

## CHAPTER 4

### SHIMON'S AVODAT HASHEM IS CORRUPTED

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Violation of the Torah prohibition engenders a second type of adverse spiritual consequence resulting from the chronic corruptive impact of hatred on *avodat HaShem*. This chapter analyzes the impact of hatred on two paths of *avodat HaShem*, *Limmud HaTorah* and *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*.

#### AVODAT HASHEM: THREE PERSPECTIVES

##### Various Paths

The RAMCHAL<sup>1</sup> explains that there are many ways to serve Hashem: when we study Torah, through our *ahavat* HaShem and *yirat* HaShem, when we perform mitzvot, and certainly through our tefillot, including Kiryat Shema and Shmonei Esrei which is synonymous with Avodah Shebalev.

##### Self-Perfection

In his sefer "Olam HaAvodah," Rabbi M.D. Kestenbaum articulates different dimensions of avodat HaShem as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- (i) our overall mission in this world is avodat HaShem, the service of HaShem;
- (ii) the goal of all the mitzvot is closeness to G-d, called *Kirvat Elokim*;
- (iii) closeness to G-d requires perfection of our character traits (Tikkun Hamiddot) "since closeness to HaShem and self-perfection are one and the same."<sup>3</sup>

##### Fulfilling HaShem's Will

In his primer on Avodah, Rabbi Y Adlerstein<sup>4</sup> states that "Avodas HaShem means, first and foremost, serving HaShem for the sole purpose of fulfilling His Will, even when unaccompanied by any pleasure or positive feeling...We reach the level of *Oveid HaShem* only through the

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem, Part IV chapter 1

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi M D Kestenbaum, Olam HaAvodah (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Rahway, NJ, 2021), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, Avodah: A Primer, <https://torah.org/torah-portion/nesivosshalom-avodahprimer/>

expenditure of extraordinary effort in fulfilling His Will, even when unattended by any other satisfaction...This, then, is the requisite first step in avodas HaShem, becoming a willing soldier in faithfully manning his assigned, holy station, and working with great effort...Working on *ruchniyus* without first preparing oneself in *avodas HaShem* simply does not work.” In support for his position, Rabbi Adlerstein indicates that in spite of Moshe Rabbeinu’s extraordinary talents and accomplishments, the Torah calls him “Moshe, the servant of HaShem.”

## **HATRED CORRUPTS LIMMUD HATORAH**

### **Adverse Effect of Hatred on Tikkun Hamiddot**

The way hidden hatred corrupts avodat HaShem through limmud Torah is not self-evident. It occurs through hatred’s detrimental effect on tikkun hamiddot (rectification of our character traits) because of the direct link that exists between tikkun hamiddot and limmud Torah.

It was mentioned that when hatred is left unattended and hidden in a person’s heart, it unleashes several negative *middot* such as anger, contempt, resentment, and especially “cruelty” called “*achzariyut*.” In addition, hatred impairs a person’s ability to be self-aware and engage in *Tikkun Hamiddot*.

Rabbi Kestenbaum teaches the following principle: “The entire purpose of the Torah is perfecting one’s *middot*.... A person who learns Torah but does not rectify his/her *middot* properly is not considered to be truly engaged (“*osek*”) in Torah.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, although a person who harbors hidden hatred may learn Torah, that person becomes unable to be “*osek*” in Torah which makes their avodat HaShem through limmud Torah deficient.

This conclusion is supported by the following Midrash:

In this Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah), Hashem addresses the Jewish people saying:

*“Be mindful that you not hate one another, or envy one another, or stir up a quarrel with one another, or shame one another, so that the ministering angels do not say before Me, ‘Master of the universe, the Torah that you gave the Jewish people, they do not engage in.’”*

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi MD Kestenbaum *Olam HaMiddos* (Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd Rahway NJ, 2021), 25.

The angels say before Hashem that if Jews hate or envy one another they are not engaging in Torah. This makes us wonder why Hashem found the angels' claim valid. The answer is actually quite simple: the angel's claim is true since that very claim was made by Moshe to the Angels at Sinai in order to obtain and bring down the Torah. At that time, when the Angels objected to Moshe bringing the Torah down to earth, Hashem told Moshe: "*Answer them!*" Then Moshe asked the Angels: "*Is there any hatred among you? Is there any jealousy among you?*" Moshe won that argument and received the Torah.

