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וְאֶתְחַנַּן
Va'ethanan

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מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- Moshe continues his speech to Benei Yisrael. He talks about how he begged God to let him enter Eretz Yisrael. God said he could not, but God allowed him to see the land from a distance.
- Moshe gives strong encouragement to the people to follow the Torah, and warns them that they could be kicked out of Eretz Yisrael if they worship idols. However, Moshe promises that God will never forget the בְּרִית (brit, covenant) with our ancestors, and Benei Yisrael can always return to God.
- God's revelation at הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai) was an inspiring experience. Moshe reminds the people of how powerful it felt and tells them the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת (Aseret Ha-Dibrot, Ten Commandments).
- The pesukim that form the first paragraph of Shema also appear in our parashah. They emphasize that we must love God and learn the words of the Torah wherever we go.
- Benei Yisrael must destroy the idols of the nations living in Eretz Canaan, and not marry people from these nations.



פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

Devarim 6:5

You shall love God your Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with everything you have.

דברים ו:ה

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדֶךָ׃

This pasuk is hard to understand because it seems to be commanding us to feel something! Can the Torah really require us to experience a certain emotion, like loving God? What are some ways to fulfill this mitzvah?

Here are three different ways to understand it.



1 Rashi thinks we're being told to have a certain attitude while performing all mitzvot.

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

Do what God says out of love. Someone who acts because of fear is nothing like someone who acts because of love.

רש"י

עֲשֵׂה דְּבָרָיו מֵאַהֲבָה. אֵינוֹ דּוֹמֶה הָעוֹשֶׂה מִיִּרְאָה לְעֹשֶׂה מֵאַהֲבָה.

According to Rashi, the Torah is teaching us how to do mitzvot. It's better to do them out of loving God rather than out of fear of getting punished.

- Why is it better to do mitzvot because you love God, rather than because you're afraid of getting punished?
- What's something you do out of love? What's something you do just to avoid getting in trouble? How are those different?
- According to Rashi, is the Torah commanding a certain feeling, or is it something else? How can you get yourself to do mitzvot out of love?



2 According to Abaye in the Gemara, the mitzvah is to get other people to love God through the way you do mitzvot.

Talmud Bavli Yoma 86a

The Name of Heaven should become loved through your actions. If you learn Torah really well and spend time with Torah scholars, and then you deal nicely with other people—what will other people say about you? They will say, "Happy is your parent or rabbi who taught you Torah!.. See how nice are the ways of the Torah and how upright are its actions!"

תלמוד בבלי יומא דף פו עמוד א

שֶׁיְּהֵא שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם מִתְאַהֵב עַל יָדְךָ. שֶׁיְּהֵא קוֹרֵא וְשׁוֹנֶה וּמְשַׁמֵּשׁ תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים, וְיִהֵא מַשָּׂאוֹ וּמַתָּנוֹ בְּנַחַת עִם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מָה הַבְּרִיּוֹת אוֹמְרוֹת עָלָיו— אַשְׁרֵי אָבִיו שֶׁלִּמְּדוֹ תּוֹרָה, אַשְׁרֵי רַבּוֹ שֶׁלִּמְּדוֹ תּוֹרָה!... רְאוּ כַּמָּה נָאִים דְּרָכָיו, כַּמָּה מְתוּקָנִים מַעֲשָׂיו.

When we show we love Torah and we're also really nice to people, then other people start to realize how amazing the Torah is. This can bring others close to God, and it creates a קִדּוּשׁ הַשֵּׁם (kiddush Hashem, sanctification of God's name).

- What's something you've done that you think might have caused others to love Torah or to love God more?
- Could you, at the same time, fulfill this mitzvah according to Rashi's understanding and according to the explanation in this Gemara? How?

3

Rambam (Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago)

It means thinking about and understanding God's mitzvot and statements and actions until we are able to understand God and get the greatest pleasure from that understanding. That is the love that is required.

רמב"ם ספר המצוות עשה ג'

וְזֶה שֶׁנַּחֲשֹׁב וְנִתְבּוֹנֵן בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמַאֲמָרָיו וּפְעֻלּוֹתָיו עַד שֶׁנַּשִּׂיגֵהוּ וְנֶהֱנֶה בְּהַשָּׂגָתוֹ בְּתַכְלִית הַהֲנָאָה, וְזֹאת הִיא הָאַהֲבָה הַמְחֻיֶּבֶת.

