**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**Rav Yishai Jeselsohn**

**PARASHAT KI TAVO**

**Sanctity That Is Evident on One's Face**

**I. Torah Observance Elevates the People of Israel**

Our *parasha* contains the blessings and the curses. Although the section of the curses is much longer and more detailed than that of the blessings, the *Or Ha-Chaim* delves more deeply into explaining the blessings. In this *shiur*, we will examine a relatively short explanation of one of the blessings, and we will try to develop and add to it a bit.

The blessings open with the declaration that when the people of Israel observe the *mitzvot*, they actualize their elevated status in the world:

And it shall be, if you hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep to do all His commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. (*Devarim* 28:1)

If we look at the section of the blessings, we see the same idea highlighted three times – a connection between observing the commandments and the holiness of Israel:

And it shall be, **if you hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep to do all His commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God will set you high** above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings will come upon you, and overtake you, if you will hearken to the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city…

**The Lord will establish you to Him as a holy people, as He has sworn to you, if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.** And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you; and they will be afraid of you…

**And the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be only above, and you shall not be beneath; if you will hearken to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do**.(*Devarim* 28:1-13)

This repetition seems unnecessary; the message is already conveyed at the very beginning of the section that fulfillment of the *mitzvot* is what causes Israel to rise. But the *Or Ha-Chaim* explains that we are dealing here with three completely different matters:

God apportioned the goodness He bestows on earth corresponding to the observance of the *mitzvot*, each according to what is appropriate for him. [These relate to] three categories of commandments in our verse, and they are: Torah study [“if you hearken…”]; the avoidance of violating negative commandments [“if you will keep…”]; and the performance of positive commandments [“if you will hearken to the commandments of the Lord…”].

**Regarding Torah study**, it foretells that "the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you, and overtake you" (28:1-2). This corresponds to the reward for “if you hearken,” in that [verse 2] concludes and says “if you will hearken to the voice of the Lord…”; evidently, this fortune corresponds to the reward for Torah study. And it is also directed at Torah study because [it is] through Torah [that] they will transform to be elevated above all the nations who do not possess the Torah…

From "the Lord will establish you to Him as a holy people" (v. 9) until [just before] "the Lord will open for you His good storehouse" (v. 12) is the promise of goodness that corresponds to **keeping the negative commandments**,alluded to in the word *li-shmor* ("to keep").This is what He concludes and says: "if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God" (v. 9). The words "and walk in His ways" (ibid.) teach that God only commands about things that He distances. And this promise corresponds to keeping the negative commandments, for by refraining from transgressions, a person is called holy…

"The Lord will open for you…" (v. 12) – Here begins the promise of good corresponding to **performance of the positive commandments**…(*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Devarim* 28:1)

The *Or Ha-Chaim's* distinctions follow from a precise reading of the verses. At the end of the section, the Torah uses the verb "hearken" (*shema*) in connection specifically with the *mitzvot* – that is, the positive commandments. In contrast, the verse in the middle of the section speaks of "keeping" the *mitzvot.* The significance of the term "keep" (*shemor*) is familiar from the laws of Shabbat, where its use in *Devarim* 5:12 is understood as referring to negative commandments (while *zakhor*, in *Shemot* 20:8, refers to positive commandments). At the beginning of our section, the Torah speaks of a combination of "hearing," "keeping," and "doing," and the *Or Ha-Chaim* understands this as a reference to Torah study, which includes all of the *mitzvot* together.

**II. Calling God's Name Upon Israel**

The description of the sanctity of Israel in the middle of this passage comes with a certain addition:

The Lord will establish you to Him as a holy people, as He has sworn to you, if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth **will see** that the name of the Lord is called upon you; and they will be afraid of you**.** (*Or Ha-Chaim* 28:9-10)

Apart from the establishment of the people of Israel as a holy nation above the other nations, it is stated here that that selection and holiness will be evident on the faces of Israel in the form of the name of the Lord being called upon them, and therefore the nations will see and be afraid of Israel. What is this “calling of the name of the Lord”? How is it evident on a person? And how is it tied up with his actions?

**III. Look at that Torah scholar!**

These questions can be answered in several ways. It may be suggested that when a person follows the ways of the Torah, his upstanding behavior makes an impression on those around him and thus he reveals the name of God that is called upon him in the world. This is like the famous *beraita*, which is also brought by the Rambam (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:11) as an expression of the sanctification of God's name:

As it was taught: "And you shall love the Lord your God" (*Devarim* 6:5), i.e., that the name of Heaven shall be beloved because of you. If someone studies Scripture and Mishna, and attends Torah scholars, is honest in business, and speaks pleasantly to others, what do people then say about him? "Happy is the father who taught him Torah, happy is the teacher who taught him Torah; woe to people who have not studied the Torah; for this man has studied the Torah – look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds!! Of him Scripture says: "And He said to me: You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (*Yeshayahu* 49:3). (*Yoma* 86a)

In this example, the person represents the name of God; it is evident in his actions and enters the hearts of those around him.

