

Parasha Meditation Vayechi

Bereishit 47:28–50:26

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Shema Yisrael – Unifying at Heart

Introduction:

The Blessing of Redemption

This week's *parasha* concluding the book of *Bereishit* culminates with the blessings that Ya'acov gave to his children. A blessing is a transfer of energy. In order to transmit Hashem's blessing to another person, the "blesser" and the blessed need to be united, both with each other and with Hashem. This is why in preparation for blessing his offspring, Ya'acov dramatically entreated his sons: "Join together and I will tell you what will happen at the end of days."¹ The ultimate blessing that Ya'acov desired to impart is the blessing of the Final Redemption. In order to reach the days of Mashiach, complete unity is needed.² Just as the first exile to Egypt came about because of the strife between Yosef and his brothers, likewise, the destruction of the Temple happened through unwarranted hatred among Jews. In order to prepare ourselves for redemption, we need to train ourselves to really love and unity with our fellow-Jews.

Eradicating Self-Indulgent Worry

"Redemption will not come until every *prutah* (the smallest denomination of coin) is gone from the pocket."³ Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, the first Satmar Rebbe, noted that the word *prutah* shares the same root as the word *pratiut* – privacy. He explains that Mashiach can't come until every *pratiut* – every self-indulgent detail that a person worries about for himself rather than worrying about his fellow, is dispensed with. When each of us will be united by caring about others the way we care about ourselves, we will merit the Final Redemption.

Israel's Expression of Unity and Praise

After imploring his children to unify with the greatest possible love for one another, Ya'acov urged them to unify with Hashem. When Ya'acov, our father assembled his sons in Egypt, at his deathbed, he commanded them to unify the name of G*d, in order to follow the path of Hashem that Avraham and Yitzchak his father had walked. Ya'acov asked them and said, "My sons, perhaps someone among you is flawed and does not stand with me in the Unification of the Name?" They all answered in unity, "Hear Israel Hashem our G*d Hashem is One" – that is, "Hear from us, our father, Israel, Hashem our G*d, Hashem is one." The old man answered "Blessed be the Name of the Glory of His Kingship for ever and ever!" And this is why all Israel has the custom to repeat this expression of praise used by Israel and his sons in these Torah verses.⁴

¹ Bereishit 49:1.

² *The Shlah HaKodesh, Parashat Vayechi, Derech Chaim, Tochachat Mussar.*

³ *Yalkut Shimoni Devarim*, Chapter 32, Allusion 946.

⁴ Rambam, *Laws of Recital of Shema* 1:4.



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Physical and Spiritual Gathering

“Gather yourselves together, and hear, your sons of Ya’acov, listen to Yisrael your father.”⁵ The Shlah HaKodesh connects the unification with Hashem expressed in the recital of *Shema* with the unification between the children of Israel. He asks, why did it state “Gather” immediately after it had stated “join together”?⁶ “Join together” refers to physical gathering, while “gather yourselves together” refers to spiritual gathering, which implies removal of jealousy, hatred and competition from the heart. Without unifying as one person with one soul, it is impossible to receive unification with Hashem. Hashem only dwells on us, when Israel are unified at heart, without jealousy, like the ministering angels, about whom it states, “they all love...they all accept the yoke of the heavenly Kingdom upon themselves.”⁷ Therefore, everyone must unify his heart with the entire congregation of Israel, as if speaking to every descendant of Israel, “Hear o Israel” – we are all united in love, without hatred and jealousy – and now we receive the unity of our G*d and recite, “Hashem our G*d, Hashem is One.”⁸ Here follows a meditation to help us get in touch with our innate love for all of Israel and unify with Hashem.

Meditation:

Before starting this meditation, you may want to look intensely at the three Hebrew letters that make up the Hebrew word “*Shema*,” until these letters are imprinted in your mind’s eye.

1. Sit comfortably in your chair take several deep breaths and relax. Breathe in Hashem’s life-giving light, breath out any tension from all the limbs of your body, starting with your head and finishing with your feet. Continue following your breath until you feel totally relaxed.
2. Breathe in “*She*” – the fire of *Shin*, breathe out “*Mah*” the water of *Mem*.
3. Continue four more breaths and imagine that you unify fire and water with your inhalation and exhalation.
4. The last letter of the word “*Shema*” is the letter *Ayin* which means eye. Imagine you take the fire of the *Shin* and the water of the *Mem* and unite them inside the Divine Eye of *Ayin*. (If it is easier for you, you may imagine a large eye instead of the letter *Ayin*). Hold this visualization as you continue breathing softly.
5. Now empty your “Divine Eye” and place inside of the *Ayin* the person you love most in life. It can be your spouse if you are married, or a parent, a sibling, a very close relative or friend.
6. Imagine filling this beloved person with Hashem’s light from head to toe, inside of your mind’s eye.

