

# Parsha Ponders

Ki Savo | September 20, 2019 | 20 Elul 5779

## *The unique G-d; the unique nation<sup>1</sup>*

את-יקוק האמרת היום להיות לך לאלקים וגו' ויקוק האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגלה וגו'  
Today you have *he'emarta* Hashem to be for you a G-d...Today Hashem *he'emircha* you to be for Him a  
cherished<sup>2</sup> nation<sup>3</sup>

This week's *parsha* uses two unusual words to describe the relationship between Hashem and His nation, the Jewish people. These words seemingly don't occur anywhere else in scripture<sup>4</sup>. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah expounded<sup>5</sup> these words as follows: Hashem said to the Jewish people: "You have made me one **חטיבה** in this world, as the verse says<sup>6</sup>: 'שמע ישראל יקוק אלקינו יקוק אחד', Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One'. [Therefore], I will make for you one **חטיבה** in this world, as the verse says<sup>7</sup>: 'ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ', Who is like Your nation, O Israel, one nation in the land". Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah seemingly didn't help us identify the meaning of *he'emarta* and *he'emircha* in this week's *parsha*. He used the similarly uncommon word *chativa* to define them. What does this word mean?

There are various suggestions that are offered. Rashi says<sup>8</sup> that it's a language of unique praise. We praise Hashem by saying that He is One, and He praises us and says that we are one. Another explanation is<sup>9</sup> it means a unique form. Meaning, a description of something that has nothing similar to it. A third explanation<sup>10</sup> is it's a language of cutting or severing<sup>11</sup>. Meaning something separate and unique, with nothing else that is as unique as it. Regardless, we see that Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah is trying to teach a new explanation of our verse. We still need to understand what exactly is his intent. As well, why did he use this unusual word **חטיבה**, instead of simply saying the verse means that we made Hashem One G-d, and Hashem made us one nation<sup>12</sup>?

Throughout the millennia, there have been people who have believed in a Creator. However, they were led astray by the various contradictory forces which we experience throughout our lives. There seems to be a concept of Evil, and a concept of Good. They couldn't understand how these forces could stem from one source, and therefore created heretical beliefs of multiple gods. Every day we affirm our belief which is contrary to these. We believe that Hashem is One and His name is One. Everything comes from Him. We announce proudly **שמע ישראל**, to reject these false beliefs. When we experience evil, we cannot fathom how this is really Hashem's mercy. Nevertheless, we believe it to be true.

In a similar vein, we find this concept with the Jewish people. Hashem put in our nature seemingly opposing forces, which shouldn't be able to go together. In truth however, they all come from one holy

<sup>1</sup> Based on Be'er Yosef to Deuteronomy 26:17-18

<sup>2</sup> Targum Onkelos *ad. loc.*

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Rashi *ad. loc.*

<sup>5</sup> Chagigah 3a

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>7</sup> II Samuel 7:23; I Chronicles 17:21

<sup>8</sup> Chagigah *ad. loc.*

<sup>9</sup> Aruch § אמר in the name of Rav Hai Gaon, brought in Mesoras HaShas *ad. loc.* by Rav Yeshaya Pick

<sup>10</sup> Abudraham Tefillas Mincha shel Shabbos, Atah Echad

<sup>11</sup> From the phrase חוטבי עצים (Joshua 9:21, see also Deuteronomy 29:10)

<sup>12</sup> The following is the Be'er Yosef's additional explanation for the above *gemarra*. See there for his first explanation, for which he provides many sources

source. Our Sages asked<sup>13</sup> why it was that we were the nation who was given the Torah? It was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir that the reason is because we are bold. This doesn't mean we are mighty or strong<sup>14</sup>. Rather, we are spiritually bold<sup>15</sup>. Historically, we have stuck to our guns when faced with adversity. We didn't bend to pressures to convert, even under pain of death. We see this even in the realm of Torah study. There was once a debate raging<sup>16</sup> between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Yehoshua held of his opinion so strongly, that when a Heavenly voice proclaimed Rabbi Eliezer was right, Rabbi Yehoshua refused to budge.

In contrast, we find that our Sages were willing to submit themselves to the decided law. When a majority of authorities ruled one way, the minority abolished their dissenting opinion<sup>17</sup>. Once<sup>18</sup>, Rabban Gamliel ruled that Yom Kippur that year was to fall on a Monday<sup>19</sup>, and Rabbi Yehoshua held Yom Kippur was to fall on that Sunday<sup>19</sup>. Rabban Gamliel, who was the final authority in that generation, ordered Rabbi Yehoshua to violate his own Yom Kippur that Sunday and observe it on Monday. Rabbi Yehoshua, who as described above, was bold enough to argue against Hashem Himself, submitted to his superior. We find this contradiction in many places. One example is that we are taught<sup>20</sup> that Torah Sages are to be as hard as steel, yet soft as a rose.

Both Hashem and the Jewish people have seemingly contradictory aspects. We often see forces of evil and forces of good in our lives, and yet they don't have two sources. Although we can't understand it, we believe everything comes from Hashem<sup>21</sup>. We believe that Hashem our G-d is One. This is the חטיבה we ascribe to Hashem. Nothing else is like Him. In a similar fashion, Hashem gave us a חטיבה, making us unique among the nations. We have seemingly contradictory aspects of boldness combined with softness. However, they both come from the same source. As such, no one else is like us<sup>22</sup>.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>13</sup> Beitzah 25b

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rashi ad. loc.

<sup>15</sup> Maharsha ad. loc. Shemos Rabbah 42:9 also interprets the phrase עם קשה עורף (Exodus 32:9, 34:9), a stiff-necked nation, as complementary, not insulting. See also Gilyon Ein Yaakov (by Rav Nata Tzvi Weiss) *ad. loc.*, Mechilta to Exodus 20:6, and Yefeh Toar to Shemos Rabbah

<sup>16</sup> Bava Metzia 59b

<sup>17</sup> The commentaries explain that this is the intention of Tosafos to Bava Kamma 27b s.v. קמ"ל דאין. See Kuntres HaSefeikos § 6

<sup>18</sup> Rosh Hashanah 2:9

<sup>19</sup> For example

<sup>20</sup> Ta'anis 4a. See <http://parshaponders.com/pinchas-5779> for an in depth treatment on this passage by the Be'er Yosef

<sup>21</sup> Hashem told us that it was He who took us out of Egypt (Exodus 20:2). This was to remove any incorrect beliefs that the various forces that the Jews experienced had multiple sources (Mechilta ad. loc., brought by Rashi ad. loc.)

<sup>22</sup> See the end of the Be'er Yosef, who proceeds to show that the Torah also has contradictory aspects (and אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, see Zohar III parshas Acharei Mos p. 73b). There can be 49 ways to make something impure, and yet 49 ways to make something pure. There's the concept of חיים אלקים חיים (Eruvin 13b. See Ritva ad. loc. and Be'er HaGoleh 1:6). This is what Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah was referring to at the end of his exposition in Chagigah loc. cit., see there