**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT NITZAVIM**

**SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT”A**

**Service of the Heart and Mind**

Adapted by Matan Glidai

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"And it shall be, when he hears that words of this curse, that he will bless himself in his heart, saying: I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart…

God will not spare him, for then the anger of God and His jealousy will smoke against that man…" (*Devarim* 29:18-19)

From the verses we see that even if a person has merely entertained this train of thought, even though he has not yet actually had the opportunity to act in accordance with these ideas, he will nevertheless be punished severely. The very decision to sever oneself from absolute subservience to God, and to follow the inclinations of one's heart, is a grave deviation deserving of harsh punishment. Ramban explains that the words, "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this Torah, to perform them" (27:26), do not refer to observance of the commandments in general, as Rashi explains, but rather to what a person thinks about the *mitzvot*:

"He should acknowledge the commandments in his heart, and he must view them as truth, and believe that one who performs them will enjoy reward and goodness, while one who transgresses them will be punished. And if he denies any one of them, or if any one of them appears to him to be nullified for all time, then behold – he is cursed. But if he transgressed any one of them, such as eating a pig or an insect out of a desire to do so, or failing to build a *sukka* and [to take] a *lulav* out of laziness, then he is not included in this curse, for the text does not say, '[Cursed is the man] who does not *perform* the words of this Torah,' but rather, 'who does not *uphold* the words of this Torah.'" (Ramban, ad loc.)

The Rambam addresses the subject of attitude in *Hilkhot Teshuva* (7:3):

"Do not say that there is repentance only for transgressions that involve some action, such as licentiousness, robbery, or theft. Rather, just as a person must repent of these, so he must seek out his negative thoughts, to repent of anger, and of hostility, and of jealousy."

The examples that the Rambam cites are admittedly character traits, but it is clear that the same idea applies with regard to negative thoughts. In *Moreh Nevukhim* (III:8), the Rambam explains why *Chazal* taught that thoughts of sin are worse than the sin itself (*Yoma* 29b). The most elevated part of man is the intellect, which is the image of God within him, and therefore whoever introduces thoughts of sin into his mind is committing a more severe desecration than one who performs a sin, physically, with his limbs.

Hence, a person's thoughts occupy a central place in his service of Go. The Gemara (*Yoma* 72b) teaches:

"Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: The verse that reads, 'This is the Torah which Moshe placed (*sam*) …' [teaches that] if a person is worthy, it [the Torah] becomes a life-giving drug (*sam*) or him; if he is not worthy, it becomes a deadly drug for him."

The Gemara does not explain what his worthiness depends on, but it would seem that the intention is what we find in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 31a) concerning a person who studies Torah but has no fear of Heaven. For someone who studies Torah as a purely intellectual exercise, with no commitment to what is written in it, the Torah becomes a deadly drug.

On a certain level this pertains also to us, the inhabitants of the *beit* *midrash*. We must examine closely the thoughts that accompany our study, and decide to what extent Torah study is an existential, vital need for us; to what extent our motivation to study flows from a profound commitment and from viewing Torah study as a central part of our Divine service.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit on Shabbat parashat Nitzavim-Vayelekh 5757 [1997].)