

פרשת
ואתחנן
Parashat Va'etchanan

*Devarim / Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11, Isaiah 40:1-26
Luke 22:13-38*

How to Maintain our Devotion to God

While reading through this week's Torah portion, we are reminded of something Yeshua taught. Yeshua used this Hebrew idiom to expand upon this week's Torah portion, saying the following, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples."* (John 15:1-8) The definition of an idiom is an expression, a term, or a phrase whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal definitions and the arrangement of its parts, but refers instead to a figurative meaning that is known only through the conventional use of a specific language.

Notice how this parallels what we read according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:4* which states, וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם: 4:4 *‘But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you. (NASB)* Those who did not attached themselves to the God of Israel were pruned off and removed because they were not fruitful in their faith. These Scriptures state that we are to attach ourselves to the Lord for life in order that we will be able to live. Yeshua is using this same analogy of himself, those who attach themselves to him will live. Listening and hearing the Lord is connected to our seeking Him and to walking in His ways. We are called to attach ourselves to the Lord. *“What does this mean to attached ourselves? How is this done? Is this connected to repentance?”* This is emphasized in the way in which Moshe spoke to the people, saying *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1*, א וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַע אֶל-הַחֻקִּים וְאֶל-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תִּחְיוּ וּבִאתֶם וּיְרִשְׁתֶּם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ: 4:1 *‘Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. (NASB)* Moshe speaks to the children of Israel to listen to the Chukim (הַחֻקִּים) and Mishpatim (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) grouping these together in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1*. In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:2* he goes on to say, ב לֹא תִסְפוּ עַל-הַדְּבָר, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תִגְרְעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: 4:2 *‘You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. (NASB)* Note how Moshe separates the mitzvot (מִצְוֹת) to the second verse saying listening (obeying) is coupled to the statutes and judgements, whereas keeping (Shomer) is connected to the mitzvot in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:2*. What we are being given here is the instruction set for how to maintain our devotion to God. The temptation to forget the Lord God of Israel is always present because of the world we live in. But there is a way to maintain one’s devotion to the Lord based upon what we are reading here in this week’s Torah portion. In *Joshua 23:6-11*, Joshua says we are to give attention to God’s Word, and that the Lord never blesses disobedience. The unmistakable sign of impending

abandonment of the Lord is found within the diminishing respect for the Chukim (חֻקִּים) and Mishpatim (מִשְׁפָּטִים) in our lives. Modern theologies teach us today that the Mitzvot (מִצְוֹת, commands) are our enemy (dispensationalism), however this is not the case. What Moshe is explaining to us in this week's Torah portion is a disregard for God's commands are the first steps toward spiritual rebellion. Joshua talked about "keeping" and "doing" God's Word, and not simply giving a faith based consent to its claims. This concept of attachment means to "cling," to "hold fast," or "cleave." (e.g. *Bereshit / Genesis 2:24*) This is the description of the intimate embrace of a husband and wife, or a young child holding fast to his father's hand. To "cling" to the Lord as described here in Parachat Va'etchanan is to stay so close to him that no sin can get between you and him. To "cling" to the Lord is to strategically plan for time alone with him for prayer and praise and the study of his Word. To "cling" to the Lord is to trust in His promises, and to walk in His ways, and to always keep His praises upon our lips (*Tehillim / Psalms 63:7-8*). This speaks of cultivating a deep affection for the Lord in every way. This is why Joshua wrote "Be very careful . . . to love the LORD your God" (*Joshua 23:11*). The emphasis here is on a relationship of intimacy, "I am yours and you are mine!" The Lord is not just God. He is our all in all because of his desire to give himself to us in covenant loyalty. His passion for us is undying. The question is what does our passion for God look like?

This week we are looking at *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1-20*.

Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1-20

4:1 'Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 4:2 'You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. 4:3 'Your eyes have seen what the Lord has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the Lord your God has destroyed

them from among you. 4:4 'But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you. 4:5 'See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 4:6 'So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 4:7 'For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 4:8 'Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? 4:9 'Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 4:10 'Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' 4:11 'You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 4:12 'Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form only a voice. 4:13 'So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. 4:14 'The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it. 4:15 'So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 4:16 so

that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 4:17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 4:18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. 4:19 'And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. 4:20 'But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today. (NASB)

ז כי מי-גוי גדול, Moshe wrote in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:7-9*, אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרִבִּים אֵלָיו כִּי־הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל-קְרָאנוּ אֵלָיו: ח וּמִי גוי גדול אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צְדִיקִים כָּל־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נָתַן לְפָנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם: ט רק הַשְּׁמֹר לָהּ וּשְׁמֹר נִפְשָׁהּ מְאֹד פֶּן-תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ וּפֶן-יִסּוּרוּ מִלְּבָבְךָ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ וְהוֹדַעְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ: 4:7 'For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 4:8 'Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? 4:9 'Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. (NASB) He speaks of the greatness of God who listens to His people who cry out for Him. These Chukim (הַחֻקִּים), Mishpatim (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים), and Mitzvot (מִצְוֹת) are righteous, holy, and good, and the nations will wonder at the Lord and His people for the greatness of the instructions the Lord has given to His people. The Scriptures say וּשְׁמֹר לָהּ וּשְׁמֹר נִפְשָׁהּ where Moshe speaks of the importance of clinging to the Lord saying, ד וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בִּיהוָה 4:4 'But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you. (NASB) It is in these verses 690

from chapter 4 of Devarim / Deuteronomy that the Lord says, “*I am God. Only I can bring you freedom. There are no other gods.*” The Lord is making it absolutely clear, there is only one God, and only he can bring salvation and freedom. It is within this context we read in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 6* the Shema, where the Lord reminds us, “*Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*” (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4-5*). In these section of the Torah, we are told there is only one God and we are supposed to love and follow him. Note in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4, 5, and 6*, we are given the same subject: “*God is one*” and “*follow Him only.*” The rabbis interpret this in the following way:

Rabeinu Bahya on Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1

ועתה ישראל שמע אל החקים ואל המשפטים אשר אנכי מלמד אתכם לעשות למען תחיו. למדנו מכאן שהלמוד אינו עיקר רק עם המעשה, וכן דרשו רז”ל לא המדרש הוא העיקר אלא המעשה. ולמדנו עוד שעם המעשה יחיה האדם, לא זולתו. ועתה ישראל שמע אל החוקים ואל המ־שפטים אשר אנכי מלמד אתכם לעשות למען תחיו; *“and now Israel hearken to the statutes and social laws I will teach you to perform in order that you shall live.” This verse teaches that learning, studying the Torah is not the main purpose of the Torah but performing the commandments one has studied. Our sages in Avot 1,17 stated this succinctly when they taught לא המדרש הוא העיקר אלא המעשה, “not the study is of the essence but the performance, the deed.” Only performance of deeds is a guarantee of life (both here and in the here-after).*

The rabbis say the primary purpose for studying the Torah is for its application to life. To perform the commands that one has studied. Note how they say studying is not the essence of what we do, but the act of obedience is what defines us. The conclusion is t he performance of the deed is the guarantee of life. Note that this is not a contradictory

understanding when we compare this to what Paul wrote to the Galatians in *Galatians 3:1-14*.

Galatians 3:1-14

3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 3:2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 3:4 Did you suffer so many things in vain if indeed it was in vain? 3:5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3:6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 3:7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 3:8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' 3:9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.' 3:11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' 3:12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.' 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' 3:14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (NASB)

Paul speaks of the receiving the Spirit of God and whether the Spirit

of God was received by works or by faith. The point Paul is making is not against doing good deeds (performing the commands). His is arguing that the performing of the command is not the means to the end. It is rather the “*end to the means.*” Obedience to the command is the outcome of our faith, it is not the author of our faith. This is why Paul argues in the way that he does, the Spirit of God was given by faith and not by the works of the Law. This faith that we have is said to make us sons of Abraham, whether we are Jew or Gentile, because faith comes first which produces the fruit of obedience. Paul argues the one who are of the works of the Law are under a curse. The idea is if we based our faith upon our obedience, this will always result in failure and there will remain within us a burning of success and failure, coupled with a lack of peace. The hope that we have is not based on our ability to obey the commands. This is why he says to the Galatians, *3:11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’ 3:12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’ (NASB)* Note here how he says we are not justified by obedience to the command, and then states that the righteous will live by faith. The definition of the righteous are those who obey God’s command. What Paul is writing here is difficult to understand in a sense. His main point is we are to live by faith, because by faith we are led to walk in obedience, to seek the Lord, to study His Words, and to put them into practice. There is a perspective here that focuses upon our motivations. This is illustrated by the following commentary.

