



Ohr Yerushalayim News

9th August 2014 - Volume 7 - Issue 5 – פרשת ואתחנן – י"ג אב תשע"ד

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Frenchie Freedman on the engagement of their daughter Debbie to Avrohom Moshe Begal (son of Mr & Mrs Sam Begal).

It's Holiday Time!

Now that Tisha B'Av has been and gone it's time for Summer holiday season. We therefore ask all members in town to support the Shul Minyanim whilst others head off for their break.

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

Understand, O Israel

Dani Epstein

It is the desire of every G-d fearing Jew to die with this phrase on their lips; it is recited thrice daily at the very least; this short phrase is perhaps the single most-famous verse of the Torah yet after a cursory examination presents a considerable challenge to comprehend why.

שמע ישראל - Hear O Israel Hashem is our G-d Hashem is one.

In the space afforded by this column it is impossible to do this phrase any sort of justice, yet worthwhile to raise a few questions and attempt to resolve one or two of them at a decidedly superficial level, leaving the unvisited majority as points to ponder.

This phrase does not introduce any new concepts. Hashem had already revealed Himself at Mount Sinai, and therefore there was no need for Moshe to state "Hashem is our G-d" - it was in fact the first of the ten commandments, and therefore all his listeners, which was absolutely everyone, were fully aware that Hashem was their G-d.

The second commandment which had been presented by Hashem Himself precludes the belief in any other god or power. This obviates the necessity of the last words of the Shema: "Hashem is one". Everyone was quite aware that Hashem was the one and only G-d. Why mention this yet again?

The sentence opens with an exhortation: **שמע!** Listen! At this point in their sojourn in the desert, the Bnei Yisroel had been assembled by Moshe for a series of public lectures that were to be his final legacy to the people. As Rashi notes, attendance was compulsory for every single person, in order to pre-empt the scoffers in the marketplace. In which case, the instruction of **שמע** would appear to be redundant; there was little else for anyone to do other than listen, and they already were.

The populace is addressed as simply **בני ישראל** rather than **בני ישראל** (if not preceded by another noun), which in **דברים** becomes simply **ישראל**. Why the change?

Hashem is mentioned twice in the phrase, when only one mention would suffice.

The last question is one raised by Rav Dovid Gottlieb. Simply saying that

something is unique does not preclude the existence of similar entities. For example, one might stand in the Louvre, examine the Mona Lisa and declare it unique; the room will be filled with other paintings, and therefore this declaration of uniqueness does not negate the existence of any other paintings.

It merely claims that a particular instance of a given item is unique in some quality, but not unique in its entirety or exclusive in its existence.

If the purpose of this word **אחד** is to affirm a monotheistic doctrine, i.e. that Hashem is unique to the exclusion of any other deity or ultimate power, then a different term ought to be employed to convey that concept adequately.

The opening phrase of **שמע** is dealt with by the Abaravanel and the Malbim, the former at great length and both at considerable depth and will both be drawn upon in the following paragraphs. As mentioned previously, only a few points will be dealt with in the hope that the unanswered questions will springboard the reader's enquiry and further research.

Given that declaring something as being singular (**אחד**) does not inherently grant the target of that declaration absolute uniqueness, one is forced to conclude after these observations purpose of the Shema is not to promote monotheism, or the belief or knowledge of the existence of Hashem.

In the opening **ברכה** of **שמע** we say the phrase **עושה שלום ובורא את הכול** - He makes peace and creates everything. This is a paraphrase of the verse in Yeshayohu (45:7) who is giving over a message from Hashem in which he says inter alia: **עושה שלום ובורא רע** - [who] makes peace and creates evil. It is Hashem Himself who affirms that even unequivocal evil is His creation. It is axiomatic that evil cannot exist without the consent of Hashem.

This is a concept that philosophers have struggled with for millenia, and continue to do so. If Hashem creates evil, then surely He must be evil too, even if He does good? The prevalent belief amongst most religious

The Week Ahead

פרשת ואתחנן

פרשת ואתחנן	שבת נחמו
Mincha	7.00pm / 7.30pm
Candle Lighting	Not before 7.17pm / 7.52-8.00
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.25am
Mincha	2.00pm / 6.00pm / 8.44pm
Rov's Mishnayos Shiur	following
Motzei Shabbos	9.49pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Monday / Thursday	6.45am / 7.10am
Tuesday / Wednesday / Friday	6.45am / 7.20am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.00pm
Mincha & Maariv Next Shabbos	6.45 / 7.30pm

people in the world today is that Hashem and evil are two distinct entities. This leads to all manner of intractable contradictions that people seem to be happier with than facing the very straightforward message of Yeshayohu, hence the reluctance to adopt a Torah-based monotheistic approach.

Following the Shema comes the mitzvah of loving Hashem – **ואהבתה – את ה' אלוהיך** which presents a major challenge. Love, as distinct from infatuation or lust, is promoted by giving; giving of one's self or possessions to the other party. It could be a mother to a child, a man to a woman; the key to the relationship is the giving.

If both parties give to the other selflessly, then the love will blossom and continually grow. If only one party gives, and the other simply takes, then the love will wither and eventually die.

How, though, can one form a loving relationship with a party one cannot see, hear or feel? How are we expected to love Hashem if the relationship will be unidirectional? Surely this is asking the impossible? Yet this is the highest form of relationship with Hashem, which is preceded by – **למטן תירא** in order that you shall fear, a considerably less elevated type of relationship.

