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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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THE SECRET OF TEFILLIN

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WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE SECRET OF TEFILLIN

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Part I. Son of Hashem

Who Took Us Out?

When the Haggadah shel Pesach describes the events in this week's sedrah, how the Bnei Yisroel were taken out of Mitzrayim to freedom, it makes what appears to be a strange comment. It quotes the *possuk* וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם – Hashem took us forth from Mitzrayim (Devarim 26:8) and then comments as follows: לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח – It was not done by means of a messenger, אלא הקב"ה בעצמו – it was Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself.

Actually, it's not only in the Haggadah; it's a Mechilta (Mesichta Pischa 13:4): וְה' הִכָּה כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – When it says that Hashem smote every firstborn, שׁוֹמֵעַ אֲנִי עַל יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ אוֹ עַל יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ – I might think it means by an angel or another messenger, לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח, תלמוד לומר 'והייתי כל בכור' – therefore it's written the extra words "And I will smite down every firstborn", to

teach you that it wasn't with a messenger." It was Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself destroying the Egyptian firstborn and taking out the Bnei Yisroel from Mitzrayim.

Now, that's easy to say but we must consider what these words actually mean. Because we know that it states openly in the *pessukim* about that night, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was doing things by means of a *shaliach*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself said that "if you will put the blood of the *korban Pesach* on the *mashkof* and on the *mezuzos*, then **וְלֹא יֵתֵן הַמַּשְׁחֵהוּת לְבֹא אֶל בְּתֵיכֶם לְנַגֵּף** – He won't permit the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you (ibid. 22:23). So we see that there was a destroyer who was loose that night – there was a *malach* who was doing this.

All Types of Angels

Certainly there were intermediary circumstances at work in Mitzrayim. Hashem took us out by means of certain things; whether they were miracles or whether they were other phenomena, it was something. The blood helped out and the lice helped out and hail helped. Later on the waters of the Yam Suf helped; other messengers too.

And *Makkas Bechoros* was the same – the *mashchis*, the plague, was a *shaliach Hashem*. Something happened to them; whether their hearts stopped beating or their nervous system collapsed, something happened. He didn't just make them die with their entire organism functioning normally; *something* happened. So the *mashchis* caused the heart to stop beating. That's also a material cause, an intermediary, that causes the heart to fail.

And actually it makes no difference at all because when it's done by messengers, it's still **הַקב"ה בְּכַבּוּדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ**. Doesn't He do everything in the universe? What things are done *without* His will? And if He does them by means of a *shaliach*, which means the intermediary circumstances, it's still Him doing it. It's all Him! That's the ABC's of understanding the world.

Ignorant Jews

It's like what a man wrote in the newspaper last year. Somebody wrote in the Jewish Week and he was quoting me. He wrote that Rabbi Miller said that AIDS is a punishment *min haShamayim*, that it's Hashem doing it. So Mel Rosen *alav hashnubbel* – he's the president of a *toeivah* synagogue – he wrote to the Jewish Week a letter and he said, "Miller is ignorant. AIDS comes from a germ."

Isn't that a *chochmah* from Mel Rosen? It's from a germ so it has nothing to do with *Shamayim*.

By the way, Mel Rosen died recently at the age of forty two. And not of old age. He died of that messenger from *Shamayim*. And in Mel Rosen's *beis hakisei*, in his synagogue, there are no *zekeinim*. In my synagogue there are

old people. We have mostly young people but there are a lot of old people here too. There are always old people in the synagogues. But in those synagogues, no old people. And that's because Hashem is doing something; He's making a *makkas bechoros* all over America – Manhattan especially. Yes, He's using a messenger, but it's Him. Absolutely it's Him.

And therefore it's a question. What does it mean over here, that on the night we were taken out of Mitzrayim that it was different, that it was Hakadosh Baruch Hu? It's always Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Along For The Ride

And so we'll understand it like this. It doesn't mean that He did things without an intermediary. It was a *malach*! But *לֹא עַל יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ בְּלִבָּר* – it wasn't only the *malach*. That's the *peirush* – it wasn't only by means of messengers because on this night the *Shechinah* went along. It means Hakadosh Baruch Hu accomplished things not merely by means of intermediaries alone but He Himself, if you could say such a thing, went along.

