

לעילוי נשמת
מרת עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה וסרטל
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



על דשא

AL EI DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"a of Gur

The Foreign God Within Us

לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני.

You shall not have other gods before

Me. (Devarim 5:7)

We say the blessing of *Yotzer ha'adam* — He who forms man, at *sheva brachos*, thanking Hashem for the creation of

Every Jewish soul carries an inner knowledge that only Hashem truly exists, leaving no place for partnership, personal agendas, or self-serving motives.

humanity. Yet this seems difficult to understand. Chazal conclude (*Eruvin* 13b) that because it is so difficult to withstand the tests of the *yetzer hara*, it would have been preferable for man never to have been created. How, then, could Chazal establish a *brachah* over the creation of man?

This difficulty can be addressed through a teaching of the Berdichever Rebbe, who posed a profound question: If Hashem's nature is to bestow good, and the world

was created solely for the purpose of bestowing goodness, how can the creation of man run counter to that purpose? How can the formation of man, whose existence Chazal saw as more harmful than beneficial, be reconciled with a creation founded on goodness?

The Kedushas Levi explains that this is in fact the deepest kindness of all. Precisely because it is better for man not to have been created, and because he would never choose existence on his own, the soul's descent into this world is an act of obedience to Hashem's will. The soul resists descending into this world and descends only because Hashem desires it. In doing so, it immediately fulfills a mitzvah. Man's very first breath is an offering to Hashem. If the creation had been for any other reason, it would not be a pure fulfillment of Hashem's will. This is the ultimate kindness.

Although it would have been preferable for man not to have been created, we nonetheless recite the blessing *Yotzer ha'adam* to thank Hashem for creating man not for his own benefit, but solely to fulfill the will of the Creator.

The Kedushas Levi on the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 5:7), לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני, — *You shall not have other gods before*
cont. on page 2

When the Mouth Precedes the Eyes: The Alef-Beis of Tikkun and Churban

פצו עליך פיהם כל איביר שרקו ויחרקו שון אמרו
בלענו אך זה היום שקוינו מצאנו ראינו.

All your enemies opened their mouths wide against you; they hissed and gnashed their teeth. They said, "We have swallowed her up!" Indeed, this is the day we longed for — we have found it, we have seen it. (Eichah 2:16)

Eichah, the lament we read on Tishah B'Av, is structured according to the *alef-beis*. Yet in chapters 2 through 4, the usual sequence is broken, with *pei* preceding *ayin*. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 104b; *Eichah Rabbah* 2:20) explain that this reflects a deep flaw: The people spoke with their mouths what their eyes had not seen.

The Gemara interprets this as a reference to the spies, who resolved to slander Eretz Yisrael before they had even laid eyes upon it. Their sin led to the first night of weeping, establishing a pattern of tears for future generations. The Midrash extends this failing to the generations near the time of the *Churban*, whose words lacked integrity.

Yet we must delve deeper to understand this point.

The Gemara's language suggests that the reversal of *ayin* and *pei* serves not just to expose the spies' sin, as their sin is already fully recorded in the Torah, but as a form of measure-for-

cont. on page 3

The Foreign God Within Us

cont. from page 1

Me, cites the Mechilta (*Rashi* to *Shemos* 20:3), which explains that *before Me* means as long as I exist. One might have thought that the prohibition against *avodah zarah* applies only to the generation that received the Torah in the wilderness. Therefore, the *pasuk* says *before Me* — just as I am eternal, so too the prohibition is binding for all generations.

How is it possible to think that only that generation was forbidden to serve idols? Belief in Hashem is the most basic requirement; why would we imagine that any generation would be exempt from that?

The Berditchever Rebbe explains that while the prohibition against *avodah zarah* applies to all generations, the generation that received the Torah experienced a uniquely elevated revelation. They heard the commandments directly from Hashem and were even raised above the angels. In that moment, they perceived the absolute Oneness of the Almighty so clearly that the notion of *shituf*, the idea that Hashem might delegate control to intermediaries like angels or stars, was entirely unthinkable.

In contrast, the nations of the world, who did not receive the commandments directly from Hashem, are not held to the same standard regarding *shituf*. Their obligation is only to recognize the existence of Hashem, even if they believe that He governs through other forces or beings.

In this vein, the Mechilta addresses a possible misconception: One might think that only the generation that heard the Torah directly from Hashem and perceived His Oneness with utter clarity was forbidden from believing in *shituf*. Later generations, lacking that experience, might seem comparable to the nations of the world and therefore not held to the same standard.

To this, the Torah responds: *Before Me*, for as long as I exist. Hashem is eternal, and the words He spoke at Sinai are forever engraved in the Jewish soul. Every generation carries within it a spiritual awareness of Hashem's unity and is thus equally obligated to believe in Hashem's absolute Oneness, without any form of partnership.

