

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger
Sfas Emes
Parshas Shemini

In the name of G-d, Parshas Shemini	בשם ה', פרשת שמini
In the Torat Kohanim on the verse "This is the thing that Hashem commanded you to do, and the glory of Hashem will appear to you" (Vayikra 9:6), it is taught: That evil inclination—remove it from your hearts, and be of one counsel to serve before the Omnipresent. Just as He is singular in the world, so too should your service be uniquely dedicated before Him. If you do so, "the glory of Hashem will appear to you."	בתורת כהנים על הפסוק זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' תעשו וירא אליכם כבוד ה'. אותו הניצר הרע העבירו מלבכם והיו בעצה אחת לשרת לפני המקום. כשם שהוא יחיד בעולם, כך תהא עבודתכם מיוחדת לפניו. עשייתם כן, וירא אליכם כבוד ה'. (תורת כהנים על ויקרא טו:)
And my revered great-grandfather, my teacher, of blessed memory, would regularly point out this teaching.	ואא"ז מורי זכרונו לברכה הנה רגיל להראות מאמר זה.
Now, the verse is interpreted to mean that all of their deeds should be only "that which Hashem has commanded."	והנה מפרש הפסוק שכל העשיות שלהם י"היו רק "אשר צוה ה'".
For in every matter in the world, there is a Divine will and intention—as it is written, "Everything He created is for His glory" (Mishlei 16:4).	כי בכל דבר שבעולם יש רצון ומבוקש השם, כמו שכתוב "כל למענהו עשה" (משלי טז:ד).
However, this is hidden and requires avodah (spiritual work) to discover that inner point—the Divine spark within every matter.	אבל נסתר זה וצריך עבודה למצא אותה. הנקדה הפנימית שיש בכל דבר.
And for the one to whom it is clarified—this is called "zeh ha-davar" ("this is the thing")—the clear Divine directive.	"ולמי שנתברר לו נקרא "זה הדבר".
This is the level of Moshe, who is called the "speculum that shines" (aspaklarya d'nehara).	והוא בחינת משה, אספקלריא דנהרא.
And the Divine service of the Children of Israel is to bring that illumination into the action itself.	ועבודת בני ישראל היא להביא אור זה. תוך המעשה ממשי.
And this is what it means: "This is the thing... you shall do"—that they should clarify in their actions this aspect of "zeh", and then "the glory of Hashem will appear to you."	וזהו שאמר "זה הדבר... תעשו", שיבררו במעשיהם בחינת "זה", וירא 'אליכם כבוד ה'.
That is, the inner point present in that very act—as it is said, "The whole earth is filled with His glory" (Yeshayahu 6:3).	שהוא הנקדה הפנימית שיש באותו מעשה עצמו, כמו שכתוב "מלא כל הארץ כבודו" (ישעיה ו:ג).

