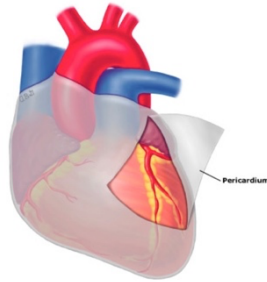


Ekev - The Heart of the Matter or the Matter of the Heart
Rabbi Eliot Malomet August 20, 2022 23 Av 5782

Last week, the key words that jumped out at us from the parasha were based on the root, ל.מ.ל - to learn and to teach. This week, let's explore another word and the way the Torah uses it to shape the way we think: **heart-לבב**. Interestingly, the word **heart-לבב** (in various forms) occurs 43 times in Deuteronomy, more than any of the other books of the Torah, suggesting that what ought to take place in our heart is at the heart of this book. Here are some different expressions with **heart-לבב** in this parasha.

Expression	Found in verse:	Comment
כִּי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְךָ	<p>ד':י"ז כִּי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְךָ רַבִּים הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִמֶּנִּי אֵיכָּה אוּכַל לְהוֹרִישָׁם:</p> <p>Deut. 7:17 If you should say in your heart: <i>More numerous are these nations than I; how will I be able to dispossess them?</i></p>	<p>The Torah refers to thinking as speaking in your heart. In this verse it is a specific type of thinking: fearful thinking. Prior to Israel's conquest of the land, they become aware that there are other people living in it. This raises a very complicated set of questions for them. They are concerned with the practical: <i>how will I be able to dispossess them</i> militarily? For us though, it's hard not to hear the moral questions embedded in this question: <i>If God promised this land to us, why are other people living here?</i></p>
לִדְעַת אֶת־אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְךָ	<p>ח':ב' וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־כְּלֵי־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הוֹלִיכָה ה' אֲלֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר לִמְעַן עֲזָתְךָ לִנְסֹתְךָ לִדְעַת אֶת־אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְךָ הֲתִשְׁמַר מִצְוֹתוֹ אִם־לֹא:</p> <p>8:2 You are to bear-in-mind the route that the Lord had you go these forty years in the wilderness, in order to afflict you, by testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not.</p>	<p>It is fascinating the way Moshe is shaping the way the people are to perceive their 40-year sojourn in the desert. Back in the book of Numbers, the stated reason for their wandering was that it was because of the negative report of the spies. The spies spent 40 days on their mission to reconnoiter the land and the punishment would be 40 years of wandering, one year for each day. But Moshe's "reframing" here is that the wandering was intended to enable the people to transition from Egypt to Canaan, from bondage to the observance of the commandments, and that the desert would be the locale of a series of experiences that would not only shape their behaviors, but shape their minds. Would the people become loyal to God? Would the people adhere to God's commandments? To know what was in your heart means that God intended the experience to shape their entire way of seeing the world and their thinking.</p>
וַיְדַעְתָּ עִם־לִבְּךָ	<p>ה':ה' וַיְדַעְתָּ עִם־לִבְּךָ כִּי פֹאֲשֶׁר יִנְסֶר אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ הַ אֲלֶיךָ מִיִּסְרָךָ:</p> <p>You are to know in your heart that just as a man disciplines his child, the Lord your God disciplines you.</p>	<p>It's one thing to know. It's another to know in your heart. In Hebrew the expression is עִם־לִבְּךָ - which should probably be translated with your heart. How do you know with your heart? This suggests a deep, personal knowledge. Knowledge that is at the core of your being. They are being instructed in how to understand their deep suffering in the desert. They are to see it not as punishment <i>per se</i> but as formative. The desert is their childhood. God is their father. They are being instructed to deeply internalize this iteration of their relationship.</p>
וְרָם לִבְּךָ	<p>ח':י"ד וְרָם לִבְּךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֲךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:</p> <p>8:14 that your heart become haughty and you forget the Lord your God, the one who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from a house of serfs,</p>	<p>In the biblical worldview, thought takes place in the heart. Arrogance, haughtiness, excessive pride, condescension, disdain, jealousy, are dispositions of the heart. וְרָם לִבְּךָ literally means if you raise your heart. רם has echoes of רוּמָם which we recognize from prayers like Psalm 145 (<i>Ashrei</i>): <i>I will raise you up my God and King</i> or Psalm 30:2: <i>O Lord because you have scooped me up</i>. Arrogance is the perception of your own indispensability. Moshe is concerned, that once they get into the land and begin to produce food on their own, they will begin to take credit for all their accomplishments and forget that they are all a consequence of God's blessings. The ultimate arrogance is ingratitude.</p>

