



The Ziegler School  
of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

# Walking with Mitzvot

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דרכיה דרכי נעם

In Memory of Harold Held and Louise Held,  
of blessed memory

The Held Foundation  
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# MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT

RABBI MOSHE SMOLKIN

The Hebrew word “mitzvah” is related to the Aramaic word “tzavta,” meaning connection. The mitzvot are the Jewish pathways to connect with God and with people. They enable us to see the sacred in the mundane, and they create bridges connecting people across space and time. Mitzvot help us expand our awareness of ourselves and open us to the realization that we are interconnected with the Holy One.

One of the primary mitzvot is the affirmation of the Shema. According to Deuteronomy 6:4-8, it is a mitzvah to say the Shema twice daily, in the morning and at night. The following is my interpretive translation of the Shema:

Hear O Israel: YHWH is our God; YHWH is One. Love YHWH, your God, with all your heart, with all your nefesh, and with all your m’od. Let the ways of connection that I provide for you this day be in your heart. Teach them to the next generation. Express them: When you are at home and when you are on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind them as a sign upon your arm, and let them be a signal between your eyes. Write them on the doorposts of your home and upon your gates.

Examining the words of the Shema illuminates the world of mitzvot and demonstrates how the mitzvot uplift our spirits.

## HEAR O ISRAEL: YHWH IS OUR GOD: YHWH IS ONE

The Shema begins by calling for Israel’s attention. We may interpret Israel to mean all Jews, but Israel is also a name for Jacob, given to him as recognition of his sacred engagement with the Divine and with humanity, including himself (Genesis 32:29).

The Midrash details the end of Jacob’s life when he calls his sons together (Genesis 49:1). When they congregate, Jacob implores them to continue honoring God in the ways of their great-grandfather Abraham and their grandfather Isaac. His sons assure him they will, affirming their commitment, “Hear [our father] Israel: YHWH is our God; YHWH is One” (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 96).

This Midrash highlights how the mitzvah of Shema can create connection: Jacob’s sons came together, connecting as a family. Jacob asked them to follow the ways of their ancestors, the Jewish pathways, the mitzvot that had been handed down from generation to generation. Finally, the sons affirmed their commitment to honor God through the mitzvot, joining as one to perform the mitzvah of Shema.

Broadening our view, Israel represents all of Jacob’s biological and spiritual descendants. As Jews, we all inherit the mitzvot as a way to connect with God and one another.

Israel also represents each one of us who engage in the sacred struggle of life. The Shema calls for us all to realize that despite the seemingly disparate parts of our world, there is an underlying unity.

We can understand this underlying unity through the first line of the Shema. While it is often translated, “Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is One,” in fact, the word “Lord” does not appear in the original Hebrew. Rather the sacred name of God (YHWH) appears in the Shema. This name is no simple noun; instead, it is a composite of different forms of the verb “to be.” Rather than “Lord,” the Hebrew asks us to see God as Being itself. All that was, is, and will be exists within the Being of God: “For behold, I fill heaven and earth” (Jeremiah 23:24). By saying the Shema, we are reminded that all is connected, that all is unified within the Holy One.

## LOVE YHWH, YOUR GOD, WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR NEFESH, AND WITH ALL YOUR M’OD

Moving to the next line of the Shema, we encounter the concept of love and its demonstration. What do we do when we love somebody? Do we give them flowers or make them dinner? Do we buy them DVDs of their favorite show or get them seats at a basketball game?



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If someone claims to love us, but never says “I love you” and never acts lovingly, then we reject that claim. If there is truly love, then there are deeds that demonstrate that love. Mitzvot are the Jewish deeds that create connection and show love. They are the Jewish way of saying, “We love You God.”

In this line, we are asked to love God not just with our heart, but also with our “nefesh” and our “m’od.” Within the mystical tradition, our nefesh is the aspect of the soul that is most connected with our physical bodies. And, classically, our m’od represents our physical possessions. In other words, though we love God in our hearts, we must also demonstrate our love by doing mitzvot through our bodies and the objects that we encounter. Through performing mitzvot in this physical world, we demonstrate our love for God.

Yet merely performing physical mitzvot is not enough. While we as physical beings must demonstrate our love through physical means, ultimately, “The Holy Blessed One desires the heart” (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 106b). Thus, mitzvot must be imbued with love and a desire to connect with God.