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And through the service in the Beis HaMikdash, this was clarified—that from all things, an elevation was made to Hashem through the offerings and other services of the Mishkan and the Mikdash. Through them, the indwelling of the Shechinah among the lower realms was clarified.	ועל־ידי עבודת בית־המקדש נתברר זה, כי מכל הדברים נתעלה לה' על־ידי הקרבנות ושאר עבודת המשכן והמקדש, שעל־ידיהם נתברר השפעת השכינה בתחתונים.
And in the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 11:6) on the verse “And it was on the eighth day, Moshe called...” it is written: “ <i>Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars</i> ” (Mishlei 9:1), referring to the seven days of Creation. “ <i>She has sent out her maidens, she calls out to man</i> ”—see there.	ובמדרש (ויק"ר פרשה י"א, ו') על הפסוק "ויהי ביום השמיני קרא כו'", כתוב: "חכמות בנתה ביתה, חצבה עמודיה לשבעה" (משלי ט:א) – שבעת ימי בראשית כו', "שלחה נערותיה תקרא על גפי מרומי קרת" – עין שם.
For the seven <i>middos</i> (character attributes) within a person are the pillars through which the illumination of holiness is drawn—when all the <i>middos</i> are aligned with the inwardness, which is the light of the Seven Days.	כי השבע מדות שבאדם הם העמודים שעל ידיהם נמשך הארת הקדושה, כשכל המדות נמשכים אחר הפנימיות. שהוא אור שבעת הימים.
And this is the aspect of <i>Shabbos</i> , through which the Jewish people testify that Hashem created and sustains all.	והוא בחינת שבת, שבני־ישראל מעידים שהשם יתברך ברא ומחיה הכל.
And this is the meaning of “ <i>to make the Shabbos...</i> ”—to clarify that even the life-force within action also comes from Hashem.	וזהו "לעשות את השבת כו'", לברר לשחיות המעשה גם כן מהשם יתברך.
However, this must be accomplished through the <i>avodah</i> (spiritual work) of the Jewish people—that all action should be done with a settled mind, without separation from the inner vitality of the matter, as stated above.	אבל זה צריך להיות על־ידי עבודת בני־ישראל, להיות כל מעשה בישוב הדעת בלי פריד מלהיות דבוק בפנימיות חיות הדבר, כנזכר לעיל.
And this is what it means, “ <i>And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbos...</i> ” (Vayikra 23:15)—that the counting is to clarify the <i>middos</i> , as mentioned above.	וזהו "וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת כו'" (ויקרא כ"ג:ט"ו), שהספירה היא לברר המדות, כנזכר לעיל.
For what is called a <i>middah</i> (measure or attribute)—for Hashem is infinite (<i>Ein Sof</i>), and He was [the same] before the world was created just as He is now.	כי מה שנקרא מדה – כי השם יתברך אינסוף, והיה קודם שנוברא העולם כמו עתה.
But through the act of Creation, a light and unique radiance was given to each created being, in measure and limit.	אבל על־ידי הבריאה נתן אור והארה מיוחדת לכל נברא במדה ובקצבה.
And the Jewish people must clarify this, for the inner vitality of the <i>middos</i> is the illumination that is beyond this world.	ובני־ישראל צריכין לברר זה, כי חיות פנימית של המדות היא ההארה שלמעלה מעולם הזה.

