



Everything that Hashem has said, “na’aseh v’nishma”

Everything Written in the Black Letters “Na’aseh” — We Will Do All The Secrets Concealed in the White Parchment “Nishma” — We Will Learn

On the upcoming, auspicious Shabbas Kodesh, we will read parshas Mishpatim from the Torah. It is vital to understand that this parsha is the completion of the spectacular revelation of Matan Torah at Har Sinai, which is described in parshas Yisro. It begins with the passuk (Shemos 24, 1): **“וַאֲלֵ מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֵלַי” — to Moshe He said, “Go up to Hashem.”** Here Rashi points out that: **This passage was said before the Aseres HaDibros; on the fourth of Sivan, Moshe was told, “Go up.”** Accordingly, the parsha goes on to chronicle unusual aspects related to the revelation of Matan Torah, such as the sprinkling of the blood from the “olot” and “shelamim”—half of which was sprinkled on the people of Yisrael and half of which was sprinkled on the mizbeiach.

The biggest chiddush, however, that appears in this parsha is the praiseworthy proclamation by Yisrael of **“na’aseh v’nishma.”** Here is the pertinent passage from the Gemara (Shabbas 88a): **“בַּשָּׁעָה שֶׁהָקָדִים יִשְׂרָאֵל נִעְשָׂה לְנִשְׁמָע, יִצְתָה בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה לָהֶן, מִי גִילָה לְבָנֵי רִז זֶה שְׁמֹלֵאכִי הִשְׁרַת מִשְׁתַּמְשִׁין בּוֹ—when Yisrael pronounced “na’aseh” prior to “nishma,” a heavenly voice went out and said to them, “Who revealed to My children the secret employed by the ministering angels?”** The divine poet commemorates this monumental declaration in the zemirot we sing on Shabbas (Yonah Matz’ah): **“וּבָאוּ—כֹּלֵם בְּבְרִית יָחִיד נִעְשָׂה וְנִשְׁמָע אָמְרוּ כְּאֶחָד—and they all entered a covenant together and proclaimed “na’aseh v’nishma” as one.**

Surprisingly, this famous proclamation does not even appear in parshas Yisro. There it merely says (ibid. 19, 8): **“וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם יַחְדָּיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה” —**

and all the people answered together and said, “Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!” In truth, this abridged version also appears in our parsha, parshas Mishpatim (ibid. 24, 3): **“כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה”**. Subsequently, however, they proclaimed both **“na’aseh”** and **“nishma”** (ibid. 7): **“כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע”**. Here is the complete passage (ibid. 3):

“וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי ה' וְאֵת כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה. וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי ה'.”

Moshe came and told the people all the words of Hashem and all the laws; and the entire people responded with one voice, and they said, “All the words that Hashem has spoken ‘na’aseh’ (‘we will do’).” Moshe wrote all the words of Hashem. On the words **“Moshe wrote,”** Rashi comments in the name of the Mechilta: **He wrote the text of the Torah from Bereishis until Matan Torah, and he wrote the mitzvos that they were commanded in Marah.** Several pesukim later, it says (ibid. 7): **“וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע” — he took the Book of the Covenant and read in earshot of the people, and they said, “Everything that Hashem has said, ‘na’aseh v’nishma’ (‘we will do and we will obey’)!”**

Now, if we read these pesukim carefully, we will note that initially when Moshe related the words of Hashem to the people only verbally, they merely responded, **“Na’aseh.”** Subsequently, however, after Moshe wrote everything down in a book and read to them from the book, only then did they respond, **“Na’aseh v’nishma.”**

The Torah Was Given as Black Fire Inscribed on White Fire

We will begin to shed some light on the subject, by introducing a teaching from our blessed sages that the Torah preceded the creation of the world and was inscribed with black fire on top of white fire. Here is the pertinent Midrash (D.R. 3, 12): **Reish Lakish said: The Torah that was given to Moshe, its parchment was of white fire, and it was inscribed with black fire.** We find a similar statement in the Yerushalmi (Shekalim 1, 1): **התורה שנתן לו הקב"ה למשה נתנה לו—לואש לבנה חרותה באש שחורה—the Torah that HKB"H gave to Moshe was given to him as white fire etched with black fire.**

