

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. **Leiba** bas Reb **Leib** ע"ה **Lovitch**
Passed away on 15 Menachem-Av, 5747

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

DEDICATED BY HER CHILDREN & GRANDCHILDREN

Dr. & Mrs. **Leib Meyer** and **Sarah**
and family שיחי **Lovitch**

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Reb **Shlomo** ben Reb **David** ע"ה **Oster**
Passed away on 17 Menachem-Av, 5753

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF HIS SON

Mr. **Zev** שיחי **Oster**

May he go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah and mitzvot.

*

DEDICATED BY HIS FRIEND

Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי **Shagalov**

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Va'etchanan, Shabbat Nachamu, 5781
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THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

three "garments" of the soul, thought, speech and action. When one's thoughts are directed towards the three redemptions one's Divine service is unbounded and therefore beyond division. Without the limits and boundaries which delineate and divide, one attains perfection in all of the three modes.¹⁸

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vo'eschanan,
Shabbos Nachamu, 16 Menachem Av, 5751)*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתחיל'
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחיי
Shagalov

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18. In a similar vein, with regard to "keeping from evil" one is precluded from evil, as a matter of course, without a need to actively engage in negating evil, as the Mishneh continues: "And you will not come to the hands of sin." The expression "**and you will not come**" implies that it will not take effort. The usage of the term "**hands of sin**," implies further, that even matters that are not inherently sinful, but could lead to sin (such as satisfying permissible desires), are automatically dismissed because of one's reflection on matters of Redemption. This is analogous to the way things will be in the Messianic Era. As the Rambam rules (in the end and seal of his work "Mishneh Torah") that "in that time ... all delights will be as abundant as the dust of the earth." His choice of the word "dust" implies that it will have no significance to us, inasmuch as "all of the preoccupation of the world will be exclusively to know G-d."

BESURAS HAGEULO

preoccupied (in a manner of one conducting "business") in the study of Torah."¹⁴

...An additional lesson and directive concerning Redemption can be derived also from the beginning of the **third** chapter of Pirkei Avos: "Look at **three** things:"

The term "three things" standing by itself can be a suggestion of the third Redemption and the third Holy Temple, a threefold Redemption and a threefold Holy Temple, because they comprise the virtues of both the first Redemption and the second, the first Temple and the second. Furthermore, the twosome features will be combined as one.

The imperative, "look," implies gazing intently, by deeply reflecting and contemplating¹⁵ matters concerning the third Redemption and the third Beis Hamikdash ("three things"), imbued with feelings of anticipation and exceptional yearning, "I anticipate his coming every day,"¹⁶ implying that he will come every day, this day, literally. How much more so, now that we stand on the threshold of Redemption, that the gazing at these three matters is increased and done with more vigor.

The suggestion can be made that the one's reflection on matters of the third Redemption and third Holy Temple ("three matters") has the capacity to effect completeness to all of our efforts within the "three pillars" - the three modes of expression, Torah, service (prayer) and loving-kindness¹⁷ whose fulfillment is through the

14. *Avos* 3:6.

15 See *Shulcahn Aruch, Admor Hazaken, Orach Chaim*, sec. 128:36, and in other places.

16. The text of "Ani Ma'amin" published in prayer books etc. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, p. 394.

17. *Avos* 1:2.

LIKKUTEI SICHOT

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

•

Volume X: *Devarim*

•

In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

VAES'CHANAN

A VOICE WITH NO ECHO

The *Midrash*¹ offers three interpretations of the phrase,² “A loud and unceasing voice,” which describes G-d’s granting of the Ten Commandments:

a) G-d’s voice was divided into seven voices and they further subdivided until [the Ten Commandments were heard] in all 70 languages of the world.

b) The voice continues to resound, and from this same voice, all the prophets and sages³ of the coming generations derived their prophecy and insights.

c) Unlike natural voices, this voice did not have an echo.