**IV. The Image of God**

This approach can indeed be understood as the plain meaning of the verses, and we see it happen with our very eyes. Nevertheless, the *Or Ha-Chaim* offers a direction that relates more to spiritual worlds:

And the statement, "And all the peoples of the earth will see," is also directed toward keeping the negative commandments. For as long as a person guards himself from violating transgressions, his face will not lose the image of God [in which he was created], and all other creatures, man and beast alike, shiver before him. This is not true of one who turns his deeds to [things God has declared He considers] abominations, which remove the image from him – as Kayin said: "Whoever finds me will slay me" (*Bereishit* 4:14). (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Devarim* 28:9)

Before we try to understand this, let us recall that the *Or Ha-Chaim* understands the account of the holiness of Israel in the middle of the section as relating to observance of the negative commandments, i.e., refraining from transgressions. In this context, he explains that man was created in the image of God, and this should be evident on the outside – but the sins that a person commits hide the Divine revelation that lies within him. Avoiding transgressions, on the other hand, will preserve that Divine revelation so that it remains outwardly visible.

As an example of this, the *Or Ha-Chaim* mentions Kayin, who cries out to God in the aftermath of his sin:

My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, You have driven me out this day from the face of the land, and from Your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth; and it will come to pass, that whoever finds me will slay me. (*Bereishit* 4:13-14)

Until that point, nobody would have dared to touch him, because of the sign of God that was on his face. Now, after the transgression, the name of God was no longer evident in him. That this was Kayin's fear follows mainly from God's response to it:

And the Lord set a sign for Kayin, so that anyone finding him should not smite him. (*Bereishit* 4:15)

What is the "sign" that God gave to Kayin? *Targum Yonatan* gives an explanation that accords precisely with the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim* in our *parasha:*

And the Lord set on Kayin's face a letter from the great and precious name, so that anyone finding him should not kill him when he sees it. (*Targum Yonatan*, ad loc.)

According to this explanation God in fact wrote part of His name on Kayin's forehead, in order to complete the name of God that was marred because of his transgression.

So far, we have explained the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim*, but the concept may still be a little above our heads and difficult to understand. What is this "image of God" that is on the face of man? And how does sin manage to cover it up, to the point that it is no longer evident to others?

**V. *Tefillin*, Choice, and the Image of God**

We will try to understand further based on Rabbi Eliezer ha-Gadol's midrashic exposition in the Gemara:

It is written: "And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you; and they will be afraid of you." It was taught: Rabbi Eliezer ha-Gadol says: This refers to the *tefillin* of the head. (*Menachot* 35b)

Why is the *tefillin* of the head that which “calls the name of the Lord” upon man?

It is possible to suggest a simple answer: The name Sha-dai is found on the *tefillin* – the letters *shin* and *dalet* on the *tefillin* of the head, and the letter *yod* on the *tefillin* of the arm. Wearing *tefillin* means wearing the name of God, and therefore the name of the Lord is evident on a person through his *tefillin.* The Ramchal explains in his book, *Adir ba-Marom*, that only a human being can call out in the world in the name of God. This is the uniqueness of man. Only when one connects the parts of the name that are in the *tefillin* of the arm and the head – only then is the name of God complete.

However, it seems that a deeper answer can also be given. In his explanation of the root of the mitzvaof *tefillin*, the *Sefer ha-Chinukh* writes:

It is of the roots of the commandment [that] since people are physical, they are necessarily drawn after their desires. For thus is the nature of anything physical, to seek whatever is comfortable for it and is pleasurable – "like a horse or a mule which understand nothing" – were it not that the soul with which God has graced us prevents us, to its ability, from sinning. But as it resides in its [the body’s] territory, which is the earth, and is far removed from its [own] territory, which is the heavens, it cannot vanquish it and [the body] always exerts its strength over it. It therefore nonetheless requires many guards to protect it from its bad neighbor, lest it rise up upon it and kill it, as it is in its territory and under its hand.

And God wanted to give us – the holy nation – merit, and [so] He commanded us to set up mighty guards around [the soul]. And they are that we were commanded not to stop [speaking] words of Torah from our mouths day and night, and that we place four fringes on the four corners of our garments and a *mezuza* on our doorpost and the *tefillin* on our arm and on our head. And all of this is to remind us, so that we will avoid the crimes of our hands and will not stray after our eyes or after the impulse of the thoughts of our hearts. Therefore, *Chazal* said (*Zevachim* 19a) that the priests and the Levites are exempt from *tefillin* while performing the [Temple] service. And since the principle of the *tefillin* is as we have mentioned, we are commanded about them (*Menachot* 36b) that we not remove our thoughts from them. Now, my son, also see how much power our body has over our soul; for despite all this, it sometimes comes up and breaches our fences. May God in His mercy aid us and protect us from it. (*Sefer ha-Chinukh*, mitzva421)

The *tefillin* demonstrate the subjugation of a person's physical systems to the word of God. The *tefillin* of the arm are directed toward the heart, which represents the animal soul and human lust, or toward the arm itself, which expresses the human powers of action; the *tefillin* of the head are directed against the head – the site of thought.