But even that's not enough; it's just a *peirush hamilos*. Because what does that mean that “He went along?” He tagged along, just for fun? No, that's nothing. And so we will translate it with one word: *interest*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu had an especial interest in what was doing that night; that's what it means.

Now, if as a result of that interest there came down a bigger *kedushah* on the Am Hashem or something else, this I cannot tell you. But the plain meaning is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had an especial interest in taking the Bnei Yisroel out of Mitzrayim. He was interested in them as if it was His own personal business.

The Chief's Interest

I gave this *mashal* once. Suppose let's say the captain of the police, his son was kidnapped. Imagine if the chief of police had a son who was kidnapped and he's in jeopardy.

Now, when a child is kidnapped the police are very busy. They are all alerted; an alarm is sent out and there are roadblocks set up everywhere. They're on the lookout for a certain person or certain kind of a car that's suspected of being involved, and so on. All types of detective work and investigations are taking place. And the chief of police is on top of everything; could be he'll even be up all night in the precinct building organizing, planning. And every police car, every policeman, every detective, the whole force, he knows exactly where they are, what they're doing.

But if his own son is kidnapped it's a different story. He's much more interested. And he's on the job, he himself. He's not satisfied merely to send detectives. He himself is cruising the streets and the roads. He won't sleep. All the shifts, he's there in the patrol car. He goes along because that's his own

son and there's nothing that interests him more than that; there's nobody he loves more than his own son.

And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu says that it was **לֹא עַל יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ בְּלִבֵּר**. “I’m not going to merely send along my intermediaries on this job because it’s My son who has to be redeemed. Even if it’s nothing more than to show that he’s the one that’s closest to Me, the one I love most, I’m personally going along.”

The Theme of Redemption

And that therefore was the theme of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Yetzias Mitzrayim actually is not a time when our forefathers were merely saved from slavery. That’s missing the entire point. They could have been saved from slavery in ways that weren’t spectacular at all; it wasn’t necessary to make *makkos*, plagues on Mitzrayim. They could have gone out in a more simple way.

Pharaoh could have got together and said, “Look at these poor people. They were once good friends of ours. Their brother Yosef was a benefactor of Egypt and all they did was ask for asylum. We did them bad and therefore it’s time to let them go out.” Now, it could be that Pharaoh himself wouldn’t do that, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have moved his heart. **לֵב מֶלֶךְ בְּיַד הָשֵׁם – עַל כֵּל אֲשֶׁר יִחַפֵּץ יִטֶּנוּ** – *The mind of a king is in the Hands of Hashem, to whichever end He wants, He will bend it* (Mishlei 21:1). He could have caused Pharaoh to change his mind and they would have been freed just like that.

But it *couldn’t* be that way because the entire spectacle of Yetzias Mitzrayim *wasn’t* to free the Bnei Yisroel. The whole thing was staged for one purpose and that purpose was to demonstrate that **בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**; that the Jew, that’s Hashem’s chosen one. That’s the purpose of everything that happened.

And what does that mean that we are the chosen one, **בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**? Merely that He chose us to receive the Torah, to serve Him, and so on? No, that’s nothing yet. **בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** means that He’s thinking about us, that His mind is on us, *only us*. **יֶדַעְתִּי מְכַל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָרֶץ** – *I only know you of all the families of the earth* (Amos 3:2).

The Infinite Mind

Now what does it mean “I know you”? And who doesn’t Hakadosh Baruch Hu know? He knows every bird and every blade of grass. He knows every micro-organism. He knows what’s happening on Mars and in far-off galaxies. A beetle is flapping its wings somewhere in the Amazon jungle, He knows that too. His Mind is infinite and it can encompass, as it does, all the facts in the universe. Anything taking place in the universe, whatever will take place and whatever did take place too, is all included in the intelligence of the infinite Mind. He *knows* it all.