The first two interpretations clearly indicate the greatness of the giving of the Torah, showing that G-d’s voice was not limited to the Holy Tongue, or to the specific time of the revelation, but extended into other languages and subsequent generations. Yet the fact that G-d’s voice did not have an echo does not seem to reflect its greatness. On the contrary, it appears to indicate a certain weakness.

Also, explanation is necessary, for G-d does not perform a miracle unnecessarily.⁴ Since a voice generally causes an echo,

Torah⁹). This includes both the revealed as well as the inner dimensions of Torah, including the study of Ein Ya'akov, an anthology of the Aggadic¹⁰ parts of Torah, in which "the majority of the Torah's secrets are hidden."¹¹ The greatest emphasis should be placed on the study of the inner dimension of Torah, in accordance with the teaching of the Arizal (whose yahrtzeit is on the fifth of Menachem-Av) that "in these later generations, it is permissible and even mandatory that we reveal this [esoteric] wisdom."¹² This is particularly true now that once these heretofore-secret teachings were elucidated and made accessible to each and every Jew in the teachings of Chassidus.

There should be an even greater emphasis on an increase in the study of matters concerning **the Redemption**, in both the revealed parts of the Torah, especially Rambam's work which comprises all the laws relating to Redemption, e.g., the laws of the Temple (which is studied currently in the period of the Three Weeks) as well as the laws of The Kings and their Wars and the King Moshiach - and the inner dimension of Torah. Study of the inner dimension of Torah in general hastens the Redemption: "With this work of yours (the teachings of R. Shimon Bar Yochai - the author of the *Zohar*)... they will emerge from exile with mercy."¹³ However, study of the inner dimension of Torah's treatment of Redemption has an added advantage.

Ideally, these learning sessions should be conducted in a manner of "Ten people (a quorum) sitting (i.e., they are established)

1. *Shmos Rabbah*, the conclusion of ch. 28.

2. *Devarim* 5:19

3. For the *Midrash* states: “Also the sages which arise in every generation; each one received his [inspiration] from Sinai.” See also *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 15c, and the sources mentioned there.

9. *Rashi*, end of *Ta'anis*.

10. [*Aggadah is the non-legal, inspirational portions of the Talmud. Translator's note.*]

11. *Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh*, sec. 23.

12. *Op cit.*, sec. 26 (142).

13. *Zohar III*, 124b, in *Raya Mehemna*, cited and elucidated in *Igeres Hakodesh*, *ibid*.

the farthest reaches of that country and the entire world. May it be G-d's will that the convention should be blessed with outstanding success, endowed with an exponential increase⁵ of infinite proportions. That this country that waged an incessant struggle against the activities of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of this generation (as well as the activities of my father, whose yahrtzeit is the 20th of Av) to disseminate Torah and the wellsprings of Torah, should now host and honor his disciples and emissaries and those who follow in his path in the dissemination of Torah and the wellsprings of Torah to the remotest reaches, must be classified as a "wonder."

These "wonders" awaken us and underscore that imminently we will see the greatest wonder, the true and complete Redemption, "As in the days of your departure from Egypt I will show him wonders."⁶ This will be a "wonder" even in comparison with the events of the Exodus from Egypt.⁷

In practical terms:

Since we are standing on the threshold of the true and complete Redemption where everything will manifest itself in an unbounded manner, one must have a "foretaste" (as is the custom to "taste a little of every dish"⁸ on the eve of Sabbath) of the infinite nature of the revelations of Redemption, by a commensurate unrestrained increase in matters of Torah and Mitzvos.

More specifically, there should be an increase in the study of Torah (to "augment the nights to the days in the preoccupation with

the fact that this voice did not — particularly since it was a strong voice — required a deviation from the natural order. What was the reason for this deviation?

The commentators explain the necessity for this miracle as follows: Were there an echo, one might have thought that the echo was a second voice. Rather than allow for such a misconception, G-d prevented the voice which pronounced the Ten Commandments from having an echo.

