner: When You will sustain me, I will surely be able to rely on You and will surely be delivered from my travails.⁶¹

The verse, however, is in no way indicating that we are to sit with folded hands and simply rely on G-d to take care of our needs, or to extricate us from a particularly knotty situation. We must do all that we can on our own behalf, while maintaining our trust in G-d that He will surely assist us in our endeavors.

The *Rebbe Rayatz* explains⁶² in a similar manner the passage at the conclusion of the Tractate *Sotah*, where the *Gemara* states numerous travails that may occur prior to Moshiach's arrival, and that "We have no one to rely on, except for our Father in Heaven."⁶³

At first glance this passage is very puzzling: What can be better than relying on our Father in Heaven; why does the *Gemara* seem to be saying that "We have no one to rely on, except for our Father in Heaven" is part of the problem?

In point of fact, when someone says "I'm not going to do anything and just rely on my Father in Heaven," he is in fact going against the explicit desires of his Father in Heaven, for G-d truly desires for him to do whatever *he* can. Sitting with folded arms and stating in a tone of hopelessness and helplessness, "there is nothing at all that I can do, I can only rely on G-d," is thus itself one of the direst situations of exile.⁶⁴ We must do all we can, and G-d will surely deliver us.

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Verse 126

It is time to act for G-d; they have breached Your Torah.

In commenting on this verse, *Rashi* cites the statement of our Sages in the *Mishnah*⁶⁵ that at certain times it is necessary to abrogate the Torah for the sake of G-d. This is in keeping with

⁶¹ See also *Or HaTorah, Shir HaShirim*, p. 390, where the *Tzemach Tzedek* interprets this verse in a similar manner.

⁶² See *Sefer HaSichos* 5702, p. 17.

⁶³ *Sotah* 49a-b.

⁶⁴ Adapted from *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 12, p. 113; *Sichos Kodesh* 5730, Vol. 1, p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Berachos* 54a.

Rava's explanation in the *Gemara*⁶⁶ that this verse reads both forwards and backwards: "Now is the time to act for the sake of G-d, for they have abrogated your Torah," and, "Abrogate Torah for the sake of G-d."

This is to say, that in certain given situations a Jewish court is empowered to act in a novel manner as a *horoas sha'ah*,⁶⁷ a short-term manner of conduct, although acting in such a manner conflicts with the generally accepted principles and guidelines of the Torah.

The following question, however, arises: Since we are speaking of an instance that a certain action must be done "for the sake of G-d," Torah itself thus seems to be saying that such conduct is permitted; why, then, is this considered an abrogation of the Torah?

In truth, the ability for a Jewish court to act in this manner stems not from the Torah itself, but from the Jewish people, whose source above is even loftier than the source of Torah. They are therefore able to bring about novel aspects in the Torah – up to and including nullifying a Positive Commandment in a given instance⁶⁸ – because of the novelty that they bring to Torah.

Indeed, the very fact that Jews are able to reach a decisive Torah ruling, when from the perspective of Torah "both opinions are the words of the Living G-d,"⁶⁹ and nevertheless only one opinion is followed in Jewish law, stems from the fact that Jews are essentially even loftier than the Torah. They can therefore rule decisively, which of the different opinions is to be followed in actual practice.⁷⁰

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Verse 130

Your opening words illuminate, enlightening [even] the [most] simple.

According to the *Midrash*⁷¹ "Your opening words illuminate" refers to G-d's commencing His creation of the world with His creation of light. The *Midrash* offers the analogy of a king who desired to construct a palace in a dark location. His first action therefore was to light lamps and torches in order to see where to build the foundations.

G-d created this illumination immediately on the first day of creation, which is referred to in the Torah as "one day"⁷² – "the day when G-d was truly One in His world."⁷³ This empowered all

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 63a.

⁶⁷ See *Encyclopedia Talmudis* (Vol. 8), article on *Horoas Sha'ah* (p. 513ff) and sources cited there.

⁶⁸ *Rambam, Hilchos Mamrim* 2:4.

⁶⁹ *Eruvin* 13b.

⁷⁰ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer Hamaamarim* 5717, p. 27.

