



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra
Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ד Kedoshim

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The Talmud (Brachot 6a) reveals a stunning idea:

אמר רבי אבין בר רב אדא אמר רבי יצחק : מנין שהקדוש ברוך הוא מניח תפילין?
שנאמר נשבע ה' בימינו ובזרוע עוזו בימינו זו תורה שנאמר מימינו אש דת למו
ובזרוע עזו אלו תפילין שנאמר ה' עוז לעמו יתן.

Rabbi Avin bar Ada quoted Rabbi Yitzchak. How do we know that Hashem wears tefillin? Because the verse says...

אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק לרב חייא בר אבין הני תפילין דמרי עלמא מה כתיב
בהו? אמר ליה, ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ. אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא
לישראל אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם
אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד ואני
אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ

*Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak said to Rabbi Chiya bar Avin, "What does it say in Hashem's tefillin?" He answered with the verse, "Who is like your nation Israel, **one nation in the land.**" Hashem said to the Jewish nation, "You have singled me out and made Me One in the world by reciting the Shema - Hear O Israel Hashem is our G-d - Hashem is One – so, too, I will make you one nation in the world, as it says, "Who is like your nation Israel, **one nation in the land.**" [The Shema is written on one of the parchments in our tefillin.]*

Although we understand that Hashem has no head and no arm upon which to place tefillin, and that there are no leather boxes containing parchments in heaven, the idea presented here in the Talmud is very clear. Because when the Jewish people recite the Shema and wear the tefillin with the Shema in them, they proclaim Hashem as the One and only G-d of the world; Hashem takes great pride in His people because they also comprise a single unified nation. They are unlike all the other nations of the world, who are simply a collection of individuals with no connection to each other.

There is a deeper level to this idea, expressed in the writings of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato.

מאמר החכמה

וצריך שתדע שהנה האדון ב"ה הוא אחד, ואין הארתו מתחזקת אלא במה שמתאחד, והנה ישראל אע"פ שבאישיהם הם רבים נקראים גוי אחד, והם ראויים לשתתחזק במ הארתו ית', אמנם האומות הם רבים ונפרדים לגמרי ואינם נתקנים ביחוד ונמצאים רחוקים מהתיקון לגמרי

*And you must know that because Hashem is One, His light can only be actualized in an entity that is equally one. Therefore, since the nation Israel, though comprising many individuals, is called “**One Nation**” only they are capable of embodying Hashem’s light. The nations of the world, on the other hand, are just a multitude of separate people and are therefore incapable of receiving Hashem’s unified light, hence, they are very far from perfection.*

What makes the Jewish nation “**One Nation**” as opposed to a collection of individuals?

To begin with, we are all one family. It started with the seventy souls who went down to Egypt with Yaakov and blossomed into the 600,000 men, (roughly 3 million souls) who left Egypt and made their way to Mount Sinai where they accepted the Torah.

The Torah is careful to point this out to us when describing Esav’s children versus Yaakov’s children. The Midrash tells us,

בעשו כתיב ביה שש נפשות וכתוב בו נפשות הרבה דכתיב (בראשית לו) ויקח עשו את נשיו ואת בניו ואת בנותיו ואת כל נפשות ביתו וביעקב שבעים נפש וכתוב ביה נפש אי דכתיי (שמות א) ויהי כל נפש יוצאי ירך יעקב וגוי אלא עשו שהוא עובד לאלהות הרבה כתיב ביה נפשות הרבה אבל יעקב שהוא עובד לאלוה אחד כתיב בו נפש אחת ויהי כל נפש וגו

*As far as Esav is concerned, the Torah writes six **souls** and many **souls**, as the verse says (Genesis 36), “And Esav took his wives, his sons and daughters and all the **souls** of his household.” As to Yaakov*

it says, “A soul of seventy – one soul – comprising seventy components.” It also says (Exodus 1) And all the soul – the offspring of Yaakov...

We see that when the Torah refers to Esav’s family, they are “souls” (plural), but when referring to Yaakov’s family, it always denotes them in the singular as one soul.

