מצות "שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד"

ח. שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד, הוא כלל גדול במעלות הצדיקים אשר הולכים לפני ה'. [רמ"א ס"א]. והיינו שיצייר בנפשו תמיד, איך שהוא עומד לפני ה' יתברך, כי הקדוש ברוך הוא מלא כל הארץ כבודו.

[משנ"ב ס"ק ד]

Day 5

Shiviti Adonai Lenegdi Tamid

Awareness of God's Presence

8) One of the fundamental principles that one must master in order to follow the path of God is contained in the verse, "שִׁוִּיתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִּי תָמִיד – I place God constantly before me." This means that a person should constantly remain aware and conscious that he is in God's Presence since God fills the entire universe.[13]

ately after drinking, jumping up immediately after bloodletting, jumping up immediately after [waking from] sleep, and jumping up immediately after engaging in marital relations. Based on this, the *Magen Avraham* and other *Aharonim* explained that although Rama instructed us to rise quickly upon waking up, he did not mean to jump out of bed the very first second. Harav Zalman defined this, ruling that one should wait long enough to recite *Mode Ani* and then get up.

The *Tosefet Shabbat* argued that Rama never meant that one must jump up out of bed upon waking, only that one cease sleeping and sit up. He brought proof from the words of Yaakov Avinu to his father, "Please get up and sit" (*Bereshit* 27:19). This concurs with the words of the halakha stated here, taken from Harav Zalman, stating that sitting up immediately upon waking is not dangerous to one's health.

The *Adne Paz* challenged this entire thesis, insisting that as long as one's intentions are to serve God faithfully, no danger will be incurred. His position is based on King Shelomo's promise (*Kohelet* 8:5), "He who observes a mitzvah will know of no evil result." The *Petah Hadevir* (1:10), however, supported the position of the *Magen Avraham*.

13. *Shiviti* – during prayers or at all times

The *Bet Oved* (cited by the *Petah Hadevir* 1:3) taught that the mitzvah of *shiviti* – remaining conscious of God's Presence – is obligatory only while one is praying. He proved this from the Talmud's statement (*Sanhedrin* 22a): Ribbi Shim'on Hasida said, "When someone prays he must picture God standing before him, following the verse, *shiviti Adonai lenegdi tamid*." The *Petah Hadevir* challenged this, since the word *tamid* means constantly and at all times, not only at certain times each day. Furthermore, the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* and the *sefer Haredim* both described the mitzvah of *shiviti* as one that must be fulfilled constantly, at all hours of every day. The passage in *Sanhedrin* does not contradict this; it means only that one must place God's Presence and omnipotence at the forefront of one's thoughts while praying, but certain one must remain conscious of His Presence at all other times as well. See more about this in *sefer Mesharim Ahevukha* (page 46).

The *sefer Sha'are Halakha Uminhag* (page 24) asked how it is possible to concentrate on the mitzvah of *shiviti* and at the same time concentrate on complicated Talmudic or halakhic issues. He suggested that while one is studying Torah one should keep a card with God's Name always in view. See below in halakha 10.

It is more likely, however, that the mitzvah of *shiviti* does not necessitate one's complete concentration. It can be compared to someone engaged in his work or other activities while television cameras are focused on him. His awareness that he is being watched does not necessarily impair his ability to concentrate on his work, but he will make sure not to do anything that might bring him criticism from those watching him.

Shiviti lenegdi

Why does this verse use the word *lenegdi* for *in front of me* instead of the word *lefanai*, which has the same meaning? The *Toledot Yaakov Yosef* (*parashat Haye Sara* #2) explained that the word *lenegdi* means "opposing me". The awareness of God's Presence should serve to oppose one's natural inclination to succumb to sin. Another possible answer is that the word *lefanai* would mean that the person pictures God in front of him all the time, but God might not necessarily be facing him and watching him. The word *lenegdi*, however, means that God is facing the person all the time, focused on watching his actions.

