that. Not everybody is ready to jump all the way in.

We are coming into the days when the King is close, when a person can walk over and be received exactly as he is. So let us not spend them waiting for something that is already waiting for us. Let us take the yoke on — the *ol Torah*, the *ruach haTorah* — and bring Him into the small moments, the half-past-four-in-the-morning moments, where the whole thing is really decided.

It is not an easy job. But it is a life. And we may as well start now.

May Hashem take the yokes off our shoulders, and answer all of us for a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*, with the geulah, bekarov beyomeinu!

קונטרס

The Ways of My Heart

נתיבות לבי

Adapted from the shiurim of

R' Dovid Steiman shlit"a

Who Is Waiting for Whom?

Elul · Ol Torah

נתיבות לבי

THE WAYS OF MY HEART · WEEKLY SERIES

בס"ד

נתיבות לבי — The Ways of My Heart

A WEEKLY MAAMAR · ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF R' DOVID STEIMAN SHLIT"A

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Nesivos Libi — The Ways of My Heart is a weekly maamar on emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem, adapted from the shiurim of R' Dovid Steiman shlit"a in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*.

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לרפואה שלמה

פייגא בת ויטא
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ple you have to deal with... The man who is out of his mind and talking nonsense at you, and you cannot answer him the way you would like to, because you have to hold yourself back and not become angry.

So it turns out the whole thing changes shape. The *middos* are going to get worked on either way. The only question is whether the Torah does it — or whether life does it, through the *gashmiyus* of this world. And that second way is the one a person chooses by default, without ever deciding it.

So who is waiting

Which brings us back to where we began.

We stand and wait for the *yeshuah*. And all the while — **Hashem is waiting for us.** Waiting for us to work on our *middos*. Waiting for us to accept the Torah completely, *fully, fully*.

What is missing is not His willingness. What is missing is our acceptance.

And it is not about being frum, frum, frum. That is not what this is. It is about reality — about what life actually is, and who is actually in charge here. Everybody knows the answer to

selves to the Torah — to the *ruach haTorah*.

Which is the hardest thing there is. Because we are so used, by default, to living inside this world, with everybody pulling us in a different direction and telling us what we ought to be doing, that changing it feels impossible.

Or the long way round

Now comes the second explanation, and this is the one that answers the question we started with.

A person who accepts the *ol Torah* fully — really fully, all the way in — the Torah itself takes care of his *middos*. It works on him from the inside. That is what the Torah does to a person.

But take someone who keeps the mitzvos and yet is not fully in it. He is doing everything, but he is in his own world, in his own creation. He is not *fully, fully* there.

Then what happens? He still has *middos* that need work. We are here for a purpose, and that purpose does not go away. So Hashem has to reach those *middos* through a different channel.

And what are those channels? The problems. Parnassah. *Tzaar gidul banim.* Etc. Difficult peo-

Who Is Waiting for Whom?

Elul — we spend our lives waiting for Hashem to answer; the Mishnah says it is the other way round

One of the hardest tests a person is given is **just to wait.**

It is hard because there is no end seen. A person waits for his *yeshuah*. He waits, and he waits, and he waits — and when is it coming? A person can go a little crazy from that.

But if you think into it, there is a major question sitting underneath the whole thing, and it changes the whole prospective. Who is waiting for whom? Are we waiting for Hashem to send us our salvation — or is Hashem waiting for us, for something?

Ask it that way and you are no longer standing still. You are in action mode. Now the only question left is: what is it that we are supposed to be doing?

The Mishnah that does not add up

The Mishnah says it plainly. Whoever accepts upon himself the ol Torah — the yoke of the Torah — the ol malchus and the ol derech eretz will be removed from him. And whoever throws the *ol Torah* off himself, they lay those two yokes upon him.

Ol malchus means the pressure of the world outside: the government, the authorities, the things a person cannot control. *Ol derech eretz* means the whole weight of *gashmiyus* — parnassah, the bills, the ordinary grinding worry of getting through a life.

Now, what exactly is this *ol Torah*?

The simple reading would be: accepting the yoke of Torah means keeping the mitzvos. I keep Shabbos, I put on tefillin, I do what a Yid is supposed to do. And *poreik ol* — throwing off the yoke — means not doing it.

