

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn



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DIFFERENT IN EVERYTHING

FOUR SIGNS

In the Megillah it says, that after they were saved from Haman's decree, the end result was that "for the Yidden there was light, and happiness, and rejoicing, and honor." The Gemara says that 'light' refers to Torah, citing the *possuk*, "a candle is a *mitzva* and Torah is light." 'Happiness' refers to Yom Tov, as it says "you shall be happy on your festivals." Rejoicing refers to *bris milah*, as Dovid Hamelech said about *milah*, "I rejoice over your word like someone who has found great profit." Honor, the Gemara says, refers to *tefillin*, citing the *possuk* "all the nations of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you, and they will be afraid of you." They show that the Yidden are bound to Hashem.

What does it mean that when we were rescued from Haman's decree these four specific things occurred? The Maharshah explains that these four things are an "os," a sign, between the Yidden and Hashem. The evil Haman could not tolerate the fact that Yidden differentiate themselves from other nations, and show that they have a special connection to Hashem. Therefore he did not permit the fulfillment of these four *mitzvos*. When we were saved from Haman's decree these four *mitzvos* were reinstated.

ARE WE DIFFERENT?

But a question arises: If one wants to make a sign showing one thing to be different from all other things, you would want to use such a sign that is only present in that one thing and not in anything else. If the sign is also present in other things then it is not a differentiating sign. Apparently, however, these four things also exist amongst the other nations of the world. They don't seem to display anything unique about the Yidden.

"Light, this is Torah." Non-Jews also have an appreciation for this, as the *possuk* says, "it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations." Non-Jews understand that Torah is a beautiful thing, great wisdom, and there are some who want to study Torah. "Happiness, this is Yom Tov." Just like we have festivals, they too have their festivals. We don't see anything particularly special here. "Rejoicing, this is *milah*." There are non-Jews who circumcise themselves. As the Rambam writes, they actually do this for health reasons. "Honor, these are *tefillin*." The Gemara explains that *tefillin* are a symbol displaying our connection to Hashem. But we find many other groups and cultures that mark themselves as members of a particular religion or organization, they have specific symbols or items of clothing, which they wear to show their allegiance to their party, tribe or people. So what do we mean that these are the specific signs that distinguish the unique connection between the Yidden and Hashem?

The Rebbe explains: When do we need to make a sign? Between two things that are utterly disconnected it's unnecessary to make a differentiating sign. Yidden have both a *neschama* and a body. "And you chose from every nation and tongue." Tanya says that this refers to the body. With regard to the *neschama* is there any need to say that the *Yiddishe neschama* is different from that of a non-Jew? It's a different type of soul entirely. It's a G-dly soul, "literally a part of G-d above." No kind of sign is required. But the body is a physical body in the most simple

sense. You can touch it with your hands, and it is made of flesh, just like the body of a non-Jew. Nevertheless it is entirely different. It is a holy body. This is the point of signs. Signs are specifically required for those things in which we are similar to other nations, and in which we are nevertheless entirely different.

INTELLECTUAL ARGUMENTS OR DIVINE REVELATION?

As mentioned, regarding Torah the Gemara cites the *possuk*, "a candle is a *mitzva* and Torah is light." But here the word light is spelled אור whereas in the Megillah it is spelled אורה, with a "hei". The difference is that the first is masculine and the second is feminine. In general terms, this is the difference between *Torah Shebiksav*, the written Torah, and *Torah Shebaal Peh*, the oral Torah. Just as between man and woman, the male

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provides and the woman receives from the man, so everything in *Torah Shebaal Peh* is taken and founded on *Torah Shebiksav*. The *Torah Shebiksav* is אור in masculine form, and the *Torah Shebaal Peh* is אורה in feminine form. It receives from *Torah Shebiksav*. Everyone knows that *Torah Shebiksav* was given by Hashem to Moshe Rabbeinu, that Hashem told him to write it down word by word. Regarding *Torah Shebiksav* there is no need to say or emphasize that it is holy. It was given directly from Hashem and we therefore understand that it is not something we can start philosophizing about it; no one can say they like one part and dislike another part; it was all given by Hashem.

But when it comes to *Torah Shebaal Peh*, superficially it seems to be an intellectual discipline. Moreover, it is not simple an explanation of *Torah Shebiksav*; many things are arrived at based on the thirteen principles of Torah exegesis. These principles are intellectual tools. Something is not explicitly written in the Torah but it is arrived at based on a "*kal vechomer*" (a fortiori) argument, or with a "*gzeiro shovo*" (textual comparison). On this count the Tzedukim came and challenged the authority of the *Torah Shebaal Peh*. *Torah Shebiksav*, they admitted was holy and given by Hashem. But *Torah Shebaal Peh* was authored by the *chachomim*, and just as the *chachomim* have understanding, they too have understanding, and they have the right to understand differently.

But the truth is that a Yid knows that the *Torah Shebaal Peh* is no less holy than the *Torah Shebiksav*. It all comes from Hashem. And not only Mishnah and Gemara but even later works. Anything that has been accepted among all the Jewish communities, *rishonim* and *acharonim*, are all holy. And if someone will say that he has arrived at a different interpretation than what is clearly stated in the *rishonim* and *acharonim*, he must nevertheless rule as they do. It doesn't matter if he has questions and proofs. He must know that he is making a mistake. It is all from Hashem. The only difference is that Hashem so decided that there are certain things that were communicated directly and instructed to be written down, then there are things that Hashem explained, "Torah was given with its explanation," but didn't instruct to be written. When Hashem said that their should be "*totafos*" between your eyes, He explained that it doesn't mean literally between your eyes but higher up on the forehead. Likewise he explained that "*pri etz hadar*" refers to an *esrog*. But so it was, some things Hashem instructed to be written and others to be transmitted orally. And there are other things that Hashem

said that are only revealed through the thirteen principles. Yet all of it was given to Moshe at Sinai. And this is also true of the ideas stated in the *rishonim* and *acharonim*.

