

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



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# Wonders

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of HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

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שַׁבַּת וְאַתְחַנֵּן-נַחֲמוּ י"ד-טו אָב תשפ"ה 🌸



“ We will open the grave next to the Megaleh Amukot. And you,” he turned to the young man, “if you are worthy of the place, pass over to the plot you bought in your lifetime.” ”

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

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to publish your classes  
in book form.  
With blessings for success..."

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# Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens  
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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# DIVINE PROVIDENCE FROM THE LARGEST TO THE SMALLEST

*One of the important allusions regarding our current year, 5785, which is fast coming to its end, is that in its Hebrew form, תשפ"ה, it stands for "May this be a year of personal Providence" (תהא שנת השגחה פרטית). Over the past year, HaRav Ginsburgh has taught repeatedly about the topic of personal Divine Providence in Chasidic thought. Here we bring you our fourth installment of his teachings on the subject (parts 1-3 were printed in Wonders issues 145, 146, and 147).*

## FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON PROVIDENCE

**I**n the addendum to *Keter Shem Tov*, we find a complete series of teachings under the title “personal Divine Providence”<sup>1</sup> (השגחה פרטית). The first<sup>2</sup> is a teaching from the Friediker Rebbe, the Rebbe Rayatz, which was adopted into the *Hayom Yom*<sup>3</sup>:

As is known regarding the matter of Personal Divine Providence, explained by our teacher the Ba’al Shem Tov, may his memory be for a blessing: Not only is every specific movement of created beings under individual Providence from the Creator, but this Providence is the life force of the creation and its existence. Additionally, every individual movement made by every individual creature is connected to the overall purpose of Creation.

For example, the movement of a single blade of grass growing in the depths of a forest, or on a high mountain, or in the deepest valleys where no person has passed, is not only under personal Divine Providence in the sense that God has decreed that this particular blade of grass will live for a certain number of days and hours, moving to the right and to the left, forward and backward,

a set number of time during its lifetime, according to a set pattern—but also that this particular movement of the blade of grass has a general connection to the overall purpose of Creation.

Through the sum total of all the individual actions of the countless details that exist in all the thousands and tens of thousands of species in the various divisions of inanimate-vegetable-animal-man, the higher purpose of creation is completed.

Thus, it is not only that that the movement of one particular blade of grass is under personal Providence, but also that this movement contributes to the fulfillment of the higher [Divine] purpose of all Creation.

Considering the relationship between personal Divine Providence and the impact of individual things on the general purpose of Creation—“Through the sum total of all the individual actions... the higher purpose of creation is completed”—several levels can be identified.

Some might say that they do not see the details—they do not perceive this world with all its details—much like the

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blind beggar in Rebbe Nachman's story *The Seven Betlers*, who claims that he does not see this world at all.<sup>4</sup> One might think that if he does not see the details, he cannot conceive of personal Divine Providence that governs all the details, and he necessarily does not acknowledge that there is a higher purpose that includes all the details. But this is not true. Actually, the blind man does not see all the details because what he sees is the state in which everything is already unified.

In other words, it is possible to see how all the details join to form a unified whole that fulfils God's higher purpose, and it is also possible to see that everything is one—that God is everything and everything is God.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, when discussing the connection between the individual and the collective, even before addressing the unification of all the details into one higher purpose, it is important to recognize that the Divine Providence over the individual has many "side effects." Perhaps someone who does not believe in personal Divine Providence would say that the direction in which a leaf rolls has no meaning, but chaos theory suggests that every small detail impacts all of reality; the flap of a butterfly's wings on one side of the world can cause a storm on the other side of the world. Of course, before considering miniscule effects that accumulate, there are direct influences. For instance, the leaf that falls from the tree and rolls to one place now leaves the tree incomplete, the straw that came loose from the roof was meant to land in a certain place but also left a small hole in the roof.

In terms of affirmation and negation, every affirmation that happens in one

place causes a negation somewhere else. The Ba'al Shem Tov did not want anyone to move his shoes from their place<sup>6</sup> because it is impossible to know what impact that would have on other things. In other words, Divine Providence over every detail ultimately influences countless other details, in expanding circles of influence, much like concentric waves moving through water, as emphasized in quantum field theory. Another metaphor we could use is that the impact of one detail on many other details is, in the language of set theory the impact on the "set," and the circle in which everything connects to the higher purpose is the influence on the so-called "set of all sets."

