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Parashat Ve'Etchanan

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COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET



Rabbi Jonathan Tawil
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SHEMA – GIVE WITNESS!

There is a famous story of a traveller who visited one of the greatest rabbis of the last generation - the Chafetz Chaim.

The traveller entered the humble abode of the Chafetz Chaim and was astonished by the meagre accommodation.

He asked the Chafetz Chaim where all his furniture was?

The Chafetz Chaim answered him by asking him where all *his* furniture was.

The traveller responded, "I don't have any. I'm just passing through this town. Any furniture would just get in my way."

The Chafetz Chaim smiled and said, "Quite so. I too am a mere traveller in this world, expecting to be here only a short while. This world is just a passageway before the World to Come. For a passageway, this is quite adequately furnished."

In this weeks Parasha we read the famous words of Shema Yisrael.

This is the quintessential prayer of our nation, the declaration and the testimony of our belief in Hashem. "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokainu Hashem Echad (6:4)." Accept, Yisrael, Hashem who is Elokainu (our G-d), Hashem is One.

The testimony that all that occurs in this world emanates from Hashem. Our Sages state that when saying this we must have in mind to accept the Yoke of Heaven. What does that mean?

When looking at a Sefer Torah we note that the last letter of the first word of Shema -the 'Ayin', and the last letter of the last word (Echad)-

'Daled', are written larger than the other letters. They stand out – why?

These two letters together spell the word 'Ed' - witness.

The Kli Yakar grants an awesome insight and writes that this alludes to the concept that we (Am Yisrael) are the witnesses of Hashem in this world. As founders of monotheism, we, through our beliefs and the way that those beliefs act upon our lives, serve as witnesses to Hashem's intimate involvement in this world.

There is a more profound lesson to learn from this Ayin and Daled:

INSTEAD MOSHE WAS ONLY ABLE TO SEE THE BACK OF HASHEM, THE KNOT OF THE TEFILIN SHEL ROSH. THAT IS IN THE SHAPE OF THE LETTER 'DALED'. THE LETTER DALED IS OF NUMERICAL VALUE FOUR AND SYMBOLISES THE FOUR CORNERS OF HIS WORLD; A WORLD THAT IS LIMITED IN SPACE.

Many Parshiot earlier (in Parshat Ki Tisa) we learnt how, Moshe asked Hashem to show him His presence (Shemot 33:18). The Midrash explains that Moshe wanted to see the reward of the righteous in this world and the next. Hashem answered that he could see Him from behind but not from the front.

The Gemara (Brachot 7b) explains that Hashem showed Moshe the knot of His Tefilin Shel Rosh (worn on the back of the head).

The Kli Yakar explains that the Tefilin contain a special Name of Hashem known as 'shakai', spelled 'Shin', 'Daled' and then 'Yud'.

When a person wears Tefilin, the letters 'Shin' and 'Yud' are in front of him.

The 'Shin' is on the front of the Tefilin Shel Rosh and the 'Yud' is the knot of the Tefilin Shel Yad (worn on the hand).

Together the Yud and Shin spell 'Yesh' - (meaning) something or a reality.

This refers to the reward of the next world which is a true being and existence - the epitome of 'Yesh'. Such an existence could not be shown to Moshe. That no eye, even *his*, could see.

Instead Moshe was only able to see the back of Hashem, the knot of the Tefilin Shel Rosh. That is in the shape of the letter 'Daled'. The letter Daled is of numerical value four and symbolises the four corners of his world; a world that is limited in space.

The Daled exemplifies the reward of *this* world.

THINK, THINK, THINK!

"Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?

5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)

Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).

What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?

6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.

What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?

6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.

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Using this important insight we can now gain a deeper understanding in the Shema.

The Ayin and Daled are both placed as large letters in the Shema to teach that the eye (Ayin) in this world can only see and understand the Daled – the reward that is connected to *this* world.

However, the reward of the next world, the 'Yesh', the 'Yud' and the 'Shin', the first letters of the words 'Shema Yisrael', that is not available to the domain of the 'Ayin', the eye, rather, that is in the domain of hearing (Shema).

That existence, we can only *hear* about.

This world with all its pleasures is limited. The delicious food, the great clothes, the fantastic

scenery are only considered of great benefit to us in this world because we possess a physical form; the soul desires these things only because the body needs them. In a place where there is no body, all these matters become nullified.

The Rambam, in the Mishna Torah, explains that there is no way we can fully anticipate the good in Olam Haba because it is so overwhelmingly great that it cannot be compared to any good in this world.

Spiritual pleasures are infinitely good, while physical pleasures are temporary.

David HaMelech, in Psalms (Tehillim), alludes to this concept when he writes, "How great is the good that You have hidden for those who fear You!"

