

And These Words Shall Be Upon Your Hearts

How To Actualize the Shema Yisrael

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Isn't the human mind an amazing thing? We can think of such brilliant thoughts and yet, at the very same time be so downright stupid and act in total contradiction to those brilliant thoughts that we know are so right.

How is this? How is it that we can rise so high in the domain of thinking and yet sink so low in the domain of activity? There is obviously some kind of disconnection here. Something is blocking us from living in accordance to all the dreams and lofty ideals that we so readily hold in our minds.

Now, let's be realistic here. It is an insult to honesty and our own self worth to blame our problems on others or on whatever other outside sources. This disconnection between what we know and what we do also exists inside us. Unless we turn inside to look and see where the broken connection is, we will never be able to fix it.

In my opinion all of life is one big long "school day." Every moment and every circumstance is a learning opportunity. Yet, acquiring information is one thing, knowing what to do with it is another. I think this is where our inner disconnection begins. Having a dream about how things can be better is one thing. Having the plan in all its gritty details how to materialize the dream is another. And it is in the details where success or failure are found. It is not enough to think or dream, it is even not even to merely act upon one's thoughts or dreams. One has to have a plan, not just a good plan, but the absolutely right plan, the one that will address the right issues in the right way and at the right time. Without this even the "best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry."

Planning is one thing, but from the surface of it, planning appears to be a drawn out process of thinking. Most will say that one has to think oneself through the plan clearly and precisely. Yet, as life itself has all too often shown us, even the best of such thought-out plans "go awry." If such is the case, then what is the right way to make and then implement the right plan? To answer this I will take us into the words of Torah.

"And these words that I command you this day shall be upon your hearts" (Deut 6:6). These words were spoken by Moses and are an essential part of the famous Shema Yisrael prayer which consists of the recitation of Deut. 6:4-9. Prior to these words Moses commanded the Israelite people saying, "you shall love HaShem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your wealth (Deut. 6:4)." There is a consistency here that sheds light on the questions above. For in both of these statements, Moses never once mentions the mind or thought. On the contrary, in both he only mentions that one ingredient which today we find so neglected. I speak of "the heart."

Having information and processing knowledge are two totally different things. They have always been separate and different. One can have a million dollars in the bank and still starve to death. Not only must one have the money, one must also know to use it and to use it wisely and properly. Knowledge is no different. Unless one knows how to use it, knowledge is a useless compilation of theoretical information without any real practical and relevant applications.

Without such relevant applications, theoretical knowledge gives rise to idealism, of thoughts how things should be, instead of how they really are. Without understanding how to properly and practically put theory into practice, idealistic ideas become elitist, chauvinistic, restrictive and ultimately repressive. Knowledge without the heart to temper, refine and apply it humanely is stale, barren and impotent. One possessing such detached knowledge lives within the confining bubble of one's own ideas and ideals, detached from the reality and actual concerns, problems and lives of everyone else. Knowledge that is not "heart-tempered" can be the single most danger to human civilization and freedoms because it leads one to act outside the contexts of reality, thus creating much confusion and chaos.

For this reason does G-d command that His Words be placed upon the heart. In other words, all knowledge of Torah and everything else is never meant to be a mere academic, intellectual memorization of facts or figures from the page or pages of a book. Such information is dry, impotent and ultimately useless. This is why for example, the Written Torah is completely subject to misunderstanding without the Oral Torah which accompanies it. One explains the other and without the Oral, the Written remains subject to countless misunderstandings due to a lack of true knowledge and understanding of what the Biblical text is actually based upon.

When we talk about the heart, we are not talking about the physical organ in one's chest and neither are we talking about human emotions. In Torah literature (T.Z. hak.), the heart is the seat of knowledge, as it is written, "binah liba u'ba halev mevin" (understanding is of the heart, for the heart understands). The heart therefore is a metaphor for a deeper type of knowledge, one that is experiential, personal and internalized. This is why the Bible uses the verb "to know" to describe sexual intercourse. Spiritual bonding is like physical bonding in that there is a complete union of both, body and soul. One connects both externally and internally. This understanding is crucial in understanding all Biblical ordinances with regards to sexual practices.