So what does Hashem mean when He says “It’s *this* people that I know”? It means that it’s this people that My interest, My love, is focused on. Absolutely I know about the Americans and the Eskimos and the tribes in the Congo too; but My attention is right here on a humble little home in Boro Park or Flatbush or any *frum* place.

Exodus Encapsulated

That’s what Yetzias Mitzrayim means: “I am *interested* only in you. You are my sole *interest* in the universe. And that’s why I made all the phenomena, all the *makkos* and the wonders, only to demonstrate this one point that I’m intensely interested in you.” The Navi Hoshea said that: **כִּי נַעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶהְבֵּהוּ** – *When Yisroel was a youth*, meaning when they were a young nation, I *loved* them, **וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבָנִי** – *and from Mitzrayim I summoned My son*.” That was the purpose, that we should know that He’s intensely interested in us, like a father for a son.

It means that’s the crux, the hinge on which everything else revolves. All the rest is a commentary on these words. All the *makkos*, all of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Makkas Bechoros and Kriyas Yam Suf, *all of the rest of history*, is a *peirush* on these three words. That’s what we mean when we say **לֹא עַל יְדֵי מִלְאָךְ לֹא עַל יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ אֶלָּא הִקָּב”ה בְּכַבֹּדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ**. That from now on, from now and forever, I’m going along with you because you’re what I’m interested in. That’s the whole subject of Yetzias Mitzrayim, of **בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, in a capsule.

Swallow the Capsule

Now, the fact that it’s a bitter pill for your American heads to swallow? Swallow it anyhow because it’s one of the central teachings of Torah. And if you don’t assimilate in your mind this idea, then you don’t begin to be a Jew; you have no connection to Torah, because that’s one of the most fundamental teachings in the Torah.

And therefore it’s a subject that has to be studied. Because just to say the words, that we’re His chosen son, is superficial talk. Even to say He’s most interested in us, He loves us most, absolutely it’s true, but what does that mean for us? That we should pat ourselves on the back and hold our noses up in the air? No, that’s not it. It’s much more than that because *we have to understand what it means to be a son*.

Part II. Student of Hashem

A Son, A Student

On the possuk **וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ** – *you should teach the Torah to your sons*, so the Sifri (6:7) says, **לְבָנֶיךָ אֵלֶּי תִּלְמִידֶיךָ** – *the sons mentioned here are your*

disciples. It means that this *possuk* is telling us that it's a mitzvah to teach Torah to other people. If you are capable, you should found an institution, a yeshivah. If you are not that capable, you can get people together and teach them. And if you're least capable, at least teach your own sons. But it's all included in "teaching your sons".

So some think that it's just a play on words here – the *possuk* means "teach your children" only that the Sages come along and twist it to bring out a point, a lesson. But no, it's not so. It is included in the *pshat*; it's included in the simple understanding of the *possuk*.

Unborn Children

Because what makes somebody a son? The fact that you beget him? The fact that he was born to you? No; *it's the fact that you teach him*. Because you have a duty to build up others. בִּנְיָן is from the word בָּנָה, a building; the fact that he's born to you only makes it a bigger obligation. A child is a building and our job is to build up 'children' by teaching them. That's *actually* how children are created.

Of course, having a child, that's the first step. That's also building because a physical child inherits from his parents his body and he inherits certain physical and mental characteristics. The two parents pool their various characteristics and it's transmitted to the children. They physically create their child.

And that's a very important beginning. You have to have a body otherwise you couldn't start. To be born, to be given a body, is a great gift and that's why a son has to be grateful to his father and mother forever. Even if they gave birth to a child and never again saw him, he has to be grateful for the physical existence that they gave him.

A Rebirth

But that's only the beginning. Because now the father and mother have an especial obligation to make their child all over again by putting into their son's mind a set of ideas and ideals. That's the real relationship of a father to a son, a parent and a child. That's what the Torah means וְשִׁנְתָּם לְבָבָם – *you have to teach your children*; make him a student. You have a job now to take your son and you have to beget him all over again, to recreate him by giving him a mind, by making him a disciple.

