The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

פרשת נצבים-וילך תשפ״ו

The Life We Choose

Dovid Kopel

The final day of משה's life is unlike any other day in the Torah.

משה is 120 years old. His entire life has been Torah. He brought it down from הר סיני, taught it to כלל ישראל (*the Jewish people*), clarified it, defended it, and embodied it. Every part of his life was bound up with giving over the דבר ה׳ (*word of Hashem*).

And yet, as his life comes to its end, משה does not act as though the work is finished.

He gathers everyone together. He speaks to them again. He prepares them for the years ahead. He writes the Torah. He writes the שירה (the song that comprises פרשת האזינו). He gives the ספר to the כהנים and commands that it be placed beside the ארון (*Ark*). He teaches the שירה and places it in the mouths of בני ישראל.

רש״י explains that on this day the מסורות (*traditions*) and מעיינות החכמה (*wellsprings of wisdom*) were closed from משה. The pain was not only that his physical life was ending. The flow of Torah from ה׳ through him was coming to an end.

And still, on that very day, he continues to teach.

A person whose life is Torah never reaches the feeling that he has done enough. The more משה has taught, the more urgently he feels that Torah must continue after him.

That may be the central question running through נצבים–וילך:

How will Torah remain alive when the living voice of משה is no longer present?

The answer is that Torah must move from משה into כלל ישראל. It must move from the written ספר into their mouths, their hearts, and their actions. It must no longer be only the Torah that משה taught.

It must become their life.

✦

Written, But Not Left on the Page

The end of ספר דברים is filled with writing.

In כי תבוא we are shown כלל ישראל being commanded to write the Torah upon the stones when they enter ארץ ישראל:

> וְכָתַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶן אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת בְּעָבְרֶךָ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה׳ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ לָךְ (דברים כז:ג)

Later, משה writes the Torah itself:

> וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי הַנֹּשְׂאִים אֶת אֲרוֹן בְּרִית ה׳ וְאֶל כָּל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (דברים לא:ט)

The completed ספר is placed beside the ארון:

> לָקֹחַ אֵת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֹתוֹ מִצֶּד אֲרוֹן בְּרִית ה׳ אֱלֹקיכֶם וְהָיָה שָׁם בְּךָ לְעֵד (דברים לא:כו)

And then Hashem commands:

> וְעַתָּה כִּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמְּדָהּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׂימָה בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (דברים לא:יט)

The Torah is written on the stones. It is written in a ספר. The שירה is written. Everything is being secured in a physical form before משה leaves.

Writing gives Torah permanence. It protects the words from being changed or forgotten. The ספר beside the ארון stands as an enduring עדות (*testimony*) to the ברית (*covenant*).

But writing alone is not enough.

A Torah can be written perfectly and remain closed. Its letters can be preserved while its voice disappears. A ספר can survive while the Torah within it is no longer alive in the people.

Hashem therefore does not say only to write the שירה. He says:

שימה בפיהם

Place it in their mouths.

The Torah must leave the page and enter the person.

✦

Placing Torah in the Mouth

We normally think of teaching as placing an idea in someone's ear. The teacher speaks, and the student receives the information.

But that is not the language of the Torah here.

Hashem does not say to place the שירה in their ears. He says to place it in their mouths.

That does not mean merely training a child to repeat the correct answer. Repetition and memory have an important place, but the transmission of Torah cannot be completed by rote. Torah is acquired through קושיא ותירוץ (*question and answer*), through pursuit, struggle, and the desire to understand.

The father does not only wait for the son to ask a question. He frames the ענין (*matter*) in a way that causes the child to feel the difficulty. He gives him enough to recognize that something does not fit. He opens the door until the question emerges from the child's own mouth.

That is the pattern found throughout the Torah:

> כִּי יִשְׁאָלְךָ בִנְךָ מָחָר (דברים ו:כ)

The child asks, and then the father responds.

That is also the structure of:

> וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה׳ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם (שמות יג:ח)

The הגדה (*telling*) is not only a speech delivered to a passive listener. It is part of a conversation. Even with the child who does not yet know how to ask, the הגדה tells us:

את פתח לו

You open it for him.

We teach him how to ask.