⁵ Bereishit 49:2.

⁶ In the previous verse, Ibid. 1.

⁷ *The Siddur*, the paragraph preceding the *Recital of Shema*.

⁸ *The Shlah HaKodesh, Mesechet Yoma, Derech Chaim, Tochachat Mussar.*

7. Get in touch with your own heart as you breathe, feel warm softness from your heart and allow yourself to feel the love you have for the person you love most in life.
8. Allow this love to spread within your entire body. How does it feel? Is it warm and soothing? A stable unwavering feeling or a passionate feeling that comes in spurts? Are there any place within your body where you find it difficult to express your love?
9. Breathe Hashem's light into the places of yourself where your love may be blocked.
10. Then breathe in "*She*" – the fire of *Shin*, breathe out "*Mah*" the water of *Mem*. Continue four more breaths and imagine unifying fire and water through your inhalation and exhalation.
11. Now place inside of your Divine *Ayin* a person you have a difficult time with in life. It can be a child, a mother-in-law, a neighbor who has caused you trouble, or anyone with whom you have or have had a conflict.
12. Imagine filling this person with Hashem's light from head to toe, inside of your mind's eye as you breathe. If you get stuck and find it difficult, try to remember that this person too is a child of G*d. Just as you love your children, or your parents love you, Hashem loves this person so very much, and desires to fill him or her with Divine light.
13. When you have completed filling this person with imaginary light – as if you paint every part of him or her with infinite Divine light – return to focus on yourself.
14. Is there any part of yourself that feels hatred, jealousy or competition with the person with who you have clashed? Locate any possible negative feeling towards this person inside of your body. Perhaps in the right side of your head, or in your shoulder or heart you feel a certain kind of resentment. Focus in on this feeling. What color does it have? What texture? Is it round or square dotted, spiked or smooth?
15. Try to remove this resentment from your body into an imaginary basket outside of yourself.
16. Now take an imaginary paintbrush of light and paint everything in the basket with Divine light, until the resentment dissipates.
17. Breathe in "*She*" – the fire of *Shin*, breathe out "*Mah*" the water of *Mem*. Continue four more breaths and imagine unifying fire and water through your inhalation and exhalation.
18. Now imagine that you are a drop of water within the great ocean of the Jewish people. Together with all of Israel, you are part of the great waves and their frosty foam. Let go, let go, let go!
19. Imagine yourself melting away and merging with that which is so much greater than yourself. Imagine yourself being just a drop of "*Mah*" riding on the waves.

20. Now breathe in “*Mah*” the water of *Mem*, breathe out “*Mah*” the water of *Mem*. “*Mah-Mah*” “*Mah-Mah*” Continue four more breaths and imagine unifying yourself with all of Israel through your inhalation and exhalation.

21. Get back in touch with the love you have for your most beloved person in life. Imagine expanding that love to include all of Israel, even those whose outlook or lifestyle is opposed to yours. We are all most beloved children of Hashem. When we unite like “one person with one heart”⁹ then we can unite Hashem in the world. שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַשֵּׁם אֶחָד – “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*” – Hear oh Yisrael, Hashem is our G*d, Hashem is One!”¹⁰

Notes:

After the Holocaust, R. Yosef Kahaneman zt'l, the Ponevezhe Rav began looking for Jewish children who had survived the war. It was known that some of the children had ended up in churches and were being raised as Christians. The Rav encountered one church that denied the existence and presence of Jewish children within their midst. Yet, he was granted permission to enter the children’s quarters to inspect for himself. When he entered, he began calling out “*Shema Yisrael*” and instinctively many of the children raised their hands to cover their eyes and started calling out “mama! mama!”

The “*Shema Yisrael*” stems from the deepest level of the Jewish soul, the יְחִידָה – *yechidah* –where all Jews are united with each other and Hashem. The *gematria* (numerical value) of אֶחָד/ *echad* and אַחָוָה/ *ahava* is identical, they are both thirteen. For this reason in the introductory paragraph before the recital of *Shema* we pray for the love of Hashem and His unity, in the secret of “Unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name.”¹¹ Moreover, the section of love “And you shall love...”¹² follows directly the *Shema Yisrael* verse. We thus find that the *Shema Yisrael* is sandwiched between “Love and Love.”

With every recital of *Shema*, we bring down Hashem’s light upon ourselves and in the world. The belief that Hashem’s Oneness unites us and includes all forces of the world, is our ultimate service of unifying Hashem. This *emunah* is our beacon of light through the dark times of our lives.

⁹ Rashi, *Shemot* 19:2 explains that we reached this level at the giving of the Torah.

¹⁰ *Devarim* 6:4.

¹¹ *Ba'al Shem Tov on the Torah, Parashat Vaetchanan.*

¹² *Devarim* 6:5.



About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work.

For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

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Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

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