To make this comprehensible and feasible, through the Shema Moshe emphasises that although we see good and evil in this world, these are merely terms we use in order to address these concepts. If, however, one had the possibility of observing Hashem's justice and mercy from His perspective, we would realise that neither the good nor the evil is anything other than a manifestation of Hashem's infinite mercy.

All the unqualified evil we observe represents both rectification and the precursor to further improvement, since everything Hashem does is inherently good, as we read on the sixth day of creation: **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת – כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד** – and El-him saw everything that He had made, and behold it was exceedingly good.

Therefore, Moshe employs the name "Hashem" which represents the attribute of mercy as well as that of "Elokenu" representing the attribute of strict justice, and combines the two by saying – **אחד** effectively stating that these two conflicting attributes are combined manifestations of Hashem.

In this light we are forced to realise that even when we observe evil occurring, this is still the mercy of Hashem, manifesting itself in much the same way one might observe a surgeon removing a limb that is infected beyond any hope of saving. By removing the limb, the life of the patient is saved. What might appear inherently cruel, with the relevant information is transformed into a life-saving action; surely the greatest kindness one can extend to a fellow human.

The perspective, therefore, is dependant on the relevant knowledge. It is axiomatic that a human is incapable of analysing or comprehending Hashem's justice or mercy, for we read in Shemos 32:20 **כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי – הַאֲדָם וְחַי** – Man cannot see me and yet be alive.

Man's existence in this world is subject to time, which limits our perception to linear progression. There is a before, during and after to every event we observe or hear about. This is not the case with Hashem, who is above time for the simple fact that time is His creation; even Man is not subjugated to his own creations, how much more so the Creator Himself!

To perceive and comprehend the justice of Hashem we would be required to transcend time, since His justice is inherently unbound to time and therefore only just in the most absolute sense if divorced from time. Since escaping time is obviously impossible, we have no choice but to conclude that the justice and mercy of Hashem is beyond our realm of comprehension.

As our perception is inherently limited, we require an external source of information that provides us with the essential knowledge that will allow us to draw our own conclusion regarding our relationship with Hashem, whether we will merely fear Him or love Him too.

This is what Moshe provides with the Shema – a definitive statement that we can love Hashem for everything that He does for us whether it

appears to be good or evil, since ultimately everything we experience is the manifestation of Hashem's love and mercy for us. This can lead to us elevating our relationship with Hashem from what might be perceived as one-way street and a servitude based on fear, to one based on an external truth and therefore one of love.

In truth, we receive everything from Hashem and give Him nothing in return, rather like a child performing some small task like learning their spellings for which the parent will reward them.

The parent will not receive any inherent personal benefit from the child's work, but will return the "favour" with a reward, which in turn might lead the child to think that they have benefitted their parent.

We can now evaluate the Shema in light of this, and conclude that it is an introduction to the mitzvah of loving Hashem, in that it provides us with the means and knowledge to fulfil that commandment.

The Multilayered Torah

Rabbi Yaakov Menken (Torah.org)

"Then Moshe separated three cities, on the opposite side of the Jordan River, towards the east." [Dev. 1:12-13, 15]

In the previous verses, Moshe Rabbeinu described the unique connection created between G-d and the Jewish people when G-d took us out from Egypt with open miracles, and then spoke directly to us.

As predicted so accurately in the Torah, no other community has ever claimed that an entire group of millions of people heard G-d directly and saw "signs and wonders". This, says Moshe, will inspire us to return to G-d and His Mitzvos even when we have wandered geographically and spiritually, and tells us that doing Mitzvos will be good for us and our future generations.

But what is the connection between this, and the selection of Cities of Refuge in the next verse? The Torah says "then Moshe separated..." as if there were some sort of logical connection -- and yet one is not immediately apparent.

The Ramban, Nachmanides, writes that immediately following the exhortation to do Mitzvos for the rewards they offer, Moshe says "let us do the Mitzvah which has come to our hands" even though the Cities of Refuge would only take effect after the Nation conquered the Land and separated three more cities within it.

The Kli Yakar elaborates: even though one cannot bring the Mitzvah to its completion, one should do whatever is possible nonetheless. This is true even if the benefit is entirely "for future generations" -- like a man who plants an Esrog tree (Esrogim are used during the holiday of Sukkos) knowing that only his son will be able to use the fruit.

Doing a Mitzvah is its own reward; one doesn't need to see the benefit, or even be able to complete the Mitzvah, in order to be rewarded for beginning the act.

By saying this, the Kli Yakar seems to extend a well-known concept concerning the study of Torah -- that the study is an end in itself, and its own reward.

I had lunch this week with two lawyers in New York, and one described how he had written a 50-page brief concerning a known ambiguity in the law, which was relevant to a recent case. The Court of Appeals, however, decided in his favor without discussing or making a ruling about the ambiguity -- thus never evaluating his lengthy argument.

So he decided to at least put the matter up for discussion by presenting his discussion in a law journal. He spent many additional hours editing and digesting his article, and was finally prepared to submit it for publication -- when Congress recognized the ambiguity and promptly changed the law.

With Torah study, there can be no such disappointment. All Torah study is valuable and rewarding! And the Kli Yakar tells us to approach all Mitzvos the same way: knowing that the practice of Mitzvos is rewarding, whether or not we can see the benefit or even complete the Mitzvah.