This interpretation, however, is insufficient. For an echo is clearly related to the original voice; it has the same tone and the same words. When the voice proclaiming the Ten Commandments came from all four directions simultaneously, the Jews did not err.⁵ If so, it is unlikely that they would err with regard to an echo, for it is obvious to any listener that an echo is merely a copy.

Another point: The Torah only relates stories when they serve as instruction in our Divine service. What lesson can we learn from the fact that the voice proclaiming the Ten Commandments did not have an echo?

WHEN G-D SPOKE TO MAN

The Ten Commandments begin with the word *Anochi*,⁶ interpreted by our Sages⁷ as an acronym for the Aramaic phrase: *אנא נפשי כתבית יהבית*, "I wrote down and gave over Myself"; i.e., G-d invested Himself in the Ten Commandments.

5. "One who increases, shall be increased" - *Ta'anis*, at the end.

6. Michah 7:15.

7. See *Or HaTorah*, Nach on this verse (p. 487). See there for cross references.

8. *Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chaim*, end of sec. 250

4. See the *Derashos HaRan, Derush Ches*, which states: "G-d desires to preserve the natural order whenever possible. Since the natural order is dear to Him, He will change it only when it is necessary." See also *Shabbos* 53b.

5. *Baalei Tosafos*, the conclusion of *Parshas Yisro*.

6. *Shmos* 20:2; *Devarim* 5:6. Similarly, our Sages (*Pesikta Rabbah*, ch. 21) interpret the word *Anochi* as an acronym for the Hebrew words meaning "I gave and wrote down the Ten [Commandments]."

7. *Shabbos* 105a, according to the text of the *Ein Yaakov*.

BESURAS HAGEULO The Announcement Of The Redemption

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Moreover, when giving these commandments, He spoke to every Jew individually. This is indicated by the use of the singular *E-lohecha* ("your G-d"). Furthermore, this applies not only to the Jews who stood at Sinai, but to all Jews of all time. As our Sages state,⁸ every Jewish soul — those who lived before,⁹ and those who lived afterwards — were present at the giving of the Torah. Every Jew heard G-d tell him — "I am G-d your L-rd." It is as if He gave His entire essence to every Jew individually.

Nor should one think that this relationship is confined to the time of the Ten Commandments, for it is perpetuated by the prophets and sages of every generation. For their words were not recited on their own initiative. Instead, "it was the spirit of G-d which spoke through them, and His word was on their tongue."¹⁰

One should not err and think that the teachings of the prophets and sages do not relate to the Sinai experience, being like the commands given to the Patriarchs before the giving of the Torah.¹¹ This is not so. G-d invests Himself in

It has been said often of late that according to all the signs we are situated in the "year that the King Moshiach will be revealed."¹ (This is in addition to the calculation that we are in the afternoon of the eve of the Sabbath, which began in the year 5751.²) These signs are represented by the widely known initials of this year, "It will be a year when I will show him wonders," particularly since throughout this year we have seen (and we will continue to see) many incidents that can be characterized as "wonders." Moreover, each one of these wonders could be described as a "wonder" even in relation to the preceding "wonder," that is, a wonder which continues to evoke a new sense of amazement as compared to the previous wonder.

Among the wonders there is also a "wonder" that has occurred in these last few days: A gathering of Chassidim and emissaries in Russia! People gathered from various places and countries in the city of Lubavitch, with the intention, among other things, to make a pilgrimage to the holy resting places of our Rebbes and leaders there, including the holy graveside of my father, master and teacher, of blessed memory (whose yahrtzeit is the 20th of Av, a day blessed from this Sabbath). Additionally, they will be convening in Moscow, the capital of Russia, to discuss and consult with one another ("Each man will assist his fellow,"³ imbued with the spirit of love and unity, "as one person with one heart"⁴), and to pass resolutions to increase with greater intensity and vigor in the dissemination of Torah and Judaism and the wellsprings of Torah to

8. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 41; *Shmos Rabbah*, the conclusion of ch. 28; *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Parshas Nitzavim* sec. 3; *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 91a; Vol. II, p. 83b; *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun 49* (86a).

