

What's Hidden in the Hamentashen (2024)

Rav Shalom Dov Ber Butman (z'tl) was a well-known Chassid of the Rebbe. Once I asked him a question. I told him that I remembered the great confidence I had that Rav Kahane would soon lead the Jewish people to a great salvation. Then suddenly one day my world was shattered when I heard he had been assassinated. I am sure the day Rav Butman heard that he would no longer see the Rebbe, it was a difficult day for him as well. My question was the following. How is it that precisely the time Rebbe Moshe Rabbeinu passes away, we are told Marvim V'Simcha? How can we increase our joy at the same time that we have lost our great leader? He looked at me with his eyes that had tremendous reverence for his Rebbe and answered, 'this is your best question.' This week the thought occurred to me that the answer to this question can be found in the word 'Ata' ('you').

And 'you' shall command the children of Israel, and they shall take to you pure olive oil. (Shmot 27:20)

According to Chassidut, because the name Moshe is absent in this week's Parsha, the 'Ata' symbolizes the 'essence' of Moshe, beyond the name. I had a different thought, however, about the meaning of the 'Ata' which I will explain. Around twenty-two years ago my father (z'tl) passed away. I was asked to say a few words at the funeral which happened to be during the week of Parsha Tezaveh. I noticed something interesting that speaks not only of my personal loss but something of the state of our current generation; a generation that no longer sees a Rebbe or a Rav Kahane. The year before he passed away was 9-11 and similar to the times we are living in now, it inspired me to seriously consider how I could escape impending disaster and find a new life in Israel.

I believed that the assassination of Rabbi Kahane (in 1990) and his son, eleven years later, gave birth to the punishments and plagues of these epic times, and I began to see Kahane in letters and gematrias in every Parsha. I started to write a book called the Kahane Codes and for a year before my father's passing, I searched for many permutations of the letters of Kahane as well as the number 76 which is the gematria of Kahane. By strange coincidence it turned out that my father was also 76 when he passed away, and for the preceding year I had been obsessed with this number. Returning to our question, how do we find joy precisely at a time when we feel isolated, defeated and fragile at the loss of those who sustained us?

Chazal tells us that Moshe is absent from this week's Parsha because after the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem called for the destruction of the Jewish people, promising to leave only Moshe behind from which He would build a new nation. Rejecting this proposition, Moshe said that he would follow the fate of his people and said that if their sin was too great to forgive "erase me from Your book" (Shemot 32:32). And, as the Baal Haturim explains from the Gemora "A curse of a sage even made on condition comes true" (Zevachim 102a).

However, even though we do not see Moshe's name in this week's Parsha, I discovered that it is indeed hidden somewhere. The breastplate (the ephod) contains twelve precious stones, each connected to a particular tribe of Israel. They are held up by two chains attached to two Shoham

stones on the Cohen's shoulders. The letters that spell Shoham, are the same letters that spell Moshe. Even though we do not see Rebbe Moshe any longer, he is still holding up all the tribes of Israel on his shoulders.

As I looked back at this dvar Torah of the past, another thought occurred to me this week. Why two stones? Practically speaking if the ephod was only held up with one stone it would not be very secure, it needs two. But are there two Moshe's? After passing through the Yum Suf on our way to receive the Torah the people of Israel were unified and the Torah describes them in the following way.

And Israel saw the great hand, which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in Moses, His servant.	וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרְאוּ הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּיְהוָה וּבְמֹשֶׁה עֲבָדָיו
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(Shmot 14: 31)

his servant **עֲבָדָיו**

and the servant **וְעַבְדֵּי**

One can read this passage as they believed in the Lord and his servant Moshe. The same letters can also be rearranged to spell 'and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe and the Eved (v'eved - the servant).' The gematria of Eved is 76 which equals Kahane. Therefore, it can also be deciphered as 'The people believed in Moshe and Kahane.'

Now one might think that this is stretching things a little, however we see something similar with the Shoham stone. There is another Shoham stone on the Ephod, and this Shoham stone represents the tribe of Yoseph. Therefore, the stone of Yoseph and the stone of Moshe are identical. In a similar way that the Cohanim come from the Leviim, Moshiach ben Yoseph and Moshiach ben David, are also partners and part of the same Geula. There cannot be Malchut without Yesod preceding it. Yehuda the penitent king would not have found his greatness if it had not been for his sins against Yoseph whose monarchy preceded his.

The shesh (linen) clothing that is discussed in our Parsha is also the same word as the 'sixth', which is the sephira of Yoseph. The Shoham stone on the bottom of the ephod is reflected in the Shoham stones on the shoulders that carry the ephod. As Rav Kahane points out, Yoseph himself was brought from the lowest place of a dungeon to become the ruler of Egypt and was dressed in 'Shesh' linen.