It is apparent from the statement of Reish Lakish that our sifrei-Torah are written with black letters inscribed on white parchment to allude to the origins of the Torah from black fire on white fire. This is the message conveyed by the passuk in the holiest of songs (Shir HaShirim 2, 5): **"סמכוני באשישות"—sustain me with "אשישות"** (literally: "dainty items"). The Midrash expounds the term **"באשישות"** to mean "two types of fire." According to the Chasam Sofer (Vayishlach), the Midrash is referring to the two types of fire that make up a sefer-Torah—black fire atop white fire.

The phenomenon of the Torah being transmitted as black fire atop white fire is explained in the sacred works of the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy"a, in Kedushas Levi (Likutim). There he focuses on the passuk (Yeshayah 51, 4): **"כי תורה מאתי תצא"—for Torah will come forth from Me.** They expounded on this passuk in the Midrash (V.R. 13, 3): **"אמר הקב"ה—HKB"H said: "A new Torah will come forth from Me"—novel aspects (chiddushim) of the Torah will come forth from Me.** This is seemingly difficult to comprehend, because it contradicts one of the thirteen principles of emunah: **שזאת התורה לא תהא מוחלפת ולא תהיה תורה אחרת מאת הבורא יתברך שמו—this Torah will not be replaced and there will not be another Torah from the Creator, blessed is His name.** So, how is it possible to say: **"A new Torah will come forth from Me"?**

The Kedushas Levi explains the matter as follows (abridged translation): **The black letters in the scroll that are visible to all represent "internal lights" that everybody is able to perceive and ultimately comprehend. The white parchment surrounding the letters represent "surrounding lights" and their messages and meaning are more concealed. As such, the white parchments are also a type of letters except that they are concealed letters on a higher level than the visible, revealed letters (they are not revealed or perceived by everyone).**

For this reason, it is forbidden to touch the actual sefer-Torah, because that annuls and hides the concealed letters . . . This is the meaning of HKB"H's statement: **"תורה חדשה מאתי תצא"—there will be a divine revelation le'asid la'vo, a revelation from the "ohr hameikif."** The whiteness of the Torah, the concealed letters that surround the visible letters, will be revealed. That is the new Torah that will come from Hashem.

Let us clarify the difference between an "internal light"—**ohr penimi**—and a "surrounding light"—**ohr meikif**. A human being is capable of perceiving an "ohr penimi" and comprehending it intellectually. Whereas an "ohr meikif" is beyond human comprehension. Hence, the "surrounding light" remains external. Accordingly, the Kedushas Levi explains that the black letters in a sefer-Torah that are visible to the eye are a type of "ohr penimi," and as such everyone is capable of understanding at least their simple meaning. The white of the parchment, the white fire, however, contains letters that are invisible; they are a type of "ohr meikif," which will remain beyond human comprehension until le'asid la'vo. Of that time, HKB"H says: **"Novel aspects of the Torah will come forth from Me."**

This also provides us with a rationale for the following teaching in the Gemara (M.K. 26a): **אמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא, הרואה ספר תורה שנקרע חייב לקרוע שתי קריעות, אחד על הגויל ואחד על הכתב—Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rav Huna: A person who sees a sefer Torah**

that is torn (burnt) must tear two times—once for the parchment and once for the script. Just as one must tear one's garment for the script—the actual letters of the Torah—so, too, must one tear one's garment for the parchment, which represents the white fire that will be revealed le'asid la'vo.