9. The giving of the Torah was intended for the souls enclotted in bodies. Nevertheless, the souls of the subsequent generations were granted an out-of-body experience of the giving of the Torah so that afterwards they could merit the revelations of *Gan Eden* in the World to Come and the Resurrection of the Dead.

10. The wording is taken from the Alter Rebbe's introduction to the *Tanya*. [Note also the concepts explained in the preceding *sichah*.]

11. The Patriarchs were also commanded to fulfill certain *mitzvos*. Nevertheless, their observance of these *mitzvos* cannot be compared to our observance after the giving of the Torah. For it was only at the giving of the Torah that G-d's essence was drawn down.

For this reason, "all [the prohibitions] we observe and [the *mitzvos*] we fulfill are observed because of the commandments which G-d commanded Moshe, and not because of the commandments which G-d gave the prophets who preceded him (*Rambam, the Commentary to the Mishnah, Chulin*, the conclusion of ch. 7).

1. *Yalkut Shimoni* 499.

2. See *Sefer HaSichos*, 5750, vol. 1, p. 254. See there for cross references.

3. *Yeshayahu* 41:6.

4. *Rashi, Yisro* 19:2.

imbues man's study with the unlimited dimensions of G-d's voice at Sinai.

When a person's Torah study penetrates every aspect of his being, even his inanimate dimensions, and is never-ending — i.e., there will be no forgetfulness — and it will also affect his conduct after he has concluded studying,³⁹ when — with the Torah's license — he is involved in material activity. In all matters, it is obvious that he has studied Torah,⁴⁰ for his learning is reflected in everything he does. This enables him to “know G-d in all [his] ways,”⁴¹ and to make this world a dwelling for Him.



39. See *Sotah* 21a.

40. See *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos De'os* 5:1.

41. *Mishlei* 3:6. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Terumah* in this series, where this concept is explained.

these teachings just as He invested Himself in the Ten Commandments.

Similarly, like the Ten Commandments, these subsequent teachings are instructions for every Jew. Every Jew is obligated to fulfill them, not only because they were granted to our people as a whole, but because they were spoken to him or her personally. This is the implication of our Sages' connection of G-d's incessant voice to the teachings of the prophets and Sages. Their teachings are an expression of the voice of Sinai. Here too, G-d speaks to every Jew individually.

The fact that a teaching was not revealed until spoken by a particular prophet or sage does not present a problem, for “until that moment, license was not granted for [this] prophecy.”¹² For “there is an appropriate time for every purpose.”¹³ Every concept in the Torah has its appropriate time when the voice that sounded at Sinai will cause it to be revealed.

Similar concepts apply with regard to the interpretation that G-d's voice resounded in 70 languages. Mankind at large is obligated to observe seven universal laws.¹⁴ The Jewish people are obligated to compel¹⁵ — and when they do not have dominion over the gentiles, to convince — the people at large to observe these seven laws.

To emphasize that these seven universal laws are an integral dimension of the Sinai experience, our Sages relate that G-d's voice resounded in all 70 languages. This shows that even the *mitzvos* to be communicated in these 70 languages are part of the giving of the Torah, and must be observed for that reason. As the *Rambam* rules,¹⁶ every non-Jew must

12. *Shmos Rabbah*, the conclusion of ch. 28.

13. *Koheles* 3:1

14. The laws which the gentiles are obligated to observe include several concepts that apply with regard to the Torah as a whole, e.g., the prohibition against studying the Torah or resting on *Shabbos*.

15. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim* 8:10.

16. *Ibid.*:11.

observe these laws because they were commanded by G-d as conveyed through Moshe, and not because they coincide with the dictates of mortal thought.