There is another reason that we are all related, and that is because we all have the same Father, Hashem. The Torah tells us (Deuteronomy 14:1):

בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם

1) *You are children to Hashem your G-d.*

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (3:14) says:

(יד) הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, חָבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם, חֶבֶה יִתְרָה נּוֹדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ט), כִּי בְּצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. חֶבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בְּנִים לְמָקוֹם. חֶבֶה יִתְרָה נּוֹדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בְּנִים לְמָקוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים יד), בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

14) *He (Rabbi Akiva) used to say, “Beloved is man because he was created in the image of Hashem; but it is by a special love that he was **informed** that he was created in Hashem’s image ...*

*Beloved are the people of Israel, for they are called the children of Hashem; but it is by a special love that they were **informed** that they were called the children of Hashem...*

Rabbi Akiva explains how all mankind was created in Hashem’s image and are beloved to Him. Our Sages explain that being created in the “image of Hashem” refers to man’s unique freedom to choose between right and wrong.

Every human being, regardless of his station in life, must constantly make moral choices as he goes through life. Animals who are controlled by instinct make no moral choices.

The Jewish people, however, are even more beloved to Hashem because, as shown above, He has called us His children and He is our father. We have a closer and deeper relationship with Him than the rest of humanity who are His subjects, but *not* His children. Hashem showed us extra love by *telling us* that we are His children. This is why the Jews are all brothers and sisters.

Our Jewish family has special rules that Hashem has instituted for His children, and He commands us to treat our brothers and sisters differently that we treat those who are not members of our family. These are the many laws given in the Torah that apply to fellow Jews only. When giving such a law, the Torah refers to a Jew in one of two terms. Either אחיך (your brother), or רעך (your fellow Jew). The Torah invokes the term אחיך - your brother - no less than 28 times, and uses the term רעך - your fellow Jew 13 times. When one of these two terms is used, the accompanying law applies only to a fellow Jew and not to a gentile. (As you review this week's Torah portion, notice how many times and in what context the word "אחיך" *your brother* is used.)

It is clear, then, that Hashem wants us to appreciate that we are one family of siblings. If your family was having a private birthday party for your father, would you invite a friend from school or work to join? It would be considered inappropriate; not being part of the family he simply doesn't belong. And if someone did bring along a friend, the "bringer" would be showing that he does not consider it special to be part of his family; anyone can join.

This idea provides an insight as to how to fulfill one of the Torah's most daunting commandments. In this week's portion we read (Leviticus 19:18):

י(ח) לא תקים ולא תטר את בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני דוד

18) You shall not take revenge, and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself, I am Hashem.

Rashi explains the difference between taking revenge and bearing a grudge:

Michael asked his neighbor Jason, "May I please borrow your lawn mower? Mine is in the shop." Jason responded, "Sorry, I don't lend out my yard equipment." If later Jason comes to Michael and asks him, "May I please borrow your wheelbarrow? I need to move around some dirt in my yard," and Michael responds, "No! You wouldn't lend me your lawn mower, so I won't lend you my wheelbarrow!" where Michael's sole reason for not lending his wheelbarrow to Jason is to get back at him for not lending him his lawn mower, that is *revenge*.

Should, however, Michael rather say to Jason, "Sure you can borrow my wheelbarrow; I am not like you who wouldn't lend me your lawn mower," that is *bearing a grudge*, the verse's second prohibition.

These commandments go against human nature. How could Hashem expect a person not to take revenge or to bear a grudge against the person who wronged him? The other guy has it coming to him! Let him feel what it is like to be rejected and not have what he needs! Perhaps if he experiences it, he will learn his lesson and be more kind. Besides, what would it have hurt him to lend me his lawn mower? It would have cost him nothing! He was just being mean, so

why should I be nice to him and act as if he did nothing wrong? And I can't even mention his meanness to him?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in Chapter 11 of his book *Path of the Just* – מסילת ישרים (*Mesilat Yesharim*) says that such a response is easy only for angels.

