

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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As we read through Sefer Devorim, we listen-in to Moshe Rabbeinu's monologue as he reviews major episodes in our national history and summarizes many different Mitzvot. As we follow Moshe's words certain verses vividly stand out. One such verse appears in this week's Parasha as we hear the familiar words of a Pasuk that most every Jew knows by heart from the earliest stages of life. As Rabbi S.R. Hirsch points out it is both the first verse we choose to teach young children as they begin to speak, as well as the last verse we expect an elderly person to utter upon leaving this world in order to meet their Maker.

Sh'ma Yisrael

Hashem Elokeinu

Hashem Echad!

Continuing up until this day, Rav Hirsch adds, even when if a Jew has separated himself entirely from the rest of our people, and lives an isolated existence ['Biddud' is the word he uses...] - the Shema would remain on his lips!

What is so special about these short

words? The Vilna Gaon writes in his 'Aderet Eliyahu' that this single verse encapsulates all of the ten commandments. This suggestion may offer an opening, or a partial explanation, as to the uniqueness of this verse. However, I would like to explore the issue through the prism provided by the words of the Sifri (Devarim Piska 31) which zeroes in on one word: 'Yisrael' - Shema Yisrael.

The Sifri wishes to answer the following question: Why do we not say 'Shema Avraham', or 'Shema Yitzchak'? - If we wish to define ourselves through our lineage, and mention the ancestral link connecting us to our forefathers, why do we not mention the other Patriarchs? The Midrash answers by noting that our nation includes each and every one of Yaakov's children: "By what merit are all of Yaakov's children included when we say "Daber el Bnei Yisrael"?"

For as opposed to Avraham who was painfully forced to remove Yishmael from his home, and Yitzchak who counted Eisav amongst his progeny, Yaakov merited to have all his children surround his bed in unison.

The Sifri writes that throughout Yaakov's life this was a question which deeply troubled him. Yaakov had seen the Pesolet (-waste) which

had emanated from his fathers and feared that the same might happen to him. He was constantly on guard, and perpetually worried by the prospect that wastrels might emanate from him. [The Cambridge dictionary defines a 'wastrel' as someone who does nothing positive with their life. A person who squanders their own abilities and the opportunities offered to them].

In Bereishit 28:20 Yaakov begins his neder saying: "If Hashem is with me and guards me on my way...". The Sifri notes that Yaakov surely did not question Hashem's presence (-"if Hashem is with me"), nor did he doubt the divine Hashgacha in his life. What Yaakov meant by his words, was to acknowledge the recurring doubt he felt regarding his children's future. Yaakov was asking that the Almighty's name should always permeate his being ("She'yachul She'mo Aly"), so that all his offspring, from beginning to end, will never produce wastrels."

This was Yaakov Avinu's main wish and his primary dream. Before Yaakov passed away he assembled all of his children and pointedly quizzed them regarding their theological position: Did they harbor any negative feelings towards G-d? Would they remain steadfast to the path he had raised them to follow? To

this they answered "Shema Yisrael", meaning that he, Yaakov their father (Yisrael) should listen: "Just as you believe in one G-d, so do we (your children) believe in Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad", (Rashi, Bereishit 49:1). The midrash tells us that upon hearing his children say "Shema Yisrael", Yaakov thanked G-d, and uttered praise that no 'pesolet' had emanated from him, saying the words: "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Va'ed", (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit 833).

From here we can clearly see, that in addition to saying Shema on their own, as a person nears the end of their journey upon this world, they have a deep-seated desire to hear their own children excitedly, and earnestly, recite the "Shema". They wish to hear their children declare their own loyalty and fealty to our tradition. When this wish is fulfilled, a person can leave this world adding a hopeful postscript to the words of the Shema. Like Yaakov Avinu, they may supplement the words of the Shema with a final declaration expressing feelings of comfort and relief: "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Va'ed".

Every parent shares Yaakov Avinu's desire to see Nachas from their children, and fears the tragic prospect of witnessing Pesolet (a

wastrel) emanating from them. It should be patently obvious that there is no simple and easy path which can guarantee and fully ensure this outcome (otherwise Yaakov would not have feared this prospect so much...). Some steps, though, seem like they are a wise and prudent investment yielding positive gains with little risk. By extracting one's offspring from the Galut where intermarriage rate is over 50%, and bringing them to the Land of Israel where intermarriage is negligent, and the prevailing culture itself one steeped in Jewish identity and tradition.

So come on Aliya, acquire your Yerusha in the Land, and help to guarantee that your spiritual Yrusha will be continued by your children for posterity!