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## Climbing the Spiral Staircase of Comfort

### Tiferes Shlomo on the Parsha

והיה עקב תשמעון

The word Eikev also means a heal, which is the lowest part of the body. The Chassidic masters relate this to the time called עקבתא המישהא, the footsteps or heals of Moshiach.

This refers to the generation who will live prior to Moshiach. We are likened to the heal because spiritually, when compared to the giants of generations gone by, we are the lowliest generation. We face the physical struggles of exile and great spiritual darkness, which makes it difficult to serve Hashem with proper Kavana.

But Hashem does not judge us by the same benchmark as previous generations when the service of Hashem was easier. In our generation, Hashem considers our smallest amount of Avodah, with limited Kavanah, to be as great as the higher service of previous generations.

This is alluded to in the verse "Hashem will disperse you amongst the nations". Even though this describes the Jewish people in exile, a subsequent verse says "and from there you will seek Hashem your G-d and you will find, when you search for Him with all of your heart and soul."

"You will find" is related to the idea of a Metziah, something that is beyond what one expected. In exile, if we just seek Hashem in the most minimal, like a Metziah, it will be considered as though we have sought Hashem with our full heart and soul.

The sages teach that the word והיה denotes a time of Simcha. The verse והיה עקב תשמעון is thus teaching that when the Eikev, the lowest of generation will listen to the voice of Hashem, this cause great Simcha and Nachas Above. Then we will be showered with the blessings in the continuation of the verse "Hashem your G-d will guard for you His covenant and Chessed".

There is a fascinating Midrash that describes how Hashem responded to the lament of the Jewish people at the beginning of this week's Haftorah.

“And Zion said תאמר ציון עזבני ה' ואדוני שכחני Hashem has forsaken me and the L-rd has forgotten me.”

This emotional cry expresses the deep pain of the Jewish people. The Beis Hamikdash had been destroyed, the Jewish people were now being thrown into the darkness of Golus. Hashem's presence was hidden and they felt completely abandoned.

What was Hashem's response? You Jewish people are a bunch of complainers; complainers the sons of complainers!

When I made a wife and soulmate for Adam, after the sin of the Eitz Hadaas, he complained about her. Yaakov did the same when Yosef was sold. I was preparing to crown Yosef as king over Egypt and Yaakov complained.

Their descendants are the same. When I gave the Jewish people the Manna, the sublime food of the angels, they too complained.

And Zion did the same. I was preparing to eradicate the evil kingdoms from the world. I removed the Babylonians, the Medes and the Greeks and in the future I will remove the fourth kingdom (Rome). Yet Zion complains, saying "Hashem abandoned me and Hashem has forgotten me."

The implication of this Midrash is that, like the other examples, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and subsequent exile was an amazing kindness that Hashem was doing for us and that we were wrong to complain about it.

How could this be? The Churban was one of the darkest moments in our history and we mourn it deeply. How could it be anything other than darkness? It seems the antithesis of kindness.

We can understand this through one of the famous teachings of the Baal Shem Tov - the analogy of a spiral staircase.

In Yiddish, a spiral staircase is called a "Shvindel Trep", literally swindling stairs. This is because the spiral staircase swindles and confuses the person who is climbing them.

When you climb a vertical staircase, you can see the apex at every point of your climb. You can sense how each step brings you closer to your destination.

But on a spiral staircase you can't always see the place that you are trying to reach. You may see it initially, but as you climb and turn 180 degrees around, you can't see it anymore. It even seems as though you are moving in the opposite direction and further away from your destination.

But once you turn the next 180 degrees, you can see the top again... that is until you make the next half circuit and are 'swindled' again.

The destruction of the Temple and subsequent exile was a 180 degrees turn up the spiral staircase of Jewish destiny. This staircase is leading us to the ultimate redemption when Hashem's presence will be openly manifest in our world. Without going through the moments of darkness and concealment, we will never reach the top.

