

Parashat Ki Tavo: When Will We Understand?

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Devarim 29:3-4	
ולא נתן יהוה לכם לב לדעת ועינים לראות ואזנים לשמע עד היום הזה:	Yet to this day, God has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

1. Experience

Bavli Avodah Zarah 5b	
אף משה רבינו לא רמזה להן לישראל אלא לאחר ארבעים שנה, שנאמר: "ואלוה אתכם במדבר ארבעים שנה", וכתוב: "ולא נתן ה' לכם לב וגו'". אמר רבא: שמע מינה לא קאי איניש אדעתיה דרביה עד ארבעין שנין.	Yet even Moses our teacher , who said this to the Jewish people, did not allude to the Jewish people until after forty years that they should have stated this request, as it is stated: "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness" (Deuteronomy 29:4), which shows that Moses was speaking forty years after the revelation at Sinai. And at that point it is written: "But the Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day" (Deuteronomy 29:3). Rabba said: Conclude from here that a person does not understand the opinion of his teacher until after forty years , as Moses said this to the Jewish people only after forty years of learning Torah.

Rashi on Devarim 29:3	
ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת. להכיר את חסדו הקב"ה ולדבק בו:	To understand the loving-kindnesses of the Omnipresent and to cleave unto Him.

2. Obedience

Devarim Rabbah 7:10	
ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת (דברים כט, ג), מהו ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת, אמר רבי יצחק בשעה ששמעו ישראל על הר סיני ואמרו (שמות כד, ז): כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא (דברים ה, כו): מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם וגו', שמעו ישראל ושתקו, אמר רבי יהודה בן לוי למה הדבר דומה לחבר אחד קשה שראה עכנא אחת קשה, אמר מי יוכל לחבר את זו, אמרו לו ולא את החבר, הכל ממך. כך כיון	"But the Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day": What is, "but the Lord has not given you a heart to know"? Rabbi Yitzhak said: When Israel stood at Mount Sinai and said: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will perform and we will heed" (Exodus 24:7), the Holy One blessed be He said: "Would that this heart will be for them [to fear Me and to observe all My commandments forever, so that it will be good for them and for their children forever]" (Deuteronomy 5:26).