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And this is what it says: “ <i>And on the eighth day Moshe called...</i> ” (Vayikra 9:1), and “ <i>This is the thing... you shall do</i> ”—for the revelation of the inner dimension must be through our own service, as mentioned above.	וְזֶהוּ שֶׁפָּתוּב: "וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה כו'", וְאָמַר: "זֶה הַדָּבָר כּו' תַּעֲשׂוּ כו'" – שְׁלָלוֹת הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת עַל־יְדֵי עֲבוֹדָתָנוּ, כְּנֻזָּכַר לַעֲיִל. (ויקרא ט':א-ו')
And this is what it means: “ <i>She has sent out her maidens, she calls...</i> ” (Mishlei 9:3). I heard from my revered great-grandfather and teacher, of blessed memory, regarding the phrase “ <i>na’ar</i> ”—see there—that in a youth there is constant excitement and arousal.	וְזֶהוּ "שְׁלָחָה נִעְרוֹתֶיהָ תִּקְרָא" (משלי ט:ג) – שֶׁמַּעֲתִי מֵאֲבוֹת אֲבוֹתֵי מוֹרֵי זְכוֹרֹנוּ לְבִרְכָּה עַל פֶּסוּק "נִעַר" שֶׁבּוֹנֵעַר. יֵשׁ הַתְּעוֹרְרוֹת תָּמִיד – עֵינֵי שֵׁם.
And so it is written in the Zohar (Terumah) that the evil inclination (yetzer hara) enters without preparation—only when a person sits in idleness.	וְכַכָּה כָּתוּב בְּזוֹהַר (תְּרוּמָה) שֶׁיִּיָּצֵר הָרַע חַל לֹלָא הִכְנָה – רַק כְּשֶׁהָאָדָם יוֹשֵׁב בְּטִל.
And this is what is meant by: “ <i>Who is the simple one? Let him turn here...</i> ” (Mishlei 9:4). But the Holy Spirit is not like this—it seeks to be acquired with a full price, to awaken the hidden and covered inner dimension, as above.	וְזֶהוּ "מִי־פָתִי נְסוּר הִנֵּה" (משלי ט:ד), וְרוּחַ דְּקָדָשׁ לֹא הֵכִי, וּבְעֵי לְמַקְנֵא בְּאִגְרָא שְׁלִים – לַעֲוֹרֵר הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת. שֶׁנִּסְתָּר וּמְכֻסָּה, כְּנֻזָּכַר לַעֲיִל.
And for this reason, man was created—to clarify the purpose of creation, that all was created for the glory of Hashem.	וְלֵכֵן נִבְרָא הָאָדָם – לְבַרֵּר מְכוּוֹן הַהֲבִיאָה, שֶׁהַכֹּל לְכַבּוֹד הַשֵּׁם וְתִבְרָךְ.
And that is why, now that the Mishkan was completed, and the Jewish people saw that the Shechinah had not yet descended, they stood before Hashem...	וְלֵכֵן עָתָה, שֶׁנִּגְמַר הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּבְנִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל רָאוּ שֶׁלֹּא שָׁרְתָה הַשְּׁכִינָה – וַיַּעֲמָדוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.
And Moshe Rabbeinu answered them that they themselves must awaken the revelation of His glory through their deeds, as stated above.	וְהַשִּׁיב לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ עָלֵיו הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁהֵם צָרִיכִין לַעֲוֹרֵר גְּלוּי כְבוֹדוֹ וְתִבְרָךְ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כְּנֻזָּכַר לַעֲיִל.
And also, the explanation of the “days of milu’im (filling/consecration)” is to fill the middos with the revelation of their innerness, as mentioned above—	וְגַם פְּרוּשׁ "יְמֵי הַמְּלוּאִים" גַּם בֵּין – לְמַלֵּא אֶת הַמִּדּוֹת בְּגְלוּי הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת – שְׁלָחָה, כְּנֻזָּכַר לַעֲיִל.
As it is written in the Zohar on the verse: “ <i>Seven days you shall fill your hands</i> ” (Shemos 29:35)—see there.	כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתוּב בְּזוֹהַר עַל פֶּסוּק: "שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּמְלֵא יָדְכֶם" (שְׁמוֹת כ"ט:ל"ה) – עֵינֵי שֵׁם.
In the Gemara, from where do we learn that a <i>tereifah</i> (an animal with a mortal defect) is not considered a living being? From what is written: “ <i>This is the living creature that you may eat...</i> ” (Vayikra 11:2).	בְּגִמְרָא: מִנָּחֵל דְּטָרְפָה אֵינָה חַיָּה? – דְּכִתְיִב: "זֹאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ כו'" ('(ויקרא י"א:ב).