You must teach him Torah. You must give him ideas. You must give him ideals. You must teach him how to look at the world. Like the mother, when she's standing by the window with her little Chana'le and it's raining outside, so she reminds herself of this obligation and she continues to create her child: "Look Chana'le, it's raining outside. Isn't that fun?" Chana'le has no sense; she hasn't developed an attitude towards rain yet. So Chana'le says, "Yes, it's fun."

“Look at the beautiful rain coming down,” the mother says. “Hashem is sending us down all the food that we eat. It’s apples and cherries and danishes coming down from the sky. Rain brings down all good things for us.” Her mother is still the fountain of all wisdom and so she agrees with her mother. So this wise mother has created her child all over again because now for the rest of her life rain is going to be food and fun.

That’s called having a child; building a child. You must teach him about Hakadosh Baruch Hu and all the fundamentals connected with the service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You have to teach him how to live with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, how to live with his fellow man. It’s a whole set of thoughts that you have to put into his brain. It’s like putting a new brain into him.

Mind Over Matter

And therefore the one who creates in his child a set of ideas, that’s the real parent. Because what’s more important, the mind or the body? The mind is more important. There are a lot of people with bodies who have to be locked up in asylums. The mind is what makes the man.

That’s why when people go to the employment agency, the personnel director won’t say, “Get on the scale.” Nobody pays by weight. That’s not the point in employment, how much you weigh. The question is what do you have up here? Experience? Ability? Do you have good sense? Do you have knowledge, training? It’s the mind that makes you valuable.

And therefore, when you create a physical child, even though you poured a lot of *koach* into him – *reishis oni*, he’s the best of your strength; when a child is born he represents the strength of the father and mother. And you poured into him vitamins and all kinds of food and he grows up big and healthy. Very good! But you haven’t finished the job yet. A big healthy boy or big healthy girl is a failure unless you have put into that head something that makes him your real child. **וְשֵׁנֵינֵתָם לְבָנֶיךָ: אֱלֹהֵי תִלְמִידֶיךָ** – *they are the real children.*

Adopted Parents

And therefore it’s possible to be a parent of many people, even if you didn’t physically create them. If you speak to people, if you change part of their ideas you are making a *ben* out of them, you are building them up, **יִבְנֶה**, and you are actually becoming their father. I told you once; I was seven years old and I was walking in the street with a relative, a distant relative. He had just come from Europe and I heard him say, “I saw a man come out of *shul* in our old little town after *Maariv*, and rubbed his hands together and said, ‘*Ich hob gedavened a geshmake Maariv* – I just davened a *geshmake Maariv*.’

“That is what’s *geshmak* in this world,” my relative told me. “To have a good *davening*.”

I'll never forget that. He built my mind when he told me that. He made me his son.

Spiritual Children

It's not a *maschal*. And so if you happen not to have any children, don't be dismayed. There are a lot of children available in this world. If you teach other people, they actually become your children. And sometimes they become your children even more than their physical parents. That's a *din*. The Gemara says in Bava Metzia (33a), אָבֵיר אָבֵיר רָבוּ – Suppose your father's horse breaks out of the stable and he runs in this direction. And your teacher's horse breaks out of the stable and runs in the opposite direction. Let's say your teacher has a horse; in the olden days it was like that.

So your father's horse is running down Ocean Parkway and your *rebbe*'s horse is running down Kings Highway. Now, you can't run in both directions at once. But there is an obligation of *hashovas aveidah*, you have to bring back a lost thing. So whose horse should you try to retrieve first?

The Rebbe Reigns Supreme

Isn't that a good question? You're standing and you don't know what to do; you're undecided. So the Gemara says, אָבֵיר רָבוּ קוֹדֶמֶת – *your rebbe's lost article comes first*. And he explains why: שְׂאָבֵינוּ הֵבִיאוּ לַחַיִּי עוֹלָם הַזֶּה – *Because your father brought you to this world*, וְרָבוֹ מְבִיאוֹ לַחַיִּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא – *but your teacher is bringing you to the Next World*.

You hear that? Your *rebbe* is creating your mind – that's what *Olam Haba* means; your mind is what you take with you. Your mind doesn't die. When a man is put into the grave his mind keeps on marching on. That's the part of him that exists forever – and therefore that makes your *rebbe* more of your father.

