

Geulas Yisrael #15: Children of Hashem

Moshe Taragin

Every human is G-d's creature. Parshat Re'eh outlines an additional status for Jews - we aren't just Hashem's creatures, we are also His children. This status had been alluded to during the early stages of the Exodus from Egypt. Hashem initially demanded that Pharo release His imprisoned child- the Jewish people. Pharo was cautioned that if he didn't accede, his own first born would be taken. This implicit message is now articulated explicitly- we are Hashem's children.

Every human is gifted with Divine traits: intelligence, emotion, consciousness, creativity, free will, hopes and personality. Crafted in the image of Hashem, every human must be respected and protected. More so, we believe that humans are created righteous and upright. Humanism- the belief in human virtue and human potential- is a cornerstone of Jewish faith. However, in addition to Divine image, Jews are chosen for a historical mission- to call humanity to a higher ground. We alone accepted the Divine invitation and His mission and because of our acquiescence, we alone, are cherished. To demonstrate His love, G-d adopted us as His children.

Balancing our respect for all humanity with our unique and chosen status as children of Hashem can be delicate. Some Jews are so universalist that they have all but abdicated any sense of "chosenness". To them, the notion that a Jew possesses a unique status or is more beloved as a child, feels racist and bigoted. Sadly, many other Jews are so national in their outlook and parochial in their experience that their view of non-Jews borders upon xenophobia or outright racism. Our greatest visionary, Rabbi Akiva, "threaded the needle" between these two complementary truths: "Every human is beloved (*chaviv*) to G-d because they possess a Divine image. A Jew is more treasured (*chavivin*) because he is a child". Selection as children should not diminish our respect or care for Mankind. If anything, our mission and the basis for our status as children, demands greater sensitivity for

general human welfare. Alternatively, our shared experience with other human beings cannot blur our pride in being selected.

How does this preferred status as children affect our religious identity and practice? Firstly, it should bolster our faith in the face of tragedy. This designation as "children to G-d" is embedded in a section of Parshat Re'eh which cautions against overreaction to death or excessive grieving by disfiguring our bodies. When facing devastating and perplexing tragedies we may not possess all the answers, but we should maintain confidence that our lives aren't random nor is our fate cast to chance or whim. Poise and confidence lies at the core of faith. Reminding ourselves that we are children should provide confidence that we are cared for- even if we can't fully decipher the outcome.

Being a child of G-d doesn't only steady faith, it also demands that we behave with dignity and "class". As Hashem's children we represent Him and His majesty. In addition to obeying Him, we must also honor Him through lives of nobility and grace. Any mutilation of the human body, even when self-inflicted or even in response to grief, is vulgar and incompatible with our profile as children of Hashem. Interestingly, after prohibiting body mutilation, the Torah restates the laws of kosher food. Beyond the specific details of kashrut, there is great benefit to the general limiting of the range of foods we consume. Limiting the types of foods which can be eaten lends dignity and restraint to the experience of eating which, if left unregulated, can become animalistic and degrading. Presumably, with more limited food options, Jews are less prone to gluttony, drunkenness and many other forms of vulgar behavior which can stem from overindulgence in eating. If the Torah is meant to help us even slightly dislodge from the sway of the flesh, laws governing our eating habits are central to that goal.

Most of all, being a child of Hashem doesn't carry an expiry date. Many of our relationships in life fluctuate, transition and sometimes cease. Once a child, however, always a child. The gemara in Kiddushin (36) cites Rebbi Yehuda who claimed that our betrayals forfeited our status as His children. Regrettably, this formed the basis of the Christian assault against the Jews: we were once the

chosen people but our repeated rebellions and the ensuing exiles indicated that Hashem had discarded us and chose another.

Responding to Rebbi Yehuda, Rebbi Meir lists four additional verses in Tanach, each portraying us as children of Hashem, even when we stray or betray Him. Once a child always a child.

Thousands of years have passed and we were always Hashem's child even when it wasn't historically apparent. The curtains of history have now been pulled back and it is obvious that our Father is beckoning us home. Once a child always a child.