The White Fire Is the Source of the Torah in the Heavens before It Was Condensed into Letters

Elsewhere, the Kedushas Levi explains (ibid.): **The white that surrounds the letter and that which is concealed within the letter reflects the receiving of abundance in the world from the Almighty, which is white. Therefore, every open letter which the white flows into . . . And there are 600,000 neshamos of Yisrael and 600,000 letters in the Torah. Every neshamah is associated with a particular letter from the aleph-Beis. Those neshamos that are related to those letters that are open on a certain side, they receive sustenance from the white that flows into the letters, and they are connected to kedushah.**

Thus, we learn from his sacred remarks that the white of the parchment that surrounds the letters, reflects that HKB"H influences from the "ohr meikif" of the white fire to illuminate the letters composed of black fire. Now, since the 600,000 neshamos of Yisrael correspond to the 600,000 letters of the Torah, this means that HKB"H illuminates the neshamos of Yisrael with the "ohr meikif" of the white fire of the parchment.

Now, let us expand on this concept. We know that the origins of the Torah in the heavenly realm are infinite and neverending. As such, it is beyond the scope of human comprehension. Seeing as the Torah represents HKB"H's wisdom, it is infinite just as He is infinite. In His infinite mercy and kindness, however, HKB"H compacted His wisdom step by step until it could be confined within the letters of the Torah; so that we are able to appreciate it and understand it to some degree. This is the Torah that we are familiar with today. This is explained by the author of the Tanya in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 4).

This explains fabulously the Kedushas Levi's explanation of the concept of black fire on top of white fire. The white fire of the Torah alludes to the origins of the Torah before it descended to earth in its restricted form, within the visible, black letters. Therefore, in Olam HaZeh, we are unable to comprehend or even perceive the white fire. It represents an "ohr meikif" that is unrestricted and is beyond the grasp of human intelligence. As we know, white alludes to the midah of chesed that spreads without being restricted.

In contrast, the black letters in a sefer-Torah that are visible to us are the part of the Torah that has undergone "tzimtzum"—restriction and modification—to enable us to comprehend it. As we know, black alludes to the midah of din, which confines and limits the abundance and divine influence that comes down from above. This then is the lesson taught by the Midrash: "אמר הקב"ה תורה חדשה מאתי תצא, חדוש תורה מאתי תצא". As the Kedushas Levi explained, le'asid la'vo HKB"H will reveal to us even the parts of the Torah that are compared to white fire that have not been modified or restricted.

All the Chiddushim of the Torah Stem from the White Fire

With this understanding, we can begin to appreciate where the chiddushim of the Torah generated by our blessed sages throughout the generations originate from—whether they relate to the parts of Torah that are revealed and apparent (the "niglah") or to the parts that are concealed and mystical (the "nistar"). We are referring to chiddushim that are not stated explicitly in the Torah that is visible to us. All of our sages' chiddushim interpreting the written letters of the Torah emanate from the white parchment—the white fire that existed above before it was restricted and trickled down to earth in the form of the letters of the Torah.

Now, although the revelation of the secrets of the Torah from the white fire will occur primarily le'asid la'vo; nevertheless, HKB"H bestowed upon the sages of Yisrael the power to ascend and access the original, unrestricted Torah, the white fire, through their tireless

efforts in the study of Torah and service of Hashem. This enables them to elaborate, interpret and clarify the letters of the Torah above and beyond what is apparent from their confined, restricted form. For this reason, they are referred to as “chiddushei Torah”; because they originate from the novel interpretations of the Torah that will be revealed from the white fire le’asid la’vo: “חידוש תורה מאתי תצא”.

This ties in amazingly with the interpretation of the brilliant author of the Chavat Da’as regarding the passuk (Devarim 32, 47): “כי לא דבר ריק הוא מכם”—**for it is not an empty thing for you.** Do not think that the areas of parchment between the letters of a sefer Torah lack content or meaning. In truth, letters also exist in those spaces; they are simply concealed and not apparent.

