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.

תשפ״ו

HeCharesh Haya Libam: Passion and the Awake Heart

Dovid Kopel

The גמרא in שבת and the מדרש in קהלת tell the tragic story of רבי אלעזר בן ערך. He was one of the great תלמידים of רבי יוחנן בן זכאי, and in פרקי אבות he is described as מעין המתגבר — a flowing spring. But חז״ל say that after being drawn into a place of comfort and pleasure, his learning left him. When he later stood up to read from the ספר תורה, he meant to read הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, but instead he read החרש היה לבם.

We know that הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם is the first מצוה (*commandment*) given to כלל ישראל. Before יציאת מצרים (*the Exodus from Egypt*), Hashem gives the Jewish people the mitzvah of sanctifying the new חודש (*the new month*) — the ability to recognize renewal and respond to it with דעת (*knowledge*) and purpose. Instead, רבי אלעזר בן ערך read החרש היה לבם — their heart was deaf. A חרש (*a deaf-mute*) is פטור מן המצוות (*exempt from the commandments*), because mitzvos require דעת. So the pasuk of renewal becomes a pasuk of inner numbness. The heart that should be awake to new beginnings becomes silent.

That makes the story even sharper, because רבי אלעזר בן ערך was מעין המתגבר — a person of passion, vitality, and אהבת תורה (*love of Torah*). Passion is a gift, but passion alone is not enough. A person has to know how to keep going even when the feeling is weaker. Rest is good, but only if it restores a person, not if it dulls him. Vacation should never turn a person into a חרש.

That is the message of ראש חודש ניסן before Pesach. ראש חודש is a זמן כפרה (*a time of atonement*) and rebirth. Before the גאולה (*redemption*) of Pesach, we are reminded that a Yid must live as הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם — awake to renewal, capable of beginning again, and ready to push forward even when the heart is not as full of passion as it was the day before.

May we be זוכה to be inspired, to have an easy preparation for חג הפסח, and may we all have a כשר חג ושמח and a gutten chodesh!

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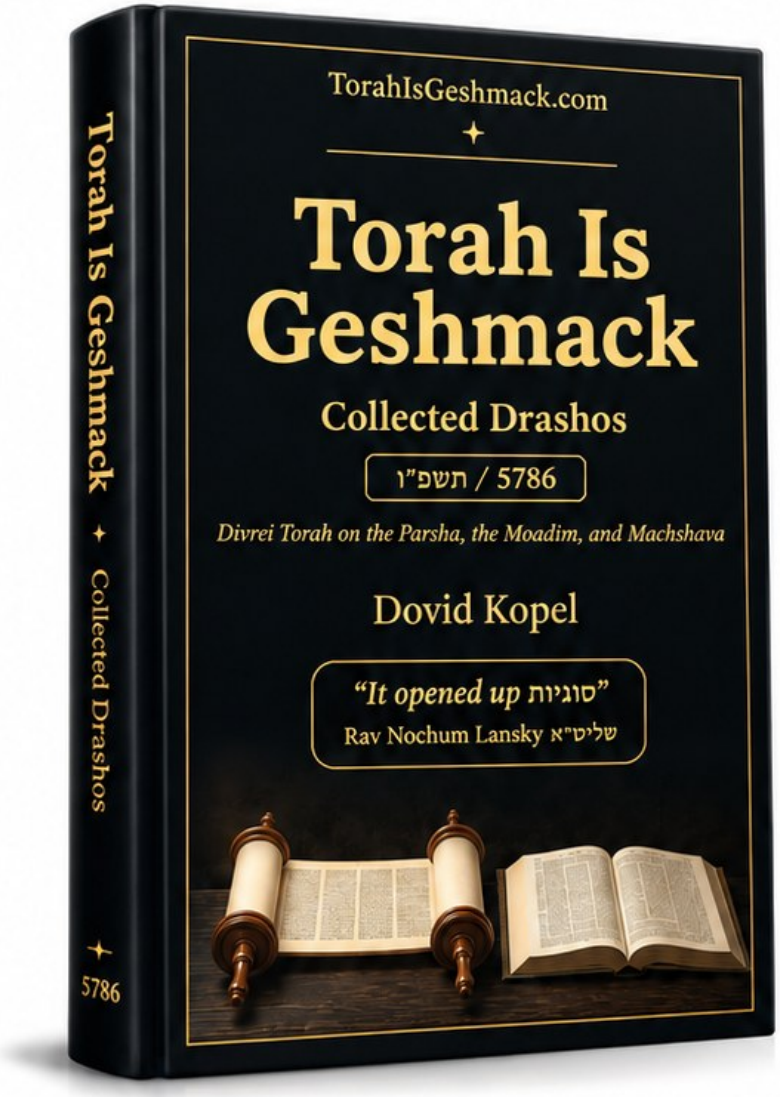
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