

You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart... And these words... shall be upon your heart. (6:5,6)

The *pasuk* tells us that one should love Hashem with all of his heart. This is followed by the admonition to place “these words” on one’s heart. A connection must exist between the two “hearts” mentioned. The *Sifri* asks how does one manifest his love for Hashem? The Almighty is not a mortal. He has no corporeality. How does one experience this sense of love? *Chazal* answer that the key lies in the words, *V'hayu ha'devarim ha'eileh... al l'vavecha*, “And these words ... shall be upon your heart.” By inscribing Hashem’s words on our heart, we come to recognize, acknowledge and appreciate the One Who brought this entire world into existence.

In his inimitable manner, the *Maggid, zl, m'Dubno*, explains this with a parable. A villager who was far-removed from anything cultural visited a large metropolis shortly before *Yom Tov*. He figured that with the Festival quickly approaching, he might as well purchase a new set of clothes in honor of the holiday. The villager came to the tailor shop dressed in his heavy wool clothing, which was the trademark of the villager of those days. Indeed, when the villager donned his daily clothes, he appeared to have put on a few pounds.

Upon entering the haberdashery shop, the villager was overwhelmed with the selection of suits in various shades and sizes. The salesman, of course, was proficient in his vocation; and immediately selected the correct size from the rack. The villager went into the dressing room to try on his new suit. Alas, he had great difficulty getting on the pants. Finally, when the pants were on, he attempted to put on the jacket, but it was to no avail. In the process, he had almost ripped the seams on the new garment. The fellow left the dressing room hurling insults at the salesman. “What kind of salesman are you?” he screamed. “You told me that this was my size. Look at the suit; it is almost torn to pieces from my attempt to put it on!”

The salesman looked at the villager and began to laugh. This did not sit well with the prospective customer. First, the man had given him the wrong size, and now, he was laughing at him. The salesman explained: “The suit size I selected for you is the correct size. The problem is that you forgot to remove your heavy wool clothes before trying on the suit. The new suit will replace your ‘village’ clothes. Remove your wool shirt and heavy wool pants, and you will immediately see how well the suit fits you!”

The *Maggid* explains that man is very much like the villager who forgot to remove his thick wool clothes. We are weighed down with character traits that take their toll on our personality and actions. We are filled with envy, obsessed with lust, and constantly seeking honor. *Middos*, character traits, are much like the clothing we wear. They define us, creating our image. A Torah scholar whose connection with the Torah is absolute and all-encompassing is able to “change his clothes,” rid himself of the evil character traits that bog him down, and focus instead on refining his character traits. He exchanges arrogance for humility, lust for satisfaction, envy for dignity and self-

respect. He realizes that unless he removes the “old clothes,” the defective *middos*, he will not succeed in donning those *middos* which are essential for spiritual growth.

The *Sifri* asks a question: “How does one love Hashem?” The Torah teaches us, *V'hayu ha'devarim... al l'vavecha*, “These words... shall be placed upon your heart.” Place them on your heart, and remove the spiritual dross that covers your heart. Take off the old clothing, so that the Torah can be placed directly upon your heart. Now, you will see how the Torah fits you perfectly. This is how one learns to love Hashem. A heart filled and overloaded with *middos ra'os*, defective character traits, does not know how to love Hashem, since it is too involved in its own self-love. Purge yourself of the dross, so that the Torah can “fit” where it belongs.

In this sense, *b'chol l'vavcha*, “with all your heart,” means that nothing should come between your heart and Hashem. Perhaps we may offer the following alternative approach: The story is told about a young *yeshivah* student who longed to meet the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah scholar, the *Chafetz Chaim*. He saved his money and took the train to Vilna. Upon arriving, he switched his mode of transport to a wagon and driver who took him to the small town of Radin, home of the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*.

It was the middle of a very cold night when the *bachur*, young man, arrived in Radin. There was no cab service to speak of, so he began to walk through the Jewish neighborhood hoping he would find someone who could put him up for the night. Luckily, he chanced upon a middle-aged man who, from external appearances, looked like a Torah scholar. “Can I help you, *Reb Yid?*” the man called to him. “Yes, I came to Radin to receive a blessing from the *Chafetz Chaim*,” the *bachur* replied. “Fine, I can help you. He is my father-in-law. Come, I will put you up for the night, and, in the morning, we will visit him.”

The *bachur* could not believe his incredible good fortune. Not only did he find a place to sleep, he now had access to the venerable sage whom he had come to visit. He quickly got into bed and covered himself from the cold that seeped through the walls of the house. As he was about to drift off to sleep, the exhausted *bachur* reminded himself that he had not yet *davened Maariv*, prayed the evening service. The *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, took over, convincing him that it was freezing in the house. He had finally come in from the cold and now lay beneath a warm blanket. Why not simply *daven* in bed? After all, *Maariv* was a *Tefillas reshus*, discretionary prayer. Under normal circumstances he would never consider such behavior, but it was so cold, and he was so tired. Why not – just this one time?

The *yetzer hara's* guile worked, because two minutes after he began *davening*, he was fast asleep. The next morning, he was up bright and early. After *davening* and eating breakfast, the *bachur* – accompanied by the *Chafetz Chaim's* son-in-law – went to visit the sage. The *Chafetz Chaim* was quite old and weak. At that moment, he was lying in bed, his face turned to the wall. His son-in-law motioned to the *bachur* to approach the bed, as he explained to the sage the reason for the *bachur's* visit.

The *Chafetz Chaim* listened, but did not turn his head to face the *bachur*. His eyes were still on the wall. Apparently, he did not feel it prudent to turn toward the *bachur*. At first, the sage did not respond to his son-in-law's request that he confer with the *bachur*. Instead, the *Chafetz Chaim* said: "Veritably, *Maariv* is a discretionary prayer. Yet, we are all aware that if one is caught stealing, he must pay back what he has stolen. In addition, he might be fined considerably. If one perpetrates an act of theft during a period of war, he will most likely be executed. This is a time of heightened anxiety in which discipline is critical to maintaining the basic structure of the community. Tolerance is extremely limited during wartime. They shoot first and ask questions later. Our present period in time is considered a spiritual war-zone; thus, it demands greater vigilance and adherence to Torah and *mitzvos*. Excuses cannot be accepted. One who transgresses a Rabbinic decree is liable to suffer the penalty of death!"

When the *bachur* heard this, he burst into tears. After a few moments of bitter weeping, he said to the *Chafetz Chaim*, "I accept upon myself to repent, perform *teshuvah*. I will never again transgress a Rabbinic decree." The fear of death was palpable in the room as the *bachur*, amid trembling and a heavy heart, asked the *Chafetz Chaim* to countenance him favorably. The sage turned around and blessed him.

This is an intriguing story which teaches us a powerful lesson. When we live in a spiritual war-zone, we must exert greater vigilance and manifest even greater meticulous observance of Torah and *mitzvos*. This is what *b'chol levavcha* is teaching us. One who loves Hashem with all of his heart understands that he can brook no compromise, allow no laxity, leave no room for error concerning his relationship with the Almighty.