Real knowledge arises from within. It is mirrored by external circumstance, and thus validated, but never is knowledge external and detached. Knowledge from the outside that is not mirrored and reflected by knowledge arising up from within the soul is no true knowledge at all. One may have facts of information but one has no true knowledge of what those facts actually mean and how they are to be properly applied. For this one needs the heart, a heart that loves G-d completely and one that has the Word of G-d properly sealed upon it, as the above verses from Deuteronomy command.

Religion today has for the most part become a boring academic by-rote exercise. Many turn to it in hope of finding meaning and answers to life's dilemmas. Many adopt all the external forms and by doing so consider themselves also attached to the internal forms related to the heart. However, in reality they have absolutely no awareness of what the inner forms actually are. They also lack any sense of personal experience of the inner forms thus perpetuating a false belief as to what the inner forms are and how they are recognized by those that actually do experience them.

The true inner form of religion is not an emotional high. The true inner form of religion has little if any emotional component to it. As we have already learned, true religion arises out of one's inner depths, out of one's unconscious, the source and seat of the Biblical heart. This is an

intuitive state of knowledge that transcends both intellect and emotions. Therefore those who mistakenly consider an emotional response to religion to be an expression of the Biblical heart are simply misguided in their understanding. Religion by emotion is no religion at all.

Many who turn to religion embrace it in automaton fashion. They play follow the leader. They blindly follow what their religious authorities say and have surrendered the great human ability of independent thought and free choice. For these religious, it is always easier and spiritually safer not to think for oneself because such independent thinking can lead one to doubt. Doubt can lead to dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction can lead to wandering. Wandering can lead to inquiry. Inquiry can lead to discovery. Discovery can lead to revelation. Revelation can lead to heart-felt need for change. Heart-felt need for change can lead to motivated action directed at challenging the stagnant status quo.

Such challenges are feared by those in power (in all religious and secular circles) and therefore in order to avoid such challenges, they are stymied and cut off from the start. The masses are taught to exclusively use their rational intellect and to divest from any emotional, intuitive or psychic foundation for making decisions. Do what makes sense we are told. Yet, at the same time, what is seen to make sense depends entirely upon one's personal point of view.

Remember, Nazism seemed rational and right to the Germans and Fascism under Stalin seemed logical and true to the Communists. The human mind without the heart to guide it can make anything, however perverted and evil, to appear rational and right. Thus the rational intellect, without a foundational moral compass can be steered in any direction and manipulated to justify and rationalize any atrocity. Immoral leaders therefore steer their followers and control what they see, hear and believe and thus control how they act.

Those who do not know how to look inward cannot see any of this. They will claim it is all illogical and thus unreal and unimportant. Those who lack the ability to look within and to know their own hearts cannot see anything intuitive and thus they cannot say anything of internalized value. Those who lack heart cannot speak up and address issues. They are molded by the powers that be to become docile. They remain silent, remain quiet and remain mentally imprisoned. They are thus easily controlled. This mental state is symbolically called "the Egyptian exile."

In this mental state, religious bureaucracy sets it, and the experiential vibrancy of true spirituality is stifled, if not outright killed. This is a crime against the soul, against Heaven and against G-d. This is why Moses, who commanded us about the importance of the heart, first spoke to Pharaoh in Egypt and said, "thus says HaShem, G-d of Israel, let my people go."

Without the heart as the center of true religion, there is no Torah. Without Torah there is no life. Without life, there is no real living. Without heart at the center of a Torah life, one is mentally cast back into slavery in ancient Egypt. Exile always exists first in the mind before it leads to the imprisonment of the body. Religious expression today can be as much of a prison as Egypt was in ancient times.

This is why we see so many religious people today embracing traditions that celebrate darkness, depression and repression. They are imprisoned in a mental prison similar to ancient Egypt. They have no idea of the harm that they do to themselves and how far from true Torah they have wandered. Yet, as long as their brilliant academic minds can think, they convince themselves that they are doing the very Will of G-d and living by every word of Torah even though as can be clearly seen by anyone with eyes in their heads, that such claims are as shallow as the the ones who claim them and embrace them. Exile is a state of deception as much as it is a prison.