Of course if your father is paying your teacher, then your father is the one. If your father is paying tuition so the *rebbe* is only a *shaliach*, a messenger of the father. We're talking about the case where the father can't afford to do anything and the teacher is teaching you for nothing. Then your teacher, that's your father – because he created in you something that's eternal. Because that really is what a son is; it's the one whose mind you created.

Students of Hashem

And now we come to the point – we can understand now a little bit of what it means בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, to be a 'son' of Hashem. It means we become His students. His Torah, His Teachings, have to be what builds our minds. All the ways of looking at the world; every kind of attitude we learn only from the Torah. He's our Father because He is the One Who creates our minds.

Every kind of attitude, we are expected to learn only from the Torah. To be a son of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, to have Hakadosh Baruch Hu as a Father,

means to have a mind that is created by Him. אֵלֵינוּ תִלְמִידִידָּךְ – We can only be called His children if we spend our lives synchronizing our little minds, our physical minds, with the tremendous and eternal and infinite Mind of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Thinking Good, Looking Good

It's not the only thing of course. "You are my child" also means not only how you think but also how you look. That's what the *possuk* says somewhere else: בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – You are sons of Hashem and therefore, לֹא תִתְגַּדְּדוּ – you should not lacerate yourselves (Devarim 14:1).

In the olden days, when someone died in the gentile family, they showed their mourning by taking out knives and cutting their skin and bleeding all over as a sign of mourning; or they would pull out clumps of their hair. But you can't do that, the Torah says: וְלֹא תַשְׁיִמוּ קִרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם – Don't make any bald spots on your head. A child of Hashem is an aristocrat and צְרִיכִים אַתֶּם לְהִיּוֹת נְאֻם – you have to be handsome because of that.

That's a teaching, open *possukim* in the Chumash, that a Jew has to be good-looking. If you walk through the streets, you must make an impression, you must be dignified. You can't wear denim, you can't walk in the street wearing shorts. It's hot? Too bad. Your dignity comes first. You're a prince and a prince has to make an impression on the world. It's a commandment, an open *possuk*: בְּנִים אַתֶּם – You are children of Mine.

Divine Disciples

But much more than how we appear, being a child of Hashem means that we have to get all of our attitudes from Him, from His Torah. That's the most salient aspect of being a son; when we speak of a son, it actually means somebody whose mind has been formed by the father. And therefore for us, the children of Hashem, the most important function is thinking about Him – His ways, His attitudes, His *mitzvos*, His ideals.

And that's included in what Moshe Rabbeinu said in the Name of Hashem, בְּה' אָמַר ה' בְּנִי בְּכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל – “Yisroel is My firstborn son.” Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “I'm actually your Father, I actually begot you, if everything in your minds comes from Me.”

Part III. Thinking of Hashem

Misplaced Mitzvah?

Now, at that time, when the Bnei Yisroel were getting ready to leave Mitzrayim, right away Hashem commanded us in the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. It's an interesting thing. Why *tefillin*? *Matzah*, I understand. *Korban pesach*, *marror*,

very good. That's what Yetzias Mitzrayim is all about. But *tefillin*? The mitzvah of *tefillin* can't wait till Har Sinai like all the other mitzvos?

The answer is that *tefillin* is Yetzias Mitzrayim! יְהִיָּה לָךְ לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וּלְזִכָּרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ – It should be for you a sign on your hand and a memorial between your eyes. Why? כִּי בָחוּק יָד הוֹצִיאָךְ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם – Because Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim with a strong hand (Shemos 13:9). And you have to understand that *k'pshuto*: “Because I’m redeeming you, that’s why you wear *tefillin*.” It means that *tefillin* is given to us to remind us of the tremendous demonstration that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made when He took us out of Mitzrayim, the demonstration that Hashem is interested in us.

