



DEVARIM

Netzavim-Vayeilech

WiFi and Torah

September 16, 2017

WIFI, DIALUP, AND THE ANTIDOTE TO LAZINESS**ABSTRACT**

One of the great dilemmas of our time is relevance of Judaism to our personal lives. Most Jews – especially the younger generation – simply don't find a resonating message in Torah. Inevitably, they seek other options...

One word in this week's Torah portion – *korov* (close) – contains the secret to solving this dilemma. And, of all places, modern technology – the devices we all carry 24/6 – teaches us the power of this one word. So the next time you speak to yourself or your youth about Judaism, all you need to do is look at your smart phone and you'll have your best and most exciting answer to why it matters to be a Jew today.

Applying the Internet as a metaphor, there are two ways we can approach a personal relationship with Judaism and the Torah: [A] As a dialup connection, which requires cords, is extremely slow, fickle and frustrating; and [B] As a WiFi connection, which is fast, built in, across all devices, and is easily accessible.

This week's Torah portion states that the Torah is close to every single person. What free public WiFi is to a laptop, the Torah is to a Jew – readily accessible! All that is required is for us to click open the device of our choice.

What better way to prepare for the New Year?

1. Wireless Access (Humor)

In January of this year, after having dug to a depth of 100 feet, American scientists discovered traces of copper wire dating back 100 years. They came to the conclusion that their ancestors had a telephone network more than 100 years ago.

Not to be bested by the Americans, in the weeks that followed French archaeologists dug to a depth of 200 feet, and shortly thereafter, headlines in the *La Monde* daily read: French archaeologists have found traces of 200-year-old fiber-optic cable. They have concluded that their ancestors maintained an advanced high-tech communications network 100 years prior to the Americans.

One week later, the Israeli daily, *Haaretz*, reported the following: After digging as deep as 1000 feet in his pasture near the Old City of Jerusalem, Yankel Berkowitz, a retired falafel-stand owner and self-styled

pseudo-archaeologist, reported that he found ... absolutely nothing! No wiring, no fiber-optics, no cables! Nada! Shum Klum! Efes! Gornisht! Yankel has therefore concluded that as far back as 1000 years, the Land of Israel had already gone wireless.

2. Yesterday and Today (More Humor)

Do you recall the original AOL dial-up? Oh, those irritating sounds as a cumbersome desktop computer struggled to get online – eeee, haaawww, rrrrrrrrr!

The struggle was compounded if you were privy to only one phone line and someone else was trying to make a phone call at the same time that you were trying to check your Spam. It was an unmitigated debacle.

Today, you look around at this wireless world. My kids don't even know what dial-up is. When they ask, I say it was the source of global frustration. The frustration of a slow connection. Or no connection altogether. It was a time when nothing seemed to be accessible – not Google, not Wikipedia, definitely no face-to-face conversations, spanning the globe via Skype.

Now, we have WiFi everywhere. And everyone demands unlimited access to everything all the time. For we live in a world of universal connectivity, hotspots, and mobile devices. It is called the World Wide Web because it is worldwide!

But whether the web is a source of connection or entanglement, as its name implies, is another discussion. Surely, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – more frustrating than a slow, weak, in-and-out WiFi connection.

Maybe you had that experience. You had to send an all-important, time-sensitive email and – wham, your Internet went out. So, you ran on over to the closest Starbucks, which, in this coffee age is thankfully on your corner. You unfolded your laptop, plug-in, agreed to Starbucks' terms and conditions and, viola, you were instantaneously online. A modern-day miracle!

Ah, but then the digital purgatory commenced as you conclude composing your email and begin attaching a 1.2 gigabyte video. Starbucks, while blessed with a plethora of frappachinos and a smorgasbord of lattes, is not so blessed with the fastest WiFi. To upload that attachment, the turtle pace of the download bar's movement makes 40 years in the desert seem like a sprint.

But it is still way better than dial-up.