⁷¹ *Bereishis Rabbah*, opening of third section.

⁷² *Bereishis* 1:5.

the subsequent days, that they, too, be permeated with the feeling that “You were shown [G-d’s Divine revelation and illumination] so that you know that the L-rd is G-d; there is none else aside from Him.”⁷⁴

This knowledge enables us to serve Him in a comprehensively illuminating manner, with our very opening words already providing illumination. Thereby, we bring light into the world and succeed in revealing in all matters within the world the G-dliness they contain, up to and including G-d’s Essence. All this lies hidden within creation, and through our service we reveal the Divine Maker in all that He made, as the we state in our High Holiday prayers:⁷⁵ “May everything that has been made know that You have made it; everything that has been created understand that You have created it.”⁷⁶

נ

Verse 138

You commanded Your testimonies in righteousness and in great faithfulness.

In commenting on this verse, the *Midrash* states:⁷⁷ “G-d acted righteously with the Jewish people in giving them the Torah.” That is to say, that G-d’s giving us the Torah was not a result of our spiritual level, for Torah is so much loftier than that which can be attained by any created being. Rather, it was a righteous and kindly act on G-d’s part to gift us the Torah; He freely chose the Jewish people and gave them the Torah. Thus we state in our blessing over the Torah: “He chose us from among all the nations and gave us His Torah.”

True free choice only exists when one chooses between two things that are entirely equal; if one of them possess a quality that the other lacks, then it is not a choice that is freely made – the quality that one possesses and which the other does not compels the choice. The Jewish people, as descendents of the Patriarch Avraham, always possessed qualities that other nations were lacking, as the verse states regarding Avraham, “For I know that he will command his children and household after him, that they observe G-d’s way, to perform righteousness and justice.”⁷⁸ How then can it be said that G-d “freely” chose us?

In fact, if G-d simply desired a nation that would “perform righteousness and justice,” then free choice would not have been involved. However, G-d desired Torah’s essence, as it is drawn from His Essence, and on this level man’s service holds no truck, and all the nations are equal in His

⁷³ *Bereishis Rabbah* 3:8.

⁷⁴ *Devarim* 4:35.

⁷⁵ In the *Amidah*.

⁷⁶ Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 39, p. 289; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5745, p. 9.

⁷⁷ *Midrash Tehillim* on this verse.

⁷⁸ *Bereishis* 18:19.

eyes. His choosing us from among all the nations was truly a matter of free choice. After having chosen us, “G-d acted righteously with us in giving us the Torah” on this truly lofty and essential level of Torah.⁷⁹

ק

Verse 150

Those who pursue licentiousness draw ever closer; they are far from Your Torah.

One should endeavor to learn life’s lessons from all, even those whose behavior is entirely unbecoming. *Maggidim* would sometimes interpret the above verse in the following manner: Those who pursue licentiousness and deny Jewish law draw near to one another, i.e., they unite in their common desires and march in lockstep. However, when it comes to “Your Torah,” i.e., those who are Torah observers, special effort is required to bring them to a state of unity and cohesion.

In a situation where we observe that disparate entities all band together, notwithstanding internal differences, to act in a spirit of unity against the dictates of Torah, it behooves us all to come together to protect and fortify “Your Torah,” in a spirit of commonality and harmony.

Standing together to protect the laws of the “Torah of Truth,” will surely serve to defeat those who join together to, Heaven forbid, disrupt the Torah. The truth of Torah will then surely prevail.⁸⁰

ך

Verse 156

Your mercies are abundant, O G-d; grant me life as is Your practice (כמשפטיך).

The Alter Rebbe explains the above verse in the following manner:⁸¹ When we draw down the level of G-d’s abundant mercies (and not merely the customary degree of Divine mercy), we merit that even in times of justice and severity (משפט), we still merit to be granted life.

⁷⁹ Adapted from *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 38, pp. 186-187.

⁸⁰ Adapted from *Sichos Kodesh* 5738, Vol. 3, pp. 214-215.

⁸¹ *Likkutei Torah, Eikev*, 14a.