Traditionally, Jewish mystics would recite a “kavannah,” a declaration of intent, before performing a mitzvah. This would help ensure that they were not performing a mitzvah by rote, but rather that they were putting their heart and soul into each holy act.

The mystics would utter the formula: “L’shem yichud kudsha b’rich hu u’shechintei, for the sake of connecting the Holy Blessed One and the Divine Presence.” In speaking this formula, they would acknowledge that in spite of the seeming separation between God and our world, all, in fact, is connected to God, for “there is nothing other than God” (Deuteronomy 4:35). With this awareness, they would use the mitzvah to bind themselves to the Holy One. While we might experiment with the traditional formula of “*L’shem yichud...*” we could also prepare for a mitzvah by simply expressing our intent: “We do this mitzvah to connect to You.”

## LET THE WAYS OF CONNECTION THAT I PROVIDE FOR YOU THIS DAY BE IN YOUR HEART

This line of the Shema reminds us that each day we are given opportunities to connect with each other, with our world and with God. God invites us to connect: “This very day, if you would but listen to the Divine call” (Psalms 95:7).

Mitzvot increase our awareness of the holy moments pervading our lives. Through our daily affirmations and blessings, we acknowledge the miracles that fill our lives: waking, opening our eyes, getting out of bed, putting on clothes, using the bathroom, eating. Each is a wonderful gift. Each gives us an opportunity to expand our awareness and connect.

The Talmud relates how Ben Zoma would contemplate, with wonder and with gratitude, the work done by so many people that enabled him to have food to eat and clothes to wear (Berachot 58a).

As we have our morning coffee, it is a mitzvah to say a blessing, taking a moment to verbalize our gratitude and our connection: to God who gives energy and existence to our world, to the land that takes in that energy and produces coffee beans, and to the people who work the land and invent complex coffee machines with their copious components manufactured around the globe.

Each day, throughout the day, we are given holy moments to connect. Mitzvot encourage our awareness of these opportunities. If we would but listen, we could hear God’s voice calling through the mitzvot, inviting us to connect.

## TEACH THEM TO THE NEXT GENERATION

The Shema welcomes us into the world of teaching, leading us to perform a mitzvah that provides a plethora of possibilities for connection. Many mitzvot are specifically designed with pedagogical goals. For example,



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the celebration of Passover is structured to teach children to ask questions about our people's redemption from Egypt: What is this *matzah stuff*? What does it mean to be free? How can we act as free people? What can we do to help others become free?

Teaching is present as we explore intergenerational connections. How did our parents sing the blessings over the Chanukah menorah? How did Grandma prepare for Shabbat? How did Zeyde work towards *tikkun olam* and justice in our world? Through their observance of mitzvot, our ancestors passed down the Jewish ways of connection.

Judaism's high regard for teachers guides us to see them as akin to our parents. The Hebrew language reveals this close connection, as both our parent, our "horah," and our teacher, our "morah," guide us to Torah. In the Bible, as Elisha watches his teacher Elijah being taken up to heaven, he cries out, "My father, my father, Israel's chariot and horsemen" (Kings II 2:12). Elijah, his father in Torah, taught Elisha how to operate the vehicle of mitzvot as a way of reaching God and people.

In Judaism, educational opportunities abound. Children watch their elders, imbibing ideas and behaviors: How do my parents speak with one another? Peers learn from one another: If he is doing that community service project, maybe I should too. And we grow from listening to our children: How can she so easily surf the net to learn about Rashi?

One last note on teaching: As we are not born knowing mitzvot, all of us are students learning these pathways of connection. Passing mitzvot down from one generation to another has been one of the great achievements of our people. If we are to reach our goal of living in a world that is whole, we must learn and teach ways of connection.

## **EXPRESS THEM: WHEN YOU ARE AT HOME AND WHEN YOU ARE ON THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU RISE UP**

Mitzvot are not meant to help us to connect with God solely in a synagogue. Whether we are walking down the street or whether we are stuck in traffic, the mitzvot help us bring Judaism into our lives. Each moment of our lives presents an opportunity to embody the teachings of our tradition.

The mitzvot provide wonderful guidelines for bringing holiness into our world, but each of us must find our own way to apply them to our lives. Let us consider a few practical applications.