Chazal teach that the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* succeeded in eradicating the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zarah*. Yet, as the Midrash¹ notes, its power did not disappear — rather, it was redirected into the *yetzer hara* for sins involving forbidden relationships, which became even more powerful. The holy *sefarim*² explain that the drive for idolatry transformed into the desire for wealth and indulgence in worldly matters. All these drives, whether for forbidden relationships or wealth, are ultimately expressions of one thing: rebellion against Hashem's will. No matter its form, the *yetzer hara's* purpose is to divert a person from fulfilling Hashem's will.

Every desire that opposes Torah is a rebellion against the will of Hashem.

This idea is also included in the prohibition against *shituf*. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 105b) describes the *yetzer hara* as an *el zar*, a foreign god residing within a person. This means that even while serving Hashem, a person may be serving himself as well — his desires and personal ambitions. The danger lies in the duality, when Hashem is not served alone.

Every Jewish soul carries an inner knowledge that only Hashem truly exists, leaving no place for partnership, personal agendas, or self-serving motives.

Hashem commanded our souls to descend into this material world to serve Him. The *Tiferes Shlomo* explains the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 4:5), ראה למדתני אתכם הקים ומשפטים כאשר, — See, I have taught you... as Hashem my G-d has commanded me, to do so in the midst of the land, that Hashem placed us specifically in a world of physicality so that we would serve Him within it, through overcoming its struggles, distractions, and temptations.

(פרשת ואתחנן, שנת תשפ"ד, סעודה

שלישית, מאמר א' - לשבע ברכות)

1 Shir Hashirim Rabbah 7:13

2 Noam Elimelech, Iggeres Hakodesh, letter 1; Sefer Hachaim — Chaim Tovim, ch. 5

When the Mouth Precedes the Eyes: The Alef-Beis of Tikkun and Churban

cont. from page 1

measure consequence. This, however, begs a question: How does reversing the sequence of these letters, positioning *pei* before *ayin*, constitute a meaningful form of punishment for their wrongdoing?

To clarify this point we must first examine the Gemara (*Brachos* 4b): Whoever recites *Ashrei* three times a day is guaranteed a place in the World to Come.

The Gemara continues: Is this because *Ashrei* follows the order of the *alef-beis*? If so, one could recite Psalm 119, which follows an

The tzaddikim teach that to deceive oneself is even worse than deceiving others. But if a person examines himself sincerely, confronting his faults with integrity and expressing only what he has seen within his heart, then he is walking the true *derech hatikkun*, path of rectification.

eightfold alphabetical structure. Is it because it includes the *pasuk*, פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל — *You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing*? Then let one recite Psalm 136, which declares, נתן לחם — *He gives food to all flesh*.

The Gemara concludes: It is because *Ashrei* possesses both of these qualities that it is unique — it follows the *alef-beis* and includes the praise of Hashem sustaining the universe.

This requires clarification. We can understand why proclaiming Hashem's kindness in feeding all creatures is significant praise. But why is the alphabetical order so important?

The Tzlach, citing the *Mekubalim*, explains that the orderly progression of the *alef-beis* reflects the attribute of *chesed* (kindness). Just as the sequence of the letters progresses in a forward motion, so too Hashem's kindness flows and increases. In contrast, the reverse order of the *alef-beis* — תשר"ק — represents the attribute of *din* (judgment).

Thus, when Chazal teach that *Ashrei* contains two unique qualities — its alphabetical order and its mention of Hashem sustaining all life — they are not saying they are two separate themes, but one unified idea. Both the order of the *alef-beis* and the praise of Divine sustenance reflect the same attribute: Hashem's boundless kindness and His continuous care of every living creature.

Thus, the reversal of the *alef-beis* itself was a punishment for the generation of the spies. The order of the *alef-beis* was disrupted and they were unable to receive the flow of *chesed*. This was a precise measure-for-measure consequence, expressed in the rearrangement of *pei* before *ayin*, because they allowed their mouths to speak before their eyes had seen.

For this reason, it can also be understood why *vidui*, the confession of sins, follows the order of the *alef-beis*. When a person is engrossed in confessing his transgressions, why would he focus on arranging his words in alphabetical order? The explanation is that it is precisely this order that arouses the attribute of *chesed*, enabling our confession and repentance to be accepted.

However, the road to kindness and authentic repentance is reserved for those who guard their mouths from speaking what their eyes have not seen. A person must not live in self-deception, reciting confessions that do not stem from genuine introspection. One must not settle for illusions of self-improvement or imagine progress where none exists.

The *tzaddikim* teach that to deceive oneself is even worse than deceiving others. But if a person examines himself sincerely, confronting his faults with integrity and expressing only what he has seen within his heart, then he is walking the true *derech hatikkun*, path of rectification. The *alef-beis* then flows in the proper order, becoming a channel of *chesed*. But when people speak with their mouths what their eyes have not seen, failing to confront their true state, the *alef-beis* becomes disordered and blocked.

The holy Rebbe of Apta taught that Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, alludes to the 15th letter of the *alef-beis*, the letter *samech*. He explains that in the future, Hashem will form a circle for the righteous, shaped like the *samech*, symbolizing perfect *tikkun*. In that moment, each soul will stand exactly in the place for which it was uniquely created.