According to Rambam, we're not being commanded to just love God out of the blue, as if we can choose to love God or not. Instead, we're being commanded to do the kinds of things that will lead us to love God. And what leads to loving God? Getting to know God!





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Ok, so how do we get to know God? We do that by learning Torah, finding the deeper meaning of mitzvot, and trying to understand God's actions in the world. Rambam says that the more you do these things, the more you'll get to know God. And the more you know God, the more you'll love God.

- The people you love the most are usually the people you know the best. Why does getting to know someone really well help you learn to love them better?
- Why does Rambam make the connection between loving God and studying Torah?
- Look it up! According to Rambam, why might Devarim 6:6-7 come right after Devarim 6:5?
- Is Rambam's explanation more similar to Rashi's or the Gemara's?
- Can you think of other ways to explain the idea of how to love God?





דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיוּן • One-Minute Debate

Debate: Va'ethanan is the best parashah in the Torah.



How to play:



- Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.



Agree!

- It has so many classics: the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת (Aseret Ha-Dibrot, Ten Commandments) AND the Shema.
- It contains a parent-child conversation about יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם (yetziat Mitrayim, the exodus from Egypt) that is part of the Pesah Haggadah. The part about the wise child!
- It tells us all about God's love for us.

Disagree!

- You can't pick favorites! That would be like parents picking a favorite child. Impossible.
- Every single word of the Torah is equally important and precious. Even the lists of names are just as holy as the Aseret Ha-Dibrot.
- The parashiyot in Bereishit are way better. More stories.

aliyot:
1) Devarim 3:23 to 4:4
2) 4:5 to 4:40
3) 4:41 to 4:49
4) 5:1 to 5:18
5) 5:19 to 6:3
6) 6:4 to 6:25
7) 7:1 to 7:11

haftarah: Yeshayahu 40:1 to 40:26

שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.

Good luck!

1. Whom does Moshe blame for the fact that he cannot enter the land?
2. What are four things that an idol can't do?
3. What was the name of the עִיר מִקְלָט (ir miklat, city of refuge) in the territory of the tribe of Reuven?
4. What reward is connected to honoring your parents?
5. What do the people ask Moshe to do after they encounter God through fire?
6. What three parts of the body are mentioned in the first paragraph of the Shema?
7. How does the size of Benei Yisrael compare to the other nations?



8. Which pasuk in our parshah appears in the Aleinu prayer? (Hint: It's the last line of Aleinu's first paragraph.)
9. In our parashah, what is the Hebrew term for the Ten Commandments?
10. **From the haftarah:** Which words appear more than one time within the same pasuk?



* Look for the answers on page 8!

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הֲלָכָה • Halakhah

Devarim 5:18

Lo tahmod (do not desire) your neighbor's wife. Lo titaveh (do not desire) your neighbor's house, or their field, or their servant, or their animals, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

דברים ה:יח

וְלֹא תַחְמֹד אֵשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ
וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה בֵּית רֵעֶךָ
שָׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ שׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ
וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ׃

Is this another mitzvah about what to think or feel?!

Not according to Rambam!

Rambam (Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago)

If you desire a servant, a house, or utensils that belong to someone else, and then you put a lot of pressure on the owner until they give it to you, even if they sell it to you for a lot of money, you have violated "lo tahmod"....

If you desire a home, a wife, utensils, or anything else belonging to someone else, as soon as you plan in your heart about how you might possibly get it from them, and you convince yourself that you can get it, you have violated "lo titaveh."

משנה תורה לרמב"ם הלכות גזלה ואבדה א:ט-י

כָּל הַחוֹמֵד עַבְדּוֹ אוֹ אֲמָתוֹ אוֹ בֵּיתוֹ וְכֵלָיו שֶׁל חֲבֵרוֹ אוֹ דָּבָר שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר לוֹ שֶׁיִּקְנֶה מִמֶּנּוּ וְהִכְבִּיר עָלָיו בְּרֵעִים וְהִפְצִיר בּוֹ עַד שֶׁלְּקָחוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁנָּתַן לוֹ דָּמִים רַבִּים הֲרֵי זֶה עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא תַחְמֹד" (שמות כ:יד, דברים ה:יח)....

