

Parsha Ponders

Nitzavim/Vayeilech | Sep 27, 2024 | 24 Elul 5784

Beyond our capabilities? Impossible¹

לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה-לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשה

It's not in the heavens, such that you would say, "Who will bring us up to the heavens, that he'll take it for us, that he'll have us hear it and perform it"²

The subject of our verse is Torah³. The verse tells us that it's not in the heavens. Rashi tells us⁴ that the implication is that if the Torah were in the heavens, we would be required to go up there and learn it. The question is, how would we get up there? We have to say that if we really would be required to go up to the heavens to learn the Torah, Hashem would provide for us a way⁵. The main point is to say that Hashem would never command us to do something that is beyond our abilities. Now that the Torah is in our domain, we have to seek after it and learn it.

Now, there are some people who are little slow. They think that the Torah is inaccessible to them. However, the Chazon Ish said that anyone who learns Torah is capable of understanding it. Everyone can plumb the depths of the Torah. The reality is just that some people need to put more effort in than others. A parable for this is when people dig to find a water source. There are places where people will find water very quickly, without too much digging. Others will have to dig very deep. Either way, if they dig deep enough, they'll find what they're looking for. Some comprehend the Torah with a little digging, others with more. The difference is not everyone has the same amount of patience.

We have two interesting statements of the Vilna Gaon. He once said⁶ that there were two passages in the *Zohar* that he didn't comprehend. He proclaimed that if there was someone at the end of the earth who could explain it to him, he would travel to them, regardless of the distance. We see from here just how far he would go to learn Torah.

Another statement he made⁷ is regarding Aristotle. The Vilna Gaon claimed that Aristotle was a pure heretic, plain and simple. He wasn't really a seeker of truth. He asserted that if Aristotle came to his house, the Vilna Gaon could miraculously show him the orbits of the sun and planets on his kitchen table. Aristotle would have ignored what his eyes saw and stuck to his opinion that everything is governed only by nature. Aristotle lived in the same generation as Shimon HaTzaddik. Surely Shimon HaTzaddik could have performed even greater miracles for Aristotle. It must be that Aristotle knew about his Creator, and yet nevertheless rebelled. Meaning, he must have had issues in his faith. As a result, he built his whole philosophy of life. Why didn't he go to Shimon HaTzaddik to resolve his issues? It must be that he was deliberate in his denial of G-d.

If we think about the Vilna Gaon's assessment, we will realize that Aristotle was in Greece, and Shimon HaTzaddik was in the land of Israel. How did Aristotle know about Shimon HaTzaddik? It's known that

¹ Based on [Ayeles HaShachar](#) to [Deuteronomy](#) 30:12

² [Deuteronomy](#) *loc. cit.*

³ Cf. [Ramban](#) *ad. loc.*

⁴ *Ad. loc.*

⁵ [Rav Shteinman](#) says this is the simple approach. He first suggests that we would get there through a divine incantation, which is something only special people would merit to achieve. That means the Torah would have only been available to certain people

⁶ [Pe'as HaShulchan](#) *Hakdama*

⁷ [Rav Menachem Mendel MiShklov](#)'s commentary on [Avos](#) *Hakdama*

Shimon HaTzaddik was world renowned. Still, that is quite the distance, and a very difficult and expensive journey in those days. Nevertheless, the Vilna Gaon determined that Aristotle was wanton in his heresy. We see that the Vilna Gaon felt that for matters of faith, if there's someone to ask for clarity, they shouldn't maintain their difficulties. They should seek out the one with the answers, no matter the effort involved. Since Aristotle didn't bother, he must have been a willful heretic.

Similarly, if someone truly understands the love of Torah, the love of Truth, they have no excuses. They have to go and seek out the truth. Someone who is having a hard time in learning, if they're obviously not in impossible circumstances, then they should keep trying. We have to focus on our love of Torah, and our love of Truth. Everything else doesn't matter. It's not in the heavens.

Good Shabbos