The Churban and Golus present us with an opportunity to grow from the darkness and reach heights that we would not have otherwise been able to reach. These times of darkness force us to dig deeper and access our deepest levels of Emunah and spiritual strength.

Our own lives are also like a Shvindel Trep. We have moments of clarity, light and revelation. We experience the good times of success and open blessings. But we also suffer times of darkness, loss and failure.

We don't always see it while we are going through these times, but every step is taking us higher. If we persevere, when we turn the corner, we will see how the setback was in fact part of our growth and ascent.

The Jewish people got swindled. When they could no longer see Hashem's presence and a brighter future, they felt abandoned.

Hashem's response was that these are the blind steps leading us closer to the Redemption. He never abandoned us. He is hidden, waiting for us to climb through the darkness and complete the revolution.

And when we do we will come to the apex of Geulah; the ultimate revelation of Hashem's presence. Then there will be no more concealment as the evil kingdoms and darkness are eradicated forever.

# Horizontal or Vertical? The Mezuzah, Tefillin & Torah

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

## The Mezuzah

The Gemara rules that if one affixed the Mezuzah to the door like a Nagar – a bolt, it is invalid. Subsequently, the Gemara notes that the Mezuzos of Rabbi, which would certainly be Kosher, were made like a bolt. The Gemara distinguishes between a bolt that is like a “peg” which is invalid and a bolt that is like an “ankle”.

Rashi explains that the Gemara is teaching that the Mezuzah is only invalid if it was placed horizontally across the wall, like pegs that are nailed in horizontally. The Mezuzah must be placed vertically upright. This is also the opinion of the Rambam. In their opinion, this is considered the respectful position for holy writings.

Rabbeinu Tam disputes the opinion of Rashi. In his view, placing the Mezuzah upright would be disrespectful as it is not considered at rest. He brings support for this view from the Luchos and the Torah scroll in the Aron of the Beis Hamikdash, that were placed lying down, even though they could have also been placed standing upright. A further proof for this, is that when the Torah is being carried and held upright, we stand. But when the Torah is placed on the Bimah lying down, it is at “rest” and so we can sit.

According to Rabbeinu Tam, placing the Mezuzah like “pegs” which is invalid, refers to tent pegs, like the pegs in the Mishkan, that are banged into the ground and stand upright.

The Shulchan Aruch rules like the opinion of Rashi and the Rambam, that the Mezuzah must be positioned upright. If the Mezuzah was placed horizontally, it would be invalid. This is the Halachic practise for Sefardim. The Vilna Gaon also rules like Rashi.

However, the Ram”o references the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam that the Mezuzah should be placed horizontally across the door frame and that if it was placed upright, it would be invalid.

Following the suggestion of the Tur, the Ram”o writes that those who wish to be careful with the Mitzvah, should place the Mezuzah on a diagonal, which would be valid according to both opinions. He writes that this is the Minhag in Ashkenaz. This opinion is quoted in the Darkei Moshe as the opinion of the Maharil and the Hagahos Maimonios

Placing the Mezuzah on a diagonal is not a “compromise” between the 2 opinions. A Mezuzah that is placed on a diagonal is completely valid according to all opinions. Rabbeinu Tam only disqualifies a Mezuzah that is perfectly upright and Rashi only disqualifies a Mezuzah that is completely horizontal.

The Beis Yosef writes that according to the view

that the Mezuzah should be on a diagonal, it should be angled with the top pointing into the house and the bottom towards the outside.

If the doorpost is too narrow to place the Mezuzah on a diagonal, it should be placed upright. Even if one could place the Mezuzah on the wall behind the door on a diagonal, it is preferable to place it in the doorway vertically.

## The Tefillin Parshios

The Rosh writes that Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam have the same dispute concerning the placing of the Parshios in the Tefillin. According to Rashi they should be inserted upright and according to Rabbeinu Tam, they should be placed into the Batim horizontally. This is also the opinion of the Yereim.

