

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## SH'MA YISRAEL HASHEM ELOKEINU...

One understanding of these words, as explained in the Zohar, that we - especially as Jews - need to understand is that HaShem, as He is known to be in the 4-letter spelling of His name (Y-H-V-H) - the Merciful One, is also ELOKEINU, that Gd of strict justice - MIDAT HADIN. Nevertheless, these two traits co-exist in the One Being, HASHEM ECHAD. This idea is given expression in many places in the siddur, not the least of which is this phrase used countless times in every bracha: BARUCH ATA HASHEM ELOKEINU... Perhaps, it is possible to follow this theme even further as the Sh'ma continues:

BARUCH SHEM K'VOD MALCHUTO L'OLAM VA'ED - may His name be blessed eternally - even in those times when He expresses Himself as ELOKIM, times when we are not inclined to feel like praising Him. Nonetheless, we recognize that this, too, is part of His essence and we are obligated to be M'VOREICH AL HARA as well (Orach Chayim 222:3).

V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM... B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA UVCHOL M'ODECHA - our love for

Gd must be expressed in all these ways. And although these words are written in the singular as a mandate to each and every individual, it is part of the exclamation "Sh'ma YISRAEL" an address to us as a nation as well. In that context, could this reminder to us about loving Gd be a national charge that holds true under different circumstances and times? That this love is for both Gd Who is merciful, as well as Who is Elokeinu, the judge.

B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA - even these words express the same idea with the dual nature of the heart: serving Gd wholly - the Gd (Y-H-V-H) Who is merciful as well as when He is the judge.

UVCHOL M'ODECHA - we know that one of the understandings of this is B'CHOL MIDA UMIDA SHEHU MODED L'CHA - that this love includes even the times when what Gd metes out to us is not what we would consider very desirable or comfortable.

V'HAYU HAD'VORIM HA'ELEH - these words, this idea that Gd is the same Being who is merciful as well as One Who delivers justice and punishment, needs to accompany us as well as our descendants - V'SHINANTAM L'VA-NECHA V'DIBARTA BAM at all times: B'SHIVTECHA B'VEITECHA - when we are dwelling in our Homeland, in

Israel; UVLECHT'CHA VADERECH - and even in the times when we are in galut; and B'SHOCHB'CHA - when the Jewish people appear to be dead, Gd forbid, and certainly UVKUMECHA - when we are reborn and are recreated in our homeland again.

UKSHARTAM L'OT AL YADECHA - this idea of the unity yet dichotomous nature of Gd must guide our actions even as a nation; V'HAYU L'TOTAFOT BEIN EINECHA - and serve to direct our eyes toward the proper goal. As in Amos (7:16) where the word TATIF (related to TOTAFOT?) is defined by Rashi as 'a language of prophecy', there is a hint of prophecy, a proper reading of the future, when we can direct our eyes and thoughts in the direction Gd would want.

*I wonder if TOTAFOT is somehow related to TAF - our children. If so, it might imply that HAD'VORIM HA'ELU' - these matters, this philosophy, should mean as much to us as our children (TOTAFOT) are in our eyes. [A little far-fetched, but...]*

UCH-TAVTAM AL M'ZUZOT BEITECHA UVISH-ARECHA - And this force will invariably inscribe this lesson in how we live in our individual homes as well as in the cities of our Land.

We don't need to be reminded, as a nation, that there are times when our faith and trust in Gd are tested. We have been miraculously reborn in the Land promised our forefathers, a dream none would have ever thought could be realized; and yet, we struggle every day for our right to exist, to live safely, to protect ourselves against a reality that seems inhuman. Even now or, actually, especially now, we need to remind ourselves that the Gd Who brought us back here, will fight our fight and protect us and get us through these times not only as a Merciful Father, but even as a Judge, because we deserve it: HaShem is BA'AL MILCHAMOT - HE is the one running the war - ZOREI'A TZ'DAKOT - He 'plants' the TZ'DAKOT, the good deeds we are doing, especially at this time - and that is MATZMI'ACH Y'SHU'OT - it causes salvation to sprout. Yes, even according to 'justice', we deserve it. 🌸