

## CANDLE LIGHTING

**8:43 PM**

Friday • Erev Shabbos

## SHABBOS ENDS

**9:56 PM**

Motzaei Shabbos • Sat night

## PIRKEI AVOS

**Ch. 3**

Know Before Whom You Stand

## PARSHAS SHLACH • THE SPIES' REPORT

# The Broken Covenant.

**E**arlier this month, at a Toronto shul, Prime Minister Mark Carney stood up and admitted: “Canada’s civic compact is failing Jewish Canadians.” A *civic compact* — his phrase for the unwritten deal between a country and its citizens: you belong here, and you are safe here. Antisemitism, he said, has surged to levels not seen in the postwar period, and a country in which Jewish day schools require guards and shuls require barriers may be protecting its citizens — but it is breaking that deal. And he named the repair work in a word he kept returning to, a word borrowed from us: “If that covenant fails for one of our communities, it fails us all.” His office gave the speech its title: *The Canadian Covenant*.

Parshas Shlach is the story of a report on a land. Twelve leaders are sent to scout Eretz Yisrael. Ten come back and tell the people, in effect, that the covenant there is broken too: it is “a land that consumes those who dwell in it”<sup>1</sup> — a land that will not hold its Jews. The facts in their report were true. The cities really were fortified; the giants were real. Calev never argues the facts.

The people believe the report, weep all night, and reach for the door: “Let us appoint a leader and return to Mitzrayim.”<sup>2</sup> Listen to what they asked for. Not a better land — a *host country*. The familiar place that had tolerated them, more or less, for generations. Chazal say that night was the ninth of Av, and Hashem’s answer echoed forward: tonight you wept for nothing — this night shall become a night of genuine weeping for all generations.<sup>3</sup>

So what was the sin, if the facts were true? The measuring stick. The spies judged the land by whether it would welcome them — whether, on its own terms, it was livable. By that measure they were right: it wasn’t. Calev’s answer is not that the giants are small. It is simply: “Hashem is with us.”<sup>4</sup> The land is not good because it is safe. It is good because it was promised.

**A civic covenant is signed by people, and people can break it. The covenant of the parsha was sworn by Hashem — and what He swears, no one can break.**

The admission is true as far as it goes — and we may take it exactly that far. This is not a government that has been a friend to the Jewish community or to Israel; fine words in a shul do not erase a record, and a Jew is entitled to hear the speech and stay unmoved. But that is precisely what makes the moment instructive. When even an unfriendly government concedes that the country is failing its Jews, the concession is worth more than a friend’s reassurance — it is testimony from the other side of the table.

But a Jew hearing that a covenant is failing should also hear something older. A civic covenant is an agreement between citizens; it holds exactly as long as people hold it — which is why it can fail, and why it needs renewing. The covenant in this week’s parsha is a different kind. Hashem swore the land to us — not because anyone there welcomed us, but because He gives it to whom He wills.<sup>5</sup> One covenant rests on the goodwill of the neighbours, and weakens when that goodwill does. The other rests on Hashem’s oath alone — and no failure of the neighbours can touch it.

The spies’ question — *will this land hold us?* — is the question of every exile, asked about every address we have ever had. This month it was answered about Canada, from the podium, by the government itself: not well enough. The parsha’s answer has not moved in three thousand years. There is one covenant that does not fail and one land we were never given because we were welcome. Calev said it in two words: *aloh na’aleh* — we will surely go up.<sup>6</sup>

1 Bamidbar 13:32. 2 Bamidbar 14:1–4. 3 Taanis 29a; Sotah 35a. 4 Bamidbar 14:8–9. 5 Rashi on Bereishis 1:1. 6 Bamidbar 13:30.

FIFTY YEARS AGO THIS WEEK · SHABBOS PARSHAS SHLACH, MEVORCHIM TAMMUZ 5735

# The Rebbe on Computers — Fifty Years Early.



A machine room of the era. In 5735, “computer” did not mean something on your desk or in your pocket — it meant a room.