Torah begins in the mouth of the father, but it is not fully transmitted until it produces a question in the mouth of the son. The father does not merely place an answer into the child's ear. He places the Torah into the child's mouth by awakening him to ask.

Perhaps that is the depth of the promise:

> וְהָיָה כִּי תִמְצֶאןָ אֹתוֹ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעָנְתָה הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְפָנָיו לְעֵד כִּי לֹא תִשָּׁכַח מִפִּי זַרְעוֹ כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת יִצְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה הַיּוֹם בְּטֶרֶם אֲבִיאֶנּוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (דברים לא:כא)

For it will not be forgotten from the mouth of its descendants.

Not only because they will repeat its words, but because their mouths will remain alive with Torah. They will continue to ask, challenge, pursue, and search for understanding.

The father begins the thought. The son enters it through his question.

That is how Torah passes from one generation to the next.

✦

The Living Song of Torah

This may also explain why the Torah is described as a שירה.

A voice can communicate information. A song carries something more. It has movement, feeling, tension, resolution, longing, pain, and joy.

The ספר תורה itself contains only אותיות (*letters*). There are no נקודות (*vowels*) or טעמים (*cantillation marks*) written in the scroll. Those are carried through the living מסורה.

The letters are written in the ספר, but the נקודות and טעמים are placed in the mouth of the reader.

The written Torah preserves the words. The living mouth gives them their sound, movement, and melody. Not because the reader invents a song, but because he has received the way the Torah is to be read from the generations before him.

That is exactly the movement from:

ויכתב משה

to:

שימה בפיהם

The letters are protected in writing. The song is protected in the mouths of כלל ישראל.

A song is alive in a way that words on a page are not. It can awaken joy, grief, yearning, and memory. Even a sad song is alive. שירת האזינו contains terrible warnings and painful truths, but pain that becomes שירה has not become silent despair. It still exists within the relationship with Hashem; it still has a voice before Hashem.

Yet the deepest song of Torah is a song of joy:

> פִּקּוּדֵי ה׳ יְשָׁרִים מְשַׂמְּחֵי לֵב מִצְוַת ה׳ בָּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם (תהלים יט:ט)

Torah is not meant only to be guarded so as to preserve accuracy. It is meant to be loved and cherished. It is meant to enter a person until its words awaken something within him.

The father begins the melody. The son joins through his question. Another voice is added to the song of כלל ישראל.

That is not merely how Torah survives.

That is how Torah thrives.

A ברית Above and Below

Hashem tells משה that a time will come when בני ישראל will turn away:

> וְאָנֹכִי הַסְתֵּר אַסְתִּיר פָּנַי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹקים אֲחֵרִים (דברים לא:יח)

There will be הסתר פנים (*concealment of Hashem's face*). The גילוי (*revelation*) from above will no longer be clear. כלל ישראל will feel abandoned and distant.

But the Torah does not leave us with that concealment. Immediately afterward, Hashem says:

> וְעַתָּה כִּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמְּדָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׂימָה בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (דברים לא:יט)

At the very moment Hashem says that He will conceal His face, He gives the mitzvah of כתיבת ספר תורה (*writing a Torah scroll*). The transition is direct. When Hashem's presence can no longer be perceived clearly from the events of the world, His true רצון (*will*) must be sought in Torah.

Hashem may conceal Himself within history, but He does not leave כלל ישראל without a place where He can be found. He places His רצון in a living text. He commands that it be taught and placed in their mouths.

The answer to הסתר פנים is therefore not only that the words of Torah must survive. Torah must remain the living גילוי of Hashem within a concealed world. A Yid may not always be able to understand what Hashem is doing by looking at the world around him, but he can still know what Hashem wants by looking into His Torah.

The לוחות inside the ארון express the Torah as it comes from above. The ספר written by משה expresses the Torah as it is received and preserved below. Fathers teach it. Children ask it. כלל ישראל carries it in its mouth. In that ארון are both sets of לוחות a constant reminder of what was and the potential of what can be forged in the future.

There is a ברית למעלה (*covenant above*) and a ברית למטה (*covenant below*).

The Torah descends from Hashem, but it must be received, written, taught, questioned, sung, and lived by כלל ישראל.

The תורה beside the ארון must become the תורה in the mouth.

