

בס"ד
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פרשת ראה

As Moshe continues to address Bnei Yisrael, he proclaims, “בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם,” that they are children of Hashem.¹ He then immediately prohibits them from making cuts in their flesh or baldness between their eyes in mourning, saying “לא תתגדדו ולא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם למת.” But what is the relevance between the declaration and the decree? Moreover, is there a deeper meaning to the seemingly obvious statement that Bnei Yisrael are children to Hashem?

The Ramban explains² that there had already been a commandment about prohibiting volitional wounding, in Parshas Emor.³ However, that forbidding was only for Kohanim, while this is showing that Bnei Yisrael, like the Kohanim, are children to Hashem, so the prohibition applies to all of them as well; the pasuk is showing that Bnei Yisrael have a similar holiness to the Kohanim. He also quotes the Ibn Ezra,⁴ who says that the line of “לא תתגדדו” means that we should not cut ourselves over anything that Hashem has done, because all that Hashem does for us is for the best. Just as children do not understand the actions of their parents yet rely on them anyway, so too we must rely on Hashem even when we cannot understand His actions. If a person loses their father, says the Bechor Shor,⁵ they should remember that while they may lack a parent, they still have a great Father who still exists, and that is Hashem. However, if someone who serves an idol loses their father, they have lost all sense of direction and guidance, because when they find themselves in a time of great need, no direction and counsel will come to them from a father who is etched in wood or a mother who is engraved in stone.⁶ We must remember and appreciate that we will always have a Father in Heaven to show us the way and guide us in our journey.

Rabbeinu Bachaye⁷ says that this shows us how our entire life perspective is so different from any of the other nations; since we are children of Hashem, we have early nothing in common with them. He quotes a *minhag* of the *Amoraim* that a father tends to leave his son a bestowal of something very valuable that belonged to him and explains that Hashem, *our* Father, has given us the gift of *Olam Haba*. Therefore, it is quite inappropriate and perhaps even nonsensical to overreact in mourning when the deceased is entering such a promising and propitious future in the World to Come; after all, this world is simply an antechamber to *Olam HaBa*, as R’ Yaakov says in *Pirkei Avos*.⁸ Rabbeinu Bachaye adds that when we are subsequently called an “עם קדוש,” the word means separate and apart, because in another life, we receive the reward for our good deeds performed in *this* life; the second life begins with the death of our bodies.

¹ דברים יד:א

² רמב"ן דברים יד:א ד"ה בנים אתם ה' אלקיכם

³ ויקרא כא:ה

⁴ אבן עזרא דברים יד:א ד"ה בנים

⁵ בכור שור דברים יד:א ד"ה בנים אתם ה' אלקיכם

⁶ ירמיהו ב:כז

⁷ רבינו בחיי דברים יד:א ד"ה בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם

⁸ פרקי אבות ד:טז

The *Ba'al HaTurim*⁹ points out that there are twelve words in this pasuk of “בנים אתם,” and the corresponds to the twelve shevatim of Bnei Yisrael that are considered to be Hashem’s children. Indeed, the theme of cohesion and unity is certainly present here. In *HaEmek Davar*,¹⁰ the Netziv quotes a Gemara in *Yevamos*¹¹ that “לא תתגדדי” means that Bnei Yisrael should not split into אגודות (factions), but instead remain in unity, retaining a sense of אחדות. The Sochatchover Rebbe remarks in his work *Avnei Nezer* that he only wishes Bnei Yisrael could be one general soul divided into many bodies; there is no reason to hyper-despair where a person passes away, for the soul is the main thing, not the body.

As we prepare to go into the month of Elul, we must understand that we have a tremendous task at hand. The *Meshech Chochma*, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, comments on a Gemara from R’ Yehuda in *Kiddushin*¹² that when Bnei Yisrael act like Hashem’s sons and cleave to the Him, they are called sons, but when they do not act like His children, they are not called sons. While Hashem loves us and considers us to be His chosen children, we need to earn that title by following in His ways. On the other hand, we have the position of R’ Meir, who opines that regardless of what happens, we are considered to be Hashem’s children.¹³ Regardless, we must enter this period with an outlook of appreciation that Hashem is always with us, combined with both a strong perspective of the purpose of this world in relation to the World to Come as well as an overall sense of oneness amongst our nation. By doing so, we will be able to begin the month of Elul with a greater sense of credence and conviction, as well as the confidence that we ensure our continued worthiness of the honorific title of “בני ה'.”

⁹ בעל הטורים דברים פרק יד:א ד"ה בנים אתם

¹⁰ העמק דבר דברים יד:א ד"ה בנים אתם וגו

¹¹ יבמות יד.

¹² קידושין לו.

¹³ Quotes the following pasukim as proof: הושע ב:א, ישעיהו א:ד, דברים לב:כ, ישעיהו א:ד, הושע ב:א