

## Ki Teitzei: The Power of Unity

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

The Shem Mishmuel raises an intriguing question originally posed by his grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. In Parshat Ki Teitzei, we read, "Ki teitzei l'milchomo al oy'vecha...." Hashem tells the Jewish nation that when they will go out to war, He will straightaway give the enemy into their hands. There is no mention of prayer or fasting or fierce battles. It seems as if Hashem gives the foreign nations over to the Jews on a silver platter. In contrast, in Parshat Behaloscha, we read, "V'ki tavo'u l'milchama..." The Jews will need to pray, fast, repent, and then do battle before winning over their enemies. Why does this situation demand so much more?

To answer this, the Shem MiShmuel points out another question. In Parshat Ki Teitzei, "Ki teitzei", which refers to the Jewish nation, is in singular tense and "oy'vecha"-your enemies, is in plural tense. However, in Parshat Behaloscha, "Ki tavo'u"-the Jewish nation, is referred to in plural tense. The Shem MiShmuel explains that the Jewish people's success in battle is not dependent on their physical strength. Their victory is dependent on their spiritual level, on how in touch they are with their "Tzelem Elokim"-their G-dly image. In fact, Jewish soldiers wore their tefillin to battle. Tefillin require extraordinary spiritual focus to the point that one needs to constantly feel the Almighty's presence in ones mind and heart. Normally in the midst of war, soldiers become inhuman. Yet the Torah

emphasizes that even in the heat of battle a Jewish fighter must maintain his sanctity. A Jew's power is not physical, rather it is a mystical, spiritual force, drawn from his perfection of Tzelem Elokim. This achieves victory over the enemy.

How does one reach such spiritual perfection? A person is made up of 248 limbs and 365 sinews which correspond to the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. The soul also has 613 elements. When a person performs mitzvot, he affects his positive corresponding aspects and when he keeps away from sin, he avoids the negative elements. In this way, a person can achieve perfection of Tzelem Elokim. If however, he neglects to fulfill one mitzvah, there is a blemish in his Tzelem Elokim. There are specific mitzvot given exclusively to the kohen and the king. Can one Jew possibly fulfill all 613 mitzvot? Chassidut explains that ideally when all Jews are united they share one common universal soul called "Yechida". If one Jew performs a mitzvah all Jews can claim a share in the act. That is how we can achieve perfection. Therefore, the most important factor in the defeat of the Jewish nations' enemies is the unity of Israel. Achdut Yisrael is the key to success in war.

The Shem MiShmuel quotes the Maharal that the Jewish people have a paradoxical and tragic tendency to split off from one other. The Jew leans towards being individu-

alistic and separate. How can we subdue this and develop the universal Jewish soul identity? The Shem MiShmuel writes that one should strive for the level of, "Kedoshim Tihiyu." Rashi explains this mitzva as a command to sanctify oneself with matters that are permitted. Dveikut b'Hashem-cleaving to Hashem, should be a Jew's primary goal. In a sense this entails relinquishing one's personal identity and agenda for Hashem's agenda. Part of unity is Ahavat yisrael-respecting each individual Jew's path in avodat Hashem. When we all cling to that same inner point and Source, namely Hashem, then we can achieve unity of Israel, perfection of Tzelem Elokim, and victory in war.

When Jews confront their enemies with achdut, their foes splinter. When Jews are disunited, their enemies join together and defeat them. In Parshat Ki Teitzei, the Jews were united in purpose and service to Hashem. Therefore, Hashem gave the enemy easily into their hands. However, in Parshat Beha'alotcha, the Jews were fractionalized and their enemies were united. Therefore they needed to do teshuva, before they could achieve victory. The month of Elul is a time of preparation for the New Year. It is a period when we work on our Ahavat Yisrael and reconcile with our fellow Jews. If we are willing to give up our personal preferences to cling to Hashem, to live holy lives, we will achieve the Yechida level of true Jewish unity.

## 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.

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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 Eul that 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.

## Tehillim 86: Begging for Forgiveness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

"Incline Hashem your ear, answer me... guard my soul for devout (*chasid*) am I." The root word of *chasid* is *chesed* which is serving Hashem beyond what is required, out of love. Why would he need to beg for mercy if he is a *chasid*? *Rabbi Avraham Shalem* writes that in fact in this context *chasid* means ashamed. He brings an interesting source, quoting a verse in Vaykira which speaks about acts of incest. There the *Torah* says this is an act of *chesed*- a shameful thing because the word *chesed* like many other Hebrew words can be either a synonym or an antonym. Sometimes when we want to exaggerate, we will say something exactly the opposite. When one doesn't behave according to the law one can be either a criminal or a person that is so careful that he puts restrictions on himself far beyond the letter of the law. If that's the case, *chesed* in itself, means out of the norm. *David Hamelech* is wracked with guilt and when he writes this, he feels Hashem has turned a deaf ear to him because he's done something shameful.

"Gladden the soul of your servant for to you O' Hashem my soul I lift up. Depression is anger turned towards oneself in which one punishes oneself for having harmed oneself. Rav Hirsh says even amidst terrible tragedy, one can experience joy if one accepts what Hashem has decreed with dignity and trust. "There is no one like you among the powers Hashem..." All the forces of nature are unified by the Creator. They are no more than different fingers on one hand. "Unite my heart to fear your name." Rashi explains that this refers to the two inclinations that battle within us. We can be hypocritical sometimes and delude ourselves into thinking that what is wrong is not so bad or even a *mitzvah*.

We ask Hashem every day, yached livave-nu-unite our heart. Let me serve you with my desires and with all that I do, in my physical as well as spiritual life. I want to be a person of integrity and I commit myself to honor Your name, the name that signifies Hashem's unity.

When we say *Shema*, we acknowledge this unity, that Hashem is the uniting force that controls the disparate forces of this world. I will honor your name by unifying myself, by making what I say, feel and do- one.

*David Hamelech* repeats here the 13 attributes of mercy. After *cheit haegel*, Moshe begged Hashem for forgiveness and he asked Hashem to teach him His ways. Hashem passed over and called out the 13 attributes, among them, "He is slow to anger and increases kindness and truth." How do we reconcile forgiveness with truth? Hashem can unify these disparate concepts. *David Hamelech* begs Hashem- "Turn to me and show me favor..." Pardon me not because I deserve it ...and save the son of your handmaiden." David invokes the name of his mother much as someone who is ill and needs prayers because when we daven for healing, we arouse Hashem's mercy in that way. "...For you Hashem will have helped me and consoled me."