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But it also says: <i>"The living creature that you shall not eat."</i>	וְהָלֹא כָּתוּב גַּם כֵּן: "חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכַל".
However, indeed the vitality of Hashem that is within every created being is its [basic] life-force.	אָבֵל כִּי וְדַאי חַיּוֹת הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ שֵׁשׁ בְּכָל נִבְרָא – הִיא חַיּוּתוֹ.
But the <i>kosher</i> vitality—[that which is] from the side of holiness—is called <i>"this is the living creature,"</i> and it may be eaten.	אָבֵל הַכֹּשֶׁרוֹת שְׁבַחֵיִים – מִסְטָרָא דְקַדוּשָׁה – וְנִקְרָאת "זֹאת הַחַיָּה", וְנֹאכֶלֶת.
And the vitality of the <i>tereifos</i> is: <i>"that which you shall not eat."</i> It is [precisely] that which fulfills His will—that the Jewish people do not eat it.	וְחַיּוֹת הַטְּרֵפוֹת – הִיא "אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכַל", מֵה שֶׁנִּשְׁלַם רְצוֹנוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ – שְׂאִין בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹכְלִין אוֹתוֹ.
That is its vitality—that which sustains that particular species, as mentioned above.	זֶה הוּא חַיּוּתוֹ – הַמַּחֲיָה אוֹתוֹ הַמִּין, כְּנֻזָּכָר לַעֲיֵל.
And it is called: <i>"the living creature that you shall not eat,"</i> as explained above.	וְנִקְרָאת "חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכַל", כְּנֻזָּכָר לַעֲיֵל.
For the vitality of the <i>Sitra Achra</i> (the Other Side) is specifically that which is repelled—	כִּי חַיּוֹת הַסְטָרָא אֲחֵרָא – הוּא דְּוָקָא מֵה שְׂדוּחִין אוֹתוֹ,
that the glory of Hashem is increased through man's overcoming his evil inclination, not cleaving to the <i>Sitra Achra</i> .	שֶׁנִּתְרַבָּה כְּבוֹד ה' עַל־יְדֵי הַתַּגְבְּרוֹת הָאָדָם נֶגַד הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע, שֶׁלֹּא לְהִתְדַבֵּק בַּסְטָרָא אֲחֵרָא.
And this is its vitality, as stated above.	וְזֶה הוּא חַיּוּתוֹ, כְּנֻזָּכָר לַעֲיֵל.
<i>And Hashem spoke... saying to them.</i> (Vayikra 11:1-2) This is not immediately understood.	וַיְדַבֵּר ה' כו' לֵאמֹר אֲלֵהֶם" (ויקרא) "י.א:א-ב) – וְאִין מוֹכֵן.
But it may be explained according to what Chazal said: Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says, "Hashem wished to merit Israel; therefore, He gave them much Torah and many mitzvos."	וַיֵּשׁ לֹמֵר עַל פִּי מַה שֶׁאֶמְרוּ חַז"ל: רַחֲב"ע אוֹמֵר: רָצָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְזַכּוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִיכָךְ הִרְבָּה לָהֶם (תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת). (מכות ג:טז)
And Rashi explains: Creeping creatures and insects are inherently disgusting—but Hashem turned that revulsion into a mitzvah.	וּפִירֵשׁ רַשִׁי: שֶׁקָּצִים וּרְמָשִׁים בְּלִי זֶה מְאוֹסִים – רַק שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עָשָׂה מִזְוָה מִזֶּה.
The explanation is that Hashem wanted the Jewish people's every action to follow the Torah—that even in situations that are unavoidable, the intention behind the act should be aligned with Torah.	וְהַפִּירוּשׁ: שֶׁרָצָה הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ שִׂיחֵיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם נִמְשָׁכִים אַחֵר הַתּוֹרָה – שֶׁגַּם מַה שֶׁאֵי־אֶפְשָׁר לְהִיּוֹת בְּאִפְסָן אַחֵר, מִכָּל מְקוֹם תִּהְיֶה כּוֹנֵן הַמַּעֲשֵׂה עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה.

