

here? Are they arguing over the *svara*, or over how to read the Mishnah? Then close the Gemara and say it back in your own words — not the lashon of the Gemara, just the idea: this one holds so, that one holds so, and here is why. *That* is what goes into your head. Then the next piece, and you tie it back to the first.

In the beginning it feels like it will take forever. But the head

gets used to it, and then it flies — it even begins gathering the information on its own. This is how a tzadik like the **Viznitzer Rebbe** could finish Shas every single year while carrying a whole yeshiva, a kollel, every Yom Tov, everyone's tzaros on his shoulders. How? Because he worked so hard at the beginning that later it went fast. There is no memorizing without working hard first. There is simply no way around it.

..... Coming into Elul

So this is what we are walking into Elul to renew. Not something crazy — a mindset. Let the heart burn again with a little fire. Push away the voice that says *"who are you,"* and put in its place: *Hashem wants me, today.* Take one small piece of His Torah and make it truly your own. Because it all begins with

fire, with love, and with being ready — in our hearts — to give everything for it. May we make the *chashivus* of the Torah greater and greater, until Hashem shines it out for all of us and draws us close to Him, with the geulah, bekarov beyomeinu!

קונטרס

The Ways of My Heart

נתיבות לבי

Adapted from the shiurim of
R' Dovid Steiman shlit"א

Fire, Love, and Ready to Die for It

Torah, Fire & Commitment · Elul

נתיבות לבי

THE WAYS OF MY HEART · WEEKLY SERIES

נתיבות לבי — The Ways of My Heart

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

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"א in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R' Dovid Steiman shlit"א teaches emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*, and for nearly two decades has shared his Torah — in English and Russian — with talmidim and readers around the world. He taught at Ohr Somayach and today teaches at Yeshiva Toras Dovid, both in Monsey, New York. He is the author of the sefer *The Ways of My Heart* / נתיבות לבי.



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Reb Yitzchak Zilber zt"l, from the Soviet Union, was arrested — someone had informed the KGB that he was writing something on scraps of paper, and he wrote it strangely, in every direction across the page, so that no informer sitting in the shul could make out what it was. The interrogator demanded: what is this? On the page were words, then numbers — that was the tzedakah he had given, a ruble here, fifty kopeks there. Fine. And this scribbling running in every direction? It was a kushya of *Rav Akiva Eiger*.

Now — anyone else would be scrambling for some answer to get out of there. Not him. He is

a *temimesdike* Yid, and his only thought is: how do I explain this properly? So he begins — a pasuk in the Torah. Then the Mishnah about the pasuk. Then, so the man will understand Rav Akiva Eiger clearer, the Gemara. Then Rashi. Then, of course, Tosafos — all by heart. Some Rishonim, for clarity. And only then, the kushya itself, and its answer. The interrogator sits there staring, completely lost. He picks up the phone: "*How many years do I give him — ten, or fifteen?*" And then, for a reason no one understands, they let him walk out. That is *limud haTorah*. That is a Yid for whom the Torah was already worth his life.

..... **The way in is hard — and then it flies**

And how does a person get there? Not with a trick. There is a sefer, *Kerem Yehoshua*, where I saw him bring a story about the author's grandfather, who would get up at two in the morning and learn until eight

— thirty blatt of Gemara with Rashi and Tosafos. It sounds impossible. But the secret is simple. You take one small piece — a third of a daf, even a quarter — and you do not move until it is *clear*. What is the machlokes

he looks at you like you fell off the moon. Why would he respect it? He has a game on an 85-inch screen; a blatt Gemara means nothing to him.

Here is the thing: that same friend lives inside us. It is the *yetzer hora*, and he whispers: "Who are you? What do you understand in learning? You don't know anything." He starts listing all your bad *middos* — come on, who do you think you are?

..... Ready to die for it

And there is one more thing, the deepest of all. The Torah cannot become *nikneh* — it cannot truly become yours — unless you are ready to give your life for it.