Signs of Affection

Tefillin, you have to know, is a sign of being chosen; chosen for royalty. If you ever saw a sculpture of the ancient pharaohs, you might see an interesting thing; he's wearing *tefillin* on his head. Pharaoh wore *tefillin shel rosh*. Of course he didn't have *shema yisrael* inside the *tefillin*, but he wore *tefillin* like our *tefillin*, a square box on his forehead. And nobody else could wear that in Mitzrayim; if you would put that on your head you would lose your head. Only Pharaoh could do it because it was a sign of chosenness; it was a demonstration that he was chosen, that he was the chosen son of their god.

And so when Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us out of Mitzrayim, He said to the Bnei Yisroel, “I want you to put this sign on your heads because it's time for the world to know that *you* are the real chosen ones.” *Tefillin* shows that we're His family, His עַם קְרוֹבֵנוּ (Tehillim 148:14).

Do you think about that when you put on *tefillin*? You'd better because the Torah says it openly. And not only the ones who wear them; because there's no question that *tefillin* are the property of the whole Am Yisroel, the *nashim* too. If there's a technical reason why women don't wear *tefillin*, but the lesson of *tefillin* is theirs too. If half of the Jewish nation are bearing the banner, the banner is not only for themselves – it's for the whole Klal Yisroel. And so the ideals of *tefillin* belong to every member of the nation. When our nation puts on *tefillin*, we're declaring what Hashem said when He took us out of Mitzrayim: בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – that all of us, the whole nation, are children of Hashem.

The Reciprocal Relationship

But we must realize there is a double purpose. Because that's not the only thing Hashem told us when He gave us the mitzvah of *tefillin*. It says there also לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ, that the purpose of *tefillin* is so that the Torah of Hashem should be in your mouth. It means that *tefillin* are more than a symbol of our greatness; they're also a symbol of our obligation.

You have to understand that there's an important principle here, a principle that works in two ways. The *possuk* says וְהָאֱמִירָה הַיּוֹם ... אֶת ה' הָאֱמִירָה הַיּוֹם – Because you make Hakadosh Baruch Hu uppermost, that's why He makes you uppermost (Devarim 26:17-18). It's a two-way street: Why does Hakadosh Baruch Hu think only of the Am Yisroel? You think it was on a whim that Hashem declared בְּנִי בְּכוֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל? The Creator of the universe, the One Who knows and sees everything, said, "I choose to be interested in *davka* this small nation" on a whim?

The answer is because they're interested only in Him. It's a two-way street. "You, Hashem, chose us to be Your children and we have to do our part by making ourselves Your children, by having Your Torah in our mouths always. That's our side of the deal – we're dedicated to having our minds formed by You." That's what it means that *tefillin* are a sign that the Jew has to keep 'the Torah of Hashem in his mouth.'

Torah and Hashkafah

Of course it especially means *divrei Torah*. That's the best way to have a mind that thinks along with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Don't you see yeshivah people, they're going from the yeshivah to the dining room; they're talking in *divrei Torah*. They've been learning all day; so now, it seems to us, that it's time for a rest. No! They're not interested in resting; they're talking on the way to the dining room, they're talking about *divrei Torah*. Their minds are being transformed into Torah minds.

But it's not only Gemara. Torah means all the ideas and ideals of the Torah; לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ means all of the *hashkafas haTorah*, all of Torah ideology, should be what we think about. And it should be the only thing!

Otherwise you have other fathers too. If you go look at the movies or the television so you have to understand that you're a child now also of the venereal disease people. You're sitting now at the feet of these 'sages', these wicked people. And even if it's 'innocent' TV, but it's *shtusim*, it's such silly things. Your father is now a silly dirty-minded comedian. You have a mixture of parents now; you have beautiful delicacies in your head and you're pouring in manure and mixing it all together. Oh no! *Bni bechori Yisroel*, means we want only Hashem's ideas to create our minds.

That's what we say, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד – Hashem is One. It doesn't mean there's only one G-d; no, that's a very narrow understanding – you're not understanding at all what *Echad* means. *Echad* means that He's the only One; there is nothing but Him. וְאֵהְבָתָ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ – With all your thoughts you should think about Him. And the Rambam says you shouldn't have any other interests. There is nothing else to think and talk about except for Him. That's what it means *Echad*.