Chizkuni on Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:1 Part 1

ועתה ישראל וגו' לרישיה דסיפרא קאי זכור והסתכל כי אחרי שעשה לך הקב"ה ממתן תורה ועד עכשיו כל הטובות הללו אתה הכעסת לפי-ניו כמה פעמים ובשבילכם נטרדתי מלהכנס לארץ ומכאן ואילך שמע *“and now, Israel, etc;”* אל החוקים וקבל מהם מוסר והכל מחול. *‘ועתה ישראל וגו' ועתה, “and now, Israel, etc.,” according to the beginning of the Sifri at the beginning of this paragraph, the words: “and now, Israel, etc.,” are Moses’ introduction to relating laws in the Torah, after he had reminded the people why it had taken so long since the Exodus until now and the reason why they were still on the east bank of the river Jordan. He had reviewed how in spite of all*

the disappointments that their conduct had caused G-d, He had not stopped displaying His fondness for them in a tangible manner each day. He, Moses, would have long ago been able to enter the Holy Land had it not been for the delays caused by them, and his having exhausted the lifespan accorded to him during those years. [His having struck the rock by mistake would have been a scenario that could never have occurred but for their having been condemned to be in the desert for so many years. Ed.] It certainly was time for them now to listen to all the laws that it would be their duty to observe once they crossed the river Jordan.

Part 2

למען תחיו , למען תחיו כי עובדי פעור נשמדו. למען תחיו , *in order that you will continue to live;” the people who had worshipped the Peor had all been killed for having failed to keep such a basic commandment.*

Part 3

“therefore it is up to you to inherit” by keeping G-d’s commandments. Do not think or even say, since Moses had been told by G-d that the Israelites standing in front of Him in Numbers 26,53, who had been told that the land would be distributed to them, this was the kind of promise that could not be revoked if they would prove unworthy.

Note how the commentary speaks of the sin of one person may effect the life, faith, and blessing of another. (*In the example of Moshe striking the rock would have never happened if the people had not been disobedient.*) The commentary speaks of the fondness of God for His people, even in the midst of their sins. The rabbis conclude that all of these commands, it will be the people’s duty to observe once they cross the river Jordan entering into the Promises the Lord has given them. This is very important interpretation, since it was not by the command that caused them to enter into the Land, it was their faith and God’s mercy that led them into the Land. It was because of their

unfaithfulness they died in the wilderness. These are the same concepts Paul appears to be making here in his letter to the Galatians. His is arguing that the performing of the command is not the means to the end. It is rather the “*end to the means.*” Obedience to the command is the outcome of our faith, it is not the author of our faith. This is why Paul argues in the way that he does, the Spirit of God was given by faith and not by the works of the Law.

The Talmud Bavli has the following to say concerning faithfulness and truth.

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 64a:11

Rav Yehuda adds: You, the house of Israel, are not like that woman who could not bear the repulsiveness of Ba'al-Peor. It is stated with regard to the attitude of the Jewish people toward idol worship: “That have attached themselves [hanitzmadim] to Ba'al-Peor” (Numbers 25:5), indicating a tight attachment, like a tightly bound cover [ketzamid patil] tied firmly onto a vessel. Yet with regard to the attitude of the Jewish people toward God it is stated: “But you who did cleave [hadevekim] to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 4:4), i.e., the connection between the Jewish people and God is like two dates that are lightly attached [hadevukot] to one another but are not tightly pressed together.

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 90b:13

And there are those who say that it is from this following verse that he said to them his ultimate proof: “But you who cleave to the Lord your God every one of you is alive this day” (Deuteronomy 4:4). Wasn't it obvious with regard to the children of Israel whom God was addressing, that “every one of you is alive this day”? Rather, the meaning of the verse is: Even on the day when everyone is dead you will live; just as today every one of you is alive, so too, in the World-to-Come every one of you will be alive.