There are then four levels, corresponding to the letters of God's essential Name, *Havayah*, which we will explain from top to bottom:

**Yud:** the perception of God's oneness, where everything is seen as truly one (not just a collection of details), corresponds to wisdom (and the *yud* in *Havayah*), in which "the True One" (תְּהֵאֵלֶּהּ יְהוָה).

**Hei:** the details joining to form a unified whole that fulfils God's higher purpose where each detail is critical to fulfilling the overall purpose corresponds to understanding (and the upper *hei* of *Havayah*), which is like an insight that grasps the entire purpose of Creation.

**Vav:** the impact of every detail on others, indicating that everything exists in interrelationship with its environment. This level corresponds to the six emotions of the heart (and the letter *vav* of *Havayah*), whose most essential is loving-kindness, or *chesed*, which affects all the other emotional attributes, just as a *chasid* is

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encouraged to create an environment around him (and if he does not, his reaction is one of utter remorse).

**Hei:** The Divine Providence over the individual detail itself corresponds to kingdom (and the final, or lower *hei* in *Havayah*), whose archetypal soul is King David who is careful to try every case with “the judgment of kingdom” (דיןא דמלכותא).

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that belief in Divine Providence constitutes faith in God and in King David (and the denial of Divine Providence is deemed a denial of both), just as the correspondence we have now build spans from God (the True One) to King David, who is sensitive to every pinch and detail in reality and is awakened by it.

## CAUSE AND EFFECT

**T**he next teaching<sup>7</sup> here enters the perspective of the single leaf finding itself rolling in the wind, and aims to feel what is happening with it:

Thus, we learn in the teachings of our teacher, the Ba'al Shem Tov, may his memory be for a blessing, that all the creations included in the inanimate-vegetable-animal-human kingdoms are all under Divine Providence in all the details of their affairs, each according to their importance. And the Holy Blessed One brings about various causes and effects to carry out some action regarding each creature.

Everything is under Divine Providence that includes the finest details, clearly observable. For example, on a bright summer day, when the sun is shining in full force, suddenly a strong wind rushes by, shaking the tree's leaves, causing some leaves to detach and

breaking the straw on the roofs and the haystacks rolling across the earth, lifting them and tossing them from place to place. After a few moments, the wind calms, and it is as if nothing had happened. The intent of the strong wind was a cause and a reason from God bringing about the detachment of the tree's leaves, the removal of some hay from the roof, and the tossing of the detached leaves and rolling hay to that place which the decree of God's supernal Providence has sent them for some Divine purpose.

Thus, even the movement of leaves or rolling hay on the street or in the field is governed by personal Divine Providence. This is even more pronounced when it comes to human beings, and specifically when it comes to Israel, His beloved people, where we find that the supernal Providence governs the finest details of all matters.

In this teaching, it is written that all the details that occur are "a cause and a reason from God" meant to bring about a specific action. One must first believe this point, though in most cases it is impossible to understand the purpose of the individual details of Divine Providence.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the expression is "cause and effect" or "effect and cause," and sometimes only one of them is used—usually the cause. The relationship between cause and effect is like the relationship of "the One who surrounds all worlds and fills all worlds."

In the foundational teaching on Divine Providence in Chabad, *Torah Or*,<sup>9</sup> it is explained that Divine Providence over all the details does not bring about multiplicity or change in Hashem's

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oneness, because everything is "revealed and known before Him" (in gematria, Divine Providence!). Hashem's knowledge does not clothe itself in the created being, but everything is revealed before Him as one and in a natural way (in the manner of "all are surveyed with one glance").

Nevertheless, there is the phenomenon of "the eyes of Hashem are roaming throughout the earth" and "Hashem's eyes roam throughout the earth," referring to angels who descend to see what is happening on earth and return to report (and they reach even to the vessels of Atzilut)—not in a manner of "revealed and known"—so that Providence can also be perceived in the consciousness of the created beings.

In other words, the goal is not for Providence to remain just as a surrounding and hidden cause, but for there to be an aspect of Providence that fills all worlds—an aspect that is felt by the created being. The cause is the surrounding aspect, but the effect—the aspect mediated by the angels of Hashem who ascend and descend the ladder—is perceived as "terrible in action upon human beings."

In truth, both dimensions of Divine Providence come from the essence of Hashem (which contains the ability to carry opposites, something that philosophers, disturbed by the apparent contradiction between unity and multiplicity, cannot grasp, and in this case, multiplicity does not contradict unity). The dimension of cause comes from the external aspect of the essence, and the dimension of effect comes from the internal aspect of the essence, and more can be said on this topic.