It does not mean anything wild. You don't have to do crazy things or make a scene; you live like a normal person. But in your head it has to be perfectly

So let me give you a clear rule. **Anything negative you think about yourself — it is the yetzer. Period. Anything that leaves you feeling lower after you have thought it, that is coming from the yetzer hora. Our job is to push it away with a positive thought, to set boundaries in its place and say it plainly: Hashem created me. I am here to serve Him. Every morning I get up, and Hashem wants me — me — to serve Him today.** It sounds simple. It is the whole battle.

clear: *I am ready to die for this Torah.* It is a mindset. And once that is set, everything else in the world turns small. Someone comes to waste your time with *narishkeit* and you think, *please — not now.* That very clarity lifts a person to a whole different dignity.

Just yesterday I read a story I cannot stop thinking about.

Fire, Love, and Ready to Die for It

As we come into Elul, the real avodah is one thing — and the Torah was never meant to be easy; the hard work itself is the closeness

We are coming into Elul now, the days of getting ready for the Yomim Noraim. And the real preparation is one word: commitment. The only question is — how strong does that commitment need to be?

Here is something people say. They say there is a *yeridas hadoros* — that the generations have gotten weaker. But I heard from gedolim that it is not really so. So what happened? The world changed. Today you don't have to work hard. Whatever you need is at your fingertips — you press a button and a few hours later it's at your door, and we are getting to the point where you won't even have to leave the house. In the

olden days a person worked hard: had a cow, had to feed it, milk it, work the ground, sweat for bread. That world built giants — before the war there were far bigger *gaonim*, far greater *tzadikim* and *ovdei Hashem* than we see today. Why? Because people knew how to work hard.

And here is the problem. Now that nobody has to work for anything, we approach the Torah the same way — we want it to be easy. But the Torah is not easy. *Yegias haTorah* — the toil, the working — that is the whole thing. There is no making the Torah yours without working hard on it.

..... **It has to burn**

So what do we need? Fire. When Moshe Rabbeinu met Hashem the first time, it was at the *sneh* — the burning bush, a fire that burns and burns and is never consumed. That is the symbol of the Torah: a constant, burning fire that is never consumed.

Think of it. If there is a fire in the house, chas v'shalom, and someone is stuck inside and there is no one to help — no firemen, no one — are we going to sit and watch? Of course not. We jump up, we run, we do something. Where does that

come from? We have it inside us, and the fire itself gives us the adrenaline. That same fire is exactly what we need for the Torah.

And I know — it feels like it is not always there. *"Right now I'm not in the mood. I'm tired. I'm not feeling it."* It's all true; it happens to the best of us. So take a break. But then get up and go. Bottom line, it has to burn — just like the *sneh*, the burning bush Moshe Rabbeinu saw — I have to get to it. Don't just sit and waste the time.

..... **It is only about you**

Now a person looks at himself and says: who am I? I'm not some big person who needs to sit and learn. That is not true. Nobody in this world knows whose Torah is more precious — the great talmid chochom sitting and learning all day, or a simple Yid grabbing a few min-

utes where he can. Nobody measures that.

Hashem Yisborach does not compare you to the gadol the way we compare ourselves to each other. He is not running some big comparison. He looks at you, only at you, and asks one question: *do you know where*

you need to be? Do you know what I am expecting from you? That, and nothing else, is the measure.

People give their opinions — about everything, and about you. And you carry it; it sits on you. But first of all, nobody asked them. And second — it makes no difference at all. It is all about Hashem. That is the

hardest thing: to disconnect from what everyone thinks and to care about one thing only — what does Hashem think of me? And when a heart burns like that, like a small fire in the middle of the darkness, that is when Hashem shines. He lights up the very Torah we are breaking our heads on, so that it shines back and shows us the way to go. That is a real guidance.

..... **Giving the love back**

And why did Hashem give us the Torah at all? The Maharal asks a question on *dayeinu*: if Hashem had brought us to Har Sinai and *not* given us the Torah — *dayeinu*, it would have been enough. Enough? Without the Torah, what could possibly be enough? He answers: the whole purpose of Har Sinai was *kirvas Elokim* — to bring us close to

Hashem, to feel close to Him. And that already happened at the mountain. The Torah is about how He brought us close, because He loves us so much.

So how do we give that love back? Through *ahavas haTorah* — by loving the very thing He hid Himself inside. When we sit and toil in His Torah, that is us loving Him back.

..... **The voice that says "who are you"**

But there is something that fights this love. Picture a friend who is far from all of this.

You're talking, you glance at your watch and say, *"Oy, I have a seder, I have a chavrusa,"* and