<p>ואמרת בלבבך</p>	<p>ח:יז ואמרת בלבבך כחלי ועצם לדי עשה לי את־התיל הזה: 8:17 And should you say in your heart: <i>My power and the might of my hand have produced all this wealth for me,</i></p>	<p>Above (7:17) <i>saying in your heart</i> referred to <i>fearful thinking</i>. Here it refers to <i>arrogant thinking</i>. The consequence of <i>raising your heart</i> or what we would call <i>self-aggrandizement</i> is arrogant thinking. The remedy for this is in the next verse: וזכרת את־יה אלהיך which we usually translate as: and you shall remember the Lord your God. The implicit message of this is that when you begin to think of yourself as a god, you have to remember that there is a God above you. The path to humility is remembrance of God.</p>
<p>ובישר ללבבך</p>	<p>ט:ה לא בצדקתך ובישר ללבבך 9:5 Not because of your righteous-merit, or because of the uprightness of your heart...</p>	<p>A rare phrase which can also mean <i>sincerity</i> as in Psalm 119:7 לבב אוֹדֶה בְּיִשָּׁר לַבָּב - <i>I will praise You with a sincere heart</i>. Here Moshe is saying to the people, <i>it's not because you are so good, sincere, upright, or moral</i>, that God is giving you the land. It's because the people who inhabit it are so evil.</p>
<p>ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם</p>	<p>י:טז ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם וערפכם לא תקשו עוד: 10:16 So circumcise the foreskin of your heart, <i>your neck you are not to keep-hard anymore;</i></p> <p>The pericardium of the heart</p>  <p>The pericardium is the sac that surrounds the heart. It normally functions to protect the heart and reduce friction between the heart and surrounding organs.</p>	<p>This is probably the most audacious of all the phrases connected to the heart. It's so difficult to translate it let alone comprehend it. But a way to make sense of this is to consider that the word ערלה in addition to <i>foreskin</i> indicates some kind of covering, thickness, or barrier. Moshe, you recall, characterizes himself as an עָרֵל שְׁפָתַיִם (Exod. 6:12) <i>uncircumcised of lips</i>. Does this mean that he had <i>thick lips</i>? Or does it mean, metaphorically that he had either a physical or psychological impediment to speaking? Likewise, does <i>the foreskin of your heart</i> mean a <i>thickening of the heart</i> or that there is some barrier or impediment to the heart that needs to be removed in order to have an un-impeded relationship with God? People who are familiar with the anatomy of the heart, are aware that the heart does indeed have a "cover" or <i>pericardium</i>. The intent here is metaphorical. Remove the barrier between you and God. Perhaps the closest symbolic gesture we have in Judaism to represent the removal of a barrier or covering is the opening of the Ark. Consider that every time we do that, we are effectively stating that in our normal lives there are barriers between us and God. But at this moment of heightened spiritual awareness, we are voluntarily removing the barrier between us and demonstrating our desire to come closer.</p>
<p>ולעבדו בכל־לבבכם</p>	<p>יא:יא ויהי אִם־שָׁמַע תִּשְׁמַעוּ אֵל־מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעִבְדוֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשׁוֹכֶם: 11:13 Now it shall be: if you hearken, yes, hearken to my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your being:</p>	<p><i>With all your heart</i> occurs 9 times in the book of Deuteronomy, (nowhere else in the Torah) and twice this parasha (see 10:12) ועתה ישׁר אל פיה ה אלהיך שאל מעטף כי אם לוראה את ה אלהיך ללכת בכל דרכיו ולאסובה אתו וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת־ה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּכָל־לְבַבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשׁוֹךָ. <i>And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you except to hold the Lord your God in awe, to walk in all his ways and to love him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your being.</i></p> <p>It is the definitive expression for <i>the totality of your being, the core of your life</i>. <i>Wholeheartedly</i> would be the closest English expression. Rather than think of this as <i>surrender</i> or <i>subservience</i> there is the indelible sense that what is being asked for here is an unwavering loyalty and commitment to God. Rashi interprets this: בְּשֵׁנַי יִצְרִיךְ - <i>with your two inclinations</i>. (the good and the bad, this is based on the fact that there are two ב's in the word לבב rather than one as in לב). Two more instances of לבב in this parasha are found in the ויהי אם שמוע passage: לֹא יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם - <i>lest your heart be seduced</i> (11:16) and וּשְׂמַתֶּם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי־עַל־לְבַבְכֶם and (11:18). When words are placed <i>on</i> the heart, eventually they go <i>in</i> the heart.</p>

THIS PARASHA SHEET IS SPONSORED BY JULIET AND PHIL WACHS IN HONOR OF THE SECOND WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF GABI WACHS AND YAAKOV MALOMET. SHABBAT SHALOM!