Because the pleasure we will receive in the World to Come has no comparison here, even the prophets could not describe it over the course of Jewish history. Any description would have simply diminished it. Our Sages tell us, "All the prophets' only prophesized about the times of the Messiah (Mashiach). However, regarding Olam Haba, no eye has ever seen, except for You, Hashem."

Over the centuries countless members of our nation have been willing to die for the sake of 'Hashem Elokainu Hashem echad' and left this world with the words Shema Yisrael on their lips. Their immense faith in Hashem was honourable and they understood the physical limitations of this world.

May we internalise this and through our actions, our words and our thoughts carry the banner of Hashem's existence and involvement in this world.



Rabbi Dov Levy

Kollel Netzach Yisrael

AT THE DOUBLE

This Shabbat we commence a series of seven Shabbatot wherein we read special Haphtarot of comfort, Shiv'ah De'Nechamatah, taking us to Rosh Hashanah. The first opens with Hashem's instruction to the prophet Yishayahu: "Nachamu nachamu ami – comfort, oh comfort my people!" The Midrash notes the double expression and points out that it is consistent with the sin and punishment preceding this time of comfort. "Chet chate'ah Yerushalayim" says Yirmiyahu in Eichah, and so too Yishayahu says: "Ki lakecha miyad Hashem kiphlayim – for she has been doubly punished". But what is the meaning of a double sin, double punishment and double comfort? Committing a large number of sins is not doubling. Similarly, being punished harshly is not a double punishment.

One of the most poignant and chilling punishments mentioned in Eichah is hunger forcing people to eat their own offspring. Yirmiyahu, in a prophetic dispute, cries out in anguish, asking why Hashem's chosen people deserve such horrendous treatment. Hashem answers that before the destruction of the First Temple they had murdered the

prophet Zechariya Ben Yehoyada, who served as Cohen Gadol and was head of the Sanhedrin. He had come to admonish the people and convince them to repent. They silenced his calling, not wanting to hear his rebuke.

The Be'er Yosef explains in the name of Rav Yitzchak Blazer that the punishment aligns itself to the sin they had done. Hashem sent a prophet to bring the people back to better ways. Not only did they not heed his warning, recognize their wrongdoings and change their ways, rather they attacked him and murdered him in cold blood. They took the opportunity for improvement they were given and used it for destruction and sin. The sin was double in nature, a sin within a sin.

NOT ONLY DID THEY NOT HEED HIS WARNING, RECOGNIZE THEIR WRONGDOINGS AND CHANGE THEIR WAYS, RATHER THEY ATTACKED HIM AND MURDERED HIM IN COLD BLOOD.

In the same vein the punishment was double. Hashem may deal a person many hardships in life. Ultimately, though, we know that these experiences are for our good. *Yisurim* a person has are usually a great merit for a person and in truth a kindness from Hashem, even when often not appreciated. However, the terrible punishment here is not only horrific in its own right, but furthermore carries

with it a deeper severity. This punishment will come back to haunt the sinner for he will be held to account for murdering his offspring. There is a doubling of the penalty, a punishment within a punishment.

This example of sin and punishment represents a deeply troubling and seemingly endless spiral. Sin brings punishment which in turn is a vehicle for more sin. However when the situation seems bleakest, with no way of breaking this cycle, Hashem declares: "Nachamu nachamu!" – I will save you from the mire you're stuck in. You will be comforted when you see no way out. Even when you're stuck in a cycle which you see no way of breaking. When there seems to be no way of doing Teshuva, I will inspire you and lead you back to the right way.

In many ways we are stuck in this 'double' cycle. If we appreciated our lowly state, distance from Hashem spiritually and lack of Eretz Yisrael and the Bet Hamikdash, we would have a glimmer of hope. We would recognise what we are missing and truly beg for it. However the destruction is within us that we do not appreciate where we stand and what we lack. However Hashem assures us He will guide us back, to develop a spiritual sensitivity and bring us true comfort with the coming of Mashiach, bimhera beyamenu, amen!

We are truly saddened to hear of the sudden Petirah of Reb David Elbaz Za"l, father in law of Rabbi Jonathan Tawil. We wish him, his wife, and all their family true comfort from the one who comforts the mourners of Yerushalayim. May they experience only semachot in their dear family. Tehe nishmato serura bisror hachayim.



Tales Of Tzadikim

One week, nearly three hundred years ago, in the area of Sali, Morocco, a plague broke out amongst the cattle. As a result, all the Jewish-slaughtered animals were found to be traife ("unfit"-disqualified). Only one calf was "kosher mehadrin" acceptable without question, and that was the one slaughtered specifically for the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar, the "Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh."

When one of the wealthy men in the city heard about this, he rushed to the Rabbi Chaim's house, hoping to get some meat in honour of Shabbat. He offered an enormous price for a piece, but the Ohr Hachaim refused, saying, "This is not a butcher shop, and the meat is reserved for the poor Torah scholars of our city." Indeed, every week it was his custom to distribute meat to the poor Torah scholars in honour of Shabbat.

