

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Lech-Lecha

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Parshas Lech-Lecha 5771

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“I Am אל שדי Walk Before Me and Be Perfect”

Revelation of the Name שדי by the Mitzvah of Circumcision To Sanctify the Three Forces Inherent in the Title איש

In this week's parsha, parshas Lech Lecha, we read about one of the central mitzvos of Judaism and the Torah. The commandment of circumcision is given to Avraham Ovinu and his children to be observed by all future generations (17,1): **“ויהי אברם בן תשעים שנה ותשע שנים, וירא ה' אל אברם ויאמר אליו אני אל שדי התהלך לפני והיה תמים, ואתנה בריתי ביני ובינך וארבה אותך במאד מאד”**—“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to him, ‘I am El Shaddai; walk before Me and be perfect. I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will increase you most exceedingly.’” Why does the Holy One specifically mention the name אל שדי when commanding Avraham to perform the mitzvah of circumcision?

In truth, the Arizal (Likutei Torah, end of Lech Lecha) states that the holy name שדי is imprinted in the Jewish male's body by means of the circumcision. How so? Prior to the circumcision, the letters “shin” and “dalet” are already present. When one raises his two arms toward the sky, with his head between his arms, one forms a “shin,” ש. If one raises his left arm only, perpendicular to his body, he forms the letter “dalet,” ד. So, the only letter missing from the name שדי is the letter “yod.” During the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision, the foreskin is removed and the membranes are stripped away, revealing the corona—in the form of a “yod”; thus, the name שדי is completed. We would like to explain why HKB”H chose to imprint specifically the name שדי—out of his myriad of names—in a Jewish man's body by means of the mitzvah of circumcision.

Furthermore, the Derech Pikudecha writes in the name of the early kabbalists that the foreskin contains three layers akin to the layers of an onion; these correspond to the three husks, the three layers of impurity—tumah. To the best of our limited understanding, let us try and understand the significance of these three layers of impurity in the foreskin.

I Am the One Who Told the World “Enough”

We will begin by citing the words of our blessed sages concerning the two names אל שדי. We find in the Gemorah (Chagigah 12.):

“אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, בשעה שברא הקב”ה את העולם, היה מרחיב והולך עד שגער בו הקב”ה והעמידו, שנאמר (איוב כו יא) עמודי שמים ירופפו ויתמהו מגערתו, והיינו דאמר ריש לקיש, מאי דכתוב אני אל שדי, אני הוא שאמרתי לעולם די. אמר ריש לקיש, בשעה שברא הקב”ה את הים היה מרחיב והולך, עד שגער בו הקב”ה ויבשו שנאמר (נחום א ד) גוער בים ויבשהו וכל הנהרות החריבו.”

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“Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One, Blessed is He, created the world, it was expanding continuously, like two unraveling balls of warp thread, until the Holy One, Blessed is He, rebuked the world and brought it to a standstill, as it says: The pillars of the heavens shudder and are astounded by His rebuke. And this bears out what Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of that said: “I am El Shaddai?” I am the One Who told the world, “Enough.” Reish Lakish said: When the Holy One, Blessed is He, created the ocean, it was expanding continuously, until the Holy One, Blessed is He, rebuked it and dried it, as it says: He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and makes all the rivers parched.”

We find the verse (Bereishis 1,10) expounded similarly by the Midrash (B.R. 5,8): **“ויקרא אלקים ליבשה ארץ, למה נקרא שמה ארץ, שרצתה לעשות רצון קונה, רבי נתן בשם רבי אחא ורבי ברכיה בשם רבי יצחק אמר, אני אל שדי, אני שאמרתני לשמים וארץ די, שאלמלא כן היו מותחים והולכין עד עכשיו”**. It should be noted, that whereas the Midrash presents this concept only concerning the heaven and the earth, the Gemorah includes the ocean in its presentation of this concept.