Rav Kahane brings down:

Sesh (which means both linen and six) and *vad* (which means linen and whose numerical value is six) evoke the six days of creation, during which God- alone (levad)

and set apart (badad) – created the world. Vad means single and alone, as Rashi explains in his commentary to Exodus 30:34

The Shoham stones are called stones of *Zikaron* of remembrance. I remember when Rav Kahane was assassinated, I read a story from Meam Loez, who discussed the funeral of Sarah Emainu that occurred during the same week. He brought down a story of a great general who was recalled by the king. It was at a time when armies were amassing to make war against the people. They cried in panic; how could the king recall our great leader in such a dangerous time. We need him now more than ever. The wise men thought about the situation and realized that maybe the king recalled him because they were relying too much on the leader and not doing enough themselves.

It seems to me that the hidden meaning of the additional joy in this month comes from this *ata* which begins our Parsha as well as the Haftorah. The great leader has gone, so what can I do? What abilities do I have? How can I possibly come close to these giant footsteps and stand up against great adversaries? When we remember those who led and served and said uncomfortable questions to comfortable Jews, and we continue along the path they forged, we too become a bit like them.

Even though we are part of something much greater than ourselves, and maybe something which is being held up from above, like the chains of the ephod, there is a great joy of fulfillment when even with our limited resources we are able to continue and build. Though we were not born to be leaders we must lead in whatever capacity we can. There is a finger pointing to us now - *ata*. In the horticulture world, pruning helps to produce more flowers.

In this week's Parsha there is another dual word, which is miluim (inauguration). The inauguration of the Cohanim and the modern word for yearly army service (milium) are the same word. Rav Kahane's brother Nachum Kahane wrote that when he donned his IDF soldiers' uniform for the first time he felt like he was putting on the priestly garments of the Cohen. He felt a strong connection between the blood and sacrifice of this uniform and the holy service of the Cohanim.

As the time of joy is upon us and the great leaders who forged the future for us are not to be seen, we must continue to be those leaders and soldiers that continue to move forward. It is a time of hidden strength, when Hashem's name is hidden in the holiday of Purim and Moshe is hidden in the Pasha, but during this time of sacrifice from the suffering of the hostages to the bravery of the soldiers there is the 'ata'. Each one of us is an 'Ata'. We must continue with the directions Moshe left us.

We might ask, why is it not written that the people believed in Hashem and his messenger (Shaliach) Moshe. Isn't a messenger a higher level than a servant? A messenger, however, can opt out of being a messenger unlike a servant. A servant continues according to what he has been commanded. Rav Kahane stood against a sea of adversity and his ideas continue to live on. This is because he served Hashem's authentic command and though he stood alone and

paid the ultimate price upon his shoulders he carried Am Israel. We are obligated to do the same with whatever talents we have.

One might even say that just as Moshe was willing to give his life to save Am Israel, his reward is to carry Am Israel on his shoulders. One could say the same about Rav Kahane.

There is joy in clarity and attaching yourself to truth and rising to the occasion to serve and to lead and to follow the great ones who preceded you. Being part of something greater than yourself makes you a greater person and reveals hidden things. Being a servant to a king is like a king. When we increase our commitment, even though the days look dark and we are between a war in the south and a war in the north, we know that our isolation is leading to malchut.

Though multitudes are now marching to the devils' drum, we are on the side of the prophets and the scholar warriors who sustain the world through the holiness of Hashem, his Torah and his Nation. Purim is a time we proclaim that we will erase the memory of Amalek. It would be good to also remember the Shoam stones, the stones of Zikaron, that hold Am Israel from the top down as well as the bottom up. When there is understanding and vision and attachment to our people, our Torah and our God, there is joy – even if we are just *ata*, we are part of something great.

Though our abilities are limited, the path has been cleared, we simply need to walk it. The power of the small is great if you see it, and grasp the chain from above to connect the Shoham from below. These are challenging times and we must persevere and not give in to political pressure for ceasefires without destroying Hamas and resettling Gaza by Jews. Rav Kahane used to say that we have already won, because we have the authentic idea, but we need to continually fight for it. When there is simple faith from below, then there is joy of fulfilling the task at hand and adding another brick to the road of Geula. Despite despair and though we may be small and leaderless, if we continue on the path we will flower and grow and cause others to grow. With this in mind, along with the bitterness of the *ata* that forges forward, something sweet can be found hidden inside the hard crust of the hamentashen.

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