

Ekev - When You Speak to Your Heart and other Thoughts
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Israeli scholar Rabbi Amnon Bazak¹ observes that in this parasha Moses focusses on what Israel might **say in their heart**² before and after they arrive in the land. Here are three things that they might **say in their (collective) heart**:

<p>כִּי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְכֶם רַבִּים הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִמֶּנִּי אֵיכָה אֹכֵל לְהוֹרִישָׁם. (ז:ז)</p>	<p>1. If you should say in your heart: More numerous are these nations than I; how will I be able to dispossess them? (7:17)</p>	<p>1. They might express fear of their enemies while they are still in the desert. The people might lose their faith in their ability to conquer the land.</p>
<p>וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְכֶם כְּחֵי וְעֹצֶם יָדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֵת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה. (ח:ז)</p>	<p>2. And should you say in your heart: My power and the might of my hand have produced all this wealth for me, (8:17)</p>	<p>2. They might express arrogance when they are living in the land. They might think that they alone are responsible for the land's abundant produce.</p>
<p>אֵל תֹּאמַר בְּלִבְכֶם בְּהִדָּף ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶתְּם מִלְּפָנָי לֵאמֹר בְּצַדִּיקוֹתַי הֵבִיאָנִי ה' לְרֶשֶׁת אֵת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְרֶשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה ה' מוֹרִישָׁם מִפְּנֵי. (ט:ד)</p>	<p>3. Do not say in your heart when God has pushed them out before you, saying: Because of my righteous-merit did God bring me in to possess this land, and because of the wickedness of these nations is God dispossessing them from before you! (9:4)</p>	<p>3. They might express a sense of entitlement based on their delusions of self-importance. They may experience these thoughts while having dwelt in the land for some time, thinking they actually deserve their safety and security because of their own merit.</p>

In each of these cases, Moses provides an alternative thought, a **remedy** (to use the metaphor of healing), to offset the awful things that the people might be thinking. Each of

these remedies involves **remembering** something, or more literally, **bearing-in-mind** a particular thing, idea, or experience.

<p>לֹא תִירָא מִהֶם זָכֹר תִּזְכֹּר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכָל מִצְרַיִם... ז:יח</p>	<p>Do not be afraid of them; bear-in-mind, yes, in mind, what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt—(7:18)</p>	<p>The remedy for fear is to remember God's miraculous plagues and deliverance.</p>
<p>וְזָכַרְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הֵנִיחַ לְךָ כַּח לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל לְמֹעַן הָקִים אֵת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם כִּי יוֹם הַזֶּה. ח:יח</p>	<p>Then you must bear-in-mind the Lord your God, that he was the one who gave you the power to produce wealth, in order to establish his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as [is] this day. (8:18)</p>	<p>The remedy for arrogance, overconfidence and narcissism is to remember that God is the One who gives power.</p>
<p>זָכֹר אֶל תִּשְׁכַּח אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִקְצַפְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמִדְבָּר לָמֹן הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד בָּאָתָם עַד הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם עַם ה'. ט:טז</p>	<p>Bear-in-mind do not forget how you infuriated the Lord your God in the wilderness; from the time that he took you out of Egypt until your coming to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord! (9:7)</p>	<p>The remedy for entitlement, delusion and self-importance is to remember your inadequacy and rebelliousness.</p>

Bear in mind that **Bear-in-mind** is an interesting choice for the translation of the word **זָכֹר**.³ While we commonly translate **זָכֹר** as **remember**, **bear-in-mind** conveys just a little more by invoking the biblical metaphor of the **Heart as Vessel**, a metaphor that has deep roots in antiquity (see the illustration) and that was not unique to the Bible.⁴

¹Rabbi Amnon Bazak, **Nekudat Peticha - Points of Departure: Short Takes in the Plain Meaning of the Text for the Weekly Parasha**. Hebrew. Yediat S'farim, 2018. p. 400.

²The expression, **לֵאמֹר בְּלִבְךָ-to speak in one's heart** is the biblical way of describing thought. The expression only occurs four times in the Torah: three times in this parasha and once in parashat Shoftim, in the passage that deals with the false prophet: **וְכִי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְכֶם אֵיכָה יָדַע אֵת הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר ה'-- Now if you should say in your heart: How can we know it is the word that God did not speak? (Deut. 18:21)**. If we examine all these occurrences in the Torah, and the several times it occurs elsewhere in the Bible, it seems to refer in general to faith or doubt. In poetic terms, one **speaks in one's heart** in moments of solitude, reflection, reverence, gratitude, delusion or disillusionment. It is also interesting to note that **the heart**, specifically in the form, **לֵב** (with the double **ב** as opposed to **לב** with one **ב**) **occurs 47 (!) times in Deuteronomy**. The chart (other side) shows quite literally,

how **the "heart" is "off the chart"** in Deuteronomy. That tells us something important about the book: one of its main themes is how to shape the thinking of a Jew. Deuteronomy is trying to answer the question: **What does a Jew think?** For example, a Jew should think about **אֶחָד ה' God as One, God as singular** (Deut. 6:4). A Jew should think about being an **עַם עֲלִילָה God's treasured possession**, (7:6). A Jew should think about history in the context of world-time and in the context of generational time, **זָכֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דֹּר וָדֹר Remember the days of the world, understand the years of generation and generation**. (Deut. 32:7). Of all the parashas in Deuteronomy, Ekev and Nitzavim contain the most **heart**. **לֵב** occurs 12 times in Ekev and 10 times in Nitzavim. That's a lot of heart.