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE OVER THE SMALLEST DETAILS

In the next teaching,<sup>10</sup> there is significant emphasis on Divine Providence over the smallest details:

The Baal Shem Tov, may his memory be for a blessing, explains that each of the created beings has a special place above. Each creation and creature has a designated place according to its essence. The inanimate is not the same as the plant, the plant is not the same as the animal, and the animal is not the same as the speaking species. And within the speaking species themselves—Israel is His special nation. However, Divine Providence is also over the tiniest creature. He concludes that the Divine Providence over the Jewish people, who are the closest to Hashem, cannot be described. And this is obvious, for if such a small thing, like a leaf or a straw, being placed in one spot or moved to another, is under Divine Providence, all the more so with regard to a Jew, who is under Divine Providence, which cannot be understood.

The Baal Shem Tov's example of the smallest thing is a leaf or straw, but today, the smallest thing is a "string" (infinitely smaller than the smallest defined particle). In Yiddish, his expression is *der grester kleinekeit* (the greatest smallness)—reminding us the Zohar's statement that, "he who is small is the one who is great."<sup>11</sup> Later, he also uses the phrase *kleinster kleinekeit* (the smallest smallness).

The essence of Divine Providence is revealed in contemplating smallness—just as the core of physics deals with the microcosm. While the macrocosm is

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also significant and full of secrets, there is enormous wisdom in cosmology, but understanding the vastness of the universe comes specifically from studying the smallest of the small, which is why particle accelerators are built.

One who believes only in general Divine Providence is like an astronomer, someone who is focused on the big picture, where the large things dominate. Belief in personal Divine Providence means that the smaller something is, the more space it occupies. From this, the secret of “For you are the smallest of all nations”<sup>12</sup> becomes clear. This is the verse describing the reason that God chose the Jewish people. Not because of their might or numbers, but rather because they are the minutest of all the nations. The ability to see personal Divine Providence is rooted in the qualities of humility and modesty.

## ENCOUNTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

**I**n later teachings, the human dimension of personal Divine Providence is emphasized, particularly in the encounters between human beings who speak to one another (beyond just walking from place to place). There is a teaching<sup>13</sup> that follows the principle of, “Who is wise? One who learns from every person”<sup>14</sup>:

The approach of our teacher, the Ba’al Shem Tov, regarding personal Divine Providence is that God orchestrates causes that will bring one individual to meet another individual at a certain moment, for a purpose. Everyone must have a teacher from whom to learn. Anyone who does not believe this is, Heaven forbid, a heretic.

One should learn something from

everything that one sees in the world, not just from human beings. However, it is sometimes difficult to see personal Divine Providence specifically in encounters with people who harm me or with a wicked person who speaks heresy. Still, one must know that even this is by personal Divine Providence, and there is something positive to learn from everyone—some good character trait. And once again, as he states, one who does not believe this is, Heaven forbid, an apostate!

There is a further nuance regarding the value of an encounter between two people<sup>15</sup>:

The Ba’al Shem Tov—may his merit protect us—said that an encounter between two people follows the orchestration of the Supernal Providence, and its purpose is that it be used for the purpose of Torah and mitzvot. In other words, the meeting of people is a Divine blessing, bestowed upon the two individuals, so that each can learn something from the other and influence one another in matters of Torah and mitzvot, not just in charity and acts of kindness.

This is a profound teaching, indicating that the purpose of Divine Providence is not only to give charity, but that when two people meet, they should strengthen each other in Torah and *mitzvot*. If one imagines a meeting with someone who is asking for *tzedakah*, I might have thought that God brought us together for the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* is considered a general commandment that is inclusive of all the *mitzvot* in general.<sup>16</sup> However, if I gave charity to the poor person and feel that I have fulfilled my obligation to produce a

good result from the meeting, I have truly not yet fulfilled my obligation to properly address the personal Divine Providence in this meeting. Because according to the Ba'al Shem Tov, there a dimension of an awakening to repent (*teshuvah*) or to increase Torah study.

The principle here is that Divine

Providence is not just something to observe—like entering a movie theater to watch a film...—but it carries a lesson and a demand: Action is the main thing.<sup>17</sup> It is not enough to perform the straightforward act of charity; one must strive to understand the higher intent to perform an intentional service of God.