גַּם הַשְּׂנֵאָה וְהַנְּקִימָה קָשָׁה מְאֹד לְשִׁמְלִיט מִמֶּנּוּ לֵב הוֹתֵל אֲשֶׁר לְבַנֵּי הָאָדָם, כִּי הָאָדָם מְרַגֵּשׁ מְאֹד בְּעֵלְבוֹנוֹתָיו, וּמְצִטֵּעַ צַעַר גָּדוֹל. וְהַנְּקָמָה לוֹ מִתּוֹקָה מְדַבֵּשׁ, כִּי הִיא מְנוּחָתוֹ לְבָדָה, עַל כֵּן לְשִׂיחָהּ בְּכוּחוֹ לְעִזּוֹב מֶה שֶׁטִּבְעוֹ מְכַרֵּחַ אוֹתוֹ, וַיַּעֲבֵר עַל מִדּוֹתָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁנֵא מִי שֶׁהֵעִיר בּוֹ הַשְּׂנֵאָה וְלֹא יִקָּם מִמֶּנּוּ בְּהִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ שְׂיוֹכֵל לְהַנְּקָם, וְלֹא יִטַּר לוֹ, אֲלֵא אֶת הַכֹּל יִשְׁפַח וְיִסִּיר מִלְּבוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא הָיָה - חֶזֶק וְאַמִּיץ הוּא, וְהוּא קָל רַק לְמַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת שֶׁאֵין בֵּינֵיהֶם הַמִּדּוֹת הַלְלוּ, לֹא אֶל שׁוֹכְנֵי בְּתֵי חֹמֶר אֲשֶׁר בְּעַפְרֵי יְסוּדָם. אֲמַנָּם גִּזְרַת מִלֶּדֶךָ הִיא, וְהַמְקַרְאוֹת גְּלוּיִים בְּאֵר הַיֵּטֵב, אֵינָם צְרִיכִים פְּרוּשׁ, "לֹא תִשְׂנֵא אֶת אַחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ" (ויקרא יט). "לֹא תִקָּם וְלֹא תִטַּר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ

Hatred and revenge are very difficult for the frail human heart to avoid because a person feels his embarrassment very acutely and endures much pain from it. Taking revenge is sweeter than honey to him because it gives him peace (knowing that the other fellow received what he assuredly deserved). Therefore, to have the strength to overcome what his nature compels him do, and to forego his honor and not hate the person who wronged him and not take revenge when the opportunity to do so arises, and not harbor any resentment, and instead to forget the entire episode and remove it from the heart as if it never happened, such a person is very strong and powerful. Doing this is easy only for angels who lack human qualities, not for human beings who live in a physical body made from earth. But the verses in the Torah are very clear and explicit, not needing deep interpretations. "Do not hate your brother in your heart." "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against the members of your nation."

The Jerusalem Talmud (Nedarim 9:4) addresses this law - do not take revenge or harbor a grudge - and explains how a person can be expected to fulfil it.

כתיב לא תקום ולא תטור את בני עמך. היך עבידא? הוה מקטע קופד
ומחת סכינא לידי תחזור ותמחי לידיה?

It says: Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge against a fellow Jew: How is a person expected to fulfill this? A butcher who was cutting meat cut his hand. Would the injured hand now take revenge against the hand that cut it and cut it back?

This is the secret to not taking revenge against another Jew. The Jewish nation is like one person, joined at the heart. Why would I hurt my other half? That's me, not him!

The prophet Yechezkel said (34:31):

לא) ואתן צאני צאן מרעיתי אדם אתם אני אלקיכם

*31) And you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, **you are Man**, and I am your G-d.*

The Talmud (Yevamot 61a) derives from this passage that only the Jewish nation is called *Odom* (man) and that the world's other nations are not called *Odom*.

קברי עובדי כוכבים אינן מטמאין באהל שנאמר ואתן צאני צאן מרעיתי
אדם אתם אתם קרויין אדם ואין העובדי כוכבים קרויין אדם

The verse gives us a powerful metaphor for the Jewish nation. Similar to a human being, the Jewish nation is like one person. Just as the human body comprises trillions of cells of different types - heart cells, muscle cells, brain cells, etc. – but all have the same DNA and work tirelessly together to give life to the body, each Jewish person is like one cell in the *Odom* of the Jewish Nation, doing his part to keep the Jewish Nation alive and well. Just as if a person is suffering from a headache or a stomachache, the entire body feels weakened and sick, when one segment of the Jewish nation is not well, the entire Jewish nation is affected and suffers from it.