Safeguard against sin

The *Yafe Lalev* (1:4) taught that the verse of *shiviti* embodies the lesson of the mishna (*Avot* 2:1), "Observe

והנה אין ישיבת האדם ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לבדו בביתו, כישיבתו ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לפני מלך גדול, ולא דבורו והרחבת פיו כרצונו והוא עם אנשי ביתו וקרוביו, כדבורו במושב המלך. כל שכן כשישים האדם אל לבו שהמלך הגדול הקדוש ברוך הוא, אשר מלא כל הארץ כבודו, עומד עליו ורואה במעשיו, כמו שנאמר: אם יסתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו נאם ה' (ירמיה כג, כד), מיד תגיע אליו היראה וההכנעה בפחד ה' יתברך ובושתו ממנו תמיד. [רמ"א שם]

People do not behave the same when in the presence of a mighty king as they do in the privacy of their own homes. They do not speak in a king's presence in the same manner as they do among their close family members. Certainly, if people will realize that they are constantly in the Presence of the great King, the Blessed Holy One, and that He watches all their activities, they will immediately be filled with awe and they will feel humbled. They will be ashamed [to act in a manner unbecoming God's honor] as the verse states (*Yirmeyahu* 23:24), "Can anyone hide in secret chambers so that I cannot see him? says God."[14]

three things and you will not come to sin...know what is above you." The *Tosefot Yom Tov* explained that this means to realize that God hovers above us, watching our every action.

This concept is expanded upon by the *Mesillat Yesharim* (chap. 25): "The strategy for gaining this level of fear is to think about the fact that God is present everywhere in the world, that He watches everything that happens and that nothing goes unnoticed by Him. Once it becomes clear to a person that he is always in the Presence of God, he will automatically come to fear Him and he will strive to avoid doing anything that would be improper in the Presence of His greatness. This is what our Sages taught, 'Know what is above you – an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears – and that all your deeds are recorded in a Book.' The Blessed Holy One watches over everything. He sees and hears everything, and every deed of a person makes an impression. Each deed is recorded in the Book, either as a merit or demerit.

"It is not easy to internalize these concepts unless one invests much time thinking about this reality. This is not something tangible that we can feel with our senses and therefore it takes a lot of study and contemplation to solidify one's awareness of it. Conversely, when people ignore this concept and go without thinking about it their level of fear of God will plummet accordingly." See more about this in the following footnote.

With God's help

The *sefer Haredim* teaches that the verse (*Devarim* 8:18), "Remember God your Master for He is the One Who gives you the power to gain wealth," is a commandment for us to remember God at all times. It is parallel to the verse of *shiviti Hashem lenegdi tamid*. Rabbenu Yona (*Sha'are Teshuva* 3:27) added that the earlier verse (ibid. 8:11), "Take care not to forget God your Master," is a commandment forbidding us from ever forgetting God.

The *Yafe Lalev* added that whenever someone speaks or writes of any project that he plans, he should say, "with God's help," or, "if God wishes," or, "if God will grant me life." These phrases should become a regular part of a person's vocabulary. The truth is that no one succeeds because of his own strength or talents; he is totally dependent on God's Will. See the holy *Zohar* (*parashat Tazria* page 51b) and *sefer Hassidim* (#82).

In connection with this, the Midrash (*Otzar Hamidrashim* #40) relates that a man once took money with him to buy an ox in the livestock market when Eliyahu Hanavi met him and asked him where he was headed.

He replied, "To buy an ox."

"Say, 'With God's help,'" Eliyahu instructed him.

"Why is that necessary? I have the money in my pocket and I'm on my way right now."

The man continued toward the market, but somewhere along the way he lost his money and had to return home empty-handed. This repeated itself several times. Finally, the man realized his error and told Eliyahu that he was going to buy an ox, with God's help. Eliyahu then revealed to him where all his lost money was located.