A Single-Minded Nation

Now, some people bristle when they hear that. We shouldn't have any other interests?! You want us to be narrow-minded people?

On the contrary, it means you're broad-minded. When somebody gets his mind concentrated on little things – he's interested, let's say, in art – that's not broad-mindedness. It's a very narrow mind. If he's interested in travel, he's a very narrow-minded fellow. If he's thinking about hotels and airplanes and cars and gadgets and about places where he will have good meals, restaurants, that's a very narrow mind!

A broad-minded man thinks about all the things connected with Hakadosh Baruch Hu; the Torah and the great concepts of universality that you see everywhere, the universal wisdom. There's the Shas, a very big Shas to think about. And the *mussar seforim*, the Chovos Halevavos, Mesillas Yesharim, Shaarei Teshuva, are filled with Torah attitudes. Gems and gems, each sentence.

And secondly, there's a world of nature to think about, and both are *seforim* that are endless. There's no end to it and therefore it's broad-mindedness when a person is thinking about Hakadosh Baruch Hu בְּכֹל לִבְּכֶךָ. If you'll think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu, so you're thinking about all the things of Creation. There's so much that's included in that subject – it's endless just like He is endless. There's no end to Torah; there's so much to think about that even if you lived a thousand years, you'd do a very small part of the big job that's incumbent on you.

Holy Tefillin

And the entire thousand years, the *tefillin* tell us, you should think only about Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And that's why in the ancient times our fathers wore *tefillin* all day long – originally every Jew was recognized from a distance by his *tefillin*. Today, because we don't trust ourselves to behave properly while wearing *tefillin*, so we take them off after a while. But originally, the purpose was that *at all times*, every Jew – the ones wearing and the ones seeing those wearing – should know that Hashem is thinking only of us and that we have to think only of Him.

And that brings us to the secret of Hashem's *tefillin*. It's a strange idea to us but the Gemara (Brachos 6b) says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wears *tefillin*. A remarkable statement! Hakadosh Baruch Hu wears *tefillin*! And why shouldn't He? *Tefillin* is a sign of royalty, so He surely deserves to wear *tefillin*.

Now, we won't say that Hakadosh Baruch Hu goes to a *sofer* and orders *tefillin* that has parchment in it; we're *moichel* that idea. After all, the *tefillin* you have to put on your arm and on your head, so where can Hakadosh Baruch Hu put the *tefillin*? So we see it's a figure of speech.

But there's something of great importance in this figure of speech. I say 'great' – it's enormous! Because just like our *tefillin* means what *we* think about always, Hashem's *tefillin* means what *He's* thinking about. And so the magnitude of this idea, that the Creator of the world is wearing *tefillin*, is stupefying!

Holy Parshiyos

So the Gemara asks there, תִּפְלִין רַמְיָי עֲלֵמָא מַה כְּתִיב בְּהוּ – What's written in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's tefillin*? In our *tefillin* it says, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד, That's in our *tefillin*, that He's our One interest, our One love. That's what *we* think about always. But what's in His *tefillin*?

So the Gemara says that in Hashem's *tefillin* is the possuk, מִי כַעֲמֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל – Who is like you, My nation Yisroel; the one and only nation in the world! *Goy echaaaaaaddddd*. That's how Hashem says it. Only He says it longer than we do. We get tired but Hashem doesn't get tired: *Echaaaaaaddddd*! He says it forever and ever: "They're My one nation in the world. That's all I care about. *Echaaaaaaddddd*! They are My one interest. Everything is done for you, My children." It means much more than we could imagine, but what it surely means is that we are the center of His thoughts, and that everything He does – and He does everything – is for us.

The Divine Mind

Now, get that into your heads because if you don't, not only do you not understand Yetzias Mitzrayim, but you don't even begin to understand Torah. The *בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* is thinking only about whom? About *יִשְׂרָאֵל*. He's thinking right now about the Satmarer Jews in Williamsburg! He's thinking right now about Lakewood. He's thinking about Meah Shearim. He's thinking about Lubavitcher *chassidim* in Crown Heights. He's thinking about Mirrer Yeshiva. That's what He's thinking about; only that.