Perhaps there is even a רמז (*hint*) in the words:

> וַיְהִי כְּכַלּוֹת מֹשֶׁה לִכְתֹּב אֶת דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר עַד תֻּמָּם (דברים לא:כד)

On the level of פשט (*simple meaning*), ככלות means that משה finished writing. But the word also carries the sound indicative of כלה (*bride*).

The Torah has reached completion as a written ספר. The Torah from above and the Torah received below are joined within one ברית. The לוחות rest in the ארון, and the ספר written by משה stands beside them.

Hashem gives the Torah. כלל ישראל receives it and gives it a living voice.

The ברית is not complete when Torah remains only above. It becomes complete when Torah lives below.

✦

Torah and תשובה

This brings us to the central passage of נצבים:

> כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלֵאת הִיא מִמְּךָ וְלֹא רְחוֹקָה הִיא לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הֵיא וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הֵיא כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ (דברים ל:יא-יד)

רש״י understands "המצוה הזאת" as referring to Torah. The רמב״ן understands it as referring to תשובה (*repentance*), which was described in the preceding פסוקים.

At first, these seem like two very different readings.

Is the פסוק telling us that Torah is close, or that תשובה is close?

Perhaps the מחלוקת (*dispute*) itself reveals how deeply the two are connected. The same words describe both terms, because Torah and תשובה move through the same three parts of the person:

בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

For Torah, בפיך means that it must be spoken, taught, questioned, and sung.

בלבבך means that it must be understood, desired, loved, and internalized.

לעשותו means that Torah must shape the way a person lives. It cannot remain a fascinating idea detached from action.

תשובה follows the same path.

תשובה requires בפיך through וידוי (*confession*). A person must give voice to what he has done. He must stop hiding from the truth and say it before Hashem.

תשובה requires בלבבך through regret, desire, and a real commitment to return.

And תשובה requires לעשותו. The person must change his conduct. He cannot speak about returning while continuing to live exactly as before.

וידוי without the heart becomes empty speech. Inner regret without action leaves the person where he was. Action without an inner return may remain external and temporary.

Both Torah and תשובה must enter the complete person.

Perhaps that is why the same פסוק can hold both meanings. Torah teaches a person how to return. תשובה is the act of returning to the life found within Torah.

The גר״א brings this structure into the opening of יהושע:

> לֹא יָמ֗וּשׁ סֵ֚פֶר הַתּוֹרָ֣ה הַזֶּ֔ה מִפִּ֖יךָ וְהָגִ֣יתָ בּ֑וֹ יוֹמָ֥ם וָלָ֛יְלָה לְמַ֥עַן תִּשְׁמֹ֖ר לַעֲשׂ֣וֹת כְּכָ֣ל הַכָּת֣וּב בּ֑וֹ כִּ֣י אָ֣ז תַּצְלִ֔יחַ אֶת־דְּרָכֶ֖ךָ וְאָ֥ז תַּשְׂכִּֽיל׃
> (יהושע א:ח)

The גר״א connects these words directly to:

בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

The ספר התורה must remain in the mouth. It must occupy the heart and influence thought. It must lead to action.

The written ספר becomes living Torah only when it enters the entire person.

✦

Not in שמים and Not Across the Sea

The Torah could have said only:

כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד

Why does it first tell us that Torah is not in שמים and not beyond the sea?

Perhaps the two phrases remove two different distances.

לא בשמים היא

Torah does not remain in the realm of מלאכים (*angels*). It was brought down into the human world. Torah was not given to beings without struggle, desire, weakness, confusion, or יצר הרע (*evil inclination*).

It was given to people.

ולא מעבר לים היא

Torah was not placed among another nation. בני ישראל do not need to cross the sea and search for the people who possess it.

Torah was entrusted to us.

But neither of these statements yet expresses the fullest closeness.

Torah can exist within the human world and still remain far from the individual. It can belong to כלל ישראל and still remain outside a person's own life.

The Torah therefore continues:

כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד

The true closeness is:

בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

Torah can become the person's own voice. It can shape his inner world. It can direct his actions.

The closeness is not simply that Torah is geographically available. It is close because it can enter him.