This Midrash shows that the Torah was given to Bnei Israel precisely to help us repair our flawed *middot* such as hatred and jealousy. When we tolerate hidden hatred, we impair avodat HaShem through *limmud* Torah.

### **Hizzuk From Rabbis**

Rav Chaim Kanievsky writes in his chapter on *middot*:<sup>6</sup>

- The Vilna Gaon (*Even Sheleimah*, Ch. 1) writes:

"All service of Hashem is dependent upon perfecting one's character traits, and negative character traits are at the root of all sins. A person's main focus in life should be to overcome his undesirable traits—and if this is not his objective, why does he need to live at all?"

- Rav Y.Y. Perr writes:

"The Gemara in *Bava Kama* (30a) cites an opinion that one who wishes to become a pious person should take care not to harm others. The Gemara does not say that he should do a lot of *chessed*, provide for people, or give *tzedakah*; only that he should avoid damaging others. There are plenty of people who are very generous with their time, money, and energy, but they actually have no real connection with *bein adam l'chaveiro*. Some do *chessed* because they want to be well-known for their generosity; others do it because it makes them feel good. They feel very righteous, but they may really be "*reshaim*," because when it comes to harming another person, they couldn't care less."

### **Application to Shimon**

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<sup>6</sup> Rav Chaim Kanievsky *Orchos Yosher* (Messorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, 2019), 269-270.

“[A] person who learns Torah but does not rectify his *middot* properly is not considered to be truly engaged (*osek*) in Torah, for the Midrash stresses that the Jewish people’s character flaws, not their lack of toil in Torah, is the reason the angels will say that the Jews are not engaged in Torah.”<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi A. Levin writes:<sup>8</sup> “As long as a person has not done teshuvah, even the Torah he studies and the mitzvot he does lack the power to bring their potential kedushah into the world.”

All this shows that you, Shimon, are expected not just to toil in Torah but to rectify your middot in order to be considered “*osek baTorah.*” Unfortunately, the presence of hidden hatred or *sinat chinam* in your heart inhibits *tikkun hamiddot* which prevents you from being truly “*osek baTorah.*” That’s how the presence of hidden hatred corrupts your avodat HaShem through the pathway of limmud HaTorah.

## **HATRED CORRUPTS ACCEPTANCE OF THE YOKE OF THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM**

### **Introduction To Kriyat Shema**

Hashem created all humans, and they all rely on Him to exist.<sup>9</sup> Everything belongs to Him, He controls everything and is called *Adon Hakol*, Master of all. For our benefit, HaShem allowed us to relate to Him as our King, by accepting the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom called *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*. We accomplish this goal with our recitation of the Shema twice a day: “Hear, O Israel, HaShem is our G-d, HaShem is One.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Understanding HaShem’s “Oneness”**

Rabbi Nosson Scherman explains that HaShem’s Oneness has two dimensions:<sup>11</sup>

#### a) Nothing else is Comparable to Him

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<sup>7</sup> Rabbi MD Kestenbaum *Olam HaMiddos* (Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd Rahway NJ, 2021), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi A Levin, *Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah* (Mosaica Press, 2022), 5.

<sup>9</sup> This is from Rabbi M Potash, *Making the Most of Prayer* (Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn NY, 2008), 197-198.

<sup>10</sup> Devarim 6:4

<sup>11</sup> *Shema Yisrael, An Overview/A Declaration of Faith*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 1982, Brooklyn NY), ix.

“When we say that G-d is One, we mean not only that there is none other, but that He is beyond comparison. Rambam’s second Principle of Faith states: ‘I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed is His Name, is unique, and no uniqueness resembles His in any manner ...’”