In the Mishna from Pirkei Avot quoted earlier, Rabbi Akiva made a third statement, which gives the unity of the Jewish nation yet another layer of depth. He said:

חֲבִיבֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנִּתְּנָה לָהֶם כָּלִי חֻמְדָּה. חֲבִיבָה יִתְּרָה נִוְדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּתְּנָה לָהֶם כָּלִי חֻמְדָּה שֶׁבּוֹ נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ד), כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נִתְּנָה לָכֶם, תּוֹרַתִי אֶל תַּעֲזֹבוּ

Beloved are the people of Israel, for to them was given a precious instrument of delight (the Torah); But it is by a special love that they were informed that to them was given the precious instrument, with which the world was created ...

Having received the Torah as one nation is yet another component in the one-ness of the Jewish nation. The Torah was given to the Jewish people only after they melded into one nation at Mount Sinai, where we stood **as one person with one heart**. At that moment in our history, the Jewish nation stood unified in their commitment to fulfill Hashem's will. Rather than describing their current state, the Torah was revealing to us that this was a prerequisite to receiving it. Without that fundamental unity, they would not have been worthy of it.

The Maharal (R. Yehudah Loeb of Prague, 1520-1609) explains that the Torah could not be given to an individual, which is why it was not given to any of the forefathers, or to the 12 tribes, or even to the 70 souls who went down to Egypt with Jacob. The Jewish nation needed to reach the critical "peoplehood" number of 600,000 before they could receive the Torah.

There is yet another layer to explore. The Torah and the Jewish nation together comprise one unit. How is that? The word **ישראל**, Jewish nation's name, can be understood as an acronym for:

יש ששים רבוא אותיות לתורה

This means: *“There are 600,000 letters in a Sefer Torah.”* The number 600,000 is the approximate number of men who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to accept the Torah. That general number is used to refer to the entire Jewish nation with all its components. Every Jew represents a letter in the Sefer Torah. His body is like the small piece of parchment on which the holy letter of the Torah is written, and his soul is like the holy letter. As one lives his life according to the Torah, he brings life to his letter, and it shines brightly and clearly among the other letters. As each of the members of the Jewish nation serves Hashem in his own unique way, each letter combines with all the other to convey the Torah’s complete message. Since every letter occupies a different position in the Torah, there are 600,000 perspectives from which to understand the Torah, corresponding to each Jew’s unique path of service to Hashem . Hence, it is only through combining all the letters of the 600,000 individuals with their unique perceptions that the full understanding of the Torah can be realized. It is like a puzzle, where the picture is complete only when every piece is in its proper place. As each small piece is added, it contributes *its* essential fragment of the picture, and at the same time, completes the picture for all the other pieces. It is only when all the pieces are in their proper places that we can appreciate the magnificent picture with all its facets.

This is why receiving the Torah on Sinai required that all 600,000 men be unified as one. If one person would not have been connected to all the others, his letter would be missing from the Torah, and the entire Torah would have been incomplete and hence invalid. This idea applies today as well. The Jewish nation needs every one of its members to contribute their special service to Hashem so that we can have the full complement of perspectives and have the complete Torah represented.

This idea applies as well to performing mitzvot. In addition to perfecting *ourselves* through performing the mitzvot, we also add a component of completeness to the rest of the Jewish nation, because the Jewish nation is one body comprising 600,000 parts, each of which is essential to the whole.

This is the basis for the concept כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה - *All Jews are guarantors for each other*, which allows one Jew to recite the Kiddush or a blessing for another Jew, it being as if the second one has said it himself. Because my perfection is contingent on him performing his mitzvah, and, without his mitzvah, I will be deficient in my mitzvah, I am doing the mitzvah for myself.

This is the meaning of “ואהבת לרעך כמוך” *Love your fellow Jew as yourself*, and how we are expected to fulfill it. Because we are all one, like the cells of the same body, we should treat each other as we treat ourselves.

During these extraordinarily difficult times, when our brothers and sisters in Israel are suffering from war, when soldiers are being killed at the front, and when innocent and helpless hostages are being tortured by a vicious, savage enemy, it is so important to realize that because the Jewish nation is one person, we can, and must, make a positive difference in their lives. Just as eating healthy and doing exercise benefits the whole body, so, too, when we make “healthy choices,” in this case by learning more Torah and doing more mitzvot and praying for their welfare, we benefit not only ourselves but also bestow benefit on the rest of our body, our brothers and sisters in Israel. How fortunate we are to be able to make a real difference in their lives as well as in our own.