THE REFINEMENT OF SPEECH

Another fundamental concept that can be derived from the fact that at Mt. Sinai, G-d's voice resounded in 70 languages relates to our Sages' comment that:¹⁷ "The Jews were exiled among the nations solely so that they would be joined by converts."

In this sense, "converts" refers not only to humans who accept the Jewish faith, but also to the sparks of holiness contained in the material substance of the gentile nations. The Jews' efforts in refining the material substance of these lands can tap the G-dliness of these sparks and elevate them to their source in holiness.

Similar concepts apply with regard to the 70 languages. When Jews use these languages for a Divine purpose — and more particularly, when they are used to teach Torah concepts, as was the practice of the *Talmud* Sages who taught in Aramaic — the sparks of holiness contained in the 70 languages are elevated. Figuratively, this can be described as Jews being joined by converts.¹⁸

One might think that the Torah as it is studied in translation lacks the holiness of the original Sinai experience. For this reason, our Sages emphasize that at Sinai itself, G-d's voice resounded in 70 languages. Although in translation, it is enclothed in garments of a lower level, the inner voice remains the same. Indeed, the fact that it descends to a lower level indicates that it has a higher source,¹⁹ as *Chassidus*

17. *Pesachim* 87b; see the explanation in *Torah Or*, p. 11b.

18. See *Torah Or*, p. 77d.

19. For this reason, *Anochi*, which refers to G-d's essence, is an Egyptian word. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Yisro* in this series, where this concept is explained.

This demonstrates the greatness of G-d's voice. It is totally unlimited, issuing from a level at which there is no difference between the material and the spiritual, and enabling the two to be fused together.³⁵

Similarly with regard to our Divine service, the Torah's ability to permeate even our heels stems from its unlimited G-dliness.³⁶ Its intellectual dimension is not sufficient, for intellect cannot relate to inanimate matter, or to the dimension of our being which parallels inanimate matter.

When the Torah permeates every aspect of a person's being, it will be retained. As our Sages comment:³⁷ "If [the Torah] is enwrapped in [a person's] 248 limbs, it will be absorbed." For studying at this level lifts a person above G-d's Throne of Glory, and at that level, "there is no forgetfulness."³⁸ This is an unlimited spiritual peak, a level which

35. The fact that the walls of a person's home will testify regarding his unfavorable conduct relates to the concept that the fusion of spiritual and material reflects a very high level of G-dliness. For the potential for such testimony comes as a result of this phenomenon.

To explain: G-d has made evil parallel to good. This is reflected in the fact that sins cause blemishes in elevated levels of spirituality. For this reason, we see that through *teshuvah*, a repentant person can reach a higher level than a completely righteous one (cf. *Berachos* 34b). This indicates that the blemish caused by sin also affects these levels. See the section in *Kuntres Acharon* entitled *Lehavin Mah Shekasuv BeShaar HaYichudim*, and the Mitteler Rebbe's text *Shaar HaBechirah*.

36. To cite a parallel, the *maamar* entitled *Shuvah* in the series of *maamarim* entitled *Yom Tov Shel Rosh HaShanah*, 5666, states that the source of the Torah is the *Or Ein Sof*, G-d's Infinite Light, as it existed before the *tzimtzum*. This is indicated by the phrase (*Yechezkel* 1:25): "And there was a voice above the heavens." As stated in the narrative of creation, the heavens separated the higher realms from our material world. The Torah, because its source is "above the heavens," has the potential to be drawn down within our material world.

37. *Eruvin* 54a; *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 4:9.

38. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 2:10.

That law continues: "This Torah ascends... but does not ascend past..." This appears to be a printing error, and the correct wording would be: "This forgetfulness ascends..." as reflected in the conclusion of the passage: "Forgetfulness does not reach..."

For the same reason, several of our Rabbis gave orders³¹ for their coffins to be made from the table or lectern at which they studied, or at which they gave food to the poor. For the wood of the table or lectern absorbed the Torah which they studied, and will testify to this effect.