And if we have any other ideas in our minds, if we think, "Well, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is *מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ* so He's thinking about space too. He's thinking about the Milky Way; He's thinking about what's doing on the other side of the universe," that's a fatal error. That's the opposite of what the world was taught at Yetzias Mitzrayim. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is looking only at us. That's the fundamental principle of the history of the world.

His Declaration

And it's the history that began when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Pharaoh to take us out of Mitzrayim. That's why it was the first thing that Moshe Rabbeinu announced when he came into the palace of Pharaoh because it's the crux of everything. What was the first thing Moshe said? *כֹּה אָמַר ה' בְּנֵי בְכוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* – So said Hashem: "My son, My firstborn is Yisroel". He hammered on the table and said, "Like it or not this is the foundation of the rest of history."

And that's why we have to bang on the table and say it to ourselves; all the time, we have to remind ourselves who we are. We have to remind ourselves that from that day forward Hakadosh Baruch Hu put on His *tefillin* and declared גוי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ – “As far as I’m concerned the Bnei Yisroel are the only nation in the world, My only interest.” And when Hakadosh Baruch Hu declares that He means it with all that He is capable of meaning it. With His tremendous and infinite Mind He declares: “There’s only one nation forever and ever in this world and in the Next World too!”

Our Declaration

And we, with our little minds, we have to rise up and fulfill our side of that declaration by making Him *our* only interest. The Am Yisroel puts on *tefillin* too and we remind ourselves that this glory of being chosen includes the obligation that comes along with it, to make Him our Father by thinking only according to His thoughts.

We have to rise up to the obligation and as much as possible live with that ideal of being His children by thinking only about Him and only like Him. That’s what it means Yetzias Mitzrayim: Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, מִי בְּעַמּוֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל גוי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ – “Forever and ever you are My one nation” and we answer back, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד, – “Forever and ever You are our One interest.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let’s Get Practical

Making Him Uppermost

In our parshah we learn about the mitzvah of *tefillin* by which Hashem makes us uppermost and we are reminded to make him uppermost. As children and disciples of Hashem, our attitudes and ideals should be formed only by Him. This week as I recite the Shema I will *bli neder* stop for a moment and reflect on this lesson, that Hashem is the sole focal point of our lives, and nothing else is important.

This week’s booklet is based on tapes:

161 – Preface to Pesach 3 | **605** – Pride of Israel | **630** – Who Is Like Your People, Yisroel | **777** – Pesach | **E-207** – My Children, My Holy People



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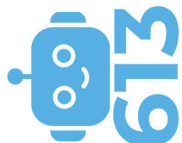
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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

QUESTION

If I'm in *shul* and somebody greets me should I answer him back?

ANSWER

You should acknowledge a greeting always. Of course, if you're in the middle of *shemoneh esrei* or you're in the first *parshah* of *krias shema*, you shouldn't, but everywhere else you should acknowledge it. But it's enough that you should turn your face to him and smile. That's enough when you're in *shul*. You don't have to jump out of your seat, run over and say *shalom aleichem* or anything else. Because you're standing in the palace of a king, and when you're standing before a king you don't do things like that.

Even the custom of walking back and forth during *davening*, I would never agree to it. I think it's very disrespectful. Of course they say it's '*heimish*'. They say it shows you're in your father's house. It shows you're not a goy – a goy is afraid of his god but the Jews are in their father's house. But it's not true. It's only an excuse for *hefkeirus*.

I was once in a place. A man with a beard and a kapote was there. He was standing and saying *birchas krias shema*, and another man who had davened in a previous *minyan* was talking to him the whole time! The whole time while this man was supposedly talking to Hashem. Isn't that ridiculous? Both of them should go back to *cheder* and learn what it means to stand in *tefillah* or even in *brachos* and speak to Hashem.

Once I witnessed in a certain *shul* a man was standing in *shemoneh esrei* and his neighbor was talking to him during that time, and the man who was standing *shemoneh esrei* from time to time nodded as if to say, "Yes, yes."

And so from the idolaters we have to learn how to respect Hashem and how to behave when we speak to Him or stand in His house. May 1982

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