

Parshat Shoftim: Shema Yisrael

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

Parshat Shoftim outlines the speech made by a kohen, the *mashuach milchama*, every time the Jews went to battle. In it, they are assured that they need not be afraid of their enemies and that the merit of *Kriat Shema* will be adequate to save them. Rashi asks why the *mitzvah* of *Shema* is singled out.

The Gemara in Brachot calls one who says *Shema* without donning *Tefilin* a false witness against himself. This is because in *Shema*, *Tefilin* is called a sign and he is not wearing this sign. The Shem Mishmuel asks why the Gemara specifically mentions *Tefilin*. The "ot"-sign of *mezuzah* is also mentioned in *Shema*. He answers this question with another question. The Gemara in Pesachim writes that the Jews of Yericho did six actions which the Sages disliked. The Sages objected to and stopped three actions. They also objected but did not stop three other actions. One of these was that the people of Yericho recited "echad" and "v'ahavta" together without pausing in between. Why did the Sages not stop this?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that the first verse in *Shema* where we state that Hashem is one is an intellectual concept. The second verse which speaks of *ahavat Hashem* addresses a person's emotion. This dual

concept is reflected in the world at large and in mankind. There is a spiritual world which we cannot perceive and there is a physical world which our five senses recognize. The mind represents the higher worlds and the emotions signify the lower world. Just as the moon receives its light from the sun, the elevated worlds energize the physical world. Similarly, the human mind controls the emotions. Our challenge is to utilize Torah to create a unified cohesive balance between mind and emotion. Some people have great intellectual powers yet their emotions are completely out of control. Some people are emotionally sensitive, yet have the wrong set of values due to their lack of intellectual development. This is our challenge-to study the Torah and to channel it into reality by using our emotions to do the will of Hashem.

This is also the concept of *Shema*. The first verse emphasizes the intellectual concept while the second verse talks about bringing this forth in real action. That is why the people of Yericho recited both verses together. They wanted to show that their mind and heart were totally committed to Hashem. The Sages objected because it was not grammatically correct. They also felt that the mind and heart each had various levels and there needed to

be a pause. However, they did not stop them, as the crux of their idea was correct.

Tefilin represents the epitome of the message of *Shema*-unification of the mind and heart. It is placed on the head and on the arm to signify that the intellect is being channeled into real emotional action through the hands. That is why the Gemara emphasized this particular *mitzvah*. Saying *Shema* and putting on *Tefilin* is the ultimate combination of *moach* and *lev* as it joins concept with real action.

This is why Rashi said that Jewish soldiers need to live the *Shema* idea in order to attain victory over the foreign nations. The fundamental objection that the gentile nations have against the Jews is their mission of uniting heaven and earth and the Torah emphasis of oneness between mind and heart. The Gentiles have split this concept of right and wrong with their daily worldly interactions. In contrast, the Torah says one should live in this world, yet still be a saint. Chassidus says this is where the true *tzadik* can be found. May we successfully meet this formidable challenge of joining mind and heart in true service of Hashem

The Beauty of the Month of Elul

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

In this class on *Elul* we will study how to see the *rachamim* in din, the nature of self-change, and how it's possible for all of us to achieve this in a limited amount of time. We know that everything comes from one source. When we say the words of *shema* and acknowledge that Hashem is one and the flow of His essence is in all of creation, it means we are a part of it and have a direct relationship with Him.

In the second paragraph of *Shema* we say, *V'haya*- And it will be as, opposed to *Vayehi* - And it was. *Vayehi* has two yud's and *v'haya* has two *heh*'s and a *vav* and *yud*. The letter *yud* is small and above the line and is a symbol of Hashem's transcendental reality hidden from the human eye. Conversely, the letter *heh* has two feet on the ground symbolizing this world. *V'haya* is used to

connote that you can see this world as being good and it will be if you listen and understand that *mitzvot* create a relationship between the one who gave them and the one who fulfills it. We as Jews have a shared ability and *mitzva* to answer Hashem's love for us by collectively loving Him and this generates goodness. In the same paragraph where we speak about love we read about losing the land and going to exile, the source of all our suffering. How can a loving Hashem do this?

There's a famous parable about a king who opened up his palace and announced to all the people that they could come take what they wanted. Some took objects of art and some jewelry. But one person embraced the king and said, "I don't want what you have, but what you are." There are all sorts of things that keep us away from embracing the King and

having a meaningful relationship with Him and they lie in our choices.