#### b) G-d is the Source of Everything we Know

Not only did He create the universe and endow its various components,...He retains ultimate control over them....This is the ultimate dimension of G-d’s Oneness: it means that everything is inseparable from His control and guidance.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **What Shema Recitation Entails**

The Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim (61:1) states that “One should recite the Shema with intention, awe, fear, shaking and trembling. “While accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, after reciting the word *Echad*, we should commit to ourselves that if we are faced with a situation of being killed in sanctification of HaShem’s Name, we would gladly be willing to do so.”<sup>13</sup> “For by declaring that G-d is One—Unique and Indivisible—we thereby sublimate every facet of our personalities and possessions—our very lives—to His will.”<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Akiva taught by the ultimate sacrifice that we must accept G-d’s sovereignty and decrees upon ourselves “*bechol nafshecha*” with all your soul, which means even if He takes your life.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Need for Humility**

Rav Avigdor Miller explains that we say Shema before Shmonei Esrei based on the passuk in Tehilim 63:5: “I will bless You in my life; in Your Name, I will raise my hands”<sup>16</sup> according to the Gemara (*Brachot* 16b) where the first part of the passuk “I will bless You in my life” corresponds to Shema, and the second part “in Your Name, I will raise my hands” corresponds to Shmonei Esrei. Since the word “*brachah*” comes from the word “*berach*” which means knee, the word

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,xi

<sup>13</sup> Rabbi E L Abish, *Portraits of Prayer 2* (Israel Bookshop Publications, Lakewood NJ, 2022), 78.

<sup>14</sup> *Shema Yisrael, An Overview/A Declaration of Faith*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn NY, 1982), 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Shema Yisrael, An Overview/A Declaration of Faith*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn NY, 1982), vii.

<sup>16</sup> Rav Avigdor Miller on *Tefillah* (The Judaica Press, inc, Brooklyn, NY, 2021), 166.

“*avarechecha*” (I will bless You) means “I declare my humility to You” or “In humility, I bend my knee to You, in recognition that You are the King.”

### **HaShem Rules Over Me**

Rabbi E L Abish<sup>17</sup> cites Rav Elya Lopian “While reciting *Shema Yisrael HaShem Elokeinu, HaShem E Chad*, and contemplating the vastness of the universe and the fact that HaShem is King and absolute Ruler over it all, make sure to remember that HaShem is the King and absolute Ruler over you as well.” “[W]e must also be cognizant that HaShem is also the Ruler of little old me. HaShem and I have a unique relationship. HaShem put me on this earth to fulfill a very special and exclusive mission, a mission so inimitable, that I am the only person who can fulfill it. This is the type of relationship each one of us has with HaShem.”

### **The Bond of Love With HaShem**

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan<sup>18</sup> teaches that since “G-d created the world as an act of love,” “love is therefore the ultimate bond between G-d and man. He describes two levels of love of HaShem, a lower level where one only loves G-d for the good He does, and a higher level where one loves G-d for what He is. The latter is achieved through the observance and study of G-d’s commandments. This love remains firm under all conditions, even when an individual is beset by evil. Also, this love brings the person to closeness to G-d (*Kirvat Elokim*).

Rabbi MD Kestenbaum writes that the second verse of Kriyat Shema [“And you shall love HaShem, your G-d, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your money”] requires us to live our life with love of HaShem...And that part of our avodat HaShem is to make the effort “to imbue ourselves with love of HaShem...which connects us to HaShem in the deepest of ways” and contributes to *Kirvat Elokim*.<sup>19</sup> One method is to reflect on all the good that HaShem bestows on us individually and as a people. When we recite the Shema, we are

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<sup>17</sup> Rabbi E L Abish, *Portraits of Prayer 2* (Israel Bookshop Publications, Lakewood NJ, 2022), 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> *The Aryeh Kaplan Reader* (Mesorah Publications, Ltd Brooklyn, NY, 1983), 194-195.

<sup>19</sup> Rabbi M D Kestenbaum, *Olam HaAvodah* (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Rahway, NJ, 2021), 219-221.

required to feel the love of HaShem in our heart. "If one merely recites the words without thinking about his love for HaShem, it is as if he doesn't really believe what he is saying."<sup>20</sup>

### **Changing The world from *HaShem Elokeinu* to *HaShem Echad***

Rashi's straightforward *pshat* of the Shema explains our mission as follows: "HaShem, Who now is only our G-d, and not that of other peoples...will in the future be acknowledged by all as the One [i.e., sole] HaShem."<sup>21</sup> We have the responsibility of changing the world from a state of *HaShem Elokeinu* to a state of *HaShem Echad*, recognized as the One and True G-d by the entire world.

How do we fulfill such a lofty mission?

