

Night And Day Become One

This week's parsha, Vaeschanan, has the verse, "You should teach them to your children (students, Rashi), and you should discuss them, when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, and when you lay down and when you rise."

From this verse we learn two foundational mitzvahs, to recite the shema twice a day, once in the morning and once at night, and to learn Torah.

It is strange, that these two mitzvahs have such different laws, almost opposite, when they are learned from the same verse.

Shema has to be recited in the morning and at night and you are done. We also say blessings for the mitzvah, both in the morning and at night.

Learning Torah, is a mitzvah that is not at specific times, but all day, and its blessings are said once in the morning and it covers all day long.

It would make sense to be the opposite way around. Because the study of Torah has the divisions of night and day, as well as different levels of study. For example, if one doesn't understand the oral Torah, he is not allowed to recite the blessing. Because it has to be understood, and when it comes to understanding, everybody is at a different level. Also, different people, learn better at different times of the day.

The Midrash asks, "How did Moshe know when it was day and when it was night? Rather, at the time that Hashem taught him scripture, he knew it was day, and when He taught him Mishnah, he knew that it was night." So we see that Torah study has the division of night and day.

On the other hand, reciting the shema, is about accepting the yoke of Heaven, and the oneness of Hashem, which are constant thought obligations.

Why is shema connected to night and day, while Torah study is not?

The life of a person, is divided into days, and every day is divided into morning and evening. As it says, "And it was evening and it was morning, one day."

In this verse can be found the purpose of existence, to make a dwelling place for Hashem in this world, which is the lowest realm, and there is nothing lower. Our job is not to negate the lowly physical world, but rather to make the lowest possible place itself into a home for Hashem, that his essence could be at home in even the lowest part of existence. In other words, the "morning," the brightest and highest level of Hashem, should be able to dwell in the "evening," the darkest and lowest part of existence. So that they become "one day," the highest and the lowest levels united as one.

This is the idea of reciting the shema, the unity of Hashem in all of existence. As our sages say, that when you say the word "echad" in the shema, "You should have in mind, when you say the Aleph (of echad, which has the numerical value of 1), that Hashem is one, when you say the ches (8), that He is unique in the seven heavens and the earth, which equals 8, and the daled (4), hints to the four directions." In other words, that Hashem is united in all of existence equally.

The shema is saying that there are the different parts of existence, and from the highest to the lowest, Hashem is one. Shema, is uniting the highest, "morning," and the lowest, "evening," as one. Shema is all about existence, the heavens and the earth and all four directions. Therefore it is connected to morning and evening, but not as two separate entities, but rather, as the factor that unites them.

On the other hand, Torah, although it effects existence, it is above and beyond existence, and it's not effected by it. As our sages say, "They are words of fire, just as fire can't become impure, so too, the words of Torah can't become impure." They are not affected by the world, because Torah is above and beyond existence.

Another reason is found in the effect we have in the world through these two modes of service to Hashem, reciting shema and studying Torah.

Reciting shema, as mentioned above, is to make the physical world into a home for Hashem. We do this by affecting the world around us to be less coarse, and nullify itself, to the point that Hashem is comfortable there. And this work continues, we have to try to attain higher and higher levels. Meaning, that we get the world more and more refined, so that greater levels of G-dliness can be at home in the world.

Every time we reach a new level, it is bringing light to the darkness of the world, morning into the evening. However, every time we reach a new level, we have to evaluate the situation, and realize that there is higher to go. The current level is dark in contrast to the higher level we wish to attain. And this is the constant progression of reciting shema, darkness to light, night to day, filling the world with ever greater levels of G-dliness. So the mode of service of reciting shema, is all about evening and morning.

On the other hand, Torah, being that its purpose is not to accomplish this unity, because it is higher, and compared to it, the whole world is completely nullified, the idea of night and day are irrelevant.

Another difference between reciting shema and studying Torah, is that being that reciting shema is nullifying the world through a person's work, it is subject to vary according to where the person is at the moment. Because we all have ups and downs, even a Tzadik, as King Shlomo said, "A Tzadik can fall seven times and rise." Sometimes we are in a position of light, close to Hashem, other times we feel that it is dark and that we are distant. The mitzvah of reciting shema is both when it's dark and when it's light, to tell us that whether it is dark or light, we have to do the work of making this place into a home for Hashem. And no matter how dark it gets, we have the ability to effect the world.

On the other hand, Torah, is above the whole idea of the world, and it is not affected by the ups and

downs of the person's spirit, and so the idea of night and day don't apply to it.

How do we rise above even when things are dark? The mitzvah of reciting shema is also considered learning Torah. Being that Torah study is above all of existence, and it's not affected by ups and downs, we have the ability to rise above.

Now we can understand why the two mitzvahs are found in the same verse, because the mitzvah of studying Torah, is what lifts us above and enables us to do the work of reciting shema, transforming the world, even when things are dark.