**VI. *Tefillin* of the Head**

Rav Kook, in his commentary to the order of donning *tefillin* in his *Olat Re'iya*, follows on the above with a wonderful explanation of the relationship between the *tefillin* of the arm and the *tefillin* of the head. As a preface to his words, I wish to note that in the yeshiva world, it is customary to distinguish between two separate *mitzvot* of *tefillin*: over the *tefillin* of the arm we recite the blessing "to don *tefillin* [*le-hani'ach tefillin*]," while the formula of the blessing over the *tefillin* of the head (for those who recite it) is "about the *mitzva* of *tefillin* [*al mitzvat tefillin*]." From this it is inferred that the mitzvaof the *tefillin* of the arm lies in the act of donning it, while the mitzvaof the *tefillin* of the headis in the very having them on the head. I will not elaborate here on this scholarly analysis, but it seems that Rav Kook’s words rely on this distinction. In his commentary on the blessing recited over the donning of the *tefillin* of the arm, regarding which, as mentioned, the focus of the mitzvalies in the act of donning, Rav Kook writes about the relationship between the two:

The estimation of the *tefillin* of the arm in relation to the *tefillin* of the head is similar to the estimation of preparation for a mitzva in relation to the estimation of the mitzvaitself. For the *tefillin* of the arm, through its holy action of sweetening all the forces of natural life, in existence as a whole and in the individual in particular, **prepares and readies everything for the supreme light, which effuses from the holy source of the great name of God, which is revealed in the radiance of His holiness through the appearance of the *tefillin* of the head,** which is directed toward the noble illumination of the sources of intellect, thought, feeling, and all the forces of life, which are ready to be illuminated by the light of the supreme holiness… Therefore, it is appropriate that the wording, "to don *tefillin*," which highlights the foundation that readies life to be prepared for the appearance of the supreme sanctity, is connected to the blessing recited over the act of the mitzva of the *tefillin* of the arm. (*Olat Re'iya*, *Tefillin*)

The *tefillin* of the arm are directed against human desires, whereas the *tefillin* of the head are directed to the higher forces of man – thought, feeling, and the life forces that distinguish him from animals. Therefore, argues Rav Kook, the *tefillin* of the head is holier than the *tefillin* of the arm.

Rabbi Eliezer's exposition also places special emphasis on the *tefillin* of the head; it is specifically through the *tefillin* of the head that it is evident that the name of God is called upon a person. It could be understood that this is because the *tefillin* of the head are visible from a distance, but there seems to be another point in play here. The *tefillin* of the head better express the essence of the mitzvaof *tefillin*: a person's capacity to subjugate his bodily powers to the holy. The ability to rise above one's desires and inclinations, and to give greater presence to the image of God in a person, is evident in the mitzvaof *tefillin.*

**VII. The Image of God**

Two great authorities dealt with the essence of this lofty concept in similar terms. The Maharal writes in *Derekh Chaim*:

Because man was created in the image of the Holy One, blessed be He, He gave him the authority to do whatever he wants, and man is not compelled in his action… This is because man was created in the image of God. (*Derekh Chaim* 3, 15)

And thus Rav Kook writes:

The essence of the image is the absolute freedom that we find in man, which is why he has the ability to make choices. (*Li-Nevokhei ha-Dor* 1)

God has no desire or impulse whatsoever, and therefore He is free, as it were, to choose as He pleases. God imprinted that very special quality in man, and thus he is different from every other living creature; he is endowed with reason and choice. The mitzvaof *tefillin* represents the significant role that the people of Israel fulfill with this choice. This capacity to choose can be a destructive tool: one can ignore the sacred and sink into one’s desires. But freedom of choice can also serve as an opportunity to call in the name of God. While no other creature is endowed with choice, and therefore its actions offer no true indication of the existence of the Creator – man can choose whether he wishes to represent God in the world or not.

With the mitzvaof *tefillin*, a person symbolically wraps himself up in the name of God, as it were, and dons the name of God in the face of the entire world. As we saw in the Ramchal and in *Sefer ha-Chinukh*, the meaning of this symbolic *mitzva* is a call to the entire world: the Jew agrees to subjugate all of his physical capacities to actualize God’s will in the world.

**VII. Transgressions that Conceal the Divine Image**

After studying the mitzva of *tefillin* and its connection to the calling of the name of God upon a person, we can better understand the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim.* Just as the mitzva of *tefillin* demonstrates a person's desire to overcome his lusts and emphasize the "image of God" in him by way of his choosing the good – so, too, does sin cover up that same image. When a person transgresses God’s will, he fails to rise above his desires and be free to choose as he pleases; rather, he is bound by his desires. Choosing the good represents a person's ability to control his inclinations and to choose, which is the very image of God from above.

(Translated by David Strauss)