

## **This Week in Torah V'etchanan**

What is it that gives you a sense of wholeness in your life?

It may not be ONE thing, but a combination of things. As I pondered this question—there were some scenarios that came to mind. For some, it is the sense of family—being together with ones that you love reenforces that sense of *shlemut* that we seek in the living of our days. For some, it is that sense of health that exudes an inner confidence of wholeness. Exercise and proper eating makes us feel good! For some, it is the intellectual sense of awareness that gives structure and order to one's being. Wholeness in that case is a directedness that inspires proper living. There are those who find wholeness in the spiritual realm—prayer, study, righteous living and meditation. The answer is allusive, there is no absolute—what gives each of us a sense of wholeness is personal and most likely a combination of things.

Our tradition understands this. Rabbi Avraham Azuli in his book *Chesed L'Avraham*, [a 17<sup>th</sup> century *Kabbalistic* text] wrote of knowing the different needs for the body and the soul. What may be essential for one, might be inaccurate for the other. He noted that being able to balance the 2 spheres of needs at appropriate times requires a clear intellect. The needs of the body and the needs of the soul might be similar such that they sometimes require a contradistinction to highlight the differences between them. Sometimes they conflict—in *Kabbalistic* thought the needs of the body are like the needs of the *kleipot* [the outer shell that hides away divine sparks]. Sometimes the body's desires will distract and take away from that of the soul's, leading someone to transgress and not live righteously.

This week in Torah, we read in Deuteronomy 4:1—“And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that [יהוה](#), the God of your fathers, is giving you.” The 12<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Rabbi Ibn Ezra defined the role of learning as the structure that will best ensure a happy life in the Promised Land. Torah is the blueprint for righteous living. Expanding on this, the Piltzer Rebbe [1848-1920] taught that knowing God's commands in advance will temper the desire of the body to wander in a lustful and destructive way. He believed through active engagement in learning, one can train the body to support the

needs of the soul. Gluttony, lustfulness, greed, jealousy, etc.—all can be tempered by an active intellectual engagement. Conscious and deliberate application enriches both the body and the soul. Please note that this verse is written as proactive, not a responsive way of living.

So—I quoted a 17<sup>th</sup> century sage and a 19<sup>th</sup> century Rebbe. Where does it leave us in 21<sup>st</sup> century? In a word—control. We can control aspects of our living to create that sense of *shlemut*/wholeness. Whether it is in the spiritual realm by invoking a blessing before we do, or choosing carefully what to eat and an exercise plan, or learning on how to do things before engaging in them, or studying God’s instructions so that a righteous path emerges before us to best give quality to our days. None of these will prevent the unexpected obstacles and challenges that occur in life, but it can strengthen our fortitude on how to deal with them.

“And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that [יהוה](#), the God of your fathers, is giving you.” Give heed. Be mindful. Live righteously.