FOR THE HEEL TO HEAR

All the revelations of the Era of the Redemption depend on our Divine service at the present time.³² Just as created beings are divided into four categories: inanimate matter, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom, and humans, so too, these four categories are manifest within every human being.³³ For example, our heads (and our minds) represent the human dimension of our being, and our heels (and the quality of deed) represent the inanimate dimension. To precipitate the coming of a time when the revelation of G-dliness will permeate even material existence, we must study Torah so that it permeates even our most material dimension, our heel.

This is reflected in the Torah's praise of Avraham:³⁴ "*eikev asher shoma bikoli*. Literally, this means "because he listened to My voice," but figuratively, it can be interpreted to mean "his heel heard My voice," i.e., Avraham's commitment was so great that even his heel appreciated G-dliness.

Similarly, at the time of the giving of the Torah, G-d's voice permeated material existence. Spirituality and material existence are two opposites, and the spiritual cannot usually permeate the material, nor can the material absorb the spiritual. Nevertheless, at the time of the giving of the Torah, this mutual exclusivity was suspended.

31. See *Kav HaYashor*, ch. 46.

32. *Tanya*, ch. 37.

33. *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Parshas Pekudei*, sec. 3; *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 69 (p. 100a). See also *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson*, ch. 38; *Koheles Rabbah* 1:4; *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 134b; *Moreh Nevuchim*, Vol. I, ch. 72; *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, p. 5a.

34. *Bereishis* 26:5. See the interpretation in *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5708, p. 253.

explains:²⁰ "The higher an entity's source, the lower it will descend."

These explanations help us comprehend the uniqueness of the first two interpretations offered by the *Midrash* on the verse cited above. Nevertheless, the third explanation — that the voice did not have an echo — still requires explanation.

NATURAL, NOT MIRACULOUS

An echo reflects the pattern of *Or Chozer*, a rebounding light. When a light is drawn down, but reaches a point where an obstacle prevents it from being drawn down further, it rebounds. Similarly, when sound waves strike an object through which they cannot pass, they bounce back.²¹ This "bouncing" takes place when the obstruction does not absorb the light or sound waves.

When G-d announced "I am G-d your L-rd," there was nothing that could prevent the passage of His voice; it pervaded all existence, even inanimate objects. Every entity was permeated with His speech.

The giving of the Torah was a foretaste of the Era of Redemption,²² at which time: "The glory of G-d will be revealed and all flesh will see."²³ Awareness of G-d will permeate even ordinary material existence.

The revelation at Sinai was of a similar nature. For this reason, G-d's voice did not have an echo. This was not a miracle, but rather a natural phenomenon. Since there was

20. See *Shaarei Orah*, the *maamar* entitled *Yaviu Levush Malchus*, ch. 12ff., and ch. 32ff.

21. *Bas kol*, the Hebrew term for echo used by the *Midrash* is also employed by the Talmud according to the interpretation of *Tosafos*, *Sanhedrin* 11a, entry *bas*. See also the gloss of *Tosafos Yom Tov*, *Yevamos* 16:6. Were I not diffident, I would say that it would appear, that there is a printing error in the *Tosafos* cited, and the proper text should be "speak (מדבר) with power," rather than "strike (מכה) with power."

22. *Tanya*, ch. 36.

23. *Yeshayahu* 40:5.

nothing blocking the passage of G-d's voice, and His voice was absorbed into the material substance of the world, it did not bounce back.²⁴

WHEN OUR WALLS WILL SPEAK

This is not merely a story of the past. When a Jew studies Torah, the words are absorbed by the walls of his home. As our Sages say,²⁵ in the Era of the Redemption, “the walls of a person's house will testify concerning him.” At present, this evidence remains hidden, but in the Era of the Redemption, “a stone from the wall will cry out, and a beam of wood will answer it.”²⁶

(Even today, the existence of this evidence is significant. With regards to questions of modesty and other issues, we see that Torah law distinguishes between the performance of certain acts in private and in public.²⁷)