I see this in my own life. Hashem has placed me and my family in a very dark and bitter situation, but thanks to my wife and children, and thanks to all of you who motivate, support and are supportive of what I am trying to do, I am able to rise above, connect to people and bring some light into the world, through studying and teaching Torah.

May we merit to unite day and night, may our darkness turn into light, and this exile come to an end with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Tu B'Av And Nachamu Everlasting

The way our calendar is set up, parshas Vaeschanan is always Shabbos Nachamu, when we read the first Haftora of consolation, Nachamu Nachamu Ami, console console My nation. It is also the Shabbos right before or after Tu B'Av, and sometimes it falls on this Shabbos itself. Tu B'Av is the 15th of Av, of which the Mishnah tells us, "There weren't holidays for Israel, like the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." In other words, the holidays of Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur are ranked as the greatest holidays we have.

What is the connection between parshas Vaeschanan, Nachamu Nachamu and Tu B'Av? Why is Tu B'Av so great?

From the words of the Mishnah, it seems that Tu B'Av is even greater than Pesach, Shavuoth and Sukkos. Why is Tu B'Av so great?

The Pri Eitz Chaim, which is a work of Kabbalah, says that it is because at that time the moon is full. But aren't Pesach and Sukkos also on the 15th of the month, when the moon is full? So what makes Tu B'Av greater than Pesach and Sukkos?

The answer that is given to this question, is that because Tu B'Av comes in contrast to Tisha B'Av and the Three Weeks, the saddest time on the Jewish calendar when our Temples were destroyed and we were thrown into exile, therefore it is the greatest holiday.

You may ask, doesn't Pesach also come in contrast to the exile in Egypt? What makes Tu B'Av greater than Pesach?

The exile in Egypt was before we received the Torah. When we received the Torah, we became a "Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation." When we went into exile after the destruction of the Temple, it was the exile of a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation, which is a more painful exile than the Egyptian exile, in which we were just a nation.

Tu B'Av represents the opposite of Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av we went into exile because of our sins. As we read in the Yom Tov Mussaf prayer, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land." Tu B'Av, on the other hand, is a time of forgiveness of sin, that's why the Mishnah mentions it together with Yom Kippur, which is also a time of forgiveness of sin. Tu B'Av represents what is accomplished through our descent into exile, the coming of Moshiach and everlasting life. For the greater the descent, the greater is the ascent that follows. It is our efforts in this dark and bitter exile, that accomplishes the coming of Moshiach, which is everlasting, and the building of the Third Temple, that will be everlasting.

The Mishnah continues to say, that on Yom Kippur and on Tu B'Av, the daughters of Jerusalem (or Israel) would go out to the vineyards and dance.

What moved them to dance specifically on those two days? The daughters of Israel sensed Hashem's joy, forgiving us, that filled them with joy, and so they danced.

Vaeschanan means and I prayed. Moshe prayed that he should lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel. The reason that he wanted to lead them into the land, was because everything that Moshe did was everlasting. He knew that if he would lead the Jewish people into Israel and build the Temple, it would be everlasting and no exile would follow. In other words, Moshiach would come.

When it says Nachamu Nachamu, it is referring to us being consoled when Moshiach comes. The double expression of Nachamu, doesn't mean just two, rather it means multiple, everlasting, that we will be consoled forever.

Now we see how Vaeschanan, Nachamu and Tu B'Av are connected. They are about the coming of Moshiach and everlasting life. Now that we have descended to the lowest possible place in the exile, and accomplished our mission, it is time for Moshiach to come and lead us to the greatest and everlasting ascent. May it happen soon, the time has come.

Nachamu Nachamu

This week's Haftora is the first of seven consoling the Jewish people. After The Three Weeks of darkness and destruction, Hashem consoles us through his prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah), each week, the consoling gets more and more powerful.

This Shabbos is called Shabbos Nachamu, because the Haftora starts with Hashem's words to Yishayahu, "Nachamu nachamu ami, console console my nation."

Being that this is the first Haftora of consoling, shouldn't it begin with one Nachamu, a basic level of consoling, and add as we do in the coming

weeks? What is the idea of Nachamu Nachamu, the double expression of consoling?

A double expression such as Nachamu Nachamu, means more than two, rather, it is an expression of multiple in quality and quantity. Not only is this consoling of greater intensity, but it is ongoing. And being that this is the first Nachamu of the seven Haftoras of consoling, it is this one that sets the standard for all subsequent expressions of consoling.

In a few weeks, we will read in the Haftora another double expression. As of now, Hashem is asking his prophets to console us, but there, He will take it to a new level, "It is I, it is I Who consoles you." This double "I," is Hashem saying, that it is coming from the deepest level of His essence. Even deeper than the giving of the Ten Commandments, which begins with only one "I," "I Am the Lord your G-d..." This is because when Moshiach comes and we will experience Hashem's consoling, the revelation will be even greater than the one at Mount Sinai, it will be Hashem's deepest essence.

It is true, with the devastation that befell our people during the Three Weeks, one would think, take it slow, first console a little, how can we handle so much? But being Jewish, we know, that we are always close to Hashem, even in times of exile and darkness, He is one with us. Hashem is saying, "Nachamu Nachamu," you can handle the double Nachamu, with all its intensity.

