

SHEMA YISROEL - FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Parshas (Vaeschanan, Aikev, Re-ai) Shoftim

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The recital of Shema Yisroel is a fundamental principle of Torah connecting several portions in Chumosh Devorim. The first portion of Shema is found in Vaeschanan; the second in Parshas Aikev. An essay to link Parshas Aikev, Re-ai to Shema is hereby enclosed.

In Parshas Shoftim the recital of Shema is emphasized in the context of involvement (chas v'shalom) in a war against enemies. The Kohain (special) declared "Shema Yisroel... Be courageous..." (Devorim 20:3). If you observe this Mitzva of the daily recital of Shema, for this alone you have earned Heavenly assistance to achieve victory (Rashi from Midrash).

Apparently, Shema is more than a single mitzvah. It is an expression of total adherence, heart and soul, to Torah and Mitzvohs.



DAILY TIKUN FOR THE AIGEL

Parshas Aikev - Supplement, Parshas Re'eh

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

A most intriguing statement in the Daf Yomi this week (Brochos 7a), coinciding with the Parsha of this week, solicits clarification. It is about the tragic blunder of the golden calf. This dreadful transgression caused “unbearable” divine anger, not easily forgiven. Moshe, the loyal all-time protector of Israel, seeks desperately to intercede on their behalf, for their survival’s sake. Says Shmuel (Brochos 32a) “Vayechal Moshe” Moshe pleaded before Hashem (Shemos 32:11), this teaches that Moshe risked his life for their sake, as he stated “And now do forgive them, but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written” (32:32). “Vayechal” from “Cholol” (Rashi), as in “m’dam cholol”, blood of a corpse (Devorim 32:42).

Hashem’s response is puzzling: Hashem relented from His intention against His people and replace it with Moshe. Forgiveness, however, was not immediately granted, “My anger will be eased, then you will get Menucha” (33:14, according to Targum Yonoson) “Wait until my countenance of anger passes, then I shall give you rest” (Brochos 7a).

How perplexing: we learn in this week’s Pirkei Avoth (5:14) “He whom it is hard to anger and easy to pacify, is a chosid”. How can one fathom the Ribono Shel Olom Himself being “hard to pacify”!?

For Hashem even this should not be so hard to pacify. When Cain killed his brother Hevel (Beraishis 4:8) he acknowledged the gravity of his crime, yet he pleaded “for Hashem is this iniquity too great to be borne?” (ibid. 4:13).

One wishes to suggest, that in addition to the very sin of idol worship, the case of the golden calf was intolerable because “SARU MAHAIR” They have strayed QUICKLY from the way that I have commanded them” (Shmos 32:8, and again in Parshas Aikev 9:12). The sin was more repugnant because it was committed so soon following the experience of Sinai and accepting the ONOCHI of the Ten Commandments.

The Talmud (Shabos 88b) compares the sudden speedy downfall while still at Sinai to the shameful bride running off with a stranger while still in the “bridal chamber”. “How brazen is the bride who is unfaithful while still at the chupa”.

Moshe is also requested to speed his descent from the mount. Hashem spoke to Moshe “go descend, for your people has become corrupt” (Shemos 32:7). In Parshas Aikev we read Hashem commanding Moshe “Descend ‘Quickly’ (MAHAIR) from here...” The speed seems a central point, just as the speedy turning away from Hashem is a central point.

This may offer comprehension to the lack of speed in granting forgiveness, measure for measure. The Chosid indeed is hard to become angry and fast to forgive, as quoted above. But to undo and recant the SPEEDY transgression of the idol worship requires slowing down, tarrying the official coveted word “SOLACHTI” (I have forgiven). That auspicious moment, stating clearly and unequivocally “SOLACHTI”, came forty days later, Rosh Chodesh Elul. A great Torah scholar once said that when we quote the statement SOLACHTI on Yom Kippur eve, following Kol Nidrai the Birchas “SHECHEYONU” which follows in honor of the arrival of Yom Kippur may also include a Shecheyonu on the attainment of the Solachti.

The Mitzvohs of the Torah observed on certain days have the leniency of the complete day for the observance. The Mishna (Megila 20b) mentions twenty-one special mitzvohs with no hour limit for its observance. There is only one exception, which is the Mitzva to read the Shema. This observance, the declaration of Hashem Echod, acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, is limited to the earlier hours of the day, no later than three hours following sunrise (Mishna Brochos 9b). The reason, one conjectures, is that this declaration is a TIKUN rectification for the sin of the idol worship, the Aigel. “Hashem Echod”. In order to rectify, likewise, the speed SORU MAHAIR, we recite the Shema in the earlier hours of the day.



CHILDREN OF HASHEM

Parshas Re'eh

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The assertion in last week's essay "Daily Tikun for the Aigel", that the daily recital of Shema possesses the capacity to rectify the sin of the Aigel, may be substantiated by the following: The second portion of Shema, Vehoya im Shomoa, begins and ends with a positive – the reward of blessings for the observance of the mitzvohs. It includes, however, the negative results if the Torah will be ignored, violated. "Beware... lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray, and serve gods of others and prostrate yourselves to them". Here the Sifri, quoted also in Yalkut (869), clearly refers to the tragic experience of the Golden Calf (Aigel). "Before their idols you would prostrate?! They have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it."

The fundamental Halachic requirement to read the Shema (all three portions) morning and evening, thus, may justly be considered a TIKUN for the sin of the Aigel. For it is not merely a mitzvah to be read; it is the heart and soul commitment to be sincerely and honestly devoted to Hashem and his Torah.

According to the above that it was SPEED of the straying from the Sinai experience that caused the delay of "Solachti", it is understandable that the word "speedily" is used in the second portion of the Shema. "Beware... lest you turn astray... you will be speedily/swiftly banished from the goodly land.

The Sifri points out that when Israel became sinful during both Botai Mikdash (Temples), Hashem was compassionate and patient, postponing the exile until many years later. The word "Mehairo" expresses the stringency of the legal penalty, corresponding to the "Maher" of the "aigel". But in practice, compassion overwhelmed

the strictness of the penalty law. [Similarly, the Torah speaks of “an eye for an eye (Shemos 21:24) though, as the Oral Law explains, the assailant must pay the monetary value of an eye].

Reiterating the above thesis that the “speed” (earlier hours of the day) to read the Shema is a TIKUN for the “Mehairo” of the Aigel, it still remains to expound the reason of the maximum three hours after sunrise.

The Talmud states (Kesubos 17): “A king cannot forgo his honor, whereas a father for the sins of his son can. How, then, can reading the Shema atone for the sin of the Aigel? Especially is the question challenging since the Shema is counted (in Rosh Hashana Musaf) as one of the ten utterances of Malchios (Kingdom).

The answer is found in Parshas Re-eh where the Torah states: “You are children to Hashem your G-d” (Devorim 14:1). Thus, Hashem is our Father, and in that capacity He may forgive our sins.

Reciprocally, once the Children of Israel are to be forgiven, they call upon Hashem, our Father in Heaven. The extended three hour schedule for reading the Shema in the morning is based on the sleeping habits of princes who rise in the morning up to three hours after sunrise (Brochos 9b). How does this justify extending the schedule for most people who rise early? The answer is “we are all princes” (Tiferes Ysroel Brochos Mishna 2).

This title is more than a compliment to the Children of Israel. For it raises their status to be considered the Children of the King of Israel. As such, they can attain atonement. For a father may forgive the iniquities of his children. Says Reb Akiva, “How fortunate you are O Israel! Before Whom do you cleanse yourselves, and Who cleanses you? Your Father in Heaven” (Mishna Yuma 85b).