A foretaste of the revelations of the Era of the Redemption is reflected in the lives of the *tzaddikim*. In this vein, the *Jerusalem Talmud* relates²⁸ that one of the elders of the Galilee possessed the staff of Rabbi Meir, and it would teach him. The question arises: How can a staff teach? And more particularly,

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24. Both factors are significant. Those dimensions of G-d's word which were relevant to that particular entity were absorbed within it, but those which were not relevant were not blocked by it.
25. *Taanis* 11a, *et al*; *Zohar*, Vol. II, p. 28a. These sources speak about the walls testifying regarding the unsavory conduct of their owner. Nevertheless, the same concept can be applied with regard to positive conduct. Indeed, based on the principle (*Sotah* 11a) “the attributes of good are more powerful than the [contrary] attributes,” it follows that the influence of positive conduct will be greater.
26. *Chabakuk* 2:11.
27. The concept that the hidden effects of our conduct are significant is reflected in our Sages' praise (*Yoma* 47a) of Kimchis for not allowing the walls of her home to see her hair. On the surface, it is difficult to understand how this is an expression of modesty. Nevertheless, because of the hidden effects of our conduct, care in such matters is significant. See the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch*, and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 2:1.
28. *Moed Kattan* 3:1; *Nedarim* 9:1.

how can it teach a higher level of knowledge than that possessed by these Sages?²⁹

Nevertheless, Rabbi Meir's Torah knowledge permeated the material objects in his environment. The staff absorbed his wisdom, as it were. And when the later Sage received this staff, the influence that was hidden in it was revealed.³⁰

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29. This is reflected in the *Jerusalem Talmud's* statement that there were no faults in these Sages' conduct that required correction.
30. In particular, it was Rabbi Meir's staff which conveyed this knowledge. The sage who received the staff was a judge, and therefore it was appropriate that he possessed a staff, for this is one of the tools of the judges (*Sanhedrin* 7b). Indeed, a staff is more appropriate than the other tools mentioned there. For this reason, the *Jerusalem Talmud* uses the Hebrew term (מַכַּל) *makal* for staff, rather than the term *mish'enes* or the like. Note the commentaries to this passage of the *Jerusalem Talmud*.
- See also the gloss of the *Sefer Meiras Enayim* 1:1 to *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 1:1 which asks why the *Shulchan Aruch* does not mention the requirement for a court to have the tools mentioned in that passage, and why most of the courts in his time were not equipped with them.
- The *Sefer Meiras Anayim* answers that perhaps the tools mentioned by the *Talmud* are required only by a court which possesses the unique *Semichah* conveyed by Moshe Rabbeinu. After the early period of the post-Mishnaic era, when that *Semichah* was no longer perpetuated, it was not necessary for a court to have those tools.

This resolution is sufficient with regard to the *Shulchan Aruch*. It, however, is not satisfactory with regard to the *Rambam's Mishneh Torah*, for the *Rambam* mentions laws that apply even in the time of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The omission of this requirement by the *Rambam* can be resolved as follows: The standard version text of the passage in *Sanhedrin* mentioned previously speaks of the necessity of a judge to possess the tools of the court; it does not mention which tools he must possess. Rabbeinu Yitzchak Alfasi and Rabbeinu Asher had a different version which specifies several of the tools which a judge would possess. (See also the gloss of the *Beis Chadash* to the *Tur*, *Choshen Mishpat*, *loc. cit.*) The *Rambam's* version of the text followed the standard version and thus leaves the term “the tools of the judges” undefined. The *Rambam* interprets that term as referring to a staff and a strap. And these he indeed mentions at the very beginning of *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 1:1.

In a related matter, the text of the *Mishneh Torah* mentions “those who travel.” Seemingly, since the ones who travel are not the judges themselves, but the police (*Hilchos Geneivah*, the conclusion of ch. 8), it appears that the text contains a printing error, and the correct version is “and they travel.”