Moses commanded all of Israel saying, “these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts.” He did not say that such words shall be “upon your minds” or “within your thoughts.” In the previous verse, he did not command Israel to “love G-d with all your minds or thoughts.” In each of these commandments, the heart is emphasized. The heart is not symbolic of one's emotions, but rather of the deepest sense of internal knowing. The heart represents the unconscious. As such, the unconscious is experienced as awareness of it arises from within. Unconscious content is experienced as psychic, intuitive and even clairvoyant awareness of true experiential knowledge, not received from external sources. This alone is Living Torah.

Communing with one's heart does not mean to “get in touch” with one's feelings. For emotions are symbolically compared to water. They rise up and down like the tides and they can freeze like ice or heat up like steam. They have no stable form whatsoever. Therefore no stable foundation can be established upon them. Emotions help to motivate us but such motivation must be focused and not left undirected. Otherwise, undisciplined and out of control emotions can lead people into terrible personal disasters. Indeed, equally bad to the one who lives by intellect alone is the one who allows oneself to be dominated by how one feels. The intellectual, without heart, has no moral compass. The emotional, without intellect have no clarity or direction.

The heart is the seat of the soul. As such, we can refer to the heart as the spirit. A heart-felt connection is the only true connection. Yet, a heart-felt connection by definition must transcend and go beyond both intellect and emotions. A heart-felt connection does not depend upon what you know in your head or what you feel emotionally. Neither of these matter. What does matter is that there is this undefinable inner sense of knowing. Deep within, one is at peace and is calm, for one has internal recognition that one's inner moral compass is guiding one's path through life. With the inner guide firmly entrenched, one never gets lost. Yet, the contrary unfortunately is also true. Without the inner guide no one will ever find their proper path through life. Such a loss of self to self, in my opinion, is the worst form of exile and self abuse.

This is why we are commanded to love G-d with all our hearts. We have to first know our own hearts in order to love G-d with them. Then we can place G-d's Words upon our hearts and internally become aware of the Living Torah, alive and breathing inside of us, directing our every move. This is the state of bonding with G-d, itself a commandment of the Torah.

In this state of true heart-bonding with G-d, we can then teach these things intuitively to our children and naturally speak of them in our homes and when we are out and about. In this “heart” state, G-d is seen everywhere, in everything and at all times. This inner awareness imbues us from when we awake in the morning until we lie down to sleep at night. Even then, the bonded soul sees G-d in one's dreams.

In this state of union with G-d, our external ritual forms of bonding mentioned in the continuing verses of the Shema Yisrael, the Tefilin and Mezuzot are internalized and become an integral part of our psychology. In this way, everyone, male and female gets to “wear” Tefilin, the best and true inner kind, never ever having to remove them. The inner bond is the key to this. This is the underlying meaning to the symbolic statement made by our Sages in the Talmud (Berakhot 6a) that even G-d wears Tefilin, to signify the bond of unity that Heaven has with us.

The words of G-d are written upon the gates of our hearts and the doorposts of our souls. The Words speak up from within us, not in the form of an audible voice, but rather as “the soft, still voice” heard by Eliyahu HaNavi. This is the perceived in the form of inner conviction, intuitive knowing and psychic awareness. This is the inner moral compass, the “voice” of Living Torah residing within. For us, it is almost close to the state of prophecy.

So, when you recite the words of the Shema Yisrael (Deut. 6:4-9), rather than just mumble them by rote as has become so common, instead, take a moment and consider how best you can actually internalize this immortal message and transform it into something alive and vibrant inside yourself. G-d is already in your heart. All you need to do is unleash Him. Allow Heavenly reality to flow through you with complete abandon and you will see (from within) the powerful bond that this brings.

“And Adam knew his wife Eve (Gen. 4:1).” With equal knowledge and heart must we “know” Heaven. For in doing so, will be bond with G-d and truly experience His Absolute unity and understand what this means and why it is so important. More than this, as we discover G-d, we will also come to discover our Selves.

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