The Rosh concludes that the custom is like Rashi. This is also the opinion of the Mordechai and is the ruling of the Tur. The Tur writes that it is like the Torah that is placed in the Aron Hakodesh upright. The Beis Yosef writes that this is because most sages are of this opinion.

The Bach gives a further reason for this. When recording the order of the Parshios in the Tefillin, it speaks about the perspective of the “Koreh”, referring to the person facing someone wearing Tefillin as “the reader”. Therefore, the Parshios should be positioned in the manner that they could be read by a person facing the Tefillin i.e. upright.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that the Parshios should be inserted upright. If the Parshios were inserted horizontally, they should be removed and replaced correctly. The Magen Avraham writes that if this is not possible, for example if the Tefillin Batim are not tall enough, the Parshios can be inserted horizontally. This would be relying on the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam, because according to Rashi, the Parshios must be placed upright.

Whilst the Rambam rules that Mezuzah must be placed upright, he does not write anything about the direction of the Tefillin Parshios

The Nodah Biyehuda questions why people are careful to where Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin only in relation to the order of the Parshios, but not to place the Parshios horizontally. He explains that this is because Rav Hai Gaon and others held similarly to Rabbeinu Tam with regards to the order of the Parshios but not with regards to placing the Parshios horizontally. Shaarei Teshuvah adds that whilst Rabbeinu Tam would invalidate Tefillin if the Parshios were not in the correct order, he would not do so if placed vertically.

Can the Parshios be inserted on a diagonal?

The Munkatcher Rebbe in Minchas Elozor and Os Chaim Veshalom writes that the Parshios of the

Tefillin should not be placed on a diagonal slope. It is not clear why this should be different to the Mezuzah.

## The Sefer Torah

The discussion above relating to the Mezuzah and Tefillin, also has practical implications for the design of the Torah scroll and Bimah, since it is connected to what is the most respectful position for holy writings.

Sefardim keep the Torah scroll in a hard case which stands upright when placed in the Aron Kodesh. For this reason, the Bimah is completely flat so that the Torah is also upright when it is being read.

Ashkenazim have the Torah scroll in a soft fabric cover and the Torah cannot stand completely upright. Rabbeinu Tam is recorded as saying that ideally, the Aron Kodesh should be deep enough so that the Torah could be placed lying down, as this is considered the most respectful position. According to Rabbeinu Tam’s view, the Bimah would also be flat and the Torah would be laid down.

Following the ruling of the Rosh and the practise of Ashkenazim to place the Mezuzah on a diagonal to accommodate both opinions, the custom is to have a Bimah that is sloped, so that the Sefer Torah at rest is on a diagonal. Similarly, when placing the Sefer Torah in the Aron Kodesh, it is “leaned” against the wall, so that it too is in a diagonal position.

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|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Menachos 33a          | 14. The Vilna Gaon     |
| 2. Hilchos Tefillin 5:8  | when asked about       |
| 3. Nimukei Yosef         | wearing Rabbeinu       |
| 4. He notes that this is | Tam Tefillin, famous-  |
| considered as Kevuras    | ly answered that if    |
| Chamor – a disrespectful | one wanted to be       |
| manner of burying a      | sure to fulfill the    |
| body. Just as bodies     | Mitzvah of Tefillin,   |
| are buried lying         | they would need to     |
| down, the Mezuzah        | wear 64 (or 24) pairs. |
| should also be lying     | He gave the example    |
| horizontally.            | of the dispute of the  |
| 5. Yoreh Deah 289:6      | Parshios being in-     |
| 6. ibid                  | serted vertically or   |
| 7. Tosfos DH Ha          | horizontally.          |
| 8. Hilchos Mezuzah       | 15.32:68               |
| 9. Siman 399             | 16.1:36                |
| 10. Orach Chaim 32:45    | 17.32:23               |
| 11. Mishna Berura        |                        |
| 45:213. The Alter        |                        |
| Rebbe does not           |                        |
| mention this.            |                        |
| 12. Orach Chaim 32:62    |                        |
| 13.2:4                   |                        |

