

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 *Shma* 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

Three Elements of Prayer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Rambam tells us that *shemone esrei* is the key prayer of the three *tefilot* we pray every day. It consists of three sections, *shevach*, *bakasha*, and *hodaah*. *Shevach* is praise of Hashem, *bakasha* refers to requests, and *hodaah* is thanks. These three segments are fundamental to the way we view the world. The most fundamental principle in Judaism is belief in the existence of Hashem. David Hamelech says in Tehilim, "*Ha'shamayim misparim k'evod Kel*. The heavens proclaim the glory of Hashem." If we open our eyes, we cannot help but be inspired by the beautiful world Hashem created. The brilliant sun, the clear moon, the twinkling stars, the intricate cloud formations, and cool breezes stir within us an inescapable urge to sing the praises of the Being that fashioned all this. We know there's only one source, the Almighty who created this amazing world. We

give *shevach*, praise for all the good He bestows upon us every day.

Much of our prayers are *shevach*. In Shacharit, the *pisukei d'zimra* is full of praise for Hashem. *Perek Shira*, an early form of prayer attributed to David Hamelech, speaks about all the different creatures and how they each sing Hashem's praises. The earth, water, springs, insects, fish, birds, and animals all laud Hashem in their own way. It's important to recite *pesukei d'zimra* with a lot of *kavanah* (intention). In many shuls, the congregation uses a special *nigun* (tune) when reciting this section, just as every creature has their unique song.

The second section of *shemonei esrei* is *bakasha*. Human needs are almost infinite and only Hashem can really provide for them. We

request many good things and hope that our fears will be allayed so we that we will not have to face suffering. Our requests include physical hopes and spiritual hopes, hope for forgiveness for our sins and hope for the redemption for the people of Israel.

The third section is *hodaah*. After Hashem responds to our needs, we thank him for everything He gives to mankind, and to us personally. We thank Him for the food we eat, for giving us the strength to get out of bed, and for being able to put on our shoes. We thank Him for the small miracles and for His constant presence in our lives.

May Hashem help us to pray with renewed vigor every day, with the right intention and fervor, so that our prayers will be accepted in heaven *l'tova*.

Elul: Room For Reflection

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The verse in Shemot says, “*V’elokim inah l’yadi v’samti lecha makom asher anus shama*,” This refers to the unintentional murderer who had to flee to a city of refuge. The Arizal says the first letters of the first four words spell Elul. What is the connection between the *ir miklat* and Elul? Invariably we try to justify our faults by taking comfort in the thought that we didn’t mean it. The *ir miklat* teaches us the serious consequence of an unintentional act. We have to face our mistakes and recognize that in some ways we are responsible.

The Sichot Hischazkus notes that *teshuvah* begins by remembering the purpose of our existence. Before a soul is sent down to the world, Hashem shows it what it’s meant to accomplish. But the *yetzer hara* makes sure to distract us. Before the sin it was clear to Adam what his mission was. But when he ate of the fruit, he entered a state of death. Death is loss of clarity. It’s living for months and years and never growing or becoming what we should or could be.

On Rosh Hashana we continually ask for life. On a deeper level we ask for the ability to utilize our full potential, to meet the right people, to seize the opportunities, and to be inspired. All of us have to ask ourselves, are we living up to our potential? In the Western world this means making it to the top in one’s profession. In Judaism, it’s sanctifying the name of Hashem and being the best we can be.

Mrs. Smiles recounts, “I have a talented student who is a teacher. When her family began to grow, she considered the possibility of leaving her job as she didn’t need the extra income. She told me, ‘I’m afraid in heaven they will ask me, ‘Where are all the students you could’ve had?’ So I told her, I’m afraid they will ask you, ‘Were you the best mother you could’ve been to your children?’ No one can substitute what a mother can give a child. A Rav once told me that our primary responsibility is our own children. Other people’s children are secondary. Developing ourselves to the fullest means developing ourselves in the areas where we are indispensable.”

Chazal say that Hashem brings *tzadikim* into the world and takes them away on the same day. But we see that there were many *tzadikim* who didn’t die on their birthday. The Chasam Sofer explains that the day a *tzadik* sets out on his path to greatness is his true birthday for it is then that he truly began to live. In the introduction to Rav Pincus’ *hagadah*, he describes the turning point in his life. As a young boy, he was once doing *bedikat chametz* on the night before Pesach. He went up to inspect the roof and he saw it was full of *chametz*. He knew the *halacha* that the area must be clean before checking. So he set to work cleaning up. Right before sunrise, he did the *bedika*. He felt so invigorated, after displaying such self-sacrifice for a *mitzvah*, that the entire Pesach he was on a high. He describes this as a defining point in his life. Sadly, Rav Pincus was taken from us many years later on the night of *bedikat chametz*. So we see Hashem fills the days of *tzadikim* in a different way because that is really what *chayut* is about, investing oneself in matters that are worth living. In Elul, we have to ask ourselves, “*Ayeka*,” Where have we been this year? Have we given to the world as much as we could’ve given? Have we really lived?

Rav Brazil says that the *ani* in “*Ani l’dodi*,” comes first because before we can build a relationship with Hashem we have to recognize our own inner greatness. No one else can do what we were put on this world to do. Rav Freifeld says the greatest obstacle in spreading the light of the Torah is our lack of confidence in our power to change and move forward. When the Midrash talks about people who are *osek b’Torah* (occupied with Torah) it refers to those who try to give expression to their soul. These are people who are prepared to struggle over and over and are never afraid to grow and strive higher.

Rav Leff says that killing unintentionally shows a disregard for the value of life. If we see the physical world as a means of creating eternal spiritual bliss then every second of temporal life is invested with infinite value. This is how the Telzer Rosh yeshiva explains Rebbe’s last words, “*Yesh kono olamo b’schah achas*.” (There are those who can acquire the world to come in one hour.) He was bemoaning the fact

that we let precious seconds escape us without eternal acquisition. One who appreciates his own life won’t be careless in endangering another person’s life. Therefore, an unintentional murderer had to be exiled to an *ir miklat*. He had to be inspired by the *leviim* who understood the sanctity of life. And he had to remain till the *kohen gadol* died in order that he would be aroused by the eulogy of the *tzaddik*. When we don’t consider the eternal value of life and carelessly commit sins, we are guilty in a certain sense of unintentional suicide. Killing time is killing life itself. Therefore Hashem gave us *chodesh Elul* as a kind of refuge to regain our perspective.

It is told that the Chofetz Chaim opted to buy slip-on shoes so he could save the time it would take to tie his laces. When Rav Trop, the *mashgiach* of Radin took ill, his students gave away days and weeks of their own lives so that he would live. The Chofetz Chaim considered donating one moment or two because for him that was like an entire life. Elul is a time to stop and ask ourselves, “How much of my day is wasted on foolish things? What steps can I take to be more responsible in the future?”

The Tiv Hamoadim says that the root word of *aveira* is *avar*-the other side. Sin brings a person to the other side. It creates a wall between us and Hashem so that even if we are learning Torah or praying we are really far away. We become our own worst enemy and there’s no one to blame but ourselves. Still Hashem has mercy on us and gives us Elul to return. How do we begin? A good way to start is to make a list of sins and then highlight the easy ones to fix first. The big ones can be attacked slowly with a plan. Sometimes the *yetzer hara* will get us to take on a lot so that we get overwhelmed enough not to do anything. Deciding on one manageable *kabbalah*, something simple that can be done every day, can affect our entire focus. Success breeds success and there’s no turning back once we’re set on the road to return. May we merit *teshuvah sheleima* and a fulfilling new year.