**P**icture 1975. Atari is two years away from putting a console in your living room. Apple doesn’t exist yet. Microsoft was founded that April in a garage no one had heard of. The word “computer” doesn’t mean something on your desk, or in your pocket, or in your kid’s hand. It means a room. A whole climate-controlled room at IBM, or NASA, or some university basement, full of refrigerator-sized cabinets, blinking lights, reels of magnetic tape spinning behind glass. Most people had never seen one. They’d seen pictures. They knew it was a machine that “thought,” somehow, and gave you answers.

That summer, on Shabbos Parshas Shlach, Mevorchim HaChodesh Tammuz, the Rebbe sat at a farbrengen and gave a *sicha* about computers.

He wasn’t doing tech commentary. He was doing what he always did, taking something the world had just barely begun to notice and showing why Hashem put it here. The computer, he said, is a perfect analogy for one of the oldest questions a thinking Jew can ask: why should I do a mitzvah I don’t yet understand?

What follows is a translation (from the unedited transcript, *Sichos Kodesh* 5735, 1975). Fifty years on, it lands harder than it did then.

## THE SICHA

In the affairs of the world, there are things that have been newly introduced in recent times.

The Zohar (I, 117a) states that in the sixth millennium, particularly in the “six hundred years of the sixth,” the springs of wisdom will be opened. Not only in the wisdom of Torah, but in other wisdoms as well. Wisdoms which, for the time being, inasmuch as they have not yet been channeled toward holiness and inwardness, remain in the category of “external spirits.”

Nevertheless, those who encounter these wisdoms and must inevitably reckon with them, as explained in Tanya at the end of chapter eight, are obligated to extract from them a directive in the service of man toward his Creator.

Among the things that have come to light in recent times, there is one matter of a general nature, employed across a great many fields, which goes by the name (in English) “computer.”

What does a computer actually do? A computer does not originate anything new. Whatever one arrives at through a computer is something a person could, in principle, figure out on his own. The advantage, however, is this: working through these matters on one’s own can take a very long time. Weeks, months, even years. And here lies the computer’s benefit: through it, one has the answer in a matter of moments.

There is a further benefit. Because working things out manually takes so long, a person is prone to making errors along the way and arriving at a

false conclusion. When one uses the computer, provided all the necessary data has been entered and the apparatus functions as it should, one can be certain that the answer it produces is a true conclusion.

But there is a danger as well. Precisely because the computer delivers its results so swiftly and with such authority, if the person feeds it incorrect data at the outset, a mistaken assumption, a flawed premise, the computer will produce a false conclusion with the very same air of certainty. And the person, trusting the machine, will accept it without question. This is a serious pitfall, because one can end up entirely misled and never realize it, since after all, “the computer said so.”

The practical lesson from all this is as follows.

When one speaks with a fellow Jew about putting on tefillin, about keeping Shabbos, and the like, and one tells him he need not wait until he personally understands the reason but should simply do it, in the spirit of *na’aseh* before *nishma*, “we will do” before “we will understand,” he may raise the following objection:

“The Almighty created me with a head on my shoulders. And the very fact that you tell me I am obligated in the mitzvos proves that I am a person of understanding, because if I lacked the capacity for reason, I would not be obligated at all. So why are you asking me to set aside the mind I was given?”

CONTINUED ON PAGE THREE →

He may press further: “Does the Torah itself not say, ‘Know the G-d of your father, and serve Him’? First know, then serve. Give me time. Today I don’t yet grasp it, but I will work it through.”

And he may add yet another concern: “If you compel me to act without understanding, I’ll be doing it by rote, with no heart and no intention, the commandment of men learned by habit. Is that really what you want?”

Here is the answer.

Does this person have any objection to using a computer? Does he insist on personally working through every calculation before he is willing to rely on the output? Of course not. He trusts the computer without a second thought.

And why does he trust it? Only because the computer was designed and programmed by experts, people who are specialists in the field, and they entered the data on the basis of their knowledge. He himself did not verify a single one of their calculations. He did not check their work. He simply relies on the fact that people who know the subject did the job properly.

And consider: these experts are, when all is said and done, human beings. They can make mistakes. The data they entered may contain an error. The programming may have a flaw. Yet he relies on the machine without hesitation.