The explanation: As the quality of mercy filters down through the chain of descent of the worlds, it is possible that the ordinary level of mercy be countered by the attribute of justice. This is particularly so, when there is justification for demanding strict justice since the person's behavior may well be wanting. In such an instance the ordinary measure of mercy does not suffice. At that time G-d's abundance mercies, i.e. the quality of G-d's mercy is required, the attribute of mercy that completely transcends the chain of descent of the worlds.

This loftier level of mercy has no limitations and can be drawn down below, even to the lowest level, thereby bringing about that even in times of justice and severity (משפט), we still merit to be granted abundant life through His abundant and transcendent mercies.

This is also why *Techiyas HaMeisim*, the Revival of the Dead, is something that will occur as a result of G-d's abundant mercies – “He resurrects the dead with *manifold* mercies”⁸² – for at that level death and life are exactly the same, and thus, even the dead are able to come alive.⁸³

ז

Those who love Your Torah will enjoy abundant peace and there will be no obstacles for them.

Asks the *Rebbe RaYatz*:⁸⁴ What is the meaning of “abundant peace,” which seems to imply that there are two degrees of peace, “normal peace” and “abundant peace.” Moreover, the verse should seemingly state, “Abundant peace to those who *study* Your Torah,” for Torah is an intellectual pursuit and more closely related to study than to love?

He explains that “those who love Your Torah” refers to those individuals who love Torah not because of the intellectual enjoyment that they derive from its study, but because it is *Your* Torah, it is G-d's Torah. Torah study that lacks this degree of love only draws down a nominal degree of peace; only those who truly love G-d and consequently love His Torah as well are able to draw down “abundant peace.”

This degree of love is accomplished through prayer, for the main aspect and service of prayer is one's striving to attain a love of G-d.⁸⁵ This is also the explanation⁸⁶ of the request of the Sage, Abba Binyamin, that “his prayer be in proximity to his bed,”⁸⁷ i.e., that his Torah study follow his prayers, and thus they will be able to be in keeping with the goal of prayer, achieving a love for G-d. Having accomplished this love for G-d in prayer, he could then translate this love to His

⁸² Text of the *Amidah*.

⁸³ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer Hamaamarim* 5717, p. 70ff; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 6, p. 84.

⁸⁴ *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5704, p. 72.

⁸⁵ See *Zohar* II, 55b; III, 267a.

⁸⁶ See *Likkutei Torah, Berachah* 96b.

⁸⁷ *Berachos* 5b.

Torah study, learning and loving Torah not because of its intellectual stimulus, but because of his love of G-d, the Giver of the Torah.⁸⁸

ן

My tongue will echo Your word, for all Your commandments are righteous.

Torah study in the form of “echoing G-d’s words,” similar to the manner of “repeating after the reader,”⁸⁹ is the highest form of Torah study.

There is a lofty manner of Torah study, wherein “Whoever reads [the Written Torah] and studies [the Oral Torah,] G-d faces him and reads opposite him.”⁹⁰ While this is indeed an elevated manner of Torah study, nevertheless, He and the A-mighty remain two distinct entities, with G-d “opposite” him.

When, however, one merely echoes G-d’s words, he is so subsumed in G-dliness that he completely loses his self-identity with his words, coming as they were, of themselves. When He does this, he draws down G-d’s very Essence, just as it was revealed at the time He gave us the Torah.⁹¹

When one studies Torah in this manner, he veritably recreates the Sinai experience – just as then the Jews were filled with “fear and awe, trembling and sweating,” so, too, now when he studies Torah these same emotions will envelop him. For when he studies Torah in this manner, G-d is saying these very words, exactly in the manner that He said them at the time He gave us the Torah on Sinai.⁹²

⁸⁸ Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 152ff.

⁸⁹ After *Sukkah* 38b.

⁹⁰ See *Tanna d’Vei Eliyahu Rabbah*, beginning of ch. 18; *Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah, Remez* 1034.

⁹¹ See *Likkutei Torah, Pekudei*, 6a.

⁹² Adapted from *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 419; *Toras Menachem, Sefer Hamaamarim* 5718, p. 235.