1. Addendum to Keter Shem Tov §179-§187.
2. *Ibid.* §179
3. *Hayom Yom* for the 28<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan.
4. *Sippurei Ma'asiyot* 13, first day.
5. Letter from Rebbe Isaac of Homel.
6. See our volume *Or Yisrael*, ch. 11 in the story about the Ba'al Shem Tov's shoes.
7. §180.
8. Purpose is associated with the *sefirah* of crown and is one of the interpretations of the statement that the contraction (the *tzimtzum*) occurred in the “middle point” of God's infinite revelation. Which is why we, from our perspective cannot see the purpose behind the events we experience. Nonetheless, because the

- contraction is not literally so, but a metaphor, God's purpose in every detail is present just as well, despite our ignorance of it. See in detail in our Hebrew volume *Mavo LeKaballat HaAri*, pp. 45-47
9. *Torah Or* 14d.
10. Addendum to *Keter Shem Tov*, §181.
11. *Zohar* 1:122a.
12. Deuteronomy 7:7.
13. §185.
14. *Avot* 4:1.
15. *Ibid.* §187.
16. *Bava Batra* 9a.
17. *Tikkunei Zohar* 60 (93b); *Ibid.* 70 (133b); see *Avot* 1:17.

*continued from page 16*

| letter of Havyah | sefirot                       | good and evil about                    |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| yud              | wisdom                        | self sacrifice                         |
| hei              | understanding                 | God's oneness, uniqueness, singularity |
| vav              | loving-kindness to foundation | Belief in God                          |
| hei              | kingdom                       | accepting the sovereignty of Heaven    |

Clearly, sovereignty as noted is related to kingdom. The letter vav in God's Name represents our service of God and belief in God is the prerequisite for performing all our duties. God's singularity and uniqueness are the most important topics

of Jewish contemplation, the essence of all of Chasidut; and, contemplation (התבוננות) corresponds to understanding (בִּינָה). Finally, self-sacrifice derives from our power of self-nullification, the inner aspect of wisdom which corresponds to the yud of Havayah.

1. *Berachot* 10b.
2. Mishnah *Berachot* 2:2. See also *Tanchuma Lech Lecha*.
3. *Mechilta Bachodesh* 6. *Sifra Acharei* 13.
4. Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvot, Asseh* 2.
5. 1 Samuel 15:4.
6. As also found in the verse, “When [God]

- became King in Yeshurum, when the heads of the people gathered, the tribes of Israel together” (Deuteronomy 33:5).
7. *Or Torah* (Maggid of Mezritch), *Beha'alotcha* 134.
8. Leviticus 22:32. See in length in *Derech Mitzvotcha, Mitzvat Kidush HaShem*.

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## STORY

# RABBI NATAN NATA SHAPIRA: A RECOMMENDATION FROM HIS NEIGHBOR

*Rabbi Natan Nata Shapira was born to Rabbi Shlomo Shapira in the year 5345 (1585), and was named after his grandfather, the Head of the Beit Din of Hrodna (Grodno, Belarus) and author of Imrei Shefer. He became known for his book Megaleh Amukot in which he explained in 252 ways [the numerical value of "enough for you" (רַב לָךְ), God's words to Moses telling him that he had prayed enough to enter the Land. In 5377 (1617), at the age of thirty-one, he was accepted as the head of the yeshiva and preacher in Krakow, replacing the Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Margalio, from whom Rabbi Natan received guidance in the mysteries of Kabbalah. He fulfilled all his public roles without expectation of reward as his father-in-law provided for all his needs. Moreover, he supported charitable institutions and dedicated sacred objects and precious fabrics to the synagogue, including a silver plate, a curtain, and mantles embroidered with gold and pearls. Rabbi Shapira composed many additional works including Chidushei Anshei Shem on Rabbi Isaac of Fez (known as the Rif), Megaleh Amukot on the Torah, and a thousand interpretations on the minor aleph in the first word of the Book of Leviticus of which only a few survived. He taught his yeshiva students the revealed Torah through in-depth analysis, but when he preached publicly, he also relied on the hidden Torah and wove deep secrets with sweet simple interpretations. He passed away on the 13th of Av 5393 (1633) and was buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Krakow.*

After the passing of the *Megaleh Amukot*, a young man came to Krakow and approached the cemetery caretaker with a request. Since he saw that there was an empty burial plot next to the grave of the *Megaleh Amukot*, he wished to purchase this plot for himself. When the caretaker heard the young man's words, he began to rebuke him: "Who are you to think yourself worthy of being laid to rest in such a holy place?" But the young man persisted. He was willing to pay a considerable sum for the purchase of the plot. Days passed, and one day the caretaker began to think about the matter and said to himself: "The expenses of maintaining the cemetery are many, the fund is empty, and here is a rare opportunity before me to fill the fund... I will approach the young man, sell him the grave, and then everything will be settled. I am old and my days are numbered, and when this young man's time comes, he will not know to whom to turn to prove the purchase." He took the money from the young man but did not register the grave in his name.