In this manner, we can explain the meaning of the following Yerushalmi (Peiah 1, 1): “אמר רבי מנא, כי לא דבר”—**for it is not an empty thing for you,” but if it seems empty (and futile) to you, it is because you are not exerting enough effort in your Torah studies.** Why does Moshe Rabeinu add the words “for you”? The Torah is never an empty thing; but if it seems so to you, it is because you are not learning properly. If you expend the effort, you will be privileged to perceive insights and comprehension beyond the realm of the written letters of the Torah. Then it will be clear to you that the areas of white parchment are not empty spaces. On the contrary! They represent the white fire from which the Torah originated before the “tzimtzum”; it is this fire that illuminates the black letters of the Torah.

This explains magnificently what Rabeinu Chaim Vital presents in the name of his mentor, the Arizal, in Sha’ar HaKavanos. It is an auspicious practice—a “segulah”—to focus on the letters of a sefer-Torah:

My master of blessed memory had the custom of kissing the sefer Torah and accompanying it as it was transported from the sanctuary to the ark to be read from. He would then linger near the ark until they opened the sefer Torah and

showed it to the congregation, as is customary. Then he would actually gaze at the letters of the sefer-Torah, and he would claim that by a person gazing from such close proximity that he is able to read the letters clearly, the person draws an exquisite (extraordinary) light to himself.

We can suggest a rationale for this “segulah” based on our current discussion. By focusing on the black letters in the Torah-scroll that are inscribed on white parchment—representing black fire atop white fire—one is able to connect with and draw from the white of the scroll incredible insights from the concealed portions of the Torah.

The Neshamos of Yisrael’s Sages Stem from the White Fire that Is the Origins of the Torah

It is an accepted and well-known fact that the neshamos of Yisrael are rooted in the holy Torah. With this in mind, it is worthwhile considering whose neshamos are connected to the black fire—the letters of the Torah representing the distilled, limited “chochmah” of HKB”H—and whose neshamos are connected to the white fire—the letters of the Torah prior to the process of “tzimtzum.”

Thus, it should be apparent to every Jew how vital it is to associate with and attach oneself to the scholars of Yisrael. For, just as the black letters in a sefer-Torah cannot exist without the support of the white parchment upon which they are inscribed; so, too, the majority of Jews who are related to the letters of the Torah must establish close relationships with the sages of their generation. Otherwise, their existence is meaningless; they must establish a relationship with those who are connected to the white parchment representing the white fire that transcends the letters we see in a Torah-scroll. Just as the black letters are intimately related to and inseparable from the white parchment, so, too, must every Jew be closely related to the scholars of the Torah.

Thus, we can interpret the passuk (Devarim 17, 8): “כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט בין דם לדם בין דין לבין נגע לגנע דברי ריבות”—**if a matter of judgment will be hidden**

from you, between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, or between affliction and affliction, matters of dispute in your cities. In other words, if you cannot find a satisfactory answer concerning your uncertainties related to the letters of the Torah that have undergone “tzimtzum”—whose scope has been limited—then: **“יקמת ועלית אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' אליך בו”—you shall rise and ascend to the place that Hashem, your G-d, shall choose.** In other words, you should seek a connection with the whiteness, the white fire that transcends the letters of the Torah. There everything is explained and clear. That is the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose and reveal le'asid la'vo. As the Midrash above expresses it: **HKB”H said: “A new Torah will come forth from Me”—novel aspects (chiddushim) of the Torah will come forth from Me.**

According to the Kedushas Levi, this implies that HKB”H will reveal to us the concealed secrets of the Torah represented by the white parchment. Hence, the text goes on to explain how we will be able to ascend to the place of the whiteness that transcends the letters: **“ובאת אל הכהנים הלויים ואל השופט אשר יהיה בימים ההם”—you shall come to the kohanim, the leviim, and to the judge who will be in those days—because they are connected with the white fire. “ודרשת והגידו לך את דבר המשפט, ועשית על פי הדבר אשר יגידו לך מן המקום ההוא אשר יבחר ה'”—you shall inquire, and they will inform you of the letter of the law. You shall act in accordance with the word they will tell you from that place that Hashem will choose—in other words, you will act in accord with what they reveal to you from the origins of the Torah, the white fire, the place that Hashem will choose. “ושמרת לעשות ככל אשר יורוך”—and you shall heed to do everything that they will instruct you.**

In this manner, we can interpret a statement of Chazal related to the passuk (ibid. 28, 61): **“גם כל חלי וכל מכה אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזאת יעלה ה' עליך עד השמדך”** - **“Also, every illness and every plague that is not written in this book of the Torah, Hashem will bring them upon you, until you are destroyed.”** This refers to the death of tzaddikim.