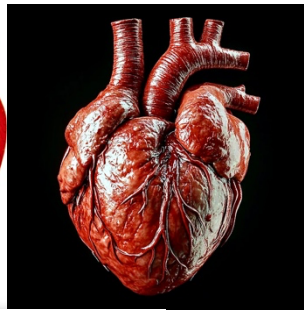
³ Everett Fox, **The Schocken Bible**. 1995.

⁴Of course, ancient humans knew that a heart was a type of vessel. Certainly, from animals, but no doubt plenty of healers and charlatans would have seen an actual human

In biblical Hebrew, memory is the metaphorical act of **placing something in the heart**. Thus, the remedy for doubtful, arrogant, or self-delusional thoughts is **remembering** - or the "act" of placing countervailing thoughts in the heart. R.A. Bazak: *The memory of the exodus, and the recollection of God's power, will be for Israel, an indispensable aspect of dwelling in the land, such that forgetting these things will result in Israel being banished from the land.*

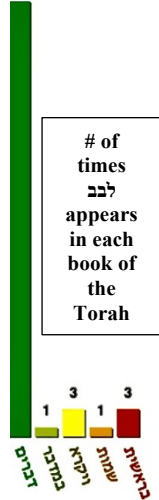


Is an amphora shaped like a heart?



committed to God's word. The **Land** is the ultimate symbol, such that each person who lives in it would be constantly engaged in thinking about its meaning simply by looking at it. Another thought about the metaphor: With all the advances in neuroscience during the last few

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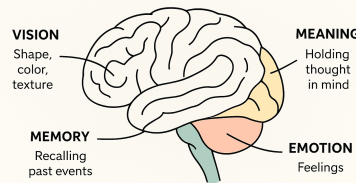


of times לב appears in each book of the Torah

It occurs to me that if **bearing-things-in-mind** is the proper response for all the things that one **says in one's heart**, then one should wonder why the Torah did not create a set of symbols for remembering those things. *Tzitzit* for example, reminds us of the mitzvot.⁵ *Mezuzah* and *tefillin* are also commonly thought of as symbols that remind us of the commandments.⁶ But to reiterate, in the three instances above where Moses invokes **calling-to-mind** or **remembering**, no symbol is mentioned to help us. Why? Because the land itself is supposed to be the ultimate symbol for reminding the people of God's power and Israel's history.⁷ We cannot overstate this. While *thinking* and *feeling* are important themes in Deuteronomy, the overarching theme of the book is **living in the Land**. The **Land** symbolizes arrival, home, and fulfillment. The **Land** is the venue of God's love for Israel, God's blessings and God's protection. The **Land**, especially the place that God chooses for his name, will be a place where God encounters humanity. The **Land** is the setting for Israel's to be an exemplar to the world in creating a just society, bound by a covenant, and

decades through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) - by which we can actually **see** which parts of the brain **light up** when engaged in different types of cognitive or emotional activity - we can give new layers of meaning to the ancient biblical texts. **Speaking to the heart** would involve those areas of the brain that process language, (in the left hemisphere), the center of emotion (the amygdala), as well as the center for applying memory, (the hippocampus). If **heart** is simply the Torah's metaphor for **mind**, we can conclude that the entire mind is activated in the spiritual life of a Jew. Or to put it another way, **neuroscience validates the meta-phorical language of the heart that we read in this parasha**. Thus, loving and serving God **with all our hearts** (11:13) is simply the ancient way of saying what neuroscientists now

BRAIN AREAS IN REMEMBERING AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE



say today in their own inimical and meta-phorical way: **love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might, that is, to the point when**

your entire brain is lit up!

SHABBAT SHALOM!

This parasha sheet is sponsored by Suzy Levin to commemorate the yahrzeit of her mother, Carol Levin, z'l.

This Shabbat we mark 680 days of the war and the captivity of the hostages. We pray for an end to the war and the return of the hostages. May God shield Israel, comfort the bereaved, protect the IDF, heal the wounded, and spare innocents from suffering.

heart and noticed that it was basically a vessel. It may only be a coincidence based on form and functionality, but it is not hard to see the similarity in the conical shape of ancient amphorae, (ancient earthenware jugs and vessels) and the slightly conical shape of the human heart. Notwithstanding that possibility, we invoke the metaphor of heart as vessel all the time. For example, when we recite the Shema every day, we regularly speak of placing ideas on the heart: **וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים וְהָיָה לָכֵן לְצִיצֵת וְרֵאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת ה' וְעָשִׂיתֶם** (Deut. 6:6). That is the Torah's metaphorical way of saying that you are obligated to think about these things - the obligation to love or to be loyal to God, or the Ten Commandments - at all times.

⁵ **וְהָיָה לָכֵן לְצִיצֵת וְרֵאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת ה' וְעָשִׂיתֶם** (במ' טו:לט) *It shall be a tzitzit-tassel for you, that you*

may look at it and keep-in-mind all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, (Num. 15:39).

⁶ But the commandments to put on tefillin **as a sign on our arms**, and **to write these things on our doorposts** do not explicitly state that the intention of those symbols is to remind us of all the mitzvot. Those symbols have many layers of meaning. A text of Torah on your doorpost signifies identity; it reminds us of the doorposts of the Israelite homes on the eve of the exodus; it makes the home a place in which you can literally find God's word. Wearing texts of Torah on your body - your arm and on your forehead - means that you become, in a very literal way, a walking Torah. And we could generate many more interpretations.

⁷ The word **אֶרֶץ-land** in all its different forms occurs 34 times in our parasha. This parasha focuses on the land of Israel more than any other parasha in the Torah. **מִזֶּל טוֹב אֵלֶיכֶם וְעוֹרִידָה!**