3. A Victim of Incest (Optional)

The differences between WiFi and Dialup are numerous:

1. WiFi – access to many individuals at once. Dialup – access to one at a time.
2. WiFi – across many devices at once. Dialup – one device at a time.
3. WiFi – no strings attached. Literally. Dialup – many entanglements involved.
4. WiFi – always connected. Dialup – have to plug in to connect.
5. WiFi – cutting edge. Dialup – old-fashioned.
6. WiFi – very little effort required. Dialup – much effort and work to get online.

Now that we understand these differences, let's talk Torah.

Say we were to ask the 15 or 16 million Jews on this planet if the Judaism they know is more comparable to a wireless device, that can be accessed anytime anywhere, or to a device with strings attached, the dial-up of old? Most will say the connection is even worse than dial-up, it is more akin to two children communicating via two cups connected by a string. At best, Judaism and Torah can seem to be like the AOL of the past – a slow dial-up connection that makes a lot of noise but is tenuous and almost unattainable.

So let me ask you:

Is the Torah wireless, providing unlimited access to all, or are there strings attached? Can anyone, anywhere, access the Torah at anytime? Or, perhaps, there is a prerequisite, a rite-of-passage, a certain status required, a password to get onto the Torah's high-speed network?

4. An Answer from Solomon

To find the answer, we need the wisdom of Solomon... and Moses.

King Solomon was considered the wisest of men¹. Part of his genius was found in his allegories – he could take the most profound and relate it through simple parable².

As its name attests, the Book of Proverbs (*Mishlei*) is replete with ... well ... proverbs. In this book, King Solomon uses the Hebrew word *atzel*, meaning lazy or slothful, in seven different contexts. Based on these

¹ Kings I 5:9-11.

² See Ibid 12.

seven, the Midrash (on our Parsha)³ describes a fascinating dialogue between a lazy person and those who attempt to inspire him to study.

Let's take a look:

King Solomon said seven things regarding the lazy – but what Moses said was greater than them all! This is what King Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs⁴:

They said to the lazy person, “Your teacher is one town over; go learn Torah from him.”

Lazy person replied, “I am afraid of the lion⁵ on the interstate highway.”

They said to him, “Your teacher is within this very city! Get up and go to him.”

Lazy replied⁶ : “I’m afraid of the lion in the local streets.”

They said: “Your teacher lives next door to you!”

Lazy responded: “Maybe the lion is right outside the door!”

They said: “Your teacher is in the house.”

Lazy replied: “If I go the door might be locked and I will have to turn back.”

They said: “The door is always open⁷.”

Lazy is starting to run out of excuses, so he said: “Whether the door is open or locked, I don’t care! I’m tired and want to sleep a little longer.”

But then, when Lazy wakes up fresh in the morning, they put food right in front of him – and he, the sloth that he is, is too lazy to put it in his mouth!

Then, after this conversation, the Midrash concludes that: While the seven proverbial sayings of Solomon are profound and deep, “what Moses said is greater than them all.” What did Moses say? The verse in this week’s Torah portion:

³ *Devarim Rabba* 8:6.

⁴ Mishlei 26:13.

⁵ The Hebrew word for ‘Lion,’ Aryeh, is composed of four Hebrew letters, *Alef, Resh, Yud, and Hey*. Anagrammatically, these four letter spell the Hebrew word *Yirah*, meaning ‘fear.’ Perhaps, the lion here is a general metaphor for fear, the fears of learning, traveling, going out of comfort zones, etc. See Likkutei Torah, beginning of Parshas Eikev. Aryeh also can refer to G-d, (see *Midrash, Yalkut Shemoni, Yermiyahu Remez* 259, citing Amos 3:8), perhaps the fear of the lion is the fear of having a relationship with G-d, the Ultimate King, the Ultimate Lion...

⁶ Mishlei 26:13.

⁷ Ibid 14.

Ki karov aylecho ha'davar m'eod b'ficho u'belevovcho l'asosa. “Rather, this thing is oh so very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, for you to implement it.”⁸ And all that’s required is to release the “thing” (that is, the word from your mouth)⁹.

This Midrash requires explanation.

5. Solomon vs. Moses

The Midrash is addressing a specific question, namely: How can I, someone who is consumed with life, with earning a living, with caring for my family, with providing for my loved ones; someone who doesn’t read Hebrew, never learned as a youth, doesn’t know *Alef Bet*, how can I ever attain the Torah?