Based on these teachings, the holy Maggid of Mezritsch, zy”a, in Likutim Yekarim (275) explains the association of the two names **א”ל שד”י**. The purpose of the limitation imposed on creation by the name **שד”י** was a manifestation of divine kindness. This allowed the various elements of creation to receive their bounty from above, each in keeping with its own limited capacity. Therefore, joined to the name **שד”י** is the name **א”ל**, connoting divine kindness—as it is written (Tehillim 52,3): **“חסד א”ל כל היום”**—“The kindness of G-d (א”ל) is continuous all day long.” In essence, this teaches us that the limitations and boundaries imposed by the name **שד”י** emanate from the attribute of divine kindness represented by the name **א”ל**. Here is this incredible insight as it appears in his own holy words:

“כי ידוע שמדת הצמצום נקרא שדי שאמר לעולמו די, רצונו לומר שהגביל מדת החסד מלהתפשט יותר מדי, ועם כל זה אף שהוא בחינת דין נקרא אל שדי, שמעורב בו החסד הנקרא א”ל, וזהו גופא חסד כי יוכלו על ידי הצמצום לקבל אורו.”

To Receive Hashem’s Bounty in the Appropriate Measure

We find this idea expressed in our holy sources countless times. The name **א”ל שד”י**—He who told the world: “Stop. Enough.”—contains both a proactive aspect as well as a restrictive aspect. On the one hand, it expresses the notion that every individual receives an abundance of good from above in accordance with his worthiness. On the other hand, it expresses the fact that this bounty is restricted, so that one does not receive more than one can handle—in the sense of (Devarim 32,15): **“וישמן ישורון ויבעט”**—this possuk teaches that there is an inherent danger in too much prosperity.

This explains beautifully why we inscribe the name **שד”י** on the mezuzah at the doorway to one’s house. It serves as a constant reminder as one enters and leaves one’s home to earn a living, that he should accept Hashem’s bounty appreciatively with love and gladness. This, after all, is the intrinsic

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message of the name **שד"י**—He provides everyone with an amount sufficient for that person's needs, while withholding that which could prove harmful.

The Name **שד"י** Restricts the Power of the Yetzer HoRah

We can now better appreciate why the possuk concerning the mitzvah of circumcision mentions the two names **א"ל שד"י** together: **"אני א"ל שד"י התהלך לפני והיה תמים"**—"I am El Shaddai; walk before Me and be perfect." The Rambam teaches us in Moreh Nevuchim (part 3, chapter 49) that performing the mitzvah of circumcision serves to weaken the yetzer horah's power of lust. He states: **"כי בהסרת הערלה תחליש האבר, ויתמעט על ידי זה התאוה היתירה על הצורך, היות מסתפקים רק בהכרחי מבלי מותרות"**—removing the foreskin weakens the male member; thus, reducing the excessive desire to only that which is necessary. . . .

This, then, is the reason that HKB"H commanded us to imprint the name **שד"י** on one's body in the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision. This name—He who told the world: "Enough"—conveys the fact that a man's power of desire should be limited to that which is required for a person's need and survival. Therefore, the Holy One said to Avraham: **"אני א"ל שד"י התהלך לפני והיה תמים"**.

This fits in nicely with that which we find in Likutei Torah from the Arizal (Vaetchanan) concerning the mitzvah of mezuzah. He instructs us that it is very important to have in mind, upon leaving one's house, that the name **שד"י** written on the outside of the mezuzah serves as protection against the yetzer horah. As explained, this name conveys the fact that the Almighty has imposed limits and boundaries upon our existence in this world; the power of lust of the yetzer horah has been reined in to some extent so as not to wreak havoc. This is the reason that HKB"H commanded us to imprint the name **שד"י** on our bodies by means of circumcision and to write it on our mezuzahs at the entryway to our homes. This name—that He said to creation: "Enough"—restricts the powers of the yetzer horah and prevents it from tempting mankind to overstep the boundaries established by the Holy One, Blessed is He.

Three Compartments of Creation: Heaven Earth and the Sea

Continuing along this path, we can now address the issue of the three husks—the three layers of tumah—contained in the foreskin. As explained, by removing the foreskin and peeling back the membranes, the corona and the letter "yod" are exposed; also, the name **שד"י** is completed which serves to weaken man's yetzer horah. To guide us along this path and to illuminate the way, we will introduce the magnificent commentary of the Kli Yakar on the possuk (Bereishis 1,6): **"יהי רקיע"**—"let there be a firmament."