Sometimes Hashem conceals His presence and that is *midat hadin*. We have to flex our spiritual muscles and search for Him and grow and change. *Elul* is a time that introduces us to *midat hadin*, yet it's called the month of *rachamim* and *selichot*. It's about taking all the *midat hadin* you experienced and committing to explore its source in *rachamim*. It's about asking for forgiveness and achieving the love and *rachamim* you want your life to be defined by. The trembling of *Elul* is an affirmation that even when your back is to the wall, it's not because Hashem is so limited that He's punishing you. Rather He's saying- I know you want Me, look for Me.

There are different practices in *Elul* that

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remove the blockages and open up the doors, among them *teshuva*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah*. *Teshuva* is about returning to who you want to be, to the fulfillments of your potential. In order to do that, you have to pinpoint what is wrong, otherwise it's hard to know how to rectify the problem. The Nesivot Sholom suggests not focusing on the misdeed but rather on the roots of it. I'll give you an example. My very good friend is somewhat

judgmental. She's a really good person. If she thinks it's right to help someone, she's there. The same kind of judgmental capacity she has for looking inward she has for looking outward. She lives in a mixed socio-economic area. One day her neighbor's kid threw some litter on her manicured lawn and she lost it, which is unusual for her because it's not right to be negative and her sense of rectitude is real. But then she realized that it says in Tomer

Devora that the effect of any act you do is far reaching. If you say something that's true but negative and judgmental you've created an aura of judgment and negativity around you, that you'll have to account for. You have to go to the root of sin to change. You might say it's too hard and you're right. You can't possibly do this yourself. This is why we have *Elul*. Hashem is there to help us in the process.

Elul Through Yom Kippur: 40 Days of Recreating Our Reality

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The month of *Elul* is a special *eit ratzon* (time of favor). Let us study what happened during this period and thereby better understand what *Elul* is about. *Klal Yisrael* experienced great miracles in Egypt. Hashem revealed himself on the night of Pesach and later on at the Red Sea. Eventually the Jews arrived at *Har Sinai* and experienced more miracles and revelation. There was an intense and close relationship with Hashem. However soon after they failed with the Sin of the Golden Calf. When Moshe delayed in returning with the *luchot*, they saw in it a lack of fulfillment of his prophecy. They also saw a vision of Moshe lying dead in heaven. They assumed he had died. Then they got over the reality of being without a leader and created the golden calf. It was a very difficult test. The nation who followed Hashem into the desert and said *naaseh v'nishma* were on a very high spiritual level. They were the foundation of *Klal Yisrael*. If they failed, it must have been a very tough challenge. Why did Hashem test them? Moreover, it seems as if He set them up for failure by enabling the Satan to fool them into thinking Moshe was dead.

The miracles in *Mitzrayim* and on *Yam Suf* were gifts given to the Jews. In *Shir Hashirim*

it says, "*Dodi li v'ani lo*- My beloved one is to me and I am to him." Hashem first gave us these gifts that we did not deserve fully. Gifts received without much effort can be lost easily. It's not as precious as something earned. When Hashem gave Moshe the first *luchot* it was supposed to stay with *Klal Yisrael* forever. If they wouldn't have failed with the golden calf, *Mashiach* would've come. The Jewish people needed to get to a high spiritual level and they needed to draw the other nations with them. However, before the giving of the *Torah*, Amalek came to fight the Jewish people and cooled off the 'waters of the bath,' not only for the Jewish people but for the other nations as well. As a result, *Mashiach* could not come yet. Shem MiShmuel explains that *Klal Yisrael* were in fact ready and could go in to *Eretz Yisrael*, but the others nations weren't worthy. It seems unfair, as if we were liable to suffer for the other nations. But in reality, it gave us another opportunity to bring *kiddush Hashem* into this world. If the nations would come back to Hashem as a result of our influence, it would be our accomplishment.

Hashem gave the Jewish people a very difficult test. If they would've overcome it, they would have turned all the gifts they got into

something they deserved and their mission would've been accomplished. However, the effort needed to do so was almost beyond human capacity. And even more so, Hashem helped the Satan bring the Jews to sin. *Chazal* explain that the generation of the desert had to pave a new path to *teshuva* for *Klal Yisrael* for all generations. When they failed and then repented, they created the DNA for *teshuva*. *Chazal* say each time Hashem brings a punishment to the Jews, there's a trace of *cheit haegel*. What was not accomplished in *cheit haegel* would be accomplished in all generations. As a result of their failure, we are part of the mission to overcome the struggles Hashem places before us.

The *Sefas Emes* says Hashem always gives good with greater measure than he gives difficulties. If we are part of the difficult consequences, we are also given the opportunity to do *teshuva*. The 40 days from Rosh *Chodesh Elul* to Yom Kippur correspond to the 40 days in the desert when the Jews repented and returned to Hashem. It's a period of time where we can tap into the power of *teshuva* forged by our forefathers and recreate our relationship with Hashem.