

Afterthoughts

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BANIM ATEM LASHEM

- You are HaShem's Children

This Parsha begins with many rules, guidelines to be followed once the people enter Israel, laws that would bring a bracha when obeyed or a k'lala when disobeyed. They are to destroy all vestiges and reminders of the idol worship done by the previous inhabitants and only serve HaShem in the Place He chooses. They can eat meat even outside of that place but not the blood and they are to remember to provide for the Levi; they are warned about anyone or any town that tries to introduce avoda zara and are obligated to do away with them. The Parsha proceeds with the practical guidelines for active living there; what food was kosher, what was not; a system of tithes, rules of shmita, and more.

What strikes me as something "out of the blue", however, are the first two verses in Perek 14: BANIM ATEM LASHEM ELOKEICHEM - You are children to HaShem, your Gd... LO TITGOD'DU V'LO TASIMU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM LAMET - you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person; KI AM KADOSH ATA... - For you are a holy people to HaShem, your Gd, and HaShem has

chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people... These two verses are separated from all that precedes and follows them, standing alone in the Written Torah. Their connection to what preceded them and what follows, isn't clear. Instructions as to how we are not to express mourning would relate to not imitating the practices of the idol worshipers and the reason given, that we are holy to HaShem, would be an obvious, if somewhat tenuous, connection.

But what drew my attention most was the preface of BANIM ATEM LASHEM. After researching, I found that this exact expression isn't used anywhere else in the Torah or even in the Tanach. That makes it powerful, but what is it meant to convey? The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh suggests that this is mentioned as a form of comfort, to say that there is no reason for extreme mourning for the person has returned to his "Father"; and the Kli Yakar continues in this vein by saying that the dead are not a DAVAR AVEID, for Gd guards these souls.

But I found that these verses also contained a more mundane, practical message for me. Death of a loved one always evokes deep emotions: feeling of loss, maybe guilt, emptiness, and more. I've been told that when dealing with the care of a dying parent, it is, unfortunately, common

for there to be disagreement among the children as to the appropriate care for the parent and, after death, there could be more conflict regarding any yerusha. Some people can even react to death with anger at HaShem for having taken the loved one. Perhaps, the idol worshipers reacted to death with these outward physical acts but, in terms of reality, maybe I can understand these words as saying something else as well: "You are like beloved children of HaShem and, therefore, when death occurs, don't behave in such a way that you become so emotional that conflicts arise that split you apart (LO TITGOD'DU); and don't "blame" HaShem and in your anger, start "leaving the derech" and remove the tefillin from between your eyes - creating a "bald" spot there (LO TASIMU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM). You are better than that. Remember, Hashem is your Father Who loves you and will continue taking care of your deceased loved one and of you, even after all of this. He chose you to be His people. Trust Him.

And, yes, I still find the placement of these two verses hard to understand.