And when Torah becomes close, Hashem becomes close. Torah is the form that דבקות (*closeness*) to Hashem takes within this world.

✦

The Hidden Life Within Torah

There may also be a רמז in the final words of the previous פרק:

> הַנִּסְתָּרֹת לַה׳ אֱלֹקינוּ וְהַנִּגְלֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת (דברים כט:כח)

On the level of פשט, the פסוק has its own meaning. But as a רמז, its structure may speak to the relationship between פנימיות התורה (*the inner dimension of Torah*) and the נגלות (*revealed parts of Torah*).

Perhaps the word נגלות can itself be divided:

נ׳ גלות

The letter נ׳ has the numerical value of fifty. It points toward the fifty gates of בינה (*understanding*), the highest level of understanding reached by משה. But within נגלות, that נ׳ is in גלות (*exile*) as it only has that which is revealed.

The revealed Torah is given:

לנו ולבנינו

Its words, laws, and actions are taught, transmitted, guarded, and lived. But a person can possess the revealed instructions and still see only what stands in front of him. He may know what Torah requires without understanding what Torah truly is, what a מצוה accomplishes, or what kind of closeness lies within עבודת ה׳ (*service of Hashem*).

The deeper בינה is present within the revealed Torah, but for that person it remains in גלות. He sees the מעשה, but not the פנימיות that gives the מעשה its life. He knows the command, but does not yet see the רצון of Hashem within it.

That is another form of הסתר פנים. Hashem's face is not only concealed within the events of the world. It can remain concealed even within Torah. Some people see its surface, but do not search for the inner life it contains.

The פסוק then ends:

לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת

The word כל has the numerical value of fifty. It is the same נ׳ that was hidden within גלות נ׳. But כל also means the whole — the completeness in which all the individual parts of Torah are seen as one living revelation of Hashem.

The נ׳ emerges from גלות as כל. This is the completion of בינה. The deeper understanding allows a person to see the wholeness of Torah, and that wholeness gives him the desire and strength:

לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת

The פנימיות does not replace the מעשה (*action*). It enables the מעשה. When the hidden בינה is revealed, the person no longer experiences the נגלות as disconnected rules imposed upon him from outside. He begins to see how every part belongs to one complete Torah and how every מצוה carries the רצון of Hashem into his life.

When Hashem's face is hidden from the world, the Yid finds His פנימיות within Torah. As he discovers the life hidden within its revealed words and actions, the נגלות themselves become קרוב.

He realizes that Torah is not taking life away from him.

Torah is showing him what life truly is.

✦

Learning How to See

Immediately after saying that Torah is close, משה continues:

> רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע (דברים ל:טו)

And then:

> הַעִדֹתִי בָכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה **וּבָחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים** לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה אַתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ (דברים ל:יט)

Torah does not merely provide information about which choice is correct. Torah gives a person the inner capacity to choose.

A person may possess בחירה (*choice*) in theory, while being ruled by habit, desire, anger, fear, and the יצר הרע in practice. He may be making decisions, but he is not truly controlling the forces that are moving him; he merely is in the passenger seat.

Torah gives a person clarity. It gives him the ability to pause and see beyond what is attractive in the moment. It teaches him to recognize the difference between what looks good and what is באמת טוב (*truly good*).

Torah does not only tell a person to choose life.

Torah forms the person into someone who can choose life.

When Torah is בפיך, it shapes what he speaks and what he hears himself saying.

When Torah is בלבבך, it shapes what he values, desires, and understands.

When Torah becomes לעשותו, it gives direction to his actions and control over his life.

The Torah does not remove בחירה.

It makes real בחירה possible.

✦

The תיקון of אדם הראשון

This may be the תיקון (*repair*) of the first human choice.

By the עץ הדעת, the Torah says:

> וַתֵּרֶא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תַאֲוָה הוּא לָעֵינַיִם וְנֶחְמָד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפִּרְיוֹ וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכַל
> (בראשית ג:ו)

ראיה (*seeing*) was central to the חטא.

The tree appeared good. Desire defined what was טוב. The eye saw, the heart desired, and the hand took.

What appeared to offer life brought death into the world.

