1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah
A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

PARSHAS VAESCHANAN – SHEMA YISRAEL

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

In this week's Parsha we find the quintessential affirmation of our faith and our belief in Hashem. It is a mandated daily proclamation and the last words that a Jew utters before departing from this world: "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" (Devarim 6,4). The Rema (Orach Chaim 61:14) translates this pasuk as follows: "Hear O Yisrael, that Hashem who is our G-d, Hashem is One".

However, Rashi renders the meaning differently: "Hear O Yisrael, Hashem who is now our G-d and not the G-d of the [other] nations – He is destined to be Hashem who is one… as it says, 'On that day, Hashem will be one and His name will be one'" (Zecharia 14,9). The R'eim, Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi, asks the obvious question: How is this statement an affirmation of Hashem's oneness? We are merely stating that in the future all the nations will realize that He is one.

The Maharal explains that not only is this declaration an affirmation of Hashem's unity, it also provides evidence to this assertion. Since Hashem will ultimately be recognized by every human being as a perfect oneness, this demonstrates that His unity is indisputable. On that day everyone will come to realize that not only is Hashem the only G-d, but also that He is and was the only cause and determiner of all events. Although we are the only ones who recognize it now, our assertion of His oneness is absolutely correct.

The Gemara in Pesachim (56a) reveals to us the source of the verse "Baruch Sheim Kevod Malchuso L'olam Va'ed" which we add to our recitation of the Shema. Yaakov Avinu gathered his sons around his deathbed and sought to reveal to them the time of the ultimate redemption. However, at that moment the Divine Presence departed from him. Yaakov asked his sons, "Perhaps there is one among my progeny who is unworthy – just like Yishmael who came from Avraham or Eisav who came from my father Yitzchak?" His sons replied, "Shema Yisrael – Hear Yisrael (our father) Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one. Just as in your heart there is only one [G-d], so too in our hearts there is only one [G-d]." To this Yaakov responded, "Baruch Sheim Kevod Malchuso L'olam Va'ed – Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity." Two questions come to mind. Why did Yaakov respond in this manner? And why did Chazal append this statement to the Shema?

Yaakov was well aware that the rest of the world at his time – even his brother Eisav and his uncle Yishmael – did not subscribe to the belief in one G-d. He understood that, in essence, his sons were telling him that even though no one else believes in the oneness of Hashem, we – all of your sons – do truly believe that Hashem is one. Yaakov, who was thinking then about the ultimate redemption, expressed the fervent hope that one day not only would his own children utter such an affirmation, but that all of mankind would recognize Hashem's unity. For indeed this is the true goal of all of Creation!

Chazal wanted us to follow Yaakov's example. When we recite the Shema, our own affirmation of His oneness, according to Rashi we also acknowledge that Hashem is only our G-d, but not the G-d of the other nations. Therefore, this declaration is incomplete until the entire human race acknowledges this too. Only on that day will "Hashem be one and His Name one." Thus, we follow it with a prayer that Hashem will reign supreme unto eternity. Baruch Sheim Kevod Malchuso L'olam Va'ed!

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

Please contact R' Ungar (Ymungar@gmail.com) with questions or comment

QUESTION: ליל שבת we were sitting and enjoying our סעודה and all of a sudden there was loud music emanating from our mp3 player. One of our small toddlers was playing with it and turned on the music. What may we do to get it turned off?

ANSWER: One may hint to a גוי to turn it off, and if that doesn't work then you may even tell the גוי directly. The הלכות of אמירה לעכו"ם are very complicated which needs to be learned well. In short, electricity is an איסור דרבנן according to many poskim, and when there is big need asking a גוי to do a דרבנן is okay. This is called a שבות דשבות במקום צורך הרבה. When there is loud music playing on שבת there is definitely a great need to get it off. The same would apply to a house alarm that is blaring on שבת. If one can hint that is better as you sidestep the גוי. The hinting needs to be שלא בדרך ציווי to the אמירה, meaning in a way that is not a direct hint. "It is so noisy in here with that music playing," is a hint with an indirect directive to shut the music. Hinting to turn on a light which will result in a positive benefit is not allowed, but when the result is a lack of something, like turning off music or closing a light, then hinting in an indirect way is okay. There are other עצות if no גוי is available so ask your Rov if need be.

