

Parshat Shoftim: Shema Yisrael

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel 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

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 *Eul* that

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remove the blockages and open up the doors, among them *teshuva*, *tefilah*, and *zedakah*. *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.

Honorable Mentchen: Avoiding Shaming Others

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Torah commands us to avoid embarrassing others. This means being careful not to mention issues that a person would find hurtful and being attuned to people's sensitivities. The Talmud in Bava Metzia goes so far as to say that if a member of someone's family was hanged, you shouldn't say to the person, "Would you mind hanging up my coat?" The Sefer Chassidim says one should not kiss a baby in the presence of someone who is single and well past marriageable age. The Gemara says one is never allowed to remind someone of their past misdeeds. One shouldn't admonish someone for doing something wrong in the presence of others. One should be careful not to expose someone's ignorance in public. If someone walks into a room, one should not immediately bombard him with questions, but rather give him time to focus.

One should avoid revealing any information that may be scandalous, saying something negative about someone who has passed away, yelling at or harshly criticizing one's employee, giving charity publicly to a person who does not want people to know he is poor, or referring to ethnic or racial groups by

derogatory names. The Gemara in Bava Metzia says that if you lend someone money and he cannot pay you back, you should try to avoid meeting the person so as not to cause him shame. Wealthy people should be careful not to embarrass others who are poorer than them. Making ostentatious simchot causes less well-off people to feel pressured into spending more than they can afford to keep up. The prohibition against embarrassing someone publicly applies just as much to children as it does to adults. In fact, children are much more vulnerable to humiliation. If a parent feels a child should be admonished, it should never be done in public. Teachers must be careful not to shame students.

If you solicit someone for charity, be sure to ask for an amount that is reasonable for the person to give. If you ask for too much, the person may feel compelled to give more than he can actually afford to avoid embarrassment. If you are wealthy, don't talk about your financial dealings in the company of less affluent people. If you have shamed someone, you should beg that person's forgiveness. The humiliation you'll feel as you do this will be a fair trade-off for causing the person hurt.

Rabbi Teller recounts, "I teach in numerous seminaries. I once attended an annual teachers' meeting at a well-known school. There were about 50 teachers present, some very old and erudite, and we were all asked to introduce ourselves. There was one young teacher who appeared overwhelmed by the distinguished faculty. When it came her turn to introduce herself, she was so frightened she couldn't open her mouth. The head of the school quickly stepped in to save her, 'This is Mrs. Weintraub who teaches Women in Tanach.' He did it so seamlessly that most of the teachers in the room didn't even notice. It was such a beautiful moment, I could almost hear the angels singing in heaven."

Rav Simcha Wasserman once hosted a group of Jews who were not yet religious at his Shabbos table. At the beginning of the meal everyone introduced themselves. There was Richard the wholesaler, Larry the computer technician, and Sam the salesman. Then Evan said, "I'm a longshoreman." There was a long pregnant silence. And then Rav Simcha, without skipping a beat, said, "I'm also a wasser (Yiddish for water) man, just like you."