

Parashat Eikev 5784, 2024:

“*Know Him in All Your Ways*”

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

The *mitzvah* of cleaving to Hashem (*hadvakute b'Hashem*) appears in our *parasha*, as well as two other times in *Sefer Devarim*:

For if you keep all these commandments which I command you to do them, to love Hashem your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him (*u'l'davka bo*). (11:22)

You shall hold Hashem, your G-d in awe, worship Him, and cleave to Him and swear by His Name. (10:20)

But you who cleave to Hashem, your G-d, are alive all of you this day. (4:4, all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

A celebrated statement of *Chazal* suggests that *hadvakute b'Hashem* is well-nigh impossible, since *Sefer Devarim* 4:26 states: “For Hashem, your G-d, is a consuming fire...” (*Talmud Bavli, Ketubot* 111b) In his Torah commentary, *Torah Temimah*, on *Sefer Devarim* 11:22, Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (1860-1941) asks why our Sages presented this position, since:

It is plausible to explain the [concept of *hadvakute b'Hashem*] in a direct language-based manner, namely, it is referring to *devekut hanefesh m'ahavah v'chibah yitarah*—the soul cleaving to Hashem from abundant love and affection. As *Dovid HaMelech* writes, “*davka nafshi acharecha*—my soul has clung after You...” (*Sefer Tehillim* 63:9)

Why did *Chazal* refrain from a soul-based approach? Rav Epstein’s answer gives voice to the incredibly high level of spirituality that *devekut hanefesh m'ahavah v'chibah yitarah* represents and the difficulty of attaining this goal: “We can answer that this *middah* [that *Dovid HaMelech* was able to reach] is the highest possible level of love of Hashem, and thereby set aside solely for

unique individuals and people who have reached the loftiest peak of spirituality. As such, it is impossible to demand this from general members (*hamon ha'am*) of the Jewish people..." If this level of *hadvakute b'Hashem* is beyond the grasp of the *hamon ha'am*, what kind of *devekut* is available to one and all?

In his Torah commentary, *Biur al HaTorah*, Rabbi Ovadiah ben Ya'akov Sforno (1475-1549) answers this question through his interpretation of the phrase "*u'l'davka bo*" (*Sefer Devarim* 11:22): "All of your actions should be undertaken with the intention to perform His will, as it is said: 'In all your ways know Him, and He will direct your paths.'" (*Sefer Mishle* 3:6) In my view, the Sforno's analysis coupled with this *pasuk* evens the spiritual playing field and makes *hadvakute b'Hashem* accessible to the entire Jewish people. Little wonder then, that the great Tanna, Bar Kappara, taught: "Which is a brief passage upon which all fundamental principles of Torah are dependent? 'In all your ways know Him, and He will direct your paths.'" (*Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 63a, translation, *The Koren Talmud Bavli*)

Shabbat Shalom

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