This is the purpose of a sign. Something that only the Yidden have, and doesn't exist at all by non-Jews, doesn't require a sign. It's distinct to begin with. There is nothing to wonder about regarding the *neshama*, the *neshama* is obviously different. The sign is effective when it comes to the body, the body in the literal sense, and similarly with regard to Torah that is connected to intelligence. Here one might say, "intelligence? I too have intelligence!" But this is incorrect. For a Yid, the wisdom of Torah, even the intellectual component, is holy. This the first sign. "Light, this is Torah" means that אורה, the feminine form, is also Torah.

REJOICING OVER LESS PLEASURE

"Happiness, this is Yom Tov." The Gemara cites the *possuk* "you shall be happy on your festivals." The non-Jews also have their festivals. But we see clearly that the happiness of their festivals brings to frivolity. Among Yidden, by contrast - it is true that "there is no happiness without meat and wine," we eat, we gather together, we drink a little *mashkeh*, we say *lechaim* and *farbreng*, but a *farbrengen* inspires *yiras Shomayim*. Not only does it not bring to frivolity, on the contrary, the happiness of Yom Tov is an entirely different type of happiness, a holy happiness; it brings to *yiras Shomayim*.

Here too we have a sign; happiness appears to be the same as other forms of happiness, but it is actually entirely different. Just like the first sign where it appears to be ordinary intellect, but it is actually Torah intellect, "everything that a veteran student will originate was given to Moshe at Sinai." Similarly here, it is happiness, but the happiness is holy, and on the contrary it brings to fear of Heaven. Even the happiness of Purim, which reaches a state of "not knowing," is not frivolous *chas veshalom*. On the contrary, what we see in practice, and what we saw by Yidden, and *chassidische Yidden* especially, is that the happiness of "not knowing" brought to even greater *yiras Shomayim*, more than regular happiness of a regular Yom Tov.

"Rejoicing refers to *milah*," and the Gemara cites the *possuk*, "I rejoice over your word like someone who has found great profit." As mentioned, the Rambam writes that there are non-Jews who circumcise themselves. Why? Because circumcision weakens certain desires for worldly pleasures, and when a person becomes too immersed in such things he becomes ill. By cutting away something of that organ the desire is weakened and one's health won't be damaged. Practically speaking, is the person happy that these desires have been weakened or not? In truth he is pained by this. Since his main interest in life is this worldly pleasure, when those desires are weakened he is pained. But he does it anyway because they forewarn the greater pain of becoming ill. But to say that he rejoices?!

But among Yidden, however, it is not only that a bigger problem is circumvented. No, "I rejoice over your word!" This is not simply the happiness that risk of illness is lessened. On the contrary, the very fact that one has less desire for this worldly pleasures, that one is not immersed in this worldly pleasures, is a source of rejoicing. When a non-Jew loses worldly pleasure it is painful, but for a Yid it is the opposite. A Yid strives to find ways to derive greater pleasure from Torah, more enjoyment in *mitzvos*, and since one competes with the other, he rejoices that he will have less worldly pleasure, and more spiritual pleasure from Torah.

PROUD TO BE SIMPLE

Regarding *tefillin* the Gemara cites the *possuk* "all the nations of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you, and they will be afraid of you." We asked that apparently many people who wish to express their allegiance to a tribe or people wear a special band or the like and are proud of their affiliation. The badge that they wear is usually made from an attractive material. But what are *tefillin* made from? Both the *parshiyos*, the *batim* and the *retzuos* are all made from animal hide. When a person wants to show that he belongs to a prestigious tribe, does he make his symbol from animal hide? On the contrary, he wants to display the attractive superiority of his tribe, what relevance is an animal? And not just an animal, but its hide! Moreover, the *tefillin* must be black. Black is not a nice color. As the *possuk* say "I am black," nevertheless, "and beautiful." This is novel, usually black is ugly.

But what is written on this animal hide? Sections from the Torah; *kadesh li kol bechor*, *vehaya im shemoah*, *yetzias mitzrayim* and *shema*. This is the symbol. A Yid says: "I am taking animal hide, and it is painted black. In other words, it may be something that human intellect cannot understand, and even looks strange. But because through *tefillin* 'the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you' therefore 'all the nations shall see' that this is my symbol."

This is connected to what is says in Tanya, "I am a boor and know nothing, I am as an animal when I am with you." Others say it means that despite being like an animal nevertheless I am with you. But the Alter Rebbe explains that through my knowledge that I am like an animal, I am with you, because compared to Hashem everything is animalistic. A Yid says, "I know its black, but when I say *shema yisroel* with this I achieve ecstasy."

And this is the point of Purim. It says in Tikunei Zohar that Yom Kippur is a day "like Purim." If you want to articulate the greatness of Yom Kippur and you say that it is "like Purim" this means that Purim is even loftier. What does this mean? Yom Kippur is the one day of the year given to the Yidden to bind themselves to Hashem through tearing themselves away from worldliness. We fast, we afflict ourselves, we spend nearly the entire day in *shul*, we *daven* the entire day. This too is an expression of how the Yidden are distinguished from other nations and connect themselves to Hashem. But this isn't the ultimate achievement.

Purim achieves something deeper - signs. The function of signs is to show that even in those areas, which apparently exist in the wider world too, are utterly different among Yidden. On Purim we celebrate, we eat and we drink, and we must eat and drink, and specifically in this way we connect to Hashem. This is the "light, happiness, rejoicing, honor," that even in the things in which we appear similar to non-Jews, here too we are utterly different. The body of a Yid too is holy.

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