If we were late to work and got into a fender-bender, how would we follow the mitzvah – to love our fellow as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18)?

If we saw a friend participating in something illicit, how would we carry out the mitzvah – to reprove our fellow (Leviticus 19:17)?

If we performed the mitzvah of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1) to end an unhealthy marriage, how would we uphold the mitzvah – to not hold a grudge (Leviticus 19:18)?

If we saw someone's rights ignored, and the courts would not or could not help, how would we strive after the mitzvah – to pursue justice (Deuteronomy 16:20)?

If we were faced with an unruly customer, how would we embody the mitzvah – to honor each person as a manifestation of the Divine (Genesis 1:27)?



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The path of life is filled with twists and turns. The mitzvot offer us ways to walk that path as a mensch, but each of us must do the spiritual work to make that goal a reality.

## **BIND THEM AS A SIGN UPON YOUR ARM, AND LET THEM BE A SIGNAL BETWEEN YOUR EYES**

In the cartoon episode “Bugs’ Bonnets,” the Acme Theatrical Hat Company’s truck accidentally opens, releasing hundreds of hats into the air. Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd wear scores of hats throughout the episode, and their behavior switches with each new hat. Through the show, they personify a soldier, a warden, a little old lady, a boy scout, a gangster, a police officer, a judge, a bride, and a groom, to name a few. The episode delightfully demonstrates how clothing impacts the way we live our lives.

As a whole, our society is fashion-conscious. Countless advertisements constantly alert us to what is in vogue. We take this information and use it to dress in ways that express who we are, though our success may often depend on how well we conform to societal trends. Judaism’s mystical tradition takes a different approach to the idea of clothing. Our actions form the garments of our soul. A life filled with mitzvot will fashion a particularly gorgeous garment.

In place of advertisements, we have “Talmud Torah,” the study of the Torah. When we learn Torah, we discover what is spiritually in vogue. Then we can try on mitzvot, exploring how each impacts our lives and the lives of those around us. Finally, we can return home excited about our new mitzvah garments.

The mitzvah referred to in this line of the Shema is the mitzvah of tefillin. Wrapping tefillin is an excellent example of how mitzvot are meant to operate. We connect to the words and message of the Shema by physically binding them to our bodies. We feel them attached to our body, pointing to our mind and our heart. Tefillin help us sense that the actions of our hands are tied to the thoughts of our mind and the motivations of our hearts.

Mitzvot are intended to bind together our body, mind and spirit. They allow the physical to link with and affect our intellectual and spiritual sides. Though the body, mind, and spirit may appear separate, they are all interconnected. Mitzvot help us to unite them so that they may work together in harmony.

## **WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOME AND UPON YOUR GATES**

In the mitzvah of mezuzah, we connect the words of the Shema to the openings of our homes. Traditionally, “Shadai,” one of the holy names of God, is written on the mezuzah. The name Shadai has been seen as an acronym for “Shomer Delatot Yisrael,” “Guardian of the doors of Israel.”

If performed properly, the mitzvah of mezuzah protects our “menschlichkeit” as we exit our homes and as we enter them. When we exit our homes, we can strive to bring wholeness and holiness into our world. We can seek to encounter each person as a manifestation of the Divine (Genesis 1:27). And we can aspire to be our best selves. When we enter our homes, we can also strive to act with compassion and love. We can care for and support those within our home, including ourselves. We can follow the path of the right and the good (Deuteronomy 6:18), for even if the rest of the world will not see, “There is no place devoid of God” (Tikunei Zohar 122b).

The doorposts of our home also represent the liminal moments of our life, when we walk through an opening in time and begin again. We can welcome a baby girl into the covenant through the mitzvah of the Brit Bat. We can celebrate the maturation of a child, now adolescent, through the mitzvah of Bar Mitzvah. We can rejoice when two people join in partnership through the mitzvah of Chuppah. And we can comfort the mourners after a death through the mitzvah of Levayat HaMet. The mitzvot connect the various periods of our life and the people who walk life’s journey with us.



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The doorposts also correspond to the transitions of the year. We can celebrate the release of Spring through the mitzvah of Passover. We can bask in the illumination of Summer through the mitzvah of Shavuot. We can take stock of our Fall harvest with the mitzvah of the Yamim Nora'im or High Holy Days, and the mitzvah of Sukkot. We can even brighten the darkness of Winter through the mitzvot of Chanukah. The mitzvot make us aware of the seasons, connecting us with the world around us.

