

Va'eschanan

THE WEISS EDITION

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ואתחנן *Va'eschanan*

ה'יט | 5:19

אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל כָּל קְהִלְכֶּם בְּהָר
מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הָעָנָן וְהָעֲרָפֶל קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְלֹא יָסָף

G-d spoke these words to your entire assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a great voice, which did not cease.

The Unstoppable Sound

The Midrash¹ describes several aspects of G-d's "great voice... which did not cease" at the giving of the Torah. Among them, that it had no echo.

How does the lack of an echo imply greatness? Ostensibly, the mightier a sound, the greater its reverberation!

At the giving of the Torah, however, the lack of resonance was not a sign of weakness, but of strength. And in fact, this lack of echo was not *despite* nature; it was the world's most natural reaction to the infinitely powerful sound of G-d's voice.

1. Shemos Rabbah 28:4.

When sound waves encounter a barrier they can neither pierce nor penetrate, they bounce back and resonate, creating what we call an echo. Naturally, more powerful sounds resound with louder echoes. But if a sound meets no barriers, because anything it encounters either absorbs it or is powerless to prevent it from passing, what will cause it to reverberate and echo?

This explains what took place at the giving of the Torah. When G-d proclaimed, "I am Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Egypt...", the mighty sound pierced and penetrated all of existence. The great voice of G-d traveled without obstruction, and therefore naturally "did not cease" or bounce back with an echo. Every part of creation, from the spiritual to the inanimate, sensed the infinite power of G-d's voice and absorbed its eternal message.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1092-1096

6:4 | ד:1

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.

The One and Only Word Echad

This verse expresses Judaism's cardinal principle: belief in the singular existence of G-d. The deeper meaning of this “oneness” is not only that there is no deity other than G-d, but that G-d is the one and only true existence: nothing exists outside of Him. Since G-d's will is the cause of any and all existence, the true identity of every being is the will of G-d that is continuously causing it to exist.²

This idea is hinted to by the Hebrew word *echad*, “one,” spelled אֶחָד. The numerical values of its three letters are one, eight and four, respectively. The ח, equaling eight, is symbolic of the seven heavens and one earth.³ The ד, equaling four, represents the four directions—north, south, east and west. The א, which equals one, represents our singular G-d, who is Master over all that exists in heaven and earth and in all four directions.⁴

This demonstrates the difference between Lashon Hakodesh—the sacred language of the Torah—and all other languages. The ten utterances with which G-d created the world⁵ were stated in Lashon Hakodesh.⁶ Hence, words in

2. See Tanya, Shaar Hayichud Veha'emunah, at length.

3. Sefer Mitzvos Katan, sec. 2.

4. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 61:6.

5. Mishnah, Avos 5:1.

6. Rashi, Bereishis 2:23.

Lashon Hakodesh are not arbitrary: each word reflects the Divine energy animating the particular object it refers to, and captures the essential character of that object. In contrast, all other languages form by human consensus; the words do not reflect the essential nature of the articles or ideas to which they refer.⁷

This is evident in the Aramaic translation of the word one, *chad*, as rendered by Targum Onkelos on this verse. The word *chad* contains a ח and a ד, representing all of creation, as explained above, but it is missing the א, which represents G-d. Though the meaning of the word *chad* is “one,” and in this context expresses the idea of G-d’s singular existence (just as the word *echad* does), the truth of this oneness is not as obvious and revealed in the Aramaic word as it is in Lashon Hakodesh.

—*Toras Menachem 5743, vol. 1, p. 264*

7. See Shnei Luchos HaBris (Shaloh), Toldos Adam, Bayis Acharon.

6:5 | ה:1

וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ

*You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart,
with all your soul and with all your might.*

The Martyr's Shema

Our Sages explain the commandment to “love G-d... with all your soul” to mean, “even if He takes your soul,” i.e., to devote yourself to G-d even at the cost of your life.