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On that very day, however, the young man suddenly passed away. The caretaker was alarmed, for the young man had not even been willing to give his name. Who knows who he is, and if he is worthy of the honorable place? But on second thought, the caretaker calmed himself: the young man has no relatives or friends, so no one will know about the whole affair. Moreover, the money went to charitable purposes and it is a great merit for this young man. The young man was buried in a side plot, and not in the plot adjacent to the *Megaleh Amukot*, which he had purchased for himself during his lifetime.

At night, the young man came to the caretaker in his dream: “We made a deal and you didn’t fulfill your part. I am challenging you in the Heavenly Court!” The caretaker was very frightened, but when morning came, he said to himself: “Dreams are void of meaning.” However, after the dream repeated itself two and three times, he realized that this was no simple matter. The caretaker went to the Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, the great Bach, who served as the rabbi in Krakow, told him the whole story, and said that he could find no peace for his soul.

The Bach replied, “When the young man comes to you again in your dream, tell him that if he desires a rabbinic court case, it should not take place in Heaven, but here on earth. Let him come for a hearing before the rabbinical court on such-and-such a date.” The caretaker did as the rabbi said, and the young man immediately agreed. They set up a partition in the synagogue, and when the time for the hearing arrived, they heard a kind of noise behind the partition and understood that the young man had come for judgment.

The rabbi directed the young man to state his claims, and when he finished telling the story, the Bach turned to the caretaker and asked: “What do you have to say in response?” The caretaker replied: “Indeed, that is exactly how it all happened, but I never intended to bury him in this place, as it is not befitting the honor of the *Megaleh Amukot*! Moreover, I do not even know his name, since he did not want to tell me.” The rabbi turned towards the partition and said: “Tell us who you are and what your name is, and then we will know if you are worthy to lie next to the *Megaleh Amukot*.” But the young man flatly refused, keeping his reasons to himself.

Then the rabbi ruled: “On the face of it, we are obligated to bury the young man in the plot for which he paid a hefty sum. But on the other hand, we do not know who he is, and perhaps it is not befitting the honor of the *Megaleh Amukot* for this young man to lie beside him. Therefore, we will open the grave next to the *Megaleh Amukot*. And you,” he turned to the young man, “if you are worthy of the place, pass over to the plot you bought in your lifetime.”

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The caretakers opened the plot, and the next morning they came to the cemetery and were astonished: the young man's grave was empty, while the grave next to the *Megaleh Amukot* was occupied. The caretakers erected a headstone on his grave and wrote on it:

Here lies the young man whose identity is unknown.  
His neighbor will testify to his stature

Years passed on the inscription on the headstone was erased. In the year 5592 (1832), the cemetery caretakers erected a new headstone on the young man's grave and engraved the following words:

A monument to a living soul we found here  
To know its name we toiled in vain  
For it was found buried among the mighty  
And its letters were erased by many years  
Indeed, his neighbor, the pride of our strength, will testify to his stature  
The *Megaleh Amukot* who illuminates our darkness  
For great is his honor in the name of glory  
To remain for generations as a memorial  
The Chevra Kadisha caretakers took this to heart  
And erected a new headstone on his grave  
In the year 5592 since the creation of earth and heaven

To unravel this story, let us transcribe another story recorded in the *Kracow Chevra Kadisha* ledger:

A young man, unknown from where he came, arrived in Krakow and sought a position to serve there. He was hired by the owner of a large store work in his shop. He worked faithfully and explicitly stipulated with the store owner that he would serve him on the condition that he could go to the synagogue to pray, morning and evening. The owner agreed, and from the time the young man came to the store, the business and trade were blessed abundantly.

Once, this young worker went to the synagogue to pray the morning prayer as was his custom. Meanwhile, merchants from afar and many customers came to the store, and the store owner could not tend to them all. The young man was late in returning, and the store owner asked several times where he was and was told that he had not yet returned from prayers.

