

Kinder Torah®

Parashas Vayechi

One

Abbaba, we are approaching the mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema*. This is a mitzvah di'oraysa (from the Torah), which we fulfill twice every day. It includes many *yeshuos* (foundations) of the Torah, among them affirmation of Hashem's Oneness and acceptance of *ole malchus shomayim* (the yoke of the kingdom of heaven). I really want to do this mitzvah right."

"I am with you 100% Avi. Let us take a few minutes to delve into the *halachos* (laws) and *kavannos* (intentions) of *Kriyas Shema*. Then you will have the tools that you need to fulfill this tremendous mitzvah. Firstly, let me inform you that this mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema* has the power to guard ones limbs, prevent destruction, and cool off the fires of *gehennom*."

"What a powerful mitzvah!"

"Yes, Avi. The Medrash Tanchuma¹ states that there are 248 words in *Kriyas Shema* corresponding to the 248 limbs in a person's body. Hashem says, 'If you will guard Mine (and read *Kriyas Shema* properly) I will guard yours (your 248 limbs).' The Gemora² relates that Rebbe Abahu said, 'Yerushalayim was only destroyed because they refrained from reciting *Kriyas Shema* in the morning and night.' Lastly, another Gemora³ cites

Rebbe Chama the son of Rebbe Chanina who teaches that *gehennom* will be cooled off for all those who read *Kriyas Shema* meticulously, taking care to precisely and accurately pronounce all of the letters. The Kad HaKemach⁴ explains that *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of 'echad' is thirteen. The word 'gan' appears thirteen times in *parashas Bereshis*. The word 'aish' appears thirteen times in *parashas Voeschanan* concerning *matan Torah*. This is to inform us that all those who *mechaven* (concentrate properly) on the word 'echad' are saved from the fire of *gehennom* and merit 'gan eden' in particular, the thirteen attributes that it has."

"That is incredible, Abba!"

IIndeed, Avi. Now, let us learn the *halachos*. There are two types of *kavannos* in *Kriyas Shema* – firstly, the intention to fulfill the mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema*, and secondly, the concentration upon the meaning of the words. These are both *halachos* in *Shulchan Aruch*. The first, *halacha* states that the requirements of a mitzvah include having *kavannah* to fulfill that particular mitzvah.⁵ Ideally, a person must be careful before each mitzvah to have intention to fulfill his obligation of that mitzvah.⁶ Secondly, *Kriyas Shema* has an additional requirement for *kavannah*. One who reads *Kriyas Shema* and does not concentrate his heart on the (meanings of the words of the) first verse – 'Shema Yisrael' – does not fulfill his obligation.⁷ The simple *kavannah* is, 'Listen

Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d. He is One.' He is Singular and Unique in the seven heavens, on the earth and in the four directions of the world. I believe this with perfect *emunah*.⁸ I accept this upon myself, and am prepared to give up my life for this *emunah*.

"All of the ten *dibros* are hinted to in the three paragraphs of *Kriyas Shema*. 'Hashem Elokeinu' hints to the first *dibur* – 'I am Hashem your G-d' (*Shemos* 20:2). 'Hashem echad' alludes to the second *dibur* – 'You shall have no other gods before Me' (*Shemos* 20:3).¹⁰ Therefore, when you say 'Hashem Elokeinu' have *kavannah* to accept upon yourself the *dibur* – 'I am Hashem your G-d'. When you say, 'Hashem Echad' have *kavannah* to accept upon yourself the *dibur* – 'You shall have no other gods before Me'.¹¹

"This is quite a commitment, Abba."