So, in the first part of the Midrash, comes King Solomon and responds brilliantly:

1. Q: What if I don’t know how? A: Just journey wherever you can to study and acquire divine knowledge, just as you would to earn a living or meet your true love.
2. Q: What if I cannot travel far and wide to study? A: You don’t have to; it’s in your very own city.
3. Q: What if the streets of my own city are challenging, distracting? A: Don’t worry, the Torah is right next door!
4. Q: What if I’m wary of even leaving my own comfort zone, my own home? A: Don’t worry, the Torah is indoors, where no outside influence can come to harm you.
5. Q: But what if the Torah doesn’t welcome me, what if its doors are closed to me? (And who hasn’t felt this feeling, of the Torah being closed to us?) A: The door to Torah is always open, it is never locked.
6. Q: But what if I’m too tired, exhausted from work, drained from the pressures of life? A: I understand, but know that the Torah is served up to you on a platter; all you have to do is eat!
7. Q: But I never learned when I was young, so how can I now that I’m older? A: Even when it feels like the winter of your life, when the days get shorter and the nights colder, even then all you have to do is plow, sow, work the field even if it’s frozen, and you will reap, you will harvest.

King Solomon, in a mathematical and logical progression, combats every excuse in the book and says: True, it isn’t easy to study and much work is required – from traveling far to overcoming fears – but if you overcome

⁸ Our Parsha, Deuteronomy 30:14.

⁹ *Ha'davar*, ‘the thing,’ can also be translated as ‘the word.’ There is a discussion in the *Rishonim* and commentaries whether this ‘thing’ refers specifically to the mitzvah of *Teshuvah* or to ‘the word’ at large, i.e. the entire Torah.

your laziness you will attain the Torah! Just like anything – going to medical school isn't easy, starting a business has its learning curve, a new relationship is scary – so, too, Torah is a committed journey.

And it makes sense. We know that King Solomon Solomon was wiser than any man to ever live¹⁰. Solomon had more brainpower than all the Google's, Twitter's, and Facebook's mainframes combined. So, of course, Solomon had the answers!

6. The Answer from Moses

Great! Fantastic! If the Midrash would end here, we'd understand exactly what is needed to attain Torah – travel, leaving one's home, walking through doors, waking up, partaking of the delicacy, sowing and harvesting, etc.

But, of course, the Midrash doesn't stop here. In its inimitable way the Midrash throws in a “monkey wrench.” The Midrash continues: “But what Moses said was greater than everything it states in the Book of Proverbs. *‘Rather, this thing is so very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, for you to implement it.’* And all that's required is to release the thing, the word from your mouth.”

But what exactly is Moses advising? And how is his advice greater than Solomon's? In contrast to Solomon, Moses does not seem to be providing any practical advice! At best, Moses seems to be sharing (if I may be irreverent) a, so-called, New Age mantra – the Torah is in your mouth, is in your heart, for you to implement it. And what does that even mean?

Let's be candid: Who among us can say that the Torah is in our mouths and hearts just waiting to be released?! I know exactly who I am and where I am and, if I'm honest, the Torah is *not* constantly in my mouth, *nor* in my heart, *nor* in the things I do. If the Torah were indeed close to me, in my mouth, heart and deeds, then I wouldn't be asking how to attain the Torah in the first place!

And, finally, if King Solomon was the wisest man to ever live, what then could Moses add that Solomon did not know?

7. Understanding Moses

The Midrash obviously has something more “up its sleeve.” To understand how “what Moses said is greater than” all that Solomon taught, we need to examine the sequence of Moses' teaching:

For this commandment which I command you this day, is not above you, nor is it far away. It is not in heaven, that you should

¹⁰ 1 Kings 5:11.

say, “Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell to us, so that we can fulfill it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell to us, so that we can fulfill it?” Rather, this thing is so very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, for you to implement it!¹¹.