The Talmud relates:

When they [the Romans] took Rabbi Akiva out for execution, it was the time for the recitation of Shema. As they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of Heaven [reciting the Shema]. His disciples said to him, “Our teacher, even to this extent?” He replied, “All my days I have been distressed by the verse ‘with all your soul,’ which means ‘even if He takes your soul.’ I said, ‘When shall I have the opportunity to fulfill this?’ Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it?”⁸

The students of Rabbi Akiva were men of great stature in their own right. Certainly, they were not surprised that the saintly Rabbi Akiva could suppress his physical pain and fulfill the mitzvah of reciting the Shema even during his execution. But the Shema proclaims G-d’s Oneness, which means that nothing exists outside of Him: the true identity of all of existence is the will of G-d that is causing it to exist. Rabbi Akiva’s

8. Berachos 61b.

students therefore understood that by reciting Shema at that moment, Rabbi Akiva was declaring that he recognized G-d's Oneness even within the torture he was suffering for studying Torah! This caused them to wonder, "Even to this point?" Could Rabbi Akiva identify G-d's singular existence even in this blasphemous attack on G-d and His Torah?

Rabbi Akiva, however, did not view his execution as a challenge to G-d's Oneness. On the contrary, in Rabbi Akiva's eyes, G-d's Oneness in this world meant that even experiences (that were not assisting in his worship of G-d directly) were enhancing his relationship with G-d indirectly—by allowing him to commit to G-d *in spite of them*. In fact, all his life, Rabbi Akiva had yearned to fulfill the mitzvah of dedicating himself to G-d to the point of *ultimate* sacrifice. Now that the Romans were offering him that "opportunity," he found the Oneness of G-d even in their cruelty.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 6, p. 126, fn. 35*

6:8 | ח:ו

וְקִשְׁרֹתֵם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפֹּת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ

You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be a reminder between your eyes.

The Tefillin Line of Attack

Our Sages teach that the mitzvah of *tefillin* frightens away the enemies of the Jewish people. The Talmud declares, “It is written: ‘All the peoples of the earth will see that the name of G-d is called upon you, and they will fear you’⁹... This refers to the *tefillin* of the head.”¹⁰ Even if our enemies do attack, G-d forbid, we are told that the merit of the mitzvah of *tefillin* will give our soldiers remarkable strength in battle: “By fulfilling the mitzvah to wear the *tefillin* [on the arm and on the head], those going to war will see the fulfillment of [Moshe’s blessing to the warriors of Gad,¹¹] ‘May he tear off the arm [of his enemy] as well as his head.’”¹²

Interestingly, when saying that the *tefillin* will scare off our enemies before they attack, the Talmud mentions only the *tefillin* of the head.¹³ In contrast, when describing the power of *tefillin* in the event that our enemies *do* attack, the *tefillin* of the arm and head are said to be *individually* effec-

9. Devarim 28:10.

10. Berachos 6a.

11. Devarim 33:20.

12. Rabbeinu Asher, Laws of Tefillin 15.

13. In this context, the function of the *tefillin* of the arm is that it facilitates the donning of the *tefillin* of the head. See Tzafnas Pa’aneach, Hilchos Tefillin 4:4.

tive, helping those at battle “tear off the arm [of the enemy] as well as his head.”

This explains the difference between the way the mitzvah of *tefillin* is related in the Book of Shemos¹⁴ and in the Book of Devarim.¹⁵ In Shemos, the Torah describes the *tefillin* of the arm and of the head as two components of one unit: “It shall be to you as a sign upon your hand and a remembrance between your eyes.” In Devarim, however, the Torah states, “You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, *and they shall be* a reminder between your eyes”—distinguishing them as two separate acts and obligations.

The reason for this difference is that in Shemos, the conquest of the Land of Israel was still intended to be led by Moshe, in which case the two *tefillin* together would have had a single effect: the nations would have been afraid to go to war against them. As Bnei Yisrael sang at the Splitting of the Sea, “All the inhabitants of Canaan melted...”¹⁶ In Devarim, however, Moshe knew that the conquest of the Land would be led by Yehoshua, and would require going to battle. Accordingly, he ascribed to the *tefillin* of the head and the hand two distinct mitzvos and merits.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 9, pp. 55–56

14. Shemos 13:9 and 13:16.

15. Devarim 6:8 and 11:18.

16. Shemos 15:15.

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ראטענשטרייך

גלב"ע ט"ו מנחם אב ה'תשפ"ב
ומ"כ בהר המנוחות בירושלים עיה"ק

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