Definitely, Avi. However, there is even more. The first verse is also like testimony, as if each person says to his friend, 'Listen, I believe that Hashem our G-d in the only One in His world.' Therefore, the letters 'ayin' and the 'daled' are enlarged, to indicate the word 'eid' (witness) – a hint to testimony. The first letter of the words 'ole malchus shomayim' are 'ayin, mem, shin' which spell 'shema' backwards. There are three meanings of 'shema' – to hear, to understand, and to

accept. All three are found in the first verse, which exhorts every Jewish person to listen and understand that Hashem is the Master of the world, there is none other than Him, and to accept upon himself the yoke of His monarchy.¹²

"And so, the mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema* is referred to as 'unification of Hashem'. The root of this is twofold – *emunah* and *kaballah*. *Emunah* is expressed in the words, "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad". It is the realization of the correctness of the perfect and true faith that Hashem is our G-d and that He is One, Individual, and Unique. One fulfills *kaballah* when he accepts upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven in its entirety – His monarchy, Divinity, and Mastery. Immediately afterward, he accepts upon himself *mesirus nefesh* (self sacrifice in sanctification of the Holy Name).¹³

"This is awesome mitzvah, Abba."

"Undeniably, Avi. Let us now go over the technical aspects of *Kriyas Shema*. It is a mitzvah to hold the *tzitzis* in your left hand, opposite your heart when you read *Kriyas Shema*. This is hinted to in the verse, 'And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart' (*Devarim* 6:6).¹⁴ Read *Kriyas Shema* with concentration, awe and fear, trembling and perspiration.¹⁵ 'Awe and fear' in acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, and the commitment to give up ones life in sanctification the Holy Name.¹⁶ 'Trembling and perspiration', as if *Kriyas Shema* were a new declaration from the king.¹⁷ We are

accustomed to reading the first verse in a loud voice in order to arouse the *kavannah*.¹⁸ We are accustomed to placing our hands [right hand]¹⁹ over our eyes when reading the first verse in order to not see anything that will interfere with our *kavannah*.²⁰ We must lengthen (our enunciation of) the 'ches' of 'echad' in order to coronate the Holy One, blessed be He upon the heaven and earth ... and lengthen (our enunciation of) the 'daled' of 'echad' long enough to think that the Holy One, blessed be He is One in His world, and rules over the four directions of the world. Do not extend the 'daled' longer than this.²¹ Put emphasis on the 'daled' in order that it should not sound like a 'reish' [say it nicely, however].²² Do not shorten the 'ches' and do not lengthen the 'aleph'.²³

"Abba, I do not know how to thank you. You have given me a veritable encyclopedia of *Kriyas Shema*!"

"Use it well Avi, to fulfill this awesome mitzvah in its entirety."

"Amen!"

Kinderlach . . .

Kriyas Shema is a mitzvah di'oraysa that we have the privilege of fulfilling every morning and night. It confirms Hashem's Oneness in the seven heavens, on the earth and in the four directions of the world. When we say it, we listen and understand that Hashem is the Master of the universe, there is none other than Him, and accept upon ourselves the yoke of His monarchy. We commit ourselves to give up our lives in sanctification of His Holy Name. *Kriyas Shema* has the power to guard our limbs, prevent destruction, and cool off the fires of *gehennom*. Therefore, kinderlach, prepare yourselves to say *Kriyas Shema* by having intention to fulfill the mitzvah, gathering your *tzitzis*, and covering your eyes. Then say the words with intense *kavannah*. May this mitzvah bring you much blessing in this world, eternal reward in the world to come!

¹ Kedoshim 6

² Shabbos 119b

³ Brachos 15b

⁴ As cited in Etz Yosef in Otzer HaTefillos

⁵ Orach Chaim 60:4

⁶ Mishna Brura (10)

⁷ Orach Chaim 60:5

⁸ Etz Yosef as cited in Otzer HaTefillos

⁹ Besamim Rosh as cited in Otzer HaTefillos

¹⁰ Mishna Brura (2) on Orach Chaim 61:2

¹¹ Anaf Yosef as cited in Otzer HaTefillos

¹² Abudarham

¹³ Yesod Vi'shoresh Ho'avodah

¹⁴ Orach Chaim 24:2

¹⁵ Orach Chaim 61:1

¹⁶ Mishna Brura (3)

¹⁷ Mishna Brura (4)

¹⁸ Orach Chaim 61:4

¹⁹ Mishna Brura (17)

²⁰ Orach Chaim 61:5

²¹ Orach Chaim 61:6

²² Mishna Brura (21)

²³ Orach Chaim 61:7

²⁴ Orach Chaim 61:8