At the end of נצבים, it is משה who gives כלל ישראל a corrected form of ראיה:

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע

Then comes the command:

ובחרת בחיים

The language reverses the original sequence:

ותרא – ראה

כי טוב – החיים והטוב

ותקח – ובחרת

In גן עדן, the human being sees something as good and takes it. In נצבים, the human being is taught how to see what is truly good and then to choose it.

The original חטא was not only a failure of choice. It was a corruption of vision. Desire taught the human being what to call good.

Torah repairs that vision.

When Torah fills the mouth, heart, and actions, a person can distinguish between what merely looks alive and what contains true חיים (*life*).

אדם reached outward and seized an object that appeared to offer life. נצבים teaches that life is found when Torah enters inwardly.

✦

The Choice of ראש השנה

This is the parshah that brings us into ראש השנה (*the New Year*).

The central connection is not merely that the end of ספר דברים contains repeated acts of writing, or that we will soon ask to be written in the ספר החיים (*the Book of Life*).

The deepest preparation for ראש השנה is:

ובחרת בחיים

ראש השנה places a new year before a person. But a new year does not automatically create a new life. The calendar can change while the person remains exactly the same.

משה prepares כלל ישראל by teaching them how a new life is chosen.

First, Torah must become close:

בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

Then תשובה becomes possible. A person can give voice to what has gone wrong, return in his heart, and change the way he lives.

Torah repairs his vision so that he can see the difference between life and death, between what appears good and what is actually good.

Only then can he truly hear:

ובחרת בחיים

ראש השנה asks a person not only whether he wants to be alive next year.

It asks what kind of life he is choosing.

Will the coming year simply be another period of existence, filled with the same habits, the same distance, and the same automatic choices?

Or will it become a year of Torah, תשובה, love, joy, purpose, and closeness to Hashem?

That is the real choice of ראש השנה.

✦

Torah Is the Life

The final פסוקים tell us what choosing life means:

> לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה׳ אֱלֹקיךָ לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקֹלוֹ וּלְדָבְקָה בוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאֹרֶךְ יָמֶיךָ לָשֶׁבֶת עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה׳ לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת לָהֶם (דברים ל:כ)

The Torah does not say only that Hashem will reward us with life.

כי הוא חייך

Hashem is your life.

Choosing life means choosing to love Hashem, to listen to His קול (*voice/sound*), and to cling to Him.

The closeness is not merely a road leading toward life. The closeness itself is life.

That is why:

כי קרוב אליך

and:

כי הוא חייך

are really one idea.

Torah becomes close when it enters the person. Through Torah, the person becomes close to Hashem. And that דבקות is the life he is being commanded to choose.

Torah does not merely teach a Yid how to live.

Torah is the life being chosen.

It gives existence meaning. It gives a person direction, clarity, joy, and relationship. It turns years merely alive into a life lived before Hashem. A life worth living.

A person can be alive for many years without truly living. Torah gives those years חיים.

✦

Written in the ספר החיים

Now the repeated emphasis on writing takes on a new meaning.

משה writes the Torah. He writes the שירה. The ספר is placed beside the ארון. The words are then placed in the mouths of כלל ישראל.

Perhaps this is a רמז to the request we make on ראש השנה:

כתבנו בספר החיים

Write us in the Book of Life.

A Yid first allows the ספר התורה to be written into him.

Through Torah, Hashem's word enters his mouth, his heart, and his actions. Through תשובה, he restores that writing when his life has moved away from it.

He chooses the life contained within Torah.

Then he stands before Hashem and asks to be written in the ספר החיים.

Not merely in the זכות (*merit*) of his Torah and תשובה.

Not merely because he wants another year of biological existence.

He asks for a life that is truly alive.

A life of:

לאהבה את ה׳ לשמע בקלו ולדבקה בו

We ask Hashem to write us into life because we are trying to write Torah into our lives.

✦

Choosing a Life Worth Living

That is the invitation of נצבים (and וילך) before ראש השנה.

Not merely to learn more Torah. Not merely to perform another act of תשובה. But to allow the joy of Torah to enter every part of life — to fill the mouth, heart, home, our choices, and actions.

When Torah becomes a living שירה within a person, it changes the way he sees. He begins to recognize what is truly good. He does not experience תשובה only as fear of punishment or regret over failure.

He returns because he remembers whom he loves.