This teaching reveals that the month of Av is deeply connected to the structure of the *alef-beis*. However, this connection comes with a condition: True *tikkun* can only be attained when a person refrains from placing his mouth before his eyes. One must first look honestly inward and examine the depths of his soul to understand what must be corrected. Only then can he merit the *tikkun* and become a recipient of Hashem's *chesed*.

(פרשת ואתחנן, שנת תשפ"ד, סעודה שלישית, מאמר ב')

Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso: Revealing Hashem's Glory in the Darkness of Exile

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד

Hear, Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One. (Devarim 6:4)

Our *parashah* begins with the *pasuk* of *Krias Shema*: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד. The Gemara in *Pesachim* (56a) teaches that immediately following these words, we recite in a whisper the phrase, שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ, —*Blessed is the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever*, a line not actually found in the Torah. Why do we say this phrase quietly? The Gemara explains that we cannot proclaim it aloud, for Moshe Rabbeinu did not say it. Yet omitting it altogether would ignore Yaakov Avinu, who did recite it. To resolve this, Chazal instituted that it be said softly.

Rabbi Yitzchak added a parable to illustrate this: A princess once smelled the aroma of a stew. To ask for the stew would be below her dignity, yet to refrain would cause her distress. Therefore, her attendants brought it to her quietly.

The parables presented by Chazal are precise, with every detail carefully chosen. Therefore, we must examine each detail of this parable. What deeper lesson is conveyed through the metaphor of the stew brought discreetly to the princess? What is the intended parallel to our own service of Hashem?

We may explain this as follows: The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) states: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said: "I have created the *yetzer hara*, and I have created the Torah as its *tavlin*, antidote." This teaches us that in order to combat the *yetzer hara*, a person needs a counteracting antidote, a spice. The stew, which Rashi describes as a spicy dish, alludes to the idea that reciting בְּרוּךְ

שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד serves as an antidote to the *yetzer hara*.

The Maharam Shik³ asks: Why is the addition of the phrase שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד in *Krias Shema* not considered a transgression of *bal tosif*, the prohibition against adding to the mitzvos? He answers based on the *Ramban* (*Devarim* 4:2) in our *parashah*, who explains that any enactment established as a protective measure for the Torah is permitted, since the Torah itself commands Chazal to institute such safeguards. The question, however, remains: In what way does the recitation of שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד function as a safeguard?

The declaration of *Shema Yisrael* proclaims the absolute unity and Oneness of Hashem, affirming that nothing opposes or contradicts this reality. Yet in this world, darkness and concealment obscure His Oneness. Therefore, we say שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, asserting that Hashem's kingdom endures forever, even when it is hidden from view.

Chazal⁴ teach that the six wings of the angels correspond to the six words of בְּרוּךְ שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. However, following the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, two of these wings were removed (*Chagigah* 13b). The holy *sefarim*⁵ explain that the two lost wings correspond to the words מַלְכוּתוֹ, as the glory of Hashem's kingdom became concealed in *galus*. In such a state, where Hashem's rule is obscured, we need a safeguard to help us withstand the intense spiritual darkness. This is the deeper meaning of the stew: Reciting בְּרוּךְ שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד serves as a spiritual antidote, fortifying us to overcome the *yetzer hara* and to perceive the Oneness of Hashem even amidst the darkness of *galus*.

It is our responsibility to reveal Hashem's glory and fill the world with His presence. The Imrei Emes notes a profound insight on the *pasuk* (*Yeshayah* 6:3), וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ, — קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ. *And they call out to each other and say, "Holy... is Hashem... fill the whole earth with His glory."* The word מְלֵא is written with a *cholam*, not a *kamatz*, indicating that it is not a description, "the earth is filled," but a command:

It is specifically
in the depths of
darkness that
Hashem's glory
becomes revealed

Fill the whole earth with His glory. This teaches us that Hashem charges each individual with the mission to fill the world with His glory.

בְּרוּךְ שְׁמַע כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד lies in its power to reveal and fill the darkened world of exile with Hashem's glory. As we say in davening, תִּאִיר אֶרֶץ מִכְבוֹדְךָ, — *Let the earth be illuminated with Your glory.* This light emerges when we stand strong amidst trials and rise above the pull of earthly materialism. It is specifically in the depths of darkness that Hashem's glory becomes revealed. It is in the very place where one wonders אֵיךְ — *Where is the place of His glory*, that man's mission begins: to reveal Hashem's *kavod* in these concealed spaces.

(פרשת ואתחנן, שנת תשפ"ד, סעודה שלישית, מאמר ג')

³ *Orach Chaim, siman* 31

⁴ *Zohar, Ki Seitzei* 282b

⁵ *Ohev Yisrael*, Parashas Vayeishev, in the name of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk; *Avodas Yisrael, Likutim Orach Chaim, siman* 55