עי' או"ח סימן ש"ז סעי' ה' לגבי שבות דשבות וסעי' כ"ב ומשנה ברורה ס"ק ע"ו לגבי דיני רמיזא. יש עוד עצה להניח תינוק קטן שלא הגיע לחינוך אצל הדבר שצריך לכבות אלא שאסור אפי' לרמוז שום דבר לתינוק לכבות. ויש עוד עצות. תש"ח.

Question 1:
What mitzvah can you do while crossing the street?

Question 2:
This week's haftarah begins, "Nachamu nachamu." Who is speaking to whom, and what does it mean?

LEAVING TEFILLIN BEHIND

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

A man named Moshe once traveled to the USSR, behind the Iron Curtain during the 70's. While visiting the city of Leningrad, he met hundreds of Jews. When he told them he had tefillin, many lined up for the opportunity to put them on. He was able to inspire and teach countless Jews who were deeply thirsty for Torah and their heritage.

Eventually, he had to leave. But he realized that once he left, these hundreds of Jews would no longer have access to tefillin. He did not know of any other tefillin in the city. He began to wonder: Should he leave his tefillin behind?

The problem was that if he did, he wouldn't have tefillin to use during his travels. He would end up missing the mitzvah for at least one day. So he asked Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv: Would it be permitted to miss one day of tefillin so that hundreds of people could put it on for the next hundreds of days, or even years?

Perhaps you could argue that if he missed one day, the merit of all those mitzvos would go to his credit. Or maybe we say that one is not allowed to miss tefillin, even if it enables hundreds of others to fulfill the mitzvah for many more days.

What do you think? Can he miss one day, so that hundreds can gain for many more? See Veharev Na Volume Four, Hebrew Edition.

Regarding last week's question about the landlord who left the Arab plumber alone, Rav Zilberstein (V'haarev Na, Volume 4, Hebrew Edition, page 50) wrote that the landlord is liable for all of the damages. This is not even considered a grama, and he is liable in full.

IF I MUST DIE, I'M HAPPY IT'S AFTER BECOMING PART OF A GROUP OF BNEI TORAH

Yaakov Wexler's short yet inspirational life was a powerful testament to emunah. In the 1920s, Mr. Yerachmiel Wexler, a wealthy Jew in Chicago, met Rav Yaakov Volk, who spoke passionately about Eretz Yisrael. Deeply moved, Mr. Wexler stayed in touch with the Rav and was inspired to visit the Holy Land.

In 1928, the Wexlers traveled to Israel, investing in various ventures, including land near Rishon LeZion. During their visit to Chevron, their 16-year-old son Yaakov, a student at the Hebrew Theological College in Chicago, visited the Slabodka Yeshivah and immediately felt at home. He pleaded with his parents to let him stay, and with assurances from American bochurim to look after him, they agreed.

Yaakov flourished in yeshivah life, studying diligently and even hiring Rav Efraim Sokolover as a tutor to catch up with the level of learning. In a letter home, he wrote: "If life means luxury, I miss that. But by my definition, I am truly happy."

In the tragic Chevron massacre of August 1929, Yaakov took refuge with others in the home of Eliezer Don Slonim. As the mob broke in, Yaakov clung to Rav Sokolover, weeping, and said: "If I must die, I'm happy it's after becoming part of a group of bnei Torah. Thank you for teaching me Torah and mitzvos." An axe blow ended his life.

Crushed with guilt, Rav Volk, who inspired Yaakov to learn in Eretz Yisrael, avoided returning to Chicago, fearing confrontation with the Wexlers—until a chance encounter in New York.

It turned out that Mr. Wexler bore no bitterness at all. "My son had a decree to live 17 years," he said to Rav Volk. "Thanks to you, he spent them learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael and died as a ben Torah. There is no greater merit than that. I remain forever grateful to you for that."

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Answer to question 1:
"V'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoseichem"– protecting oneself – by looking both ways and crossing carefully.

הגר"ח קנייבסקי זצ"ל, הובא בס' כאשר צוה ה' ע' קפ"ג

Answer to question 2:
Hashem tells the neviim, "Comfort Bnei Yisrael after their suffering."

Source: Pischai Parsha

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Good Shabbos!