But that cannot be what the Mishnah means. Because keeping the mitzvos is not something a person "accepts upon himself." It is simply what he is obligated to do. The Mishnah says *mekabel alav* — he takes it on — as though it were something extra, something on top. So there must be something else here. Something living underneath the yoke.

people and their ordinary moods. The car does not start. There is a hole in the tire. He is rushing to daven and nothing is going his way.

And the question is only this: **at what point does Hashem come into the picture?** At what point?

So *ruach haTorah* turns out to be exactly this — bringing Hashem into your life at every step of the way. That is the *ol Torah* a person accepts. And when we slide into the negativity instead, we are, in the Mishnah's own words, *poreik ol* — we have taken the yoke off.

What He lifts off your shoulders

And look what the Mishnah promises for it.

Someone who is ready to be *mekabel* the *ol Torah* — Hashem helps him. What is inside that package? The headaches of parnassah. The pain of raising children *al pi* Torah, and everything that comes with it. Hashem removes the problems of this world from him.

Can you imagine what is being offered here?

And what do we have to do for it? We have to be *mevatel* our-

more — you are on a rollercoaster.

So I stopped. And that was that. Half past four in the morning. Who are you calling? Who is going to come and save you at that hour?

I called Chaveirim. There was no other choice.

Now — here is the whole point. Right there, I had an opportunity. Wonderful. *Let's get nervous.* Let's start working ourselves up: what are we going to do, how are we going to do it. A person warms himself up into that mood so easily, and within a minute he is fully inside it.

That is not *ruach haTorah.* That moment, exactly that one, is the moment Hashem is waiting to be brought in.

And *baruch Hashem*, the man came, and he did the biggest *chesed* in the world, and we still went, and it was still beautiful. We did not make the *netz*. It did not matter.

Think of a battery. It has a plus and it has a minus, and that is how it works. Life is built the same way — there is a positivity and there is a negativity. And the negativity is a thing that eats a person alive. I am not speaking about someone who is unwell; I am speaking about ordinary

Torah is a life, not a practice of religion

Here is the answer, and it is worth sitting with.

The Torah has 613 mitzvos. It has what to do and what not to do, and that is real. But there is something above that, and it is called *ruach haTorah* — the spirit of the Torah. It's not a wind that blows past. Ruach here meaning what Hashem actually wants from us through the Torah.

Because the purpose of the Torah is not only to inform us that this is permitted and that is forbidden. If I can put it this way, that is very *square*. This yes, this no. That is not how the Torah works.

The Torah is a life. It is not a practice of religion. And that is the biggest mistake a person can make about it. In American society people think Torah is a religion, and in Russian society they thought the same — that you are either religious or you are not religious. And even while being frum, with all the rush and busy, busy, busy can become just like practitioners of Yiddishkeit losing the real Ruach Hatorah. Torah is life. And if it is a life, then it asks something much higher of a

person than a list of things we are supposed to do and not supposed to do.

What does it ask? There is a goal: we need to be mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh. A kingdom of kohanim, a nation of kedushah.

And that is not something Hashem commanded directly, item by item. It falls under *ruach haTorah*. It means a Yid is *mechaven* — he has it in mind — in everything he does. Where he walks, where he looks, what he lets himself think about. Even in the places where there is no *issur* at all, he stays with the *ruach haTorah*.

You can recognise such a person. You talk to him and the conversation does not go where those conversations usually go. He is simply not there.

Where is he flying?

And here is the other side, and I do not say it to be sharp.

A person can keep everything. Kiddush, the *seudah*, tefillin — all of it exactly according to *halachah*. And then a certain moment comes, and you listen to him, and you wonder: *what* is he talking about? Where is he flying? Where is the ruach HaTorah?

You can be sitting at a Shabbos table and feel like you are in a stadium.

We say a *dvar Torah* — beautiful. And two minutes later we are on to politics. But it is Shabbos Kodesh. And that is exactly the seam where *ruach haTorah* either enters or does not.

Because we have everything already written down for us, and it is so much holier. Why do we need to bring down some clever line from somewhere else? We do not have enough of our own?

Half past four in the morning

Let me tell you what this looks like in practice, because it happened to me.

We had planned to go out to see netz hachamah by the ocean. I wanted every one of my children to see it with their own eyes — that the sun comes up **on time**.

So we are driving, and the alarm in the car is beeping and beeping, and I am not paying attention to it. Then I decided to look. The tire is slowly losing air. And if you are driving a heavy car and a tire is going down and you do not stop it in time, you are not driving any