We see from this that Moses is addressing something far more fundamental than King Solomon: Solomon is advising on ways to get over slothfulness and resistance to Torah study. Moses is coming to answer a piercing question:

Why indeed do people *not* study Torah? What is the *root* cause (not just the excuses addressed by Solomon, which are more circumstantial and symptomatic)? If we were to poll this congregation, I believe the answer would be dissonance, which would fall into one or both of the following categories – spiritual disconnect or physical disconnect:

1. The *spiritual* disconnect goes like this: The Torah seems to be intellectually above and beyond my limited physical understanding ... I am on earth and the Torah seems to be “in the heavens” ... I am a simple person, the Torah is too profound ... I’m not really such a G-d type of guy, I’m more of an agnostic and don’t really relate to spiritual, heavenly, religious stuff.

2. The *physical* disconnect goes like this: The Torah’s ideals, its mitzvahs, the implementations it demands, are way too “distant” from the way I live my life ... I am here in this modern 2017 reality and these Torah ideals are “across the sea,” in a different space and time and reality ... it’s just too far from who I am ... I like bacon, I like shrimp, I like to steal from my neighbors, I don’t want to give 10 percent of my money away to poor people ... I cannot relate to the Torah ... And anyway, there is also a vast sea of physical limitations dividing Torah and me: I do not have the time to study ... I do not possess the resources, the prerequisites ... I do not read Hebrew; my Rabbi doesn’t get me; etc. etc.

In other words, we feel there is a dissonance between who we are as individuals and what the Torah is as an ideal, be it a heavenly spiritual disconnect or an across-the-sea physical disconnect.

8. The Moses Solution

And this is precisely what Moses is coming to address. Moses is a *Roeh Nemon*, a Faithful Shepherd, the selfless leader of the Jewish people – and such a leader comes to address not the symptoms but the roots.

Moses is saying that every Jew is *inherently* connected with Torah. Torah is the natural inheritance¹² and the

¹¹ Deuteronomy *Nitzavim* 30:11-14

¹² Deuteronomy 33:4.

very nature of a Jew. Torah is who you are, your innate state¹³, your natural habitat¹⁴. Every Jew, no matter where she is coming from or to where he is going, is indigenous to the Torah and the Torah is indigenous to the Jew. Embedded within each Jew is the entire Torah, as the Talmud says that every child is taught the entire Torah in its mother's womb¹⁵.

As such, says Moses, “all that's required is to release the thing, the word from your mouth.”

Thus, “what Moses said was greater than everything” Solomon advises on the symptoms, how to get beyond our resistance to Torah, while Moses words reveal the inherent connection of the Jew to Torah.

But now the question is the other way around: If “what Moses said is greater than” all that Solomon taught, why then do we need King Solomon's advice?

The answer is equally obvious: due to the fact that the divine soul descends into an animal soul and the material world, its inherent connection to Torah is concealed. In this world we get distracted and lazy, finding many excuses for not accessing Torah. King Solomon therefore provides us with wise counsel on how to overcome these resistances.

9. Dial-Up versus WiFi

We can understand the difference between Solomon's and Moses' approach by comparing Dialup to WiFi.

Among the differences between Dialup and WiFi (listed earlier), the number one and root distinction¹⁶ is that Dialup is a connection that must be *acquired* and WiFi is a connection that is *inherent*.

And this *nafka minah*, this practical difference between Dialup and WiFi, represents the two different approaches of King Solomon and Moses:

There are two ways of looking at a Jew's relationship with Torah, either as Dialup or as WiFi.

Solomon is addressing Dialup Jews, or better put – our Dialup connection to Torah, how to connect when you feel disconnected. Solomon's teaching is necessary for us to address lazy tendencies and other outer resistances we have in order to access Torah. Solomon presents a mathematical, logical, administrative point

13 See *Megaleh Amukot*, Section 186: *Yisrael* is an acronym for *Yesh shishim ribiu oisijos l'Torah* (“There are 600,000 letters in the Torah”), for each soul corresponds to and is an embodiment of the letters of the Torah.

14 See Talmud, *Berachos* 61b comparing Jews and Torah to a fish in water: Just like a fish cannot survive for a moment out of water, so too Jews cannot survive without Torah.