14. Our Sages taught (*Ta'anit* 15a) that when a community declares a fast day due to a community-wide calamity, an elderly scholar is to speak *divre kevushin* to the community. Rashi explained that *divre kevushin* are words that capture people's hearts and lead them to repenting. Tosafot,

ובעל נפש אל יוציא מחשבה זו מנגד עיניו, ויעמיק בזה, והיה לאיש צדיק, ויום יום יוסיף בפרישות ודבקות בו יתברך. [יפה ללב אות ו]

The truly devout will keep this concept in their consciousness constantly and develop it until they reach the level of tzaddik. They will then continue to rise in spiritual levels on a daily basis.

citing Rabbenu Hanan'el, explained that the scholar reveals to them their hidden sins. The *Eliya Rabba* challenged this interpretation – how is it possible for the scholar to do this? Is he a prophet? He therefore explained that Rabbenu Hanan'el meant that the scholar is to explain to the people how God is fully aware of all their hidden sins, which are all revealed to Him. If the scholar can succeed in this, he will surely inspire the people to repent for the sins that they have committed privately, although no one else knows of them.

Levels of fear for Heaven

The *sefer Hatanya* (*Likute Amarim* chap. 42) states that if someone will simply realize that God is fully aware of his deeds he will immediately be filled with the fear of Heaven. For some people, this can take only a moment, but others with a different nature cannot conceive of God unless they seek Him persistently. This is especially so for people who succumbed to sins of immorality in their youth. If they try hard enough, however, they too will succeed in achieving a minimal level of fear for God.

The *sefer Hassidim* (#37) defines genuine fear of God in the most elementary fashion – it is manifest when someone has an opportunity to enjoy a sin without fear of being discovered by any other person, but he desists from the sin simply because he fears God. The *Yafe Lalev* (1:7) explained that this is the intention of Rama in this halakha.

How to develop *yir'at Shamayim*

The *sefer Shema Yisrael* (Vol. II, page 46) lists several ways to inculcate the fear of Heaven in one's heart: 1) To look up at the sky; 2) to look at one's *tzitzit*; 3) to recite the section of the Torah demanding the fear of Heaven (*Devarim* 10:12-22) while wearing tefillin "of Rabbenu Tam"; 4) to study Torah while wearing tefillin of "Rabbenu Tam"; 5) to spend much time in synagogues and Torah study halls; 6) to be careful to speak only permissible speech; 7) to seek and promote peace; 8) to fulfill the mitzvah of standing in honor of elderly people and Torah scholars; 9) to picture in one's mind God's Name with the vowels of the word *yir'a* – יִרְאָה [See below in halakha 10]; 10) to study Torah constantly; 11) to behave with utmost humility; 12) to keep the works of Rambam in one's home; 13) to study the *Arba'a Turim*, the *Bet Yosef* commentary and the *Shulhan Arukh* regularly; 14) to eat the Shabbat meals specifically in honor of the Shabbat; and 15) to speak only sparingly, spending long periods in silence.

Regarding #13, Harav Shalom Rokeach of Belz declared that he attained his level of *yir'at Shamayim* through his diligent study of the *Arba'a Turim* with the *Bet Yosef*, in particular *Tur Orah Hayim*.

Besides the above list, it is important for each of us to pray to God to help us attain a high level of *yir'at Shamayim*. The Talmud teaches (*Shabbat* 156b) that the mother of Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak was told by astrologers that he would grow up to be a burglar. From that time on, she made sure that he would never go bareheaded and she instructed him to always pray that the *yetzer hara* should not control him.

The Maharsha explained that although God does not control one's spiritual level and actions, if someone demonstrates that he wishes very much to follow the ways of holiness, he will receive Heaven's assistance. If someone prays for such assistance, it is likely that he will receive it.

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak became one of the main authors of the Talmud, and Rashi (comment to *Megillah* 28b) stated that he was one of the most pious of all Babylonian Jewry. To prove this, he cited the passage in *Sota* (49b) where Rav Nahman complained that the Mishna should not say that true *yir'at Shamayim* no longer exists, since he knew that he did possess this lofty trait. Undoubtedly, this was due to his constant prayers and those of his saintly mother.

The *sefer Metzuve Ve'ose* relates that someone once asked Harav Hayim Soloveichik of Brisk to bless his son to become a Torah scholar possessing genuine *yir'at Shamayim*. Rav Hayim replied that the boy's level of Torah learning will be decided on how much his father studies with him, while his level of *yir'at Shamayim* depends on how many tears his mother sheds as she prays for him after kindling the Shabbat lights.

