



פרשת תצוה
פרשת זכור
אדר תשפ"ג
שנת הקהל



HAKHEL AND PURIM

Based on the words of the Megillah, the sages teach that the acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai was not complete. This was because their acceptance was 'coerced' by Hashem suspending the Mountain over their heads.

The Gemara teaches that nonetheless, they reaccepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh. This acceptance was done wiffully of their own volition.

That being the case, Purim is connected to Matan Torah and by extension to Hakhel. The Rambam teaches that the gathering of Hakhel was a recreation and reexperiencing of Matan Torah.

The Megillah also emphasises the idea of unity and gathering of the Jewish people, which is another theme of Hakhel.

Before she would approach the king, Esther asked Mordechai to go and gather the Jewish people together לך כנוס את כל היהודים. Esther understood that the unity of the Jews would stand in her merit.

Similarly in the decree that gave the Jews permission to fight back against their enemies, Mordechai wrote להקהל ולעמוד על נפשם that they should gather (הקהל) and stand up for their lives.

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אין בית המדרש בלא **חידוש** Chiddush



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The Ultimate Leadership Quality

A Parsha thought based on the writings of the Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk

ואתה הקרב אליך את אהרן אחיך ואת בניו איתו מתוך בני ישראל לכהנו לי

You must draw your brother Aharon close to you from among Bnei Yisroel together with his sons

Moshe merited to be the leader of the generation because he took to heart the suffering of the Jewish people and was willing to sacrifice himself (*mesiras nefesh*) for their sake. When Hashem was going to destroy the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe threatened that should Hashem not forgive the Jewish people, then his name should be erased from the Torah.

Moshe displayed this quality in his youth as well. In Parshas Shemos, the Torah says that Moshe grew up. The very next Posuk says *"and Moshe grew and went out to his brothers."* Rashi comments that the first verse refers to Moshe's physical growth. The second verse refers to his achieving greatness. What was his greatness? That *"he went out to his brothers."* Moshe saw each Jew as his brother and felt their pain, sacrificing of himself to stand up for them in their suffering.

Dovid Hamelech, who was also the king and leader of the entire Jewish people, shared a similar quality. He too was willing to sacrifice himself on behalf of the Jewish people. At a time when the Jewish people were struck by plague, Dovid asked Hashem to put the suffering on him instead; *"place Your hand against me, for what have these sheep (the Jewish people) done?"*

This is the message conveyed at the beginning of Parshas Tetzaveh when Hashem instructs Moshe to *"draw your brother Aharon close to you."*

As Kohen Gadol, Aharon represented the Jewish people, elevating them and drawing down blessings for them through his service. To truly fulfil this role, he too needed to have the same quality of Moshe; to be able to sacrifice himself for the sake of the Jewish people.

And so, Hashem commands Moshe to bring Aharon close to him, to his level, to teach him that he too must be willing to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people.

The verse continues מתוך בני ישראל. Literally this means to *"draw Aharon from amongst the Jewish people"*. On a deeper level, תוך means inside. Hashem is

teaching that Aharon should be elevated until his תוך, his inner core and very being should be *"Bnei Yisroel"* i.e. overflowing with Ahavas Yisroel and devotion to the Jewish people.

In Parshas Emor, the Kohen Gadol is described as הכהן הגדול מאחיו, *"the Kohen who is greater than his brothers"*. On this verse, our sages teach that the Kohen Gadol should be made great by his fellow Kohanim - גדלהו משל אחיו, by giving him money and status. On a deeper level, the verse is teaching that Ahraon's greatness is *"from his brothers"* on account of loving all of the Jewish people as his brothers and seeking out their wellbeing.

This theme is reflected in the Parsha's description of the Bigdei Kehuna, the Priestly garments. Concerning the Choshen breastplate, the Torah teaches;

והיו על לב אהרן בבואו לפני ה' ונשא אהרן את משפט בני ישראל על ליבו לפני ה' תמיד

And it shall be on Aharon's heart when he comes before Hashem, Aharon must carry the judgement (*Mishpat*) of Bnei Yisroel on his heart.

The names of the 12 tribes were engraved onto the stones of the Choshen. *Mishpat* refers to Hashem's judgement of the Jewish people. On a deeper level, wearing the judgements of the Jewish people of his heart means that the Kohen Gadol had to constantly remember the Jewish people, to appeal to Hashem to *"sweeten their judgements"* and if required, be willing to carry accept judgements upon himself instead.

The passage describing the Kohen Gadol's robe concludes;

והיה על אהרן לשרת ונשמע קולו ואל הקודש לפני ה' ובצאתו ולא ימות

It must be worn by Aharon when he serves. And its sound will be heard when he enters the Sanctuary before Hashem and when he leaves, so that he not die.

The verse can also be read *"and his voice will be heard"*. When Aharon will sacrifice himself for the sake of the Jewish people, his prayers will be heard and accepted by Hashem. And the Torah assures that in the merit of Ahavas Yisroel, he will emerge from before Hashem in peace and he will not die.