15 Talmud, *Niddah* 30b. And even after we are made to forget the Torah upon birth, it always remains embedded in our unconscious (see *Likkutei Torah*, *Shelach* 44a).

16 Which leads to all the other symptomatic differences.

of view – which looks at a person from the outside in: you are living on a material plane; you ostensibly don't have a connection with Torah, so here are the logical steps to take in order to bridge the gap and acquire Torah. That is very formulaic. There is a problem; here is the solution. Plug in, dial in, connect. Solomon is saying: Dialup into the Torah – do whatever it takes!

Moses, on the other hand, focuses on the inner WiFi connection in every Jew, how every Jew inherently contains and retains within herself or himself the connection to Torah and G-d, no matter what¹⁷. Moses, the humble servant¹⁸, is G-d's chosen leader, a man of G-d, who looks at the Jews from the inside out. From that point of view, every single Jew, man, woman, and child, always contains Torah within them. All they have to do is open their mouths. Moses is saying: Connect to Torah via WiFi, by accessing the Torah that is embedded inside of you.

Both approaches are necessary: King Solomon, in his great wisdom, advises practical ways to acquire Torah when you are not in the mood or are just plain lazy. So he says: Do whatever it may take to acquire it. Dialup. Buy wires. Get motivated!

Moses, the quintessential shepherd of the Jewish people throughout all generations, takes it to another level: Moses (and the Moses in each Jew¹⁹), elicits the inherent and essential connection of every Jew to Torah – the WiFi connection.

10. Two Ways to See Torah

We can see Torah in two ways: as law or as music.

If we see it as law, it is to us a system of do's and don'ts, which may make sense, but don't necessary resonate within. Say like traffic laws, to stop at a red light: We do it because we understand that if we don't all abide by these laws we will not be able to drive the streets safely. Or we do it because of fear of getting caught and paying as hefty fine.

¹⁷ See Maharzav's commentary on the Midrash: King Solomon is addressing the Jews that have not yet learned Torah, and thus need to great effort to study and acclimate themselves and their mouths to Torah. Moses, on the other hand, is speaking to his generation who has already received Torah; the Torah is already in their mouths (i.e. they are accustomed to its language). They therefore only need to review what they have already learned, which takes very little effort. "All that is required is to release the words from their mouths." However this does not explain the relevance of the verse to all the generations following Moses'. Based on the discussion in the sermon, that Moses elicits the inherent connection of every Jew to Torah, we understand how this is relevant to everyone, and how Moses' statement is greater than all of Solomon's suggestions.

¹⁸ Moses was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth (Bamidbar/Numbers 12:3).

¹⁹ See Tanya chapter 42.

If we see it as music, it is to us a system that reflects and expresses who we truly are. Like music it resonates within our spirits because it is us. The Torah is a blueprint of our lives, and its message is embedded in our psyches. It is our spiritual DNA. Thus we are taught the entire Torah in our mother's womb – essentially the divine source code being downloaded into the fiber of our psyches.

Solomon the wise was addressing the issue of Torah's accessibility from a behavioral perspective: You're lazy – here is what you ought to do. You're less lazy or lazy in another form – here is practical advice to overcome your resistance. (Actually, seven different levels of advice for seven different levels of slothfulness.)

This advice is necessary to get beyond our lethargic tendencies. And they are therefore documented in the Torah as counsel for the indolent. But these interventions, though wise and effective, don't change the lazy person; they simply circumvent or transcend his slothful nature.

Moses, says the Midrash, offered us a far greater insight: The Torah is embedded inside of you – it is you and you are it. The only thing is that there are veils and shrouds concealing and hiding you from recognizing the inner truths of Torah. Like a jamming signal disrupting or interfering with a WiFi transmission, our immersion in the material world has a way of creating static that distorts and blocks our ability from accessing our own inner souls and resources.

This thing is so very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, for you to implement it.

Moses teaches us that we need simply deploy anti-jamming devices to block out the turbulence, and allow our souls to connect with Torah²⁰.