He returns to his Father.

He returns to his King.

He returns because he wants to be close.

That is תשובה מאהבה (*repentance out of love*).

A person does not only run away from death. He chooses life. He does not only abandon the wrong path. He rediscovers the joy, meaning, and closeness waiting for him within Torah and עבודת ה׳.

Then the request to be written in the ספר החיים takes on its fullest meaning.

We do not ask only that, in the זכות of our Torah and תשובה, Hashem should grant us another year. We ask for a year when we are genuinely alive. A life filled with purpose, love, joy, growth, and דבקות.

We ask not merely to live longer.

We ask for a life worth living.

A full life. A complete life. A life in which Torah is not confined to the בית מדרש, but fills every page. A life in which our choices become expressions of Torah. A life in which we serve Hashem not only because we must, but because we love Him and find joy in being close to Him.

May we all merit to embrace the שמחה (*joy*) of Torah and carry its song into every part of our lives. May that joy awaken us to תשובה מאהבה, help us see true טוב, and give us the strength to choose חיים again and again.

May Hashem write us in the ספר החיים—not only for years of life, but for years filled with life.

May we fill every page with Torah, love, purpose, and true עבודת ה׳. May we make choices worthy of the life Hashem has placed before us. And through those choices, may we merit together to usher in משיח צדקנו (*our righteous Messiah*), במהרה בימינו.

ובחרת בחיים כי הוא חייך

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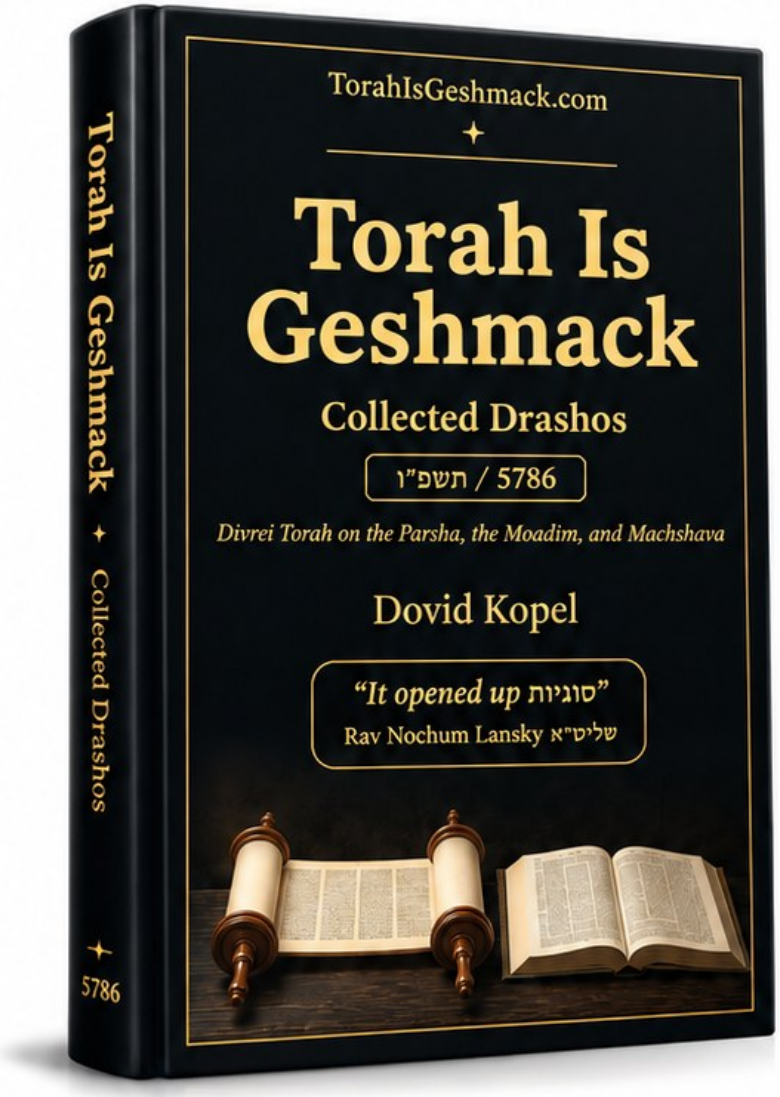
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