This is especially relevant now, when we are so close to the coming of Moshiach, and the darkness is doubled. We must realize, that only our physical existence is in exile, however our spiritual essence is always free and one with Hashem. Soon we will see the fruit of our labor, a double Nachamu, as the physical will also be free, and it will experience Hashem's essence as well, as our Haftora says, "And Hashem's glory will be revealed, and all flesh together will see, that the mouth of G-d spoke."

My wife, Dina, asked me, "When every month you were losing more and more abilities, you just said, 'let's figure out how to deal with it,' how come it

didn't seem to faze you?" I told her that I am just crazy. But the truth is, that I am certain, that Hashem is doing this to me for a good reason, and I feel like He has chosen me for a specific mission. I don't necessarily like being unable to do anything and I surely don't wish this on anyone, but if Hashem put me in this situation, I will use it to accomplish His mission. Soon this mission will end, and the bad situation will be unnecessary.

The same thing is true for all of us in this exile. Hashem chose us to accomplish His deepest desire. He put us here, in this dark exile, to accomplish this mission, because it is only here that it can be accomplished. Very soon, because of our efforts, the mission will be accomplished and we will reap the rewards. This exile will end and we will truly be consoled, forever, like the Haftora says, Nachamu Nachamu. May it happen soon.

Break Out

In this week's parsha, Vaeschanan, we read how Hashem took for Himself "a nation from within a nation." The Jewish people from within the Egyptians. Moshe is expressing how this only happened for us. Never has one nation been taken out from within another, aside for the Jewish people from Egypt.

Why is this detail important for us to know? What lesson can we take from here for our personal lives?

Egypt in Hebrew is Mitzrayim, which is from the word maytzar, constraint. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He removed us from all constraints, physical, psychological and spiritual. When we cleave to Hashem and His Torah we are open and free. The only constraints we have, are the ones we accept upon ourselves.

In every situation we have the ability to be free. Even in this dark exile, where the world seems against us. Even in our personal lives, as each of us has difficulties, suffering, and pain.

It is our choices that express our free nature, not our predicaments. In every situation we find a way to free our essence, our Jewishness.

Today this seems harder than ever, as there is great temptation to be like "them" (non-Jews). But we have been there before, and if you try, Hashem will surely help you free yourself from your Egypt.

On a more subtle level, those whose Jewish observance is because he wants to be like "them" (other Jews), need to ask if they are proper role models. Are they stuck in a religious Egypt? Does their fervor turn them to dislike those who don't share their convictions? This is not a free person, he also needs to free himself from his false religious notions. For his way is also not "Jewish."

On a deeper level. Each of us have the ability to free ourselves from our current level and reach higher plateaus. Yesterday's freedom is today's Egypt. If you are not growing you are not free. If you could ask yourself: How can I improve myself? How can I get closer to Hashem? Then you are free.

Finally, realize, that to get closer to Hashem, you need to love his children, and see them as "us," not "them," including those you deem less observant or more observant.

Loving each other is the key to our redemption, it is how we break the chains of this exile. Perhaps that is why it is so difficult, nevertheless, we will overcome this as well. May it happen soon.

Listen, Understand, Love

In this week's Parsha, Vaeschanan, in the second verse of the Shema, we are commanded, "And you should love Hashem..."

When it comes to loving someone, you either do or don't. You cannot be commanded to love another. How then do we fulfill this commandment?

Hashem wants to be understood, known. The more we understand about Hashem, the more we love him. Being that Hashem is infinite, there is always more to know.

To be loved, is to be understood.

Most women know this naturally, as they yearn to be understood. When they are understood, they feel loved.

To understand, you must listen. To listen is to remove one's personal understanding and feelings on the subject and hear it from the other one's perspective totally. To listen is not just about hearing, it's about picking up on nuances such as facial expressions, body language and hints. To experience the other.

Again, most women naturally know how to listen, most men do not, hence the complaint "he doesn't listen." Good listening takes effort and could be exhausting.

Hashem is saying, "try to understand Me, from My perspective." Hints are found all over the Torah. Pick up on the hints, listen.

Hashem is asking us to understand why He created this world? How do we fit in the scheme of things? He wants us understand Him, to know Him.

A hint to this is found in the first verse of the shema.

Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad.
Listen Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.

In the Torah, this verse has two oversized letters, ayin and dalet, Together they make up the Hebrew word, "da," to know or understand.

Shema Yisrael, If you will listen. Da, You will understand. That Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One. In other words, what Hashem is all about. V'ahavta..., and then you will love Hashem...

Knowing Hashem's purpose, will motivate and animate you, as you will find deep meaning in fulfilling Hashem's will. Not from a feeling of obligation but rather from love.

Listen, understand, love.

(For anyone wanting a deeper understanding of Hashem. I would suggest learning Chabad chassidus. Contact your local Chabad Rabbi for more info.)