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>שָׁמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבָבְכֶם זֶה לָהֶם, הָיָה לָהֶן לִוְמֵר רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם אֲתָה תֵּן, לְפִיכָךְ אָמַר מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא נָתַן ה' לָכֶם לֵב לִדְעוֹת.</p>	<p>Israel heard, and they were silent. Rabbi Yehuda ben Levi said: To what is the matter comparable? It is to a powerful snake charmer who saw a certain powerful serpent. He said: 'Who is able to charm this one?' They said to him: 'Are you not the snake charmer? It is all from you.' So, when the Holy One blessed be He said: "Would that this heart will be for them," they should have said: Master of the universe, You make it so. That is why Moses said: "But the Lord has not given you a heart to know."</p>
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Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 4:2	
<p>וּמֵהֶן חֲמֵשֶׁה דְּבָרִים הַנוֹעְלִים דְּרָכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה בְּפָנֵי עוֹשֵׂיהֶן. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. הַפּוֹרֵשׁ מִן הַצִּבּוּר, לְפִי שֶׁבָּזְמַן שִׁיעָשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה לֹא יִהְיֶה עִמָּהֶן וְאִינוּ זֹכָה עִמָּהֶן בְּזָכוֹת שֶׁעוֹשִׂין וְהַחֹלֵק עַל דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים, לְפִי שֶׁמְחַלְקָתוֹ גּוֹרֶמֶת לוֹ לְפָרֵשׁ מֵהֶן וְאִינוּ יוֹדְעֵי דְּרָכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְהַמְלִיעִיג עַל הַמִּצְוֹת, שֶׁכִּינֹן שְׁנֵתְבַזּוּ בְּעֵינָיו אִינוּ רֹדֵף אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְלֹא עוֹשֵׂן וְאֵם לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה בָּמָה יִזְכָּה. 2. וְהַמְבַּזֶּה רַבּוֹתָיו, שֶׁדָּבָר זֶה גּוֹרֵם לוֹ לְדַחְפוֹ וּלְטָרְדוֹ כְּגִיחָזִי וּבְזָמַן שֶׁנִּטְרָד לֹא יִמָּצֵא מְלִמֵּד וּמוֹרֶה לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ הַתְּשׁוּבָה. 3. וְהַשּׂוֹנֵא אֶת הַתּוֹכָחוֹת שֶׁהָרִי לֹא הֵנִיחַ לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ תְּשׁוּבָה. 4. הַפּוֹרֵשׁ מִן הַצִּבּוּר, לְפִי שֶׁבָּזְמַן שִׁיעָשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה לֹא יִהְיֶה עִמָּהֶן וְאִינוּ זֹכָה עִמָּהֶן בְּזָכוֹת שֶׁעוֹשִׂין וְהַחֹלֵק עַל דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים, לְפִי שֶׁמְחַלְקָתוֹ גּוֹרֶמֶת לוֹ לְפָרֵשׁ מֵהֶן וְאִינוּ יוֹדְעֵי דְּרָכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְהַמְלִיעִיג עַל הַמִּצְוֹת, שֶׁכִּינֹן שְׁנֵתְבַזּוּ בְּעֵינָיו אִינוּ רֹדֵף אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְלֹא עוֹשֵׂן וְאֵם לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה בָּמָה יִזְכָּה. 5. וְהַמְבַּזֶּה רַבּוֹתָיו, שֶׁדָּבָר זֶה גּוֹרֵם לוֹ לְדַחְפוֹ וּלְטָרְדוֹ כְּגִיחָזִי וּבְזָמַן שֶׁנִּטְרָד לֹא יִמָּצֵא מְלִמֵּד וּמוֹרֶה לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ הַתְּשׁוּבָה. 6. וְהַשּׂוֹנֵא אֶת הַתּוֹכָחוֹת שֶׁהָרִי לֹא הֵנִיחַ לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ תְּשׁוּבָה. 	<p>Among [the twenty-four that hold back teshuvah] are five deeds which cause the paths of Teshuvah to be locked before those who commit them. They are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One who separates himself from the community; when they repent, he will not be together with them, and he will not merit to share in their merit. 2. One who contradicts the words of the Sages; the controversy he provokes will cause him to cut himself off from them, and thus, he will never know the ways of repentance. 3. One who scoffs at the mitzvot, since he considers them as degrading, will not pursue them or fulfill them. If he does not fulfill mitzvot, how can he merit [to repent]? 4. One who demeans his teachers; this will cause them to reject and dismiss him as [Elishah did to] Gehazi. In this period of rejection, he will not find a teacher or guide to show him the path of truth. 5. One who hates admonishment; this will not leave him a path for repentance. Admonishment leads to Teshuvah. When a person is informed about his sins and shamed because of them, he will repent...
<p>לְפִיכָךְ צָרִיךְ לְהַעֲמִיד בְּכָל קְהָל וְקְהָל מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל חָכֵם גָּדוֹל וְזָקֵן וִירָא שְׂמִימִים מְנוּעָרִי וְאֶהוּב לָהֶם שֶׁיֵּהָא מוֹכִיחַ לְרַבִּים וּמְחַזְרֵן בְּתְשׁוּבָה, וְזֶה שֶׁשּׂוֹנֵא אֶת הַתּוֹכָחוֹת אִינוּ בָּא לְמוֹכִיחַ וְלֹא שׁוֹמֵעַ דְּבָרָיו לְפִיכָךְ יַעֲמֵד בְּחִטְאָתָיו שֶׁהֵם בְּעֵינָיו טוֹבִים:</p>	<p>Therefore, it is proper for each and every congregation in Israel to appoint a great sage of venerable age, with [a reputation of] fear of heaven from his youth, beloved by the community, to admonish the masses and motivate them to Teshuvah. This person who hates admonishment will not come to the preacher's [lecture] or hear his words. Accordingly, he will continue his sinful [paths], which he regards as good.</p>

3. When Will We Understand?

Rabbi Yehuda Amital z"l, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Yom Ha-atzma'ut 5747 (1987)
<p>Hazal teaches, "But the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive" (Devarim 29:3) – a person does not fully understand his teacher's thought until the age of forty. Perhaps now that we have passed our fortieth year, we will understand the thinking of our Teacher, the Holy One, blessed be He, and perceive what He wanted of us at the time of the establishment of the State. Then we will merit for God to pour a spirit upon us from on High, as Rabbi Yehuda ha-Levi said: "As I emerged in Your direction, I found You emerging towards me."</p>