**He alone and nothing else**

A Joke to Begin With…

Back in the early 1920s, in a state-run Communist school in the Soviet Union, a teacher was giving a regular Soviet-propaganda anti-religion lesson:

"Dear students, do you see the blackboard?" asked the teacher.

"Of course," "Certainly," "Absolutely," the children in class responded.

"Excellent," the teacher replied. "That's a sign that the blackboard exists!"

"Do you see the wall?" the teacher then asked, and without waiting for an answer, he continued, "That's a sign that the wall exists."

And he went on and on, as the students chanted enthusiastically in answer to his questions of "Do you see it?" the phrase "That's a sign it exists!"

"Now, dear comrades, do you see G-d?" the teacher asked the students in a sarcastic and ridiculing tone. Total silence reigned in the classroom, which included a fair number of Jewish children from observant families. No one dared to answer, fearful of obvious repercussions.

"Ah, that's a clear sign that it doesn't exist!" the teacher declared unequivocally.

There was one student in the class from a Jewish home, who was compelled by Soviet law to attend this school. When he heard what the teacher said, he angrily took action.

He stood up on his chair and cried out: "Do you see the teacher's brain?"

"No?"

"That's a sign that he has none!"

A central theme in **Parshas Vaeschanan** is the commandment of *Achdus Hashem —* the absolute oneness of G-d*.* The primary sources on this essential topic, in-fact, one of the principles of the Jewish faith, are included within the parsha. First, there is the famous passuk of "You shall know this day and consider it in your heart, that Hashem, He is G-d, in the heavens above, and upon the earth below; there is none else." Then, there is the even more famous pasuk o*f Shema Yisrael*, declaring that "Hashem is our G-d, *Hashem is One."*

At first glance, looking at the matter superficially, the Torah commands us to believe that there is only *one* Divine ruler. In contrast to the widespread belief among the ancient nations of the world, that there are multiple deities, the Torah rules that there is only one G-d! However, the whole concept of paganism and worshiping the sun, the moon, the stars, cows, sheep, and even wood and stones, sounds so absurd and ridiculous, that at least these days, the average person would ask: Why does the Torah have to warn and command us time after time about something so obvious?

The Alter Rebbe in Tanya phrases the question with a twist of irony and undisguised cynicism: "Would it occur to you that there is a deity dwelling in the waters beneath the earth, so that it is necessary to caution so strongly "Take it unto your heart"?

This penetrating question, that has occupied the Torah's commentators ever since, compels us to say there is a much more in-depth explanation to the words "There is none else besides Him" and "Hashem is One."

When we look back at the roots of paganism, we find that it descended from a particular philosophy that does in-fact place Hashem at its center.

Hashem did indeed create the world, but He is not an active partner in everything happening under the sun. According to them, He left the day-to-day involvement with the world and His creations to other spiritual powers, i.e., the powers of nature, the angels, etc. They are "the Divine representatives," and their job is to"help" G-d run the world smoothly.

The Torah thereby comes to teach us a most-important, profound message: G-d has no helpers! No stars or constellations, no planets, no angels, no *sefiros*, and not even – man!

There is no existence in the world (and beyond it) capable of changing the Divine Providence established by G-d for each of His creations. An expert doctor or a talented attorney can be Hashem's messengers in helping one person or another get out of a difficult situation. However, they can *never* change that person's fate! Knowing the President of the United States will be of no help if G-d decides otherwise. The entire world, with all its components and powers, is only "an ax in the hand of the hewer," who is none other than G-d Himself.

As always, Chassidus unveils a much deeper level of this fundamental belief. Based on the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the interpretation of the Chabad Rebbe'im throughout the generations, the words *"Ein Od Milvado"* mean – there is no existence besides G-d!

Not only do we have no control or sovereignty over what happens within us and around us, we essentially have no independent existence whatsoever! In practical terms, without the G-dly strength creating us at every moment, we simply wouldn't exist. The world is not only an entity G-d instills life in every moment the likes of the soul animating the body. If Hashem is only the "soul" of the world, then from where has the "body" come?

It's quite difficult for the average person to "digest" the realization that "I don't exist." Therefore, the Torah commands us, "Take it unto your heart" – internalize, contemplate, focus upon the Divine truth that there is only one existing entity – Hashem.

Hashem's plan in creating the world was that this truth should reign over all, revealed before our physical eyes in the days of Moshiach. Through the constant and strenuous *avoda* during exile of trying to instill this G-dly truth into our minds and hearts, the Prophet Yeshayahu promises us that eventually "And your Teacher shall no longer be concealed from you, and your eyes shall see your Teacher (30:20), "The glory of G-d shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see that the mouth of G-d spoke" (40:5), at the coming of the Redemption.

No longer will we need to internalize this faith because the Divine revelation reigning at that time will bring each one of us to the tangible and complete recognition that "everything that has been made will know You have made it, and everything that has been created will understand You have created it."

In light of all the aforementioned, Parshas Va'eschanan presents before us a plan of action for bringing the Redemption. We must engage in *"Avodas ha'Emuna"* – instilling within us and in everyone around us the intellectual recognition that there is "nothing else" period. Specifically now, in these final days before the Divine revelation of the days of Moshiach, we must learn in-depth the inner teachings of Torah, meditating on the relevant Chassidic discourses that properly explain how…there is no (independent) world!

To Conclude with a Story

We will conclude with a story told by the renowned *mashpia* R' Mendel Futerfas, of blessed memory:

Once, the wealthy Chassid, R' Mendel Gurary, was traveling by train to his home in Kremenchuk. Since the journey was a rather long one, he decided to go through the carriages in search of "Jewish faces"…

Suddenly, his eyes caught a figure bundled up in a corner under a blanket. Something about him said that he wasn't just trying to get some sleep…

Without thinking twice, R' Mendel walked over and lifted the blanket while holding out his hand and giving a warm and heartfelt *'Shalom Aleichem.'* He soon realized that under the blanket was none other than the renowned Chassid, R' Gershon Ber Paharer, a student of R' Hillel Paritcher, and he had been deeply immersed for several hours in meditation on *Achdus Hashem*.

"Who are you, *yungerman*?" R' Gershon Ber asked.

"My name is Mendel Gurary."

"What is your destination?"

"Home, to Kremenchuk," replied R' Mendel.

Then, in a state of profound contemplation, R' Gershon Ber said something that remained engraved in R' Mendel's memory forever. "*Yungerman, yungerman*! *Zalst einteine'n di shtub mit di kinder az Hu levado v'ain zulaso"* = Instill within your home and the children that there is He alone and nothing else."

Good Shabbos! **■**

**Based on Sha'ar HaYichud V'HaEmuna (Chapters 1-6); Derech Mitzvosecha (Mitzvas Achdus Hashem); Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 29, first sicha on Parshas Va'eschanan.**