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

Speaking to the Public: The Calculation of Rav Yisrael Salanter

Dovid Kopel

I am sure this is not especially striking or novel, but I wanted to say it. There are several great ראשי ישיבות (*yeshiva heads*) and רבנים who speak publicly on many different topics. It is important to remember that when they speak publicly, they are speaking to the public. They are giving over the thought, approach, or חיזוק (*strengthening*) that they feel is needed for the רבים (*the many*). That does not mean it is a "one size fits all" situation.

I know from personal experience that there were several discussions I had with מרן ראש הישיבה הרב אהרן פעלדמאן שליט״א where he would say one thing publicly, and then give a different, more nuanced response privately. These are not contradictions. גדולים and רבנים speak to people according to what they need to hear.

There is a story cited from Rav Dov Katz's תנועת המוסר about Rav Yisroel Salanter in Memel. Many of the local merchants were weak in שמירת שבת (*Sabbath observance*). Rav Yisroel came to speak in shul about שבת, but first asked whether there were any Jews from Lithuania present — people who were used to being much more careful in מצוות. When he heard that they were present, he did not speak about שבת at all. Only another time, when he was told that those Jews were not there, did he begin addressing the issue. And even then, he did not begin with the full demand at once. He spoke gradually — first urging them to stop writing on שבת, then later to stop loading merchandise, and only afterward addressing other parts of their שבת desecration.

The חשבון (*calculation*) is incredible. One might ask: is the קדושה of an entire city not greater than the concern for a few individuals? Perhaps the answer is that when you speak in public, you are not only speaking to the group you had in mind. You are speaking to everyone in the room. The words needed by one ציבור (*community*) may be damaging to another. A message meant to raise one person can lower the bar for someone else. Rav Yisroel understood that the same words do not land the same way in every ear.

For the merchants in Memel, even a limited step in שמירת שבת may have been a tremendous beginning. But for someone who came from a place where שבת was simply not open for negotiation, hearing שבת spoken about in gradual, limited terms could itself introduce a dangerous possibility. It could turn something absolute into something that sounds negotiable. What a thought. What an incredible and intricate thought process. We should all be inspired to be meticulous with our words, and with the impact they may have on others.

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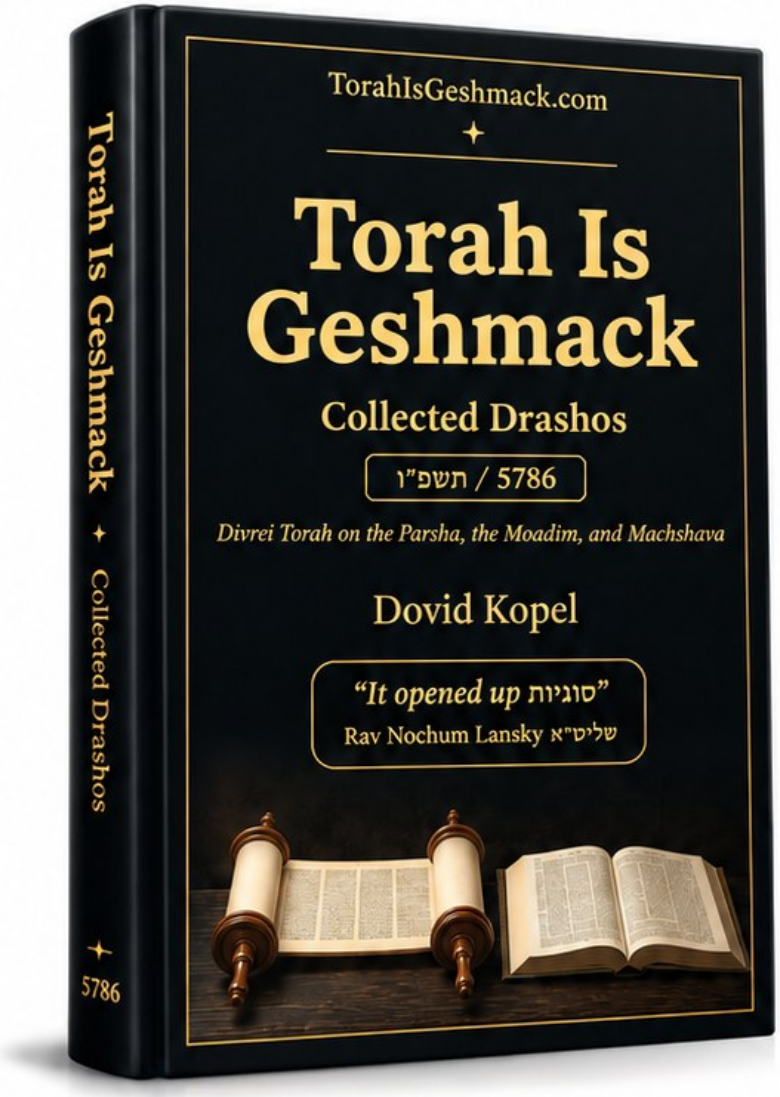
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