כָּל הַמִּתְאַוֶּה בֵּיתוֹ אוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכֵלָיו שֶׁל חֲבֵרוֹ. וְכֵן כָּל הַיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן מִשְּׁאָר דְּבָרִים שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר לוֹ לִקְנוֹתָן מִמֶּנּוּ. כֵּיוָן שֶׁחָשַׁב בְּלִבּוֹ הֵיאַךְ יִקְנֶה דָּבָר זֶה וְנִפְתָּה בְּלִבּוֹ בַּדָּבָר עָבַר בְּלֹא תַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא תִתְאַוֶּה" (דברים ה:יח).

According to this, lo tahmod and lo titaveh are about actions, not feelings. Lo tahmod is about pressuring someone to give you something that's theirs, even if you pay for it. And lo titaveh is about making a plan to get something that belongs to someone else, even if you don't carry out the plan.

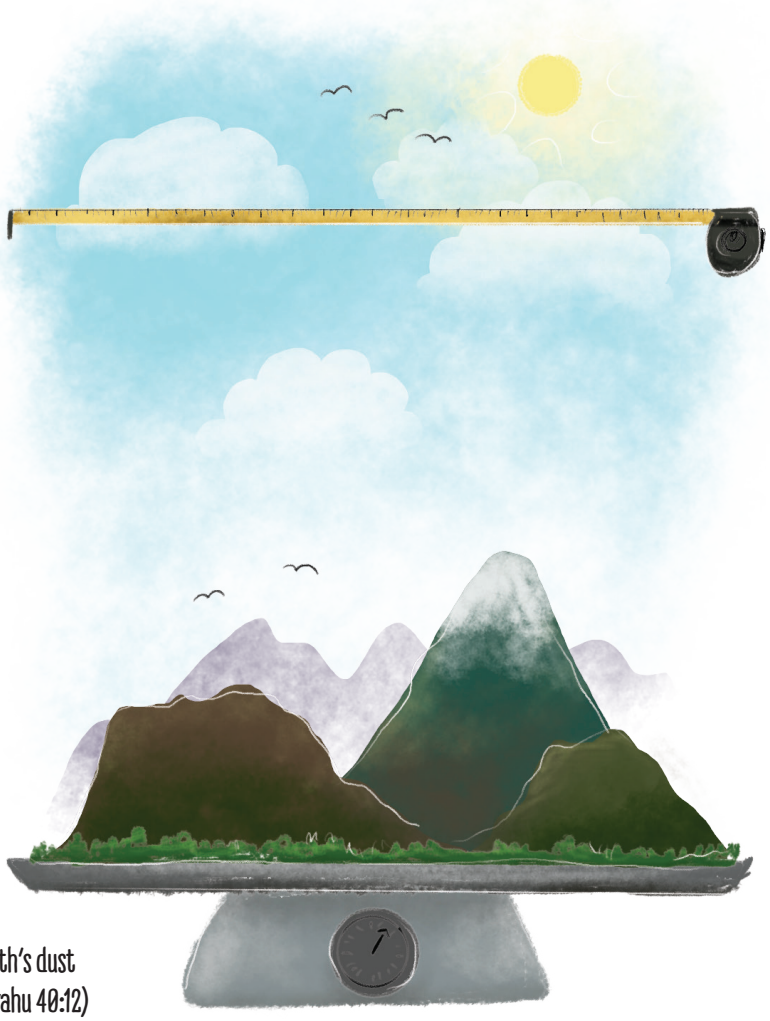
- What's the problem with these things? What's wrong with making a plan to take something if that plan is just in your head? And what's wrong with pressuring someone to sell something to you? If you pay them, isn't that fair?



- Have you ever felt pressured to give something to a friend, or to make a trade? What was that like?
- When you see cool stuff that other people have, what are some helpful things to say or think to yourself?



דִּקְדּוּק • Grammar



Earlier this year, we learned about a special vowel called קָמָץ קָטָן (kamatz katan). It looks like a kamatz (in the shape of a T), but it's pronounced "o," just like the vowel holam, which is related to it.