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And Chazal also said: A person should not say, “I don’t want to eat pig,” but rather, “I do want to—but what can I do? My Father in Heaven has decreed upon me [not to].”	וְכֵן אָמְרוּ גַם כֵּן חֲזו"ל: "אַל יֹאמַר אָדָם: אֵין אֶפְשִׁי בְּבֶשֶׂר חֲזִיר, רַק יֹאמַר: אֶפְשִׁי – וְמָה אֶעֱשֶׂה? אָבִי שְׁבַשְׁמִים (גִּזֵּר עָלַי. " (תו"כ כ קדושים פרשה ח
And this is what Chazal said on the verse “ <i>This is the animal that you shall eat...</i> ”—that the Jewish people are clinging to life.	וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמְרוּ חֲזו"ל עַל פֶּסוּק "וְזֹאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ כו'" (ויקרא י"א:ב') – שֶׁבְּנִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבוֹקִים (בְּחַיִּים. (ויקרא רבה י"ג:ב
For every action of a Jew must be connected to its source.	כִּי כָל מַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל צָרִיךְ לִהְיוֹת מְדוּבָק בְּשָׂרְשׁוֹ.
And this is the meaning of “ <i>And you shall sanctify yourselves...</i> ” (Vayikra 11:44)—a person sanctifies himself from below.	וְזֶהוּ "וְהִתְקַדְּשִׁתֶּם" (ויקרא י"א:מד) – אָדָם מְקַדֵּשׁ עַצְמוֹ מִלְּמַטָּה.
That is, through not being attached to physicality, but rather to the inner vitality of the thing.	שֶׁעַל־יְדֵי שְׂאִינֵנוּ דְּבוֹק בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת, רַק בְּפְנִימִיּוֹת חַיּוֹת הַדְּבָר.
For the inwardness is distinct from the material of the object—even though it manifests within the physical.	כִּי הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת הֵיא נִפְרָדָת מִחֲמַר הַדְּבָר, אַף־עַל־פִּי שֶׁהֵיא בְּתוֹךְ הַגִּשְׁמִי.
So too must the intention of the one performing [the act] be, as explained above.	כֵּן צָרִיךְ לִהְיוֹת כּוֹנֵן הָעוֹשֶׂה, כְּנֻזָּכָר לְעֵיל.
And this is what it means: “ <i>saying to them</i> ”—that His will was for them to separate from creeping creatures and insects because that is His will, as explained above.	וְזֶהוּ "לֵאמֹר אֲלֵהֶם" – שֶׁהֵיָה הִרְצוֹן שִׁפְרָשׁוֹ מִשְׁקָצִים וּרְמָשִׁים, עַל־יְדֵי שֶׁכֵּן רְצוֹנוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ, כְּנֻזָּכָר לְעֵיל.
And even though, without this, it is revolting—and how can one say, “I desire it”?	וְאֵף שֶׁבְּלִי זֶה הַדְּבָר נִמְאָס – וְאִיךָ? "יֹאמַר: "אֶפְשִׁי בּוֹ
However, the explanation is that the avoidance should come more from the command of Hashem than from one’s own disgust—	רַק הַפִּירוּשׁ: שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הַמְּנִיעָה מִצַּד צוּרֵי הַשֵּׁם – יוֹתֵר מִהִמָּאוּס מִצַּד עַצְמוֹ.
That even in such a case, where disgust would naturally prevail, nevertheless, it should be rejected even more due to the utterance of Hashem, as explained above.	שֶׁאֵף בְּהִכָּרַח כְּזֶה שֶׁהִמָּאוּס גּוֹבֵר – מִכָּל מְקוֹם, מִצַּד מֵאֲמַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ – יִרְחַק מִמֶּנּוּ יוֹתֵר, כְּנֻזָּכָר לְעֵיל.

[NOTE: Summary

This teaching explores the deep rationale behind the Torah's commandments regarding purity and dietary laws, specifically referencing the verses on forbidden creatures (א"א). While certain animals are naturally repulsive, the Torah turns abstaining from them into a **mitzvah**, not because of their inherent disgust, but because Hashem *commanded* it. The deeper point is that Hashem desires that every action—even those that we might do instinctively or naturally—should be **intentionally aligned** with His will.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger

Sfas Emes

Parshas Shemini

When a Jew says, “I do want it, but I abstain because Hashem said so,” it reveals a deeper level of service: one not driven by instinct or personal preference, but by attachment to the Divine will. This aligns with the ideal that *all actions of a Jew should be connected to their source*, to holiness, and to the inner vitality within the physical. The Jew sanctifies himself *not* by denying physicality, but by recognizing and focusing on its **inner purpose and Divine root**.

Practical Takeaway

Next time you feel an instinctual aversion to something (e.g., non-kosher food, inappropriate content, etc.), pause and reframe it:

- Don't avoid it *just* because it's disgusting or undesirable to you.
- Instead, elevate the experience by consciously thinking:
“I am abstaining because this is the will of Hashem.”

This shift transforms a natural reaction into an act of **holy self-discipline** and **Divine service**, deepening your personal connection with Hashem.

True Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov and the Butter Merchant

A Chassid once came to the Baal Shem Tov with a spiritual concern. He said, “Rebbe, I keep kosher and avoid all forbidden foods, but I don’t feel elevated. I even hate the smell of treif food—it disgusts me.”

The Baal Shem Tov looked at him and said:

“That is exactly your problem. If you refrain from treif because it disgusts you, you’re no better than the gentile who also hates its smell. But a Jew’s abstention must come not from nature—but from *emunah*, from obedience and love of Hashem.”

He continued:

“Go to the butter merchant in town and learn from him.”

The Chassid did so, and overheard the man say: “Ah, how I miss the smell of non-kosher sausages from the village I used to live in—but thank G-d, I am a Jew! And a Jew listens to his Father in Heaven!”

The Chassid returned to the Baal Shem Tov, his heart awakened.

Moral: Avoiding sin is greater when done not from personal taste, but from surrender to G-d’s will. That surrender is what transforms the mundane into the holy. **END NOTE]**