If that is the case, all the more so when we are speaking about Torah, which was given by the Holy One Himself. The “data” was entered by the Master of the Universe. Torah was transmitted through Moshe Rabbeinu, the most trusted of the entire house, and from him through the Prophets, through the sages of the Talmud, and onward through every generation of Torah masters, each one receiving from those who came before, down to the Torah authorities of our own day.

When the sages of Torah tell a Jew, “Put on tefillin,” this is the output of a system whose programmer is the Almighty Himself, and whose data has been entered and verified by the most brilliant and faithful minds in all of human history.

## He trusts a machine built by fallible human beings and never thinks to question it. How can he refuse to trust the Torah, which comes from the One who cannot err?

And there is a further point.

When we tell him *na’aseh* before *nishma*, “act first, and understanding will follow,” we are not telling him to abandon understanding. On the contrary. The understanding will come. But it comes after the doing, and it comes through the doing.

Here too the computer analogy holds. A person who is himself an expert can, if he chooses, work through the entire calculation on his own. It will take him a long time, weeks, months, but eventually he will arrive at the answer. And when he does, he will discover that his answer is the same as what the computer gave him in moments.

The computer did not rob him of understanding. It gave him the correct result immediately, so he could act on it right away, and then he could go back and work through the reasoning at his own pace. And when he finally does, he sees: the answer was right from the start.

It is the same with Torah. When one tells a Jew, “Put on tefillin now, keep Shabbos now, do first, and the understanding will follow,” one is not asking him to be mindless. One is telling him: the greatest sages have already worked it through. The “computer” of Torah, programmed by Hashem and operated by the sages of all generations, has already produced the answer. Act on it now. And in time, your own mind will catch up and confirm what the sages told you from the beginning.

This itself, the fact that when understanding finally does come, it confirms what the sages said all along, strengthens one’s trust for the next time. Just as each time a computer’s result is independently verified, one’s confidence in the machine grows, so too, each time one’s own understanding catches up to what Torah instructed, one’s trust in the sages deepens.

And the essential thing is this: in the meantime, while the understanding has not yet arrived, one must not sit idle. One must act. Because the sages have spoken. The “computer” has given its answer. And the answer is true.

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THREE CHAPTERS

Hilchos Maaser, ch. 1–3

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Hilchos Shabbos, ch. 23

SEFER HAMITZVOS · POSITIVE 127

*Maaser rishon* — the first tithe, one-tenth of the harvest, given to the Levi.

### ON THE HORIZON

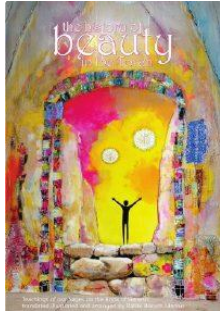
## The Weeks Ahead.

- ◆ **June 15–16** — Rosh Chodesh Tammuz.
- ◆ **Thursday, June 18** — 3 Tammuz · The Rebbe’s Day.
- ◆ **June 27–28** — 12–13 Tammuz · Chag HaGeulah of the Previous Rebbe (1927).
- ◆ **Thursday, July 2** — 17 Tammuz · Fast day.

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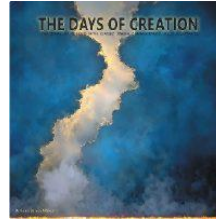
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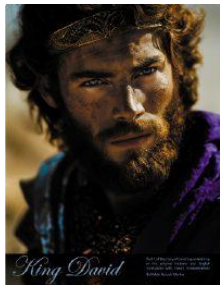


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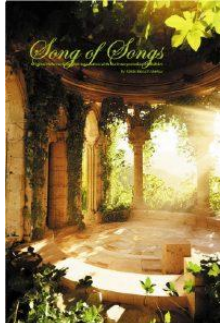


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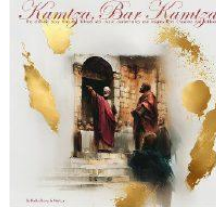


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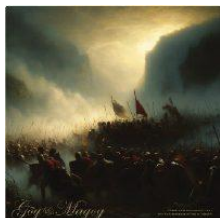


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