We conclude our journey together as does this line of the Shema – with gates. The mitzvot are the gates, conduits between our hearts and the Holy One. They are openings to let the Divine into our lives. And they are doors through which we can reach out to the Holy One. The mitzvot provide a medium through which our spirits can come to know the Spirit of God. As it says in Proverbs 31:23: “Her partner is known through the gates.” We come to know our Divine Partner through the gates of mitzvot.



## MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT 1

ארחות צדיקים שער ה: שער האהבה  
האהבה כוללת מעשים רבים יותר מכל המידות. וכשישים האדם אהבתו לטובה,  
היא למעלה מכל המידות, כדכתיב: "ואהבת את ה' אלהיך" (דברים ו:ה), ואין  
מעלה בעבודת הבורא יותר ממי שעובד מאהבה....

העובד מאהבה, עוסק בתורה ובמצוות והולך בנתיבות החכמה, לא מפני דבר  
שבעולם, ולא מפני יראת הרעה, ולא כדי לקבל הטובה, אלא עושה האמת מפני  
שהיא אמת, וסוף הטובה לבוא. ומעלה זו היא מעלה גדולה מאד, ואין כל אדם  
זוכה לה. והיא מעלת אברהם אבינו שקראו הקדוש ברוך הוא, "אוהבי" (ישעיה  
מא:ח), לפי שלא עבד אלא מאהבה. והיא המעלה שציונו בה הקדוש ברוך הוא על  
ידי משה רבינו, עליו השלום, שנאמר: "ואהבת את ה' אלהיך" (דברים ו:ה). ובזמן  
שיאהב האדם את השם, ברוך הוא, אהבה הראויה, מיד יעשה כל המצוות מאהבה.

וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה? הוא שיאהב את השם אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאד,  
עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת השם, יתברך, ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד, כאילו חולה  
חולי האהבה, שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה והוא שוגה בה תמיד, בין  
בשבתו, בין בקומו, בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה. יתר מזה תהיה אהבת השם,  
ברוך הוא, בלב אוהביו, שוגים בה תמיד, כמו שציונו: "בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך"  
(דברים ו:ה). והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל: "כי חולת אהבה אני" (שיר השירים  
ב:ה), וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה....

ואין האהבה הזאת מתקיימת אלא במי שנותן דעתו לקיים כל המצוות כהלכתן, כי  
מי שאינו יודע המצוות אשר ציוהו יוצר הכל, אין זה נקרא אוהב גמור. לכן יאהב  
כל אשר יביאהו לאהבת הבורא, ברוך הוא וברוך שמו, והעושה כן, טוב לו בעולם  
הזה ולעולם הבא.

**ORHOT TZADDIKIM (A WORK OF MUSAR, OR ETHICAL BEHAVIOR, WRITTEN IN THE LATE 15TH CENTURY  
BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR.)**

### **GATE 5: THE GATE OF LOVE**

Love, more than any other trait, entails action. And when a person directs their love toward a positive end, it is higher than any other trait. For it is written, "And you shall love YHWH your God" (Deuteronomy 6:5). And there is no greater level of service to the Creator than the person who serves from love.

The person who serves from love immerses themselves in Torah and mitzvot and walks in the ways of wisdom, not because of something in this world, and not because they fear something bad, and not in order to receive any benefit; rather they act the truth because it is true, and in the end the benefit will come. This level is a very great level, and not every person attains it. This is the level of Abraham our patriarch, whom the Holy Blessed One called, "The one who loves me" (Isaiah 41:8), for he served solely from love. This is the level that the Holy Blessed One commanded through Moses our rabbi, peace be upon him, as it says, "And you shall love YHWH your God" (Deuteronomy 6:5). And when a person loves God, the Blessed One, with a love that is befitting, they will immediately do all the mitzvot from love.



# MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT 1

What is the love that is befitting? When a person loves God with such a great, immense, intensely strong love that their soul is wrapped up in the love of God, the Blessed One, and they are constantly fixated on it, as if they were like a love-sick person whose mind is not freed from the object of their love, and they are constantly fixated on it, whether they are sitting or standing, eating or drinking. The love of God, the Blessed One, should be even greater than this in the hearts of those who love God, as God commanded us, “with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 6:5). And this was what Solomon alluded to, “For I am love-sick!” (Song of Songs 2:5), for all of Song of Songs is an allusion to this topic.