Rabbi E L Abish answers:<sup>22</sup> " We are told how to effect the change from *HaShem Elokeinu* to *HaShem Echad*. The instructions are found in the very next sentence that we recite: *Veahavta eit HaShem Elokecha*, "you shall love Hashem your God." The Gemara<sup>23</sup> explains that this is to be achieved by learning Torah and by behaving and interacting with the nations of the world in a pleasant manner. People observing the refined behavior of a learned Jew will quickly realize that the Torah teaches and conditions one to act and behave in a pleasant manner. Concerning such a person, HaShem says 'You are My servant through who I am glorified.'<sup>24</sup> This will cause people to behave morally and acknowledge HaShem as the only true G-d"....Torah is not simply an intellectual pursuit, it is a way of life. We must demonstrate that living according to the dictates of the Torah makes life genuinely sweet and pleasant. We can't ignore the feelings and sensitivities of others and expect them to recognize and appreciate HaShem. In fact, the greater one's involvement with Torah learning, the greater his responsibility to display sensitivity to others, of all races and religions....On the most basic level, this would mean taking absolute care not to do anything that could possibly cause any person to be opposed to acknowledging HaShem as G-d."

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<sup>20</sup> Rabbi E L Abish, Portraits of Prayer 2 (Israel Bookshop Publications, Lakewood NJ, 2022), 90.

<sup>21</sup> Shema Yisrael, An Overview/A Declaration of Faith, Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn NY, 1982),15.

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi E L Abish, Portraits of Prayer 2 (Israel Bookshop Publications, Lakewood NJ, 2022), 82-83.

<sup>23</sup> Yoma 86a

<sup>24</sup> Yeshayahu 49:3

## **The Vilna Gaon's Meaning of the Word "Shema"**

Rabbi D. Glatstein explains that the Vilna Gaon revolutionized the meaning of the Shema using a different translation of the verb "Shema": instead of "Listen up!" it means "gather and unite!"<sup>25</sup> When "Shaul was gathering Klal Yisrael, urging them to unite and wage war against Amalek," the passuk in I Shmuel 15:4 states "*Vayeshama Shaul et haam*, Shaul had all the people summoned."

"When we recite Shema Yisrael, in truth we are saying that we are gathering and uniting with all the other Jews of the world. Then, because Shema Yisrael, because Klal Yisrael has gathered as one, what follows is the reflection of that: HaShem is One!"

## **Application to Shimon**

The presence of hatred in your heart corrupts your *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim* in several ways:

1. By saying the Shema "we must consciously reaffirm that everything that occurs naturally in the physical world is absolutely governed by G-d's will." We also learned that "*the ultimate dimension of G-d's Oneness means that everything is inseparable from His control and guidance.*"<sup>26</sup> By judging David guilty and harboring hatred toward him, you "took the law in your hands" which is equivalent to rejecting HaShem's will, control, and guidance. You became unable to fulfill the requirement of "sublimating every facet of your personality to HaShem."
2. We learned that reciting Shema is equivalent to saying: "*In humility, I bend my knee to You, in recognition that You are the King.*" Harboring hatred reflects arrogance, the opposite of humility.
3. By saying the Shema, we commit ourselves to faithfully uphold and adhere to the Halakha. However, hatred feelings lead you to violate at least five Torah commandments.
4. When people observe the refined behavior of a learned Jew, it helps effectuate the change from *HaShem Elokeinu* to *HaShem Echad* because people realize that the Torah teaches and

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<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Daniel Glatstein *The Concealed and the Revealed* (Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Rahway, 2022), 106.

<sup>26</sup> *Shema Yisrael, An Overview/A Declaration of Faith*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn NY, 1982),xi



conditions Jews to act and behave in a pleasant manner. Harboring hatred will stop you from exhibiting refined behavior.

5. When we recite 'Shema Israel,' in truth we unite with all other Jews of the world and make an active demonstration of the "*achdut*" of Klal Yisrael. When hatred is present, Jewish unity or *achdut* is not possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

Shimon, the analysis provided in this chapter identified two ways in which your hatred feelings corrupt your *avodat* HaShem:

1. Your *avodat* HaShem through limmud Torah became deficient because hatred precluded tikkun hamiddot and the lack of tikkun hamiddot precluded your ability to be "*osek baTorah*."
2. Your acceptance of the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom when you recite Shema became deficient because of the discordance between your actions and the *kavanot* required during recitation of *Kriyat Shema*.