While they were speaking, one of Rabbi Chaim's "customers" walked in. Upset, the rich man exclaimed, "Huh? You call this one a Talmid Chacham ["wise student"-i.e.,

accomplished Torah scholar]?" The Ohr Hachaim ignored his comment and gave the scholar his portion. The rich man realized the futility of his endeavour, and stalked out in anger.

That night, the Ohr Hachaim had a dream in which he was told from Heaven that since he had not protested against the embarrassment of a Talmid Chacham, he would have to go into exile for a full year. Immediately, Rabbi Chaim packed his few belongings and set out on his long arduous journey, travelling from one town or village to another, making sure not to sleep two nights in the same place. He often went to sleep hungry, yet he accepted his pain with love and prayed to the One Above to forgive him for his sin.

One Friday many months later, the Ohr Hachaim found himself on the outskirts of a city. He sat down on a stone to rest his weak body and reflected on the first verse of the weekly Torah reading, "Eem b'hukotai tailaihu." When he continued walking towards the city, deep in thought and attachment to the Creator, forty two original explanations of this verse occurred to him!

Later, when he arrived in town, he went directly to the local shul. The shamash [caretaker] invited him to his home for Shabbat. At the conclusion of the Friday night meal, the shamash told his guest of the local custom to join the meal at the house of the Rabbi of the city. So they went together, joining the throngs already gathered, waiting to hear the Rabbi's pearls of wisdom.

When the time came and all eyes turned towards the head of the table, the Rabbi was still sitting quietly, in a trance-like state. After a few more moments, he roused him-



Dear Rabbi,

Pirkei Avot is commonly translated "Chapters of the Fathers." When the tractate known as Avot (indeed, when all the tractates) was redacted, was it then divided into such chapters, or were the chapters - like those of the Pentateuch - divisions made sometime afterwards?

The chapters of the Mishna are original divisions by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who compiled the Mishna (170 CE). The tractate called Avot meaning Fathers became known as "Chapters of the Fathers" because of the custom to read one chapter each week between Passover and Shavuot.

The chapter divisions in printed texts of the Pentateuch are of relatively recent origin, created by Christian monks in the 13th century. In the Torah scroll there are different divisions (called parshiot petuchot and setumot) signified by spaces between blocks of text. These divisions are the original divisions revealed to Moshe through prophecy. There is another ancient Jewish tradition called sedarim by which the Pentateuch is divided into 154 portions. This was customary when the public Torah reading took three years to complete reading the entire Torah. Today the public Torah reading is divided into 53 weekly portions and the Torah is completed once a year.

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THINK, THINK, THINK!

Why is east called mizrach?

4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).

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What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?

6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.

How well-versed must one be in Torah?

6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.

Where does the word totafot come from?

6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.

Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?

6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.

What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?

7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.

When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?

7:9 - 2,000.

Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

References are to Rashi unless stated otherwise

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self and began to speak. He transmitted fourteen brilliant explanations on the first verse of the weekly Torah reading, "Eem b'hukotai tailaihu," and then concluded, "These explanations I just heard in Heaven, in the name of the holy tzadik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar."

"Mr. Chaim ben-Atar [i.e. not a tzadik, not a rabbi -ed.]" the unknown guest called out. All eyes turned to see who had the chutzpa to dishonour the Ohr Hachaim, and were prepared to punish him. However, the shamash, feeling responsible for his guest, requested them to leave the poor man alone.

At the conclusion of his Shabbat day meal, the Rabbi expounded on a second set of fourteen interpretations, saying that these

too he had heard in Heaven in the name of the holy tzadik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar.

The same scenario repeated itself. Again the anonymous guest screamed out, "Mr. Chaim Ben-Atar," heightening the irritation of the townsmen.

Before the Third Meal, the shamash warned his guest to behave properly, but to no avail. The scene repeated itself a third time. They decided to lock the disrespectful guest in a room until after Shabbat, and to keep him locked up until fitting measures would be decided upon.

That night, a sudden strong storm swept through the city, causing much damage. The townspeople frantically rushed to the Rabbi for his prayer and blessing. The Rabbi told them

that he had just been informed from Heaven that Gehinom closes on Shabbat, and it does not reopen on Saturday night until the Ohr Hachayim recites Havdala [the "separation" ceremony to enter into the new week]. Since the tzadik could not make Havdala, being that he is currently locked in a room, a great uproar ensued above, which is the cause of such a harrowing storm below.

Upon hearing this and realizing their mistake, the townsmen immediately released their holy guest from his confinement. Rabbi Chaim understood that this was his sign that his repentance had been accepted in Heaven, and the next day set out to return to his home.

QUICK QUOTE...



...Hmmm



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