The Bigdei Kehuna

Lessons from the Choshen and Ephod

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

Securing our Choshen to our Ephod

In our next few posts, we will focus on two of the garments of the Kohen Gadol; the Ephod and the Choshen and the relationship between them.

The Ephod was a type of apron that was worn from behind and would drape down to the heels of the Kohen Gadol. On the shoulder straps there were two Shoham (onyx) stones on which were engraved the names of the 12 Tribes, 6 names on each stone.

The Choshen was a woven breastplate that the Kohen Gadol wore above his heart. It had 12 different precious stones set in golden settings, with the name of one of the 12 Tribes on each stone.

The Choshen was tied to the Ephod with Techeiles-wool threads and the Torah gives an explicit warning (and prohibition) “and the Choshen shall not be detached from the Ephod”.

Worn from behind and extending down to the ankles, the Ephod represents the lowest and most mundane aspects of our lives and the lowest and most external levels of our psyche. The Choshen, worn over the heart, represents the loftiest levels of the soul. The two encompass our entire being, from our greatest spiritual qualities to our most basic functions.

The Torah’s prohibition teaches us that we need to make sure that the two are constantly secured together, uniting these two extremities of our lives.

Our lofty G-dly feelings should not only be channelled into our spiritual activities of prayer and study. We need to make sure that everything that we do, even our most mundane, is permeated with the influence and inspiration from the deepest levels of our souls.

Relating Front and back

The Zohar describes the relationship between the Choshen and the Ephod using the verse אַחֲרַי וְקִדְמִי צִרְתָּנִי, which can mean “You have fashioned me front and back.” The

Ephod worn at the back and the Choshen worn at the front, represent 2 different pathways of serving Hashem. The difference between them is analogous to difference between the back of a person and their front.

When looking at someone face-to-face, we see animation and expression, which convey their emotions. In contrast, when looking at someone’s back, we can’t discern any emotion.

A face-to-face relationship with Hashem is one that is permeated with feeling and desire. The word for face (Panim), is related to the word Penim, meaning inner. This inner service is represented by the Choshen, which was worn at the front and over the heart, the seat of emotion.

A “back-sided” relationship with Hashem represents our service when we lack feeling. In Kabbalah, this Avodah is called Iskafia, compelling. When we are not inspired and we lack feeling, we must use our mind to dominate the heart, to compel ourselves to serve Hashem even when our heart is not in it. This service is represented by the Ephod.

These 2 pathways are the different services of Tzaddikim and Beinonim. The Tzaddik is constantly alight with fiery love and passion, always inspired to serve Hashem with an inner service. The Beinoni struggles with physical desires, dullness of heart and lack of inspiration which they must overcome to serve Hashem.

Even though one was worn at the back and the other over the heart, both the Choshen and Ephod are holy and both are integral parts of the Kohen Gadol’s clothing. If either were missing, his Temple service would be disqualified.

Hashem formed a unique few “front”, to serve Him without struggle and with inner feeling. Most of us He formed “back”, with inner battles that we need to confront and overcome. Neither Avodah is superior to the other, they are both holy garments and Hashem has Nachas from both, as long as we apply ourselves to the service that He has destined for us.

25 in the morning and 25 in the evening

The names of the 12 Tribes were engraved on the Shoham (onyx) stones affixed to the shoulder straps of the Ephod. 6 names were written

on each stone, as taught in the Torah; ששה על משמותם על, “six of the names on [one stone]”. The division and spelling of the names ensured that there were exactly 25 letters on each stone.

The first letters of these words ששה על משמותם spell שמע Shema. The verse Shema Yisroel has 25 letters. The two stones with 25 letters each, represent the two times each day that we are commanded to recite the Shema; once in the morning and once at night.

The stone on the right side corresponds to the attribute of Chesed. This represents the morning Shema which is recited at a time of light and revelation. The left stone corresponds to the attribute of Gevurah. This represents the evening Shema, recited at a time of concealment, darkness and challenge.

In the first verse of the Shema, we accept upon ourselves Hashem’s kingship and surrender ourselves to Him. Day and night also represent different phases in our lives.

When the sun shines on us and we experience physical and spiritual success, we feel secure and it is easy to forget about Hashem, as we attribute our success to our own doing. In our ‘daytime’ we need to say Shema, to humble ourselves and recognise the true source of our blessings.

Likewise, when we struggle with darkness and go through hard and challenging times, we feel down and alone. In this state it is hard to find motivation to serve Hashem. In our ‘night-time’ we need to say Shema, to realise that we are not alone and that Hashem is in control and there for us when we turn to Him.

This is the inner message of the 2 Shoham stones on the side of Chesed and the side of Gevurah. No matter what circumstances or stage of life that we find ourselves in, be it bright or dark, we are able to and need to say Shema, our connection to Hashem.