



We find in Parashat Eikev the admonition "*u-vo tidbak*" – to "attach oneself" to God (10:20). Based on a Talmudic passage in Masekhet Ketubot (111b), Maimonides understood this phrase as introducing a Biblical command to associate with Torah scholars, both socially and commercially. By ensuring to spend time in the company of Torah scholars, one "attaches" himself to the Almighty insofar as he comes under the influence of the scholars and receives guidance and inspiration by their example and instruction. Maimonides lists this obligation among the 248 affirmative commands of the Torah (*Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, *asei* 6), and addresses it as well in the *Hilkhot Dei'ot* section of *Mishneh Torah* (chapter 6).

Others, however, including Rav Saadia Gaon and Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, did not include this obligation in their listings of the Torah's commands. The *Tashbatz* (Rabbi Shimon Ben Tzemach Duran, Algiers, 1361-1444), in his *Zohar Ha-rakia* commentary to Ibn Gabirol's *Azharot*, claims that Ibn Gabirol and Saadia Gaon understood the aforementioned passage in the Talmud as advancing a secondary reading of this verse. The primary implication of "*u-vo tidbak*," the *Tashbatz* contends, refers simply to monotheistic faith and the rejection of pagan beliefs. When the Talmud infers from this phrase an obligation to maintain association with Torah scholars, it does so only as an *asmakhta* – a subtle allusion in the Biblical text, which does not represent the primary meaning and intent of the verse.

Maimonides, of course, viewed the Talmud's reading of this phrase as reflecting the primary reading, and not merely an *asmakhta*. He likely understood the word *tidbak* as a reference to "clinging" rather than "attaching." The Torah here admonishes that one must do what is necessary to avoid slipping away from his devotion to God, to firmly cement his commitment to a proper lifestyle and mode of conduct, lest he naturally fall prey to the internal and external pressures to which all people are subject. *U-vo tidbak* means that one must make a proactive effort to remain committed to God, and maintain a constant opposing force to man's sinful instincts and frailties. The oral tradition teaches that this is achieved primarily through regular contact with, and exposure to, accomplished spiritual leaders whose piety and wisdom guide and inspire their followers to remain faithful to the laws and values of the Torah.

It is noteworthy that in codifying this obligation in *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides includes it in *Hilkhot Dei'ot* – where he discusses the laws of general conduct – rather than in *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, where he presents the laws of Torah learning. The

requirement to associate with Torah scholars does not relate to one's obligation to acquire Torah knowledge, but is rather an obligation concerning one's general lifestyle; it serves as a means of ensuring a life of piety and virtue. Indeed, it is in chapter 6, which discusses the importance of living among people with admirable qualities and the danger of living among sinners, that Maimonides introduces the obligation to associate with Torah scholars. It is by placing ourselves under the frequent, inspiring influence of our spiritual leaders that we "cling" to the Almighty and work towards ensuring our steadfast commitment to His Torah.