One of the most typical words to have a kamatz katan is the word כָּל (kol), meaning "all." Here it is three times in a row in our parashah:

בְּ**כָל**-לְבָבְךָ וּבְ**כָל**-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְ**כָל**-מְאֹדֶךָ

be**khol** levavekha, uve**khol** nafshekha, uve**khol** me'odekha

with all your heart, with all your soul, and with everything you have (Devarim 6:5)

But check out this phrase from this week's haftarah:

וְכָל בַּשְּׁלִשׁ עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ

And calculates the earth's dust with a measure (Yeshayahu 40:12)

If you read that first word quickly, you might think it is pronounced vekhol, the familiar word with a kamatz katan. But guess what? It's actually a regular kamatz!

How do you know? Well, the word כָּל only has a kamatz katan when it is joined to the next word with a makaf (dash) and looks like this: וכל־, like in the passage from the Shema above. Otherwise, it is written with a holam, and it looks like this: וְכֹל. So in this case, where the word has no makaf but does have a kamatz, it must be pronounced vekhal. And the word doesn't mean "all." It means "measures" or "figures out."

Keep looking for each kamatz katan, but don't get too eager—sometimes it really just is a regular kamatz!

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מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash



The name of our parashah, וָאֶתְחַנַּן (Va'ethanan), means "I begged" or "I prayed." It's talking about when Moshe prayed to God and begged for permission to go into Eretz Yisrael (Devarim 3:23-25).

God had decreed that Moshe wouldn't enter Eretz Yisrael (Bemidbar 14), and God even repeated this decision years later (Bemidbar 27). **So why does Moshe bother praying now? Was there any reason to think that God's mind would change?**

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

You began to show Your servant an opening for standing and praying even though the decree had been fixed. Moshe said to God: "I learned this from You. You said to me, 'And now leave Me alone'" (Shemot 32:10). Was I holding You back? You said this to open the door and teach me that it depended upon me to pray for them. And that's what I'm doing again now.

רש"י

אַתָּה הַחִלּוֹתָ לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ פֶּתַח, לִהְיוֹת עוֹמֵד וּמִתְפַּלֵּל אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁנִּגְזְרָה גְּזֵרָה. אָמַר לוֹ מִמְּךָ לָמַדְתִּי, שֶׁאָמַרְתָּ לִי "וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִי" (שמות לב) — וְכִי תּוֹפֵס הָיִיתִי בְּךָ? אֶלָּא לִפְתֹּחַ פֶּתַח, שֶׁבִּי הָיָה תָּלוּי לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ כֵן הָיִיתִי סָבוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת עַכְשָׁו.

After the חֵטְא הָעֵגֶל (heit ha-eigel, sin of the golden calf), God seemed to hint to Moshe that he should pray for the people, even though God had already decreed that they should be killed. So Moshe prayed, and it worked! They weren't destroyed. From this experience, Moshe understood that prayer always has the potential to change things, even when a situation might seem hopeless.

- Do you sometimes pray to God even when you aren't sure it will help, or you are pretty sure it won't? How does that feel?
- How does it feel to think that there's always a chance prayer could help?
- This time, Moshe doesn't get what he asks for (Look it up: Devarim 3:26-28). Do you think Moshe regretted his choice to try? If you pray for something and you don't get what you prayed for, would you be able to live with that? Why?

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. The people (3:26)
2. See, hear, eat, or smell (4:28)
3. Betzer (4:43)
4. A long life (5:16)
5. Make sure God stops talking to them! They want Moshe to speak to God alone, and pass along what he hears (5:22-24)
6. The heart (6:5-6), the arm, and the eyes (6:8)
7. Benei Yisrael are the smallest (7:7)
8. וְיָדַעְתָּ הַיּוֹם וַהֲשֵׁבֹתָ אֶל לְבָבֶךָ כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹקִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת אֵין עוֹד (Know today and keep in mind that God alone is Lord in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other) (4:39)
9. עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים (Aseret Ha-Devarim, the Ten Words or Statements) (4:13)
10. נַחֲמוּ (nahamu, comfort) in 40:1, כִּי (ki, for) in 40:2, כָּל (kol, all) in 40:4, וַיְלַמְּדֵהוּ (vi-yelamdehu, teaching them) in 40:14, הֵן (hein, they) in 40:15, אֵין דֵּי (ein dei, not enough) in 40:16, הֲלוֹא (ha-lo, do you not) in 40:21, אַף בַּל (af bal, hardly) in 40:24