

## Nitzvaim Dvar Torah, Rabbi David Mahler

Near the beginning of the first of this week's two *parshios*, we are told that - "*Ha'nistaros La'Hashem Elokeinu v'haniglos lanu u'levaneinu ad olam*. The hidden things are for *Hashem* our God, but the revealed are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah."

What are the hidden things and the revealed things that the *pasuk* refers to?

In a beautiful explanation, *Rashi* describes that this verse depicts the covenant the Jewish people have towards one another. *Kol yisrael areivim zah ba'zeh*, we are guarantors one for the other. *Ha'nistaros*, the hidden mistakes, the concealed indiscretions of a fellow Jew belong to God and we cannot be held accountable for his/her actions. However, *ha'niglos*, our fellow Jews' revealed errors and shortcomings are *lanu*, they "belong" to us and if not addressed, we are responsible, we are accountable for not doing more, for not helping, supporting, reaching out and spreading light.

An important and timely message.

However, *Rabbeinu Bachya* offers his own insight which puts forth, in my estimation, an even more prudent message.

*Rabbeinu Bachya*, the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish philosopher and commentator comes at the verse from a different perspective. He suggests that the *pasuk* is not referring to our relationship and responsibility with one another, but rather it addresses each of our own personal commitments to the performance of *mitzvos*.

"The hidden things are for *Hashem*" is a reference to the reasons, the purpose, the meanings, the "why" of *mitzvos*. We can conjecture, we can study, we can suggest, but in the end of the day, only *Hashem* knows the deeper purpose and reason for each *mitzvah* He has commanded us. *R' Bachya* continues to explain that while we can't definitively know the *ta'amei ha'mitzvos*, the reasons for the commandments, *ha'niglos lanu u'levaneinu*, that which is revealed - namely the charge to perform them - is incumbent upon us and our children. For *Rabbeinu Bachya*, the *pasuk* is there to tell us to leave the reasons to *Hashem* and focus on the performance, the actions.

*Rabbeinu Bachya* is highlighting the distinction between the world of thought and feeling and that of action.

Rabbi Berel Wein tells the following story:

A Rabbi in New York once told the story of the time he was returning from a trip. Needing a ride home from the airport, he called his son to confirm that he would pick him up after the long flight. "Abba, I really wish I could, but unfortunately, I can't." "Listen," he told his son, "I am counting on you for the ride so please do what you need to so you can pick me up." His son answered, "Abba, I love you so much, you are the most amazing Abba and you mean the world to me, and I couldn't possibly love you more, but I just can't pick you up." At that point, the Rabbi describes, he said to his son, "Moshe, Do me a favor: love me a little less and pick me up at the airport."

Ultimately, our responsibility and the measure of who we are, is determined not by the *nistaros*, the feelings and thoughts we may have, but by the *niglos*, that which we do, how we behave, the actions we take.

"Love me less and pick me up at the airport."

In *Yahadus*, your head and heart are only as good as your hands. In Judaism, you are a good person if you do good things. You are kind if you act kindly towards others. You are generous if you give of your time and money to others.

It's interesting that of all the positive commandments we are mandated to perform, very few are not accomplished through action. For example, we are commanded to "Remember (*Zachor*) Shabbos and make it holy". *Zachor* literally means to remember, yet *Chazal* tell us that the way we fulfill this *mitzvah* is by actively making *Kiddush* over a cup of wine on Friday night. It's not enough to think about the holiness of the day but we need to concretize thought into action.

It might just be a coincidence but if you want to check if someone's alive – if their heart is working – you can check their pulse in their neck – but also by their hands.

I must tell you that I feel so bad for people who think they are good or that they are generous because in their hearts they mean to be.

In the *pasuk* mentioned earlier, the words *lanu u'levaneinu* have dots on top of them, even in the *Torah* scroll itself. The dots serve the purpose of emphasis - as if to underline these words. Perhaps the *Torah* is telling us that *l'vaneinu*, our children, learn not from the *nistaros*, not from that which is hidden and concealed in our

hearts, no matter how noble it may be. Rather, they learn from and ultimately resemble the *niglos*, that which we actually do.

If you want your children to daven, learn, have integrity, show sensitivity to others, forgive easily, accept others who don't live an identical lifestyle – act that way and the probability of them following soars.

In the Yeshiva world, one will often describe another as a *lamdan*. In yeshiva, colloquially, a *lamdan* is a young man who knows how to learn at a high level. The late, great Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman took issue with this usage of the word. He quipped that a *gazlan* (thief) is not one who knows how to steal but rather one who steals. So too, a *lamdan* isn't someone who knows how to learn but rather one who learns. It's not what's in the head. It's what's in the hands.

Thoughts are important and *kavana* adds color to our actions – but void of action – it's simply not enough.

We are an action-based religion.

As we approach the king of all kings let's not talk so much about what we want to do – let's do it.

I know you want to pick me up from the airport. What time will you be there?