

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

VIHYITEM LI SEGULA

You will be a treasure to Me

SEGULA is an unusual word, used only seven times in all of Tanach. Its accepted definition is that it refers to something treasured and unique. That is how HKBH sees us - that's what He wants us to be. Under what conditions would this be?

IM SHAMO'A TISHM'U B'KOLI... - If you hearken well to Me... you will be a treasure to Me. As Rav S.R. Hirsch explains: "If you really obey Me and continue in this relationship, then the fundamental condition for this is that you become a SEGULA... you must belong exclusively to Me".

Rav Moshe Tzvi Neria (Ner LaMa'or; p. 215) fills in a little background about this "gift" of being an AM SEGULA, by referring to the Gemara in Shabbat (86b). According to the Gemara, Moshe did not relay this message to the people when they reached the Sinai desert because of exhaustion from the journey. Why would this tiredness from traveling be so great that they would not be able to hear this news, namely, the VIHYITEM LI SEGULA verse that Moshe would say? On the contrary, this should have been an uplifting message.

However, when Moshe heard these

words from HaShem, he asked "what will the nations of the world say when they see that You have chosen the Jews over all the other nations? Gd's answer serves to validate Moshe's concern. HaShem responded: "Every generation with its troubles, every generation with its enemies of Israel; but EHYEH ASHER EHYEH, I will be with them in every trouble." Given this response, Moshe chose to allow the people to rest and, perhaps, to absorb the atmosphere of Har Sinai for a day before sharing this information with them. And although it was then clear to them what this SEGULA entailed, their response was All that HaShem has spoken, we shall do - NAASEH. We are ready to accept the Torah, knowing full-well the sacrifices that it will entail.

Beyond understanding the essence of what this SEGULA meant, my mind began to wander, as it usually does when I'm presented with an unusual word. I was drawn to the fact that there is a vowel called a SEGOL. And I wondered why would this vowel would have such a name? Is there any connection between the SEGOL and SEGULA? There should be. The form of two dots over one, basically forming the outline of a triangle, didn't help me much. The shape does resemble a cluster of grapes, an eshkol, whose root SHIN-KAF-LAMED, by the way, is a cognate meaning of SAMACH-GIMEL-LAMED.

Other than that, nothing. Then, I focused on the three dots, the triangular shape and the fact that the number three plays such an important part in Judaism.

Admor Dovid MiLilov points out that no matter how you turn around the SEGOL, it retains its shape, hinting to the fact that no matter the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people, even when we sin, we remain Jews inside and out. To me, this smacks a little of the message of SEGULA, as presented in the Gemara.

In his notes in Torah Sh'laima, Rav Kasher teaches that these three dots represent the three forefathers, in whose merit, we have been saved from numerous troubles, e.g. the sin of the golden calf.

Regarding the importance of the number three which figures quite prominently in our tradition, Rav Shimshon Pinkus, in his book on numbers, Birchot HaCheshbon, says that the number three represents strength. It implies an existence forever.

The Hebrew word for three is SHALOSH. The letter SHIN has three points and the middle letter LAMED is a multiple of three.

And more:

A Galilian told Rav Chisda: 'Blessed is HaShem Who gave the triad Torah (Ta-Na-Ch), to a triad people (Kohen,

Levi, Yisrael), through a third child (Moshe was the third child) in the third month (Sivan).

And there is more. What about: three holidays; three prayers a day; doing an act three times creates a chazaka; AL SH'LOSHA D'VARIM HA'OLAM OMEID - the world stands upon three principles (as a matter of fact, in the first chapter of Pirkei Avot, in 13 out of the 18 mishnayot, the Tanna lists three things as advice). Yes, and there are many more examples.

In the world of science, the three-sided shape of the triangle is considered the strongest shape there is, either in its original form or in multiples of that form. And consider this: The symbol that, for some reason, has represented the Jews for ages, the Magen David, consists of two triangles. When you connect their six points, you have a hexagon. Nature loves hexagons because they are the most efficient, stable and optimal shape for various purposes. Snowflakes are all hexagonal; bees create their hives through hexagons; six cyclones on the south pole of Jupiter form a hexagonal pattern around a central cyclone. How about the persistent hexagonal cloud pattern around the north pole of Saturn, which the scientists cannot explain. (Notice any similarities between the strength and importance of the hexagon and our Magen Dovid?)

Clearly, there is something special and unique about the number three, and its triangular SEGOL (whose letters, by the way are each a multiple of three). That must be it: Unique. And that's just what a SEGULA is. We are, indeed, a unique people. Let's only hope that we are unique in the way Gd wants us to be: "We must belong exclusively to Him." *