Where does this passuk suggest anything about the death of tzaddikim? We can explain the matter very nicely in keeping with our current discussion. As we have learned, tzaddikim are connected with the white fire that transcends the letters inscribed in a sefer-Torah. Thus, when this passuk specifies: **“Every illness and every plague that is not written in this book of the Torah”**—it is alluding to the death or absence of tzaddikim, who are connected with the white parchment which is not written in this book of the Torah.

How Foolish Are People Who Stand for a Sefer Torah but Neglect to Stand for a Renowned Torah Scholar

It is with great pleasure that we will now explain a fascinating passage in the Gemara (Makkos 22b): **אמר רבא, כמה טפשי שאר אינשי, דקיימי מקמי ספר תורה ולא קיימי מקמי גברא רבה, דאילו בספר תורה כתיב ארבעים ואתו רבנן בצרו חדא.”** **Rava said: How foolish are some people, who stand up in honor of a sefer Torah, but they do not stand up in honor of a “gavra rabbah.”** For it is written in the sefer Torah **“forty”**; the Rabbis came along and subtracted one. In other words, people who show respect for a sefer Torah but not for the great men who interpret the Torah are truly foolish. For the Torah specifically states (ibid. 25, 3): **“ארבעים יכנו”** - **“He shall administer forty lashes to him,”** and yet the sages possess the power to override the Torah’s specific prescription and establish the maximum number of lashes as thirty-nine.

Let us explain this passage in keeping with what we have learned. Since these people stand up out of respect for a sefer-Torah comprised of black letters inscribed on a white parchment—representing the black fire imposed on white fire with which the Torah was given—then why do they not have the common sense to stand up out of respect for an exemplary scholar who is connected with the white fire that transcends the letters of the Torah? This illustrates the degree of their foolishness; they are ignorant of the fact that the white is superior to the letters.

Rava supports his claim that scholars, being connected to the white fire, are on a higher level than the letters of the Torah as follows: **"For it is written in the sefer Torah 'forty'; the Rabbis came along and subtracted one."** Based solely on what the black letters say, the sinner would receive forty lashes, because it states explicitly: "ארבעים יכנו". Yet, the sages, on account of their connection with the white fire that transcends the black letters, perceived the true, divine will—that only thirty-nine lashes should be administered. That being the case, if they recognize the need to stand up to honor the black letters in the sefer-Torah, all the more so should they stand up for a prominent scholar who is connected with the white fire, which is on a much higher level.

We can now rejoice, because we can understand the distinction between Yisrael's two responses. When Moshe Rabeinu related the words of the Torah to them verbally, they only heard the letters that were being spoken. Hence, they responded simply: **"All the things Hashem has spoken we will do!"** Subsequently,

however, when Moshe recorded the Torah in writing with his immense kedushah, with black letters on white parchment: **"He took the Book of the Covenant and read in earshot of the people."**

Only then did they appreciate the phenomenon: Not only is the Torah a compilation of black letters which are visible and can be perceived by every individual according to the root of his neshamah, but it possesses an additional, higher, more significant dimension—the white parchment. It represents the white fire that transcends the black letters. Thus, they understood that they had not yet attained the entire Torah. It is necessary for them to heed and learn from the Torah-scholars, who have succeeded in accessing the white fire. Therefore, only then did Yisrael respond: **"Everything that Hashem has said, 'na'aseh v'nishma'!"** **"Na'aseh"**—we will do everything that Moshe read to us from the sefer; **"v'nishma"**—we will heed and learn from the Torah-scholars who perceive the white fire.



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