11. Hi-Tech Solutions (Optional)

And Moses isn't just repeating a feel-good mantra; Moses is providing a practical solution to the problem.

Three hi-tech terms we are all familiar will help bring this practical idea home:

B'ficha – in your mouth

DSL = is the acronym: Don't Stop Learning. In your mouth, all you have to do is open your mouth and the connection is there. Don't Stop Learning. Bit by bit.

²⁰ Moshe obviously did not elaborate *how* one actually achieves this "closeness." But he opens up the door and teaches us that it is indeed very close, because it is the very nature of our souls. It's fascinating to note that Rabbi Schneur Zalman's classic *Tanya* comes to explain this very verse – "to explain well *how* this 'thing' (Torah and mitzvot) is 'very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, for you to implement them' in a long and short way with G-d's help." Our discussion can also explain the meaning of the Alter Rebbe's expression "in a long and short way." The short way of Solomon is an immediate short term solution; but to arrive at a long term lasting solution we need to recognize the depth of Moses' words that it is "very close to you," i.e. within you.

U'bihavcha – and in your heart

Heart Drive – Not a Hard Drive but a Heart Drive. A heart pumps blood through all the veins and arteries in your body. It is the ultimate Network!

La'asoso – to implement it

Cable = a mitzvah translates as “connection,” an internet connection... a mitzvah thus is cable, a connector between we and G-d. Cable does not mean are connection isn't wireless; the cables, the mitzvahs are but the physical representations of our intrinsic connection!

12. Midrash Conclusion

The Midrash concludes with by saying – *v'hotza davar mitoch picha*, “and release, liberate, free, articulate the thing (the word) from within your mouth.”

Moses is saying: The Torah is within you, all you have to do is set it free, open your mouth and release the pearls within, open your heart and liberate the gems therein possessed.

As the verse says: You need not be someone to fly to heaven for you, and you need not someone to travel the seas for you – the Torah is oh so very close to you, it is within, within your mouth, your heart, and this is how you implement it.

May we all take the advice of Moses and have the courage to do it today. Amen.

13. Rosh Hashana Connection (Optional)

We always read these profound verses the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. And the message is clear. Every Jew has full access to G-d, the Torah, and Judaism. It is a WiFi experience like no other. The only requirement – open your mouth, open your heart, and the result will be implementation.

Thank G-d for Moses and all our true leaders. With all their genius and enormous qualities, their most astonishing power no doubt lies in their supreme unwavering confidence in us: The absolute belief that you and I have within us the source code and WiFi signal connected straight to the Source Above to resolve all our issues.

Yes, my dear friends, in the last days of Moses life on earth he left his beloved people the most important message of all: This thing – this journey to find truth, love, G-d, purpose – this journey called Torah and Judaism – may appear ostensibly to be beyond and distant, in heaven and across a wide sea. Please know that this is absolutely not the case. It is close – very close; very relevant – to you in your mouth, heart and implementation.

So many of us search for answers to our questions and dilemmas in all types of places far and wide. We travel

across the word. We visit therapists. We try medications. We spend money and aggravation.

All this – while the answers are right here inside of you! With no need for wires and IP's and all other snake-oil salesmen selling us their version of nirvana.

Whoever you are, from “leaders to water carriers” (as we read in the opening of this Torah portion), the Torah is within you – providing you with direction and guidance to find the answers to any of your questions; addressing your personal life in the most relevant fashion.

All we need to do is open the book, read it in a personal way, attend a class where the teacher presents it in this relevant way, and you will discover wonders.

Now as we stand all together in the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana, together, as one, and with WiFi (as opposed to Dialup which requires each individual has his/her own line) every single Jew on this – or any other – planet can and will connect together on one divine network!

The only requirement – open your mouth, open your heart, and it is yours. Amen.

© Copyright 2017 The Meaningful Life Center. By downloading this PDF file from Meaningful Sermons, you agree to respect the copyright of this written material. You understand that your right to this material is limited to using it to deliver sermons, classes or other oral presentations to your community. You agree not to publish this material or any part thereof, nor to email, fax, copy, scan, mail, etc. or otherwise share this material with others, nor to verbally share these ideas with others.