This love only endures when a person sets their mind to halakhically fulfill the mitzvot, for a person can not be said to love completely if they are not aware of the mitzvot that the Creator of all has commanded them. Therefore, a person should love all that brings them to a love of the Creator, Blessed is the One and Blessed is Name of the One. For a person who acts this way, it is good for them in this world and in the next world.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- **Do we observe mitzvot because we love God, or do we observe mitzvot because they bring us to love God? Explain.**
- **If we know that doing mitzvot will benefit us in this world and in the next world, how can we do the mitzvot solely out of a pure love of God? The text implies that this is the highest love of God, but how is it possible for us to achieve it?**
- **What does it mean to love God with all your heart and with all your soul?**
- **How is loving God different from our love of other people or from our love of values we hold dear?**



## MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT 2

הזהר לספר בראשית רכד: א:

רבי יהודה פתח ואמר: "החרשים שמעו והעורים הביטו לראות" (ישעיה מב: יח). החרשים שמעו - אלן בני נשא דלא צייתין למלולי אורייתא, ולא פקחין אודנייהו למשמע לפקודי דמאריהון. והעורים - דלא מסתכלין למנדע על מה אינון קיימין.

דהא בכל יומא ויומא כרוזא נפיק וקרי, ולית מאן די שגח. דתניא אינון יומין דבר נש, כד אתברי, בההוא יומא דנפק לעלמא, כלהו קיימין בקיומיהו. ואזלין וטאסין בעלמא. נחתין ואזהרון לבר נש כל יומא ויומא בלחודוי....

תא חזי. כד קריבו אינון יומין קמי מלכא קדישא, אי הוא זכאה האי בר נש דנפיק מעלמא, סליק ועאל באינון יומין. ואינון לבושי יקר דמתלבשא ביה נשמתיה. ואינון יומין הוו דזכה בהו ולא חב בהו. ווי לההוא דגרע יומוי לעילא, דכד בעאן לאלבשא ליה ביומוי. אינון יומין דפגים איהו בחובוי חסרין מההוא לבושא, ואתלבש במנא חסרא. כל שכן אי סגיאין אינון, ולא להוי ליה לבר נש במה דאתלבש בההוא עלמא....

זכאין אינון צדיקיא דיומיהון כלהון טמירין אינון לגביה דמלכא קדישא, ואתעביד מנייהו לבושי יקר לאתלבשא בהו בעלמא דאתי.

### ZOHAR (THE CENTRAL TEXT OF KABBALAH), GENESIS 224a

Rabbi Yehudah opened and said, "Deaf ones, listen! Blind ones, look and see!" (Isaiah 42:18). Deaf ones, listen! – These are the people who do not follow the words of the Torah, and do not open their ears to hear the mitzvot of their Master. Blind ones, look and see! – They do not look to know upon what they stand.

For behold, each day a crier calls out, yet no one pays attention. For it is taught: When a person is created, on the day the person goes out into the world, all the days of the person already exist. The days go and fly out into the world. They descend and one by one caution the person.

Come see: When those days approach the Holy Sovereign, if the person leaving the world is righteous, those days go up and enter and become precious garments, which clothe the person's soul. Those days, that is, in which a person acted righteously and not wickedly. Woe to the one who has lessened their days above, for when they wish to clothe the person in the person's days, the days that were impaired through wickedness will be lacking from the garment, and the person will be clothed in a deficient garment. How much more so if there are many such days, then there will be nothing for the person to wear in that world.

Happy are the righteous whose days are all stored with the Holy Sovereign, for from those days precious garments are made to wear in the next world.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why should mitzvot affect our presence in the next world, if as the previous text implies, mitzvot are an expression of love and are not done for personal gain?
- How can mitzvot help us to weave our lives in this world into beautiful garments?
- How can we personalize our observance of mitzvot so that our individuality is expressed?
- Can doing mitzvot help us to know upon what we stand? If yes, how?



## MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT 3

בראשית רבה מד: א:  
"אחר הדברים האלה היה דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה לאמר וגו'" (בראשית טו: א).  
"האל תמים דרכו, אמרת ה' צרופה, מגן הוא לכל החוסים בו" (תהלים יח: לא).  
אם דרכיו תמימים, הוא על אחת כמה וכמה.  
רב אמר: לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות. וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה  
למי ששוחט מן הצואר או מי ששוחט מן העורף. הוי לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף  
בהם את הבריות.

### MIDRASH GENESIS RABBAH 44:1

"After these things, the word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision saying..." (Genesis 15:1).

"God's path is pure, the word of YHWH is refined, a shield to all who take refuge within it" (Psalm 18:31).

If God's ways are pure, how much more so is God?

Rav said: The mitzvot were given solely to refine people through them. Does the Holy Blessed One care whether a person slaughters an animal by the throat or by the scruff of the neck? Thus, the mitzvot were given solely to refine people through them.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- Look at Genesis Chapter 15. How does this passage relate to mitzvot?
- How do mitzvot help refine people?
- Can mitzvot help us approach the purity of God?
- What does this text imply about the spirit of mitzvot in contrast to the letter of mitzvot?



## MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT 4

היהודי הקדוש מפשיסחא

”ויקרא פרעה אל משה ויאמר: לכו עבדו את ה' רק צאנכם ובקרכם יצג... ויאמר משה: גם אתה תתן בידנו זבחים... כי ממנו נקח לעבד את ה' אלהינו...” (שמות י: כד-כו).

פרעה אמר: אפשר לעבוד את ה' במחשבה ורגש, ואם באמת רצונכם לעבוד ה', צאנכם ובקרכם למה לכם? ”לכו עבדו את ה'” בלב נכון, בכוונה טהורה, ואין לכם צורך בקרבנות, ”צאנכם ובקרכם יוצג”.

אמר לו משה: כוונה בלבד, שאין מעשה מצרף אליה, אינה חשובה ולא כלום. העיקר הוא המעשה ועל ידו תתעלה ותתעמק הכוונה, על-כן ”וגם מקננו ילך עמנו כי ממנו נקח לעבוד את ה' אלהינו.” מן המעשה נתעורר לעבודת ה' בהתלהבות ובדביקות.

### THE HOLY JEW FROM PESHISCHA (HASSIDIC REBBE YAAKOV YITZHAK, 1766-1814)

“And Pharaoh called to Moses, and he said, Go! Serve YHWH! But your flocks and herds shall stay. And Moses said, You should even give us sacrifices... for we shall take from them to serve YHWH our God” (Exodus 10:24-26).

Pharaoh said: It is possible to serve God through thought and feeling, and if you truly wish to serve God, why should you need your flocks and herds? “Go! Serve God” with a true heart, with pure intention, and then you will have no need for sacrifices, “your flocks and herds shall stay.”

Moses said to him: Intent alone, without action connected to it, is meaningless. The essential component is the action, and through it, the intention is elevated and deepened. Therefore, “Our livestock will also go with us...for we shall take from them to serve YHWH our God.” It is through action that we will rouse ourselves to serve God with ecstasy and attachment.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- Do you agree that intention alone is meaningless?
- How does this text compare to the previous text in terms of the spirit of mitzvot as opposed to the letter of mitzvot?
- Does the performance of mitzvot actually elevate and deepen intent?
- “It is through action that we will rouse ourselves to serve God with ecstasy and attachment.” Are the mitzvot ends in themselves or stepping stones in our service to God?



# MITZVOT AND THE SPIRIT – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

משלי ג: ו  
בְּכֹל דְרָכֶיךָ דַּעֲהוֹ, וְהוּא יִישר אֶרְחֻתֶיךָ.

## PROVERBS 3:6

Through all of your actions, know God. And God shall straighten your paths.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- How can every action help us to know God?
- Is it possible for us to live with this type of consciousness for all of our actions?
- What does it mean that God will straighten our paths?
- Can all our actions be mitzvot? Can we also know God through actions that are not mitzvot?
- How do our actions change our connection with God? How do our actions change God's connection with us?
- Jewish Mysticism (Tikunei Zohar 110b) states that Itaruta Dile'Tata, awakening from below, leads to Itaruta Dile'Ela, awakening from above. How does this proverb reflect that idea? Must awakening always begin with our actions, or can it begin with God's actions?







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