The rabbis discuss the attitude of Israel in the case of Baal-Peor, they attached themselves to this false god (*Bamidbar / Numbers 25:5*). Their attachment is described as a tightly bound cover onto a vessel. This is an interesting analogy since it draws in the illustration that

whatever was placed inside cannot escape. When we consider the act of idolatry, that was coupled to immorality, sin, and unrighteousness, these things are added unto a person who participated in Baal-Peor worship. The contents of such cannot be changed. On the other hand, the one who cleaved unto the God of Israel, the Lord adds to such a person righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. Note how the comparison is to two dates pressed together lightly. One has only a moderate effect upon another, suggesting we are called to cooperate with the work of the Lord in our lives. This is contrasted to the idolatry which is forceful as a lid that is stuck tightly to a vessel. The concepts here are to faith and faithfulness. Cleaving to the Lord is both the act of having faith, and being faithful, which is described in the Talmud as *“today every one of you is alive, so too, in the World-to-Come every one of you will be alive.”*

Our devotion to God is found in this concept of attachment which means to *“cling,”* to *“hold fast,”* or *“cleave.”* (e.g. *Bereshit / Genesis 2:24*) This is the description of the intimate embrace of a husband and wife, or a young child holding fast to his father’s hand. To *“cling”* to the Lord as described here in Parachat Va’etchanan is to stay so close to him that no sin can get between you and him. This clinging to the Lord is exactly what Yeshua was teaching in *John 15:1-8* *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”* To *“cling”* to the Lord is to trust in His promises, and to walk in His ways, and to always keep His praises upon our lips (*Te-hillim / Psalms 63:7-8*). This speaks of cultivating a deep affection for the Lord in every way. This is why Joshua wrote *“Be very careful . . . to love the LORD your God”* (*Joshua 23:11*). The emphasis here is on intimacy, *“I am yours and you are mine!”* This is how Yeshua could say, *“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.”* (*John 15:1-8*) The Lord is not just God. He is our all in all because of his desire to give himself to us in covenant loyalty. His passion for us is undying. The question is what does our passion for God look like?

Our passion for the Lord should be found within the concept of repentance, having a change of mind that leads us to walk away from sin and not do it again. This change of mind and attitude, the change of perspective, results in a change in behavior. It means turning from the life of disobedience (sin) that is contrary to God's Torah, to a way of life that is defined by God's Torah. Repentance means to surrender our lives, mind, body, and soul, to the will of God according to His word. When we consider the Torah and its purpose, to direct us back to the ways of righteousness, and to cause us to recognize our need for a savior, we realize the truth of what repentance means for God's people. It forces us to think about what the Lord is doing, where He is leading us, and also what we are doing that He is not leading us to do. Cultivating our devotion to God is found in the Torah commands. The Torah describes both positive and negative commands (e.g. "*you shall not do...*"). On the positive side, repentance means turning to righteousness through a life of faith and obedience. The rabbis recognize that many of the mitzvot in the Torah are negative (e.g. "*you shall not do...*"). This however provides us with an opportunity, because each negative command has a positive side. For example, the command forbidding the worship of false gods means "*Worship only the true God.*" The command against idolatry means "*Worship God in spirit and in truth.*" The command forbidding taking God's name in vain means "*Praise His name, and bring honor to His name by your good example.*" The commandment against murder means "*You shall cherish the gift of life*" and especially the life of your brother and even your enemy. Our devotion to the God of Israel is found in all of these things. Most importantly, our devotion to the Lord is found in our faith in Yeshua the Messiah, to believe He is the one our Father in heaven has sent to redeem us and to guide us in life and truth according to God's Torah. The Messiah directs us back to the ways of righteousness, and to cause us to recognize our need for a savior, we realize the truth of what repentance means for God's people. The Torah forces us to think about what the Lord is doing, where He is leading us, and also what we are doing that He is not leading us to do. This is the point and the purpose of the Torah and God's Messiah in our lives!