The store owner went in a rage over the delay and went to the synagogue himself: if the worker had prolonged his prayer, he would forgive him, but if he was wasting time idly, he would take revenge on him. When he came to the synagogue, he saw

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him standing and looking upward at the ceiling paintings, with no words coming from his mouth and he ran to him in his fury and struck him on the cheek. All the worshippers there gathered to see what was happening.

The store owner left the synagogue and went to his store, and the young man did not return to the store again. Instead, he went to the holy Rabbi, the *Megaleh Amukot*, whom he knew from before, to take leave and part from him. The holy rabbi bitterly pleaded with him: “Why do you leave me?” But all his entreaties were in vain. The holy rabbi said to him: “At least don’t depart from me without words of Halacha, so that I may have an eternal remembrance. Behold, I have toiled on my book, *Megaleh Amukot*, and written 252 interpretations on the verse “God said to me, ‘Enough for you,’” whose numerical value is 252, regarding Moses pleading to enter the Land of Israel. Let your honor also tell me something that I have not brought in my book!”

The young man said to him: “I have an insight that is not brought in the books: Since there are four angels called ‘living ones’ (*chayot*) that carry the supernal chariot. Three correspond to the three pilgrimage festivals and to the three patriarchs. Moses wanted to enter the Land of Israel so that by its holiness, he could become the soul to which the fourth living one of the chariot would correspond. The Holy Blessed one said to Moses, “Enough for you, do not continue to speak to me anymore about this matter” because I have already prepared my servant David to be the fourth leg of the chariot. This is all alluded to in the word “about this matter” (בְּדַבַּר הַזֶּה). “About... matter” (בְּדַבַּר) is an acronym for “the son of David is the fourth leg” (בְּן דָּוִד בְּרִגְלֵי רַבִּיעִי).” They parted and the man of truth disappeared.

The store owner, seeing that the young man did not return to him, deeply regretted having shamed him in public. He went with a bitter soul to the *Megaleh Amukot* and upon coming to his house, the rabbi said to him: “When you struck him on the cheek, he did not feel it at all, and you did nothing to him. But to me you did! You distanced from me a friend and companion, and he is now 500 parasangs away and I will not see him again. But I rejoice in the words he left me.”

Could this mysterious worker be Elijah the Prophet who is known to disappear? If we accept the storyteller’s assumption that the worker is also the young man who bought the grave, this is not possible at all, for Elijah does not die. But there is someone closely connected to Elijah, for whom death is indeed possible: this is the Mashiach who is born anew in

each generation and passes away if the generation does not merit redemption. Even regarding the true Mashiach, who will merit eternal life, there is an opinion in the Gemara that he too will die, and his son and grandson will inherit his kingdom.

And what is the meaning of the intense friendship between him and the *Megaleh Amukot*? This can be understood in light

of the *Megaleh Amukot's* extensive focus on Moses and God's refusal to let him enter the Land. One of the ideas Chasidut takes from the *Megaleh Amukot* is that if Moses had entered the Land, the Temple would have been supernature, eternal, and would never be destroyed. But God wanted the Divine service in the Land of Israel to depend on us, with all its transience and its risk of failing. The Divine toil of His people is more beloved to God than a building that is entirely miraculous and stands forever.

Noting how preoccupied the *Megaleh Amukot* was with God's refusal to allow Moses to enter the Land and its implications, clearly, he was the Moses of his generation. The Torah words with which the Mashiach of the generation, the David of the generation, parted from him was actually an expression of the connection between them. His desire to be buried near the *Megaleh Amukot* is also a connection between David and Moses. The *Megaleh Amukot* innovated that Moses (משה) is an acronym for the phrase, "What was is what will be" (מה [נשה] הוא [שהיה]) and so just as Moses is the

first redeemer, he is the final redeemer. Thus, just as there is Mashiach son of David and Mashiach son of Joseph, there is Moses' soul—known in the Zohar as *Raya Mehemna* (the faithful shepherd)—who constitutes another figure in the redemption. In the end, Moses too will enter the Land: both will rise together from their shared grave in Krakow and arrive straight in the Land of Israel.

And a numerical allusion to conclude: the value of Moses (345, משה), is the product of 15 and 23, where 23 is the value of "living one" (חיה), a connotation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest level of the soul. But Moses aspired to reach the highest level known as "singular one" (יחידה), the aspect of Mashiach in the soul. Indeed, the *Megaleh Amukot's* name, Natan Neta<sup>2</sup> (נתן נטע), equals 629, or 17, the value of "good" (טוב)—alluding to the first description of Moses, "And she saw that he was good"<sup>3</sup>—times "the singular one" (יחידה). The sum of the four multiplicands: 15, 23, 37, and 17 is 92, or 4 times 23, the value of "living one" (חיה), which means that the average value of all 4 multiplicands is 23, the base of Moses (משה); all if about Moses.