He added that every person should have a confidante with whom he can discuss his strategies for overcoming the *yetzer hara*. Bsides this, everyone must be very careful about the people with whom he associates. Our Sages (*Avot deRibbi Natan*) teach that if a person keeps company with sinners, he is liable to suffer the same punishments as they

ואם לא יגיע אליו מיד, יעמיק הרבה בענין זה, עד שיגיע אליו, וגם ישוב בתשובה שלימה על כל עונותיו, שהם המונעים מהגיע אליו היראה כמו שכתוב: (ישעיה נט, ב) עונותיכם היו מבדילים בינכם ובין אלהיכם. [ש"ע הרב מהדו"ת סי' א אות ח]

ט. הרוצה לקיים "שויתי" כראוי, יזדרז לקיים מה שכתוב בהקדמת ספר החינוך, שש מצות חיובן תמידי, לא יפסקו מעל האדם אפילו רגע אחד כל ימיו. וכל זמן, וכל רגע שיחשוב בהן, קיים ממצות עשה, ואין קץ למתן שכר המצות. ואלו הם: א. להאמין בשם. ב. שלא להאמין זולתו. ג. לייחדו. ד. לאהבה אותו. ה. ליראה אותו. ו. שלא לתור אחר מחשבת הלב וראיית העינים. [ביאור הלכה ר"ס א]

Even if someone finds it difficult to conceive of God's awareness, he should continue to strive to contemplate it until he succeeds. At the same time, he should repent completely for his previous sins since they are the barrier that prevents him from seeing the truth. This is what the Prophet said (*Yeshayahu* 59:2), "Your sins acted as a barrier between you and your God."

Six incessant mitzvot

9) The proper way to fulfill the mitzvah of *shiviti* is to remain aware of the six mitzvot of the Torah that must be fulfilled constantly, every hour of every day, as long as a person lives. The *sefer Hahinukh* (introduction) lists them: a) to believe that God exists; b) to believe that there is no other god; c) to believe that God is One; d) to love God; e) to fear God; and f) to avoid following the whims of one's heart or eyes. The reward for fulfilling these mitzvot is immeasurable.[15]

do even if he does not join them in performing sins. Rabbenu Yona added (*Igeret Hateshuvah*) that if someone keeps company with those who perform mitzvot, he will be a partner in receiving their reward even if he does not join them in performing mitzvot.

15. To love God

The *sefer Haredim*, cited in the *Mishna Berura* (25:14) states that when someone recites the verse, "וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת ה' וגו' – You must love God," he must fill his heart with love for God. Otherwise he will be guilty of false testimony – stating that he accepts upon him this mitzvah while ignoring it. Although we are obligated to fulfill this mitzvah all the time, not only when we recite this verse, at all other times it is necessary only to be aware that we love Him. When reciting the verse, we are supposed to think more consciously of our love for Him. See the comment of the *Petah Hadevir* cited above in the footnote to halakha 8.

The *sefer Shemirat Halashon* (Vol. II, epilogue, chap. 2) recommends that everyone devote a few minutes after each day's prayers to think about the many reasons we have to love God. The ideal time for this is between one's morning prayers and when one eats breakfast, since one is supposed to fulfill all one's daily mitzvot before eating. See the comments of *sefer Mesharim Ahevukha* (page 46).

Guarding one's eyes from sin

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yehave Da'at* Vol. V, #63) emphasized that people who go to beaches or pools where both men and women bathe or sun together are guilty of a terrible sin. Our Sages taught (*Berakhot* 61a) that if a man crosses a river behind a woman he will receive no share in the World to Come. Rashi explained that this is because the woman lifts her garments while crossing, exposing parts of her body that are usually covered. The Tosafot explained that this strong statement concerns a person who regularly commits this sin, since this will eventually lead him to the depths of immoral behavior. Someone who crossed a river one time behind a woman does not necessarily forfeit his portion in the World to Come.

Our Sages (*Bava Batra* 57b) explained the verse (*Yeshayahu* 33:15), "He shuts his eyes so that he would not see evil," as referring to a person who averts his eyes from looking at woman laundering their clothes. Rashbam explained that the women laundered their clothes on the