

## Parshat Eikev 5782

*"And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you, other than to fear Hashem your G-d, to go in all of His ways and to love Him and to serve Hashem your G-d with all of your intellect and with all of your soul, to observe the mitzvot of Hashem and His statutes which I command you today, for your benefit" (Devarim 10:12-13).*

The theme of fearing and loving Hashem is one of the major threads running through Sefer Devarim, and here it appears in its most elemental form: this is all that is asked of us.

Contextualising this passage, the Meshech Chochmah observes that this plea comes at the end of more than a chapter's worth of admonitions. From the beginning of chapter 9, when we are told that we will be crossing the Jordan to enter the promised land, we are warned against haughtiness. This is not going to happen because of our righteousness, for we are a stiff-necked people (9:6) and have angered Hashem repeatedly (9:8ff), but rather because of the inhabitants' wickedness and Hashem's promise to our forefathers (9:5). And after being reminded of our failings, we are given straightforward guidance on how to behave better in the future. This request is obviously not for Hashem's benefit, for what could He take from us, but rather for ours, as it says explicitly.

The Netziv, though, following in the footsteps of the midrash, expresses his surprise at the language of these verses. Moshe's wording of this question: *"What does Hashem your G-d ask of you, other than to..."* could be seen by some as sounding like something small, straightforward and easily achievable. Yet this is surely the ultimate demand! What else could possibly be asked of us? Furthermore, as we approach Elul, when we will be saying L'david Hashem ori v'yish'i each day, we are reminded of David Hamelech's request of *"Achat sha'alti"*, *"One thing I have asked of Hashem is this request: to sit in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to gaze upon the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit His palace"* (Tehillim 27:4). In our context, the Netziv quotes a poetic midrash on that verse: *"Hashem said to David: 'You say that you are only asking for one thing, yet you are asking for much!' To which David replied: 'And You likewise, "What does Hashem your G-d ask of you", yet You demanded much!'"*

Thus in addition to the magnitude of the "simple" request, the Netziv also questions the compound nature of the instruction. For if we were asked to complete the sentence: *"What does Hashem your G-d ask of you, other than to ..."*, we would surely only say one thing - yet Moshe gives a list of many different demands: to fear Hashem, to go in all of His ways, to love Him, to serve Him and so on.

The answer that the Netziv offers is in my view ingenious in its simplicity and beauty, and I offer a brief summary of it here. He observes that the verses quoted at the start actually break up into four parts as follows, for there is no "vav" ("and") between these parts: *"... to fear Hashem your G-d / to go in all of His ways and to love Him and to serve Hashem your G-d with all of your intellect and with all of your soul / to observe the mitzvot of Hashem and His statutes which I command you today / for your benefit."* This instruction is addressed to all of Israel, yet it is impossible for every Jew to fulfil all of these. Rambam regards loving Hashem as an intellectual state achieved through a deep understanding of Torah.

Therefore the Netziv suggests that this verse is actually addressed to each individual Jew rather than to the community as a whole, and each person is given only one of the four instructions. The first, *"to fear Hashem your G-d"*, is addressed to the leaders of the generation - they do not have the time to be immersed in the study of Torah, for they have the burden of leadership on their shoulders. Nevertheless, their position of power can easily lead them astray as we have witnessed all too often, and so they are warned to fear Hashem, just as kings are explicitly instructed (see Devarim 17:19). The second, *"to go in all of His ways..."*, is directed at the scholars who have gained an understanding of Hashem and are therefore able to truly love Him, in Rambam's sense of the term. The third, *"to observe the mitzvot..."* is addressed to the majority of members of the community, who are involved in their day-to-day work and cannot devote the time needed to reach the sublime levels of understanding required to love Hashem in this way. Finally, those who are commanded fewer positive mitzvot - women, children and the slaves of olden times - are instructed to work *"for your benefit"*, that is, for the benefit of society, by supporting their husbands, parents and masters respectively.

Thus the exhortations in these verses, in the Netziv's reading, become far more attainable. We are each instructed to do what is within our capacity to achieve.