1. Deuteronomy 3:26. This verse is part of *parashat Va'etchanan* and some years later, he passed away within a week of this Torah reading.

2. The second name, Neta, alludes to Moses planting (נטע) in us eternal life by giving us the Torah.

3. Exodus 2:2.

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## PARTZUF

# WHAT SETS THE SHEMA APART FROM ALL OTHER MITZVOT

### GREATER THAN LEARNING TORAH

**P**arashat Va'etchanan contains many of the foundations of Torah among them the so-called Ten Commandments and the *Shema*, our quintessential statement of faith in God's oneness and uniqueness. The *Shema* that we recite every day (at least twice) is composed of three paragraphs, the first of which is taken from our *parashah*, "Hear O' Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is one."

In the Talmud, we find the following statement: "Rabbi Mani said: Greater is one who recites *Shema* at its appropriate time than one who engages in Torah study."<sup>1</sup> This saying has several deep Chasidic commentaries, but we shall begin by focusing on its plain meaning. What exactly is it that sets the *Shema* apart from the rest of the Torah?

Rabbi Mani's statement was said with regard to the Mishnah dealing with the time for reciting the *Shema* in the morning. The *mishnah* ends with the words, "one who recites it from that time onward loses nothing, but he is considered to have read the Torah," since the words of the *Shema* are verses in the Torah (as noted, the entire first paragraph appears in our *parashah*). Still, from this *mishnah* we learn that it is better to recite the verses of the *Shema* at their appointed time, because then one both performs the *mitzvah* to recite the

*Shema* at its appointed time and merits the *mitzvah* of learning Torah.

The commentaries note that the *mishnah* is comparing one who recites the *Shema* after its appointed time to someone who is learning Torah at a time that is not pre-appointed for the *Shema*, because if it is the time for the *Shema* (and even for prayer), one would be obligated to stop learning in order to perform these *mitzvot*. In addition, they note that the point being made by the *mishnah* is not that reciting the *Shema* at its pre-appointed time is greater than simply reading Torah verses, for there is no novelty in that. Rather, reciting the *Shema* at its appointed time is greater than even learning Torah—with understanding and comprehension—like learning Mishnah. *Pnei Yehoshua* adds that when learning Torah, when engaging with Torah, one is required to deepen one's understanding to the point that one will remember what one has learnt. He argues that reciting *Shema* in its time is greater because even when it the pre-appointed time has passed, reading the verses of the *Shema* is not merely that alone. There is something additional in the recital of the *Shema*—in the verses themselves—and therefore when it is recited at its appointed time, it is considered greater than learning Torah with all its possible depth and comprehension. What we want to see is

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what exactly is special about these verses.

To present this as a question: How can it be that reciting the Shema at its appointed time can be greater than the Torah learning of even the greatest scholar who is engaged and immersed fully in the Torah?

## THE SUPERIORITY OF THE SHEMA

**T**he *Pnei Yehoshua* and other answer this question by citing that “Accepting the sovereignty of Heaven is most important” (קבלת מלכות שמים חשיבא טפי), even when it is not the Shema’s appointed time. It follows therefore that reciting the Shema at its appointed time is even greater.

Accepting the sovereignty of Heaven is a prerequisite to all *mitzvot*. The sages state this in the following way, “Why does the ‘*Shema*’ [i.e., its first paragraph] precede the ‘*Vehayah im shamo’a*’ [the second paragraph]? So that one first accept the sovereignty of Heaven.”<sup>2</sup> The same idea is expressed regarding the first two “commandments” of the Decalogue—first “I am *Havayah*,” then “you shall have no other gods”—the necessary order is “accept My sovereignty, then accept my commandments.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, there are those who argue that the superiority of the *Shema* is that it states the essence of our faith and faith precedes even Torah study, for one must believe in the Giver of the Torah to learn properly. Even though the Rambam learns the *mitzvah* of having faith in God from the first commandment of the Decalogue and not from the Shema, the words of the Jerusalem Talmud that by reciting the *Shema*, we are taking upon ourselves the entire Decalogue, with the words, “*Havayah* is our God,” corresponding in particular to the first commandment of the Decalogue, “I am *Havayah* your God.”

