

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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*This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Asnat bat Lea, Suzanne Perlman, a creative and powerful woman with an unwavering Jewish identity who always remembered her forefathers. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"*

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN

## All For One

*Listen, Israel, Hashem is our Lord, Hashem is One (6:4).*

Bal Haturim (ad loc) points out that in the cantillation of this famous *possuk* [cantillation marks provide a structure to sentences of the Torah similar to that provided by punctuation marks] there is a *psik* between the second occurrence of "Hashem is" and the word "One." A *psik* essentially marks a pause. In other words, when reading the *Shema* the verse is broken up and read thusly: "*Hashem is our Lord, Hashem is – One.*"

Bal Haturim explains that the use of the *psik* is to teach us a very specific lesson. In general, the description of Hashem as our "Lord" refers to His attribute of absolute justice, while the title "Hashem" refers to his attribute of absolute mercy. Bal Haturim therefore concludes that the pause in this verse is intended to teach us that both the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy are a part of the unity of the Almighty – "One."

Bal Haturim's explanation of the purpose of the *psik* requires further clarification. Why would we need a specific lesson to teach us that both attributes of the Almighty are a part of the unity? After all, a person can be happy or sad, kind or harsh, and we innately understand that it all stems from one source. Why would we need a special verse in the Torah, particularly what is probably the **most famous verse in the Torah**, to teach us that both attributes of Hashem are part of the same unity?

In truth, Bal Haturim is alluding to one of the most fundamental principles of our philosophy, one that is rightly taught from this famous *possuk*. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his famous work on philosophy *Derech Hashem*, points out (1:1:5) that Hashem, unlike a person, has no compartmentalization. That is, a person's psyche can be divided into many components – will, memory, imagination, desire, etc. – but Hashem is indivisible. Even though there are many attributes that we perceive, they are in truth all part of his perfect oneness: there are no separate components.

This difference is very important to internalize. A person can have varying reasons for his actions; therefore different feelings can be attached to each action. Hashem has a single purpose for everything and, as stated above, does not compartmentalize. The purpose of creation, according to *Derech Hashem* (1:2:1), is for Hashem to bestow good. Thus, every single act is part of the "goodness" that Hashem is providing. In other words, everything that Hashem does is part of the unity of purpose. Therefore, both mercy and justice are aspects of the same goodness, and a person receives what Hashem feels is the ultimate good in a given situation. The source of every act by Hashem is this unity. This is what we learn from the *Shema*.

Understanding this principle is the key to understanding Jewish philosophy.



**Miami Edition**

There is often a feeling of tension in the observance of the *mitzvos*; are we doing it for ourselves or for Him? For example, why do we keep Shabbos or kosher? Is it that we merely obey Hashem or is it because Hashem has determined that this system will deliver to our lives the highest level of "good"? Examining this carefully is the difference between pining every second for Shabbos to arrive and pining every moment for Shabbos to be over. Do we continuously regret the constrictions that keeping kosher places upon us or are we thankful that Hashem has given us a system that He has determined is the best for us to follow? Do we perceive *mitzvos* as onerous obligations or a remarkable roadmap for successful living?

The *Shema* teaches us that everything is part of the unity of purpose and therefore for our good. We follow the Torah and *mitzvos* because it is in our best interest to do so. Even though we perceive different components of His actions, as viewed through the prism of our psyche, everything is in fact merely a reflection of the One and His desire to bestow good.

# Home is Where You Are

**And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates (6:9).**

This week's *parsha* details the *mitzvah* of placing the ubiquitous *mezuzah* on the doorways of our homes. In fact, the word *mezuzah* itself means doorway. This seems a strange name for the piece of parchment that we affix to the doorway. Generally, names of *mitzvos* refer to the actual item utilized for the *mitzvah*, not how it is used or where it is placed; this would be like calling *teffilin* "forearm." Why is the name of this *mitzvah* different; what is so significant about where it is placed that it becomes the very definition of the *mitzvah*?

When *Bnei Yisroel* were about to leave Egypt, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, Hashem commanded them to place the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on the doorways of their homes. The reason given in the Torah is that on this night Hashem was going to visit all the Egyptian homes and kill all the firstborns. By placing the blood on the doorways it would be

recognizable as a Jewish home and Hashem would "pass-over" that home and not harm the inhabitants. In truth, this is a little odd. After all, Hashem Himself came to redeem the Jews that night and to smite the Egyptians; why would He need the blood on the doorway to perceive the difference between the homes of the Jews and those of the Egyptians?

The answer, of course, is that the purpose of placing blood on the doorways was for our own sake. It was our declaration that we are Jews and not Egyptians. Physically putting the blood on the doorways of our homes was an articulation of our allegiance to Hashem. Chazal teach us that most of the Jews never left Egypt (see Rashi *Shemos* 13:17); they had seemingly fully integrated into Egyptian society. Placing the blood on the doorways was a way of showing who had chosen to be

identified as Jews and not Egyptians. Why was this sign also the doorways to their homes?

In American society "a person's home is their castle." That is, a person's home is considered their absolute space. This has many applicable ramifications in law. Basically all homeowners consider their home to be their kingdom, where their rule is absolute. Similar to having a family name on the door or a "Villa De \_\_\_\_" sign on the wall, when we put a *mezuzah* up at the entrance of our home we are declaring that this is God's space. By putting up a *mezuzah* we are proclaiming that even in our most private space we are still in His place. This is why the very essence of the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* is its placement on the doorways of our homes – a declaration that our home is really His and that Hashem's rule is absolute, even in our personal space.

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