There is another opinion that what sets the Shema apart is that it declares God’s oneness, known as the *mitzvah* of God’s singularity (א.יחידה). The Alter Rebbe says that this is the special *mitzvah* that was given to the generation that entered the Land of Israel. The Tzemach Tzedek, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, states that the Ba’al Shem Tov’s great novelty focuses on his understanding of the *mitzvah* of God’s singularity. Thus, Chasidut, the Torah of the Ba’al Shem Tov is essentially the Torah of the Land of Israel, since its focus is on the *mitzvah* that was given to those who entered the Land of Israel.

The Shema as we have seen contains the very foundations of Torah: Accepting the sovereignty of Heaven, faith in God, and God’s singularity.

What we have seen so far can be the basis of a meditation on the *Shema*, which we recite twice daily, particularly on its first verse, “Hear O’ Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is one.” This verse is made of three parts: “Hear O’ Israel,” “*Havayah* is our God,” and “*Havayah* is one.”

Some challenge the wording by noting that it could have just said, “*Havayah* our God is one,” why the repetition of the God’s essential Name, *Havayah*, before the “one?” When we divide the verse into three parts, this becomes clear. There are three independent statements. They correspond to accepting the sovereignty of Heaven, faith in God, and God’s singularity.

One of the most well-known linguistic allusions discussed regarding the first word, Shema (שמע), is that it is an acronym for “the yoke of the sovereignty of Heaven” (על מלכות שמים). Chasidic sources interpret the first two words, “Hear O’ Israel,” as a gathering of the people, just as the word is used in the verse, “Saul gathered the

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people”<sup>5</sup> (וַיִּשְׁמַע שְׂאוֹל אֶת הָעָם). Gathering the people happens around a king, around a sovereign.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the first statement of the *Shema* calls upon us to collect ourselves, collect our soul’s faculties and concentrate on God’s sovereignty, taking upon ourselves the yoke of the Heavenly commandments.

The second statement, “*Havayah* is our God,” is as noted earlier, represents the commandment to belief in God and parallels the first commandment of the Decalogue, “I am *Havayah* your God.”

The third statement, “*Havayah* is one,” is clearly the commandment to believe in God’s singularity

## SELF-SACRIFICE

Another most important explanation of Rabbi Mani’s statement that we began with is that the *Shema* is greater than Torah study because when reciting the *Shema*, one has the intent of sacrificing oneself. This is the willingness to fulfill the Torah’s commandment that God be sanctified.<sup>8</sup>

Chasidut explains that in the reciting of the *Shema*, the intent to sacrifice oneself is in potential, while that potential is activated during *Nefilat Apayim* (Falling on the Face), which is why we fall on our face, as if we have fallen dead. Still, it is the potential that awakens in the soul the practical activation of our willingness to sacrifice ourselves.

In the Tanya, the Alter Rebbe writes that we recite the *Shema* twice daily to remember our power of self-sacrifice which is what drives us to keep the commandments and to stand against all tests (particularly in the Land of Israel, as noted earlier). This intent

that sets the *Shema* apart from the rest of the Torah occurs in the “seal,” or signature of the *Shema*, i.e., in the word “one” (אֶחָד), which we are required to sustain. The Arizal writes that when sustaining the word “one,” we should have in mind that we are willing to endure the four forms of capital punishment, where 4 is the value of the (enlarged) *dalet*, the last letter of “one” (אֶחָד).

This last contemplation of the self-sacrifice awakened by the *Shema* is the Kabbalistic reason that the recital of the *Shema* is unique among the Torah’s commandments, setting it above even Torah learning. The latter is able to awaken feminine waters (מַיִין נוֹקְבִין) and elevate them only to the level of *Ze’er Anpin* and *Nukva*, as hinted to by the words, “... and the revealed, for us and our children forever, to perform all the words of this Torah.” Only the recital of *Shema* is able to raise this spiritual awakening in us to the level of the supernal Father and Mother, the so-called concealed worlds, hinted to by the words, “The concealed is for *Havayah* our God.” When an individual is willing to sacrifice themselves, he or she can reach the concealed realm and can then draw down the root of the supernal unification between the Father and Mother *partzufim*, which itself originates in the infinite revelation of God Himself, drawn down through the *partzufim* of the crown. All of this is captured in the well-known *gematria*, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֶחָד, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֶחָד, equals עֵתִיק יוֹמִין אֶרֶץ אֲנָפִין, the names of the two *partzufim* of the crown.

The *partzuf* of what sets the *Shema* apart is thus:

*continued on page 14*