Upon close inspection, we find that the Almighty divided this world into three distinct compartments: the heavens, the earth and the oceans. We find these three elements mentioned in

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together like dough—from the earth and the sea; whereas, his soul, which HKB”H blew into his body, came from the heavens. So, man truly contains within him these three forces, **אֵרֶץ יָם שָׁמַיִם**—whose first letters spell out **אִישׁ**, man.

We have already shown that these three forces wished to expand and evolve until HKB”H rebuked them using the name **שָׂדֵי**—saying: “Enough.” As a result, man, too, who is composed of these three constituents, has the desire to expand beyond the limits the Almighty has set for him. So, just as they were halted by the name **שָׂדֵי**, so, too, must man heed the Holy One’s voice telling him: “Enough.” In other words, until this point, the Torah allows you to go; beyond this point, you must not trespass.

The Name **שָׂדֵי** Restricts the Three Negative Forces Contained within the Foreskin

Based on the explanation of the Kli Yakar, we now understand why the name **שָׂדֵי** effectively negates the yetzer horah. The yetzer horah essentially originates from the three forces that spell out the word **אִישׁ**—the earth, the sea and the heaven—and that man is made of. Due to their intrinsic nature, man possesses the desire to expand and overstep the boundaries imposed on him by HKB”H in His Torah. Nevertheless, due to the name **שָׂדֵי**—which limited the expansion of creation and set boundaries for man’s three constituents—man also possesses the power to curb his appetites and to abide by the boundaries HKB”H has set for him in the Torah.

In this manner, we have gained a better understanding of HKB”H’s command regarding the mitzvah of circumcision: **”אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדַּדַּי הַתְּהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָמִים”**—“I am El Shaddai; walk before me and be perfect.” We have presented the view of the Rambam that the mitzvah of circumcision is designed to weaken the power of the yetzer horah. We have also learned from the teachings of the Arizal that by removing the foreskin during the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision, the corona resembling the form of the letter “yod” is exposed—thereby completing the manifestation of the name **שָׂדֵי** on a man’s body. As a result, man is able to minimize the power of the yetzer who wishes to expand and lust after all the pleasures this world has to offer.

At this point, we can begin to comprehend the matter of the three layers of the foreskin. These three layers—representing the three husks (klipot) of tumah—resemble the layers of an onion and cover the letter “yod” of the corona. In the words of the Tikunei Zohar: **”קְלִיפָה דְעֵרְלָה דְכָסִי עַל יוֹ, אֵית לָהּ תַּלְתָּ קְלִיפֵי כַגְלָדִי בְצַלִּים”**. These three husks are the three forces of the yetzer horah in man which are due to his origins from the three elements **אֵרֶץ יָם שָׁמַיִם**—earth, sea, heaven—whose first letters spell out **אִישׁ**. It is therefore necessary to remove them by means of the mitzvah of circumcision. By doing so, the letter “yod” of the corona will be revealed and the name **שָׂדֵי** will be completed—this will restrict the power of the yetzer just as it told all of creation: “Enough.”

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A Spice for Shabbos

HKB”H Said “Enough” on Shabbos Kodesh Enabling Man to Control the Yetzer within Him

It is written in the ten commandments (Shemos 20,8): “זכור את יום השבת לקדשו, ששת ימים תעבוד, ועשית כל מלאכתך ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלקיך, לא תעשה כל מלאכה אתה ובנך ובתך... כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ את הים ואת כל אשר בם וינח ביום השביעי, על כן ברך ה' את יום השבת ויקדשהו”—Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. . . for six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. . .

We must explain why HKB”H makes specific mention of the heaven, the earth and the sea which He created during the six days of creation. Secondly, we usually find mention of only the heaven and the earth; why are all three entities mentioned here with regards to Shabbos?

We have discussed the explanation of the Kli Yakar in this week’s main article. He explains that man is made up of these three elements of creation—the earth, the sea and the heavens—whose first letters spell out the word **אי”ש**. Just as the earth, the sea and the heavens wished to expand indefinitely, so, too, man possesses an inherent desire and tendency to expand beyond the boundaries HKB”H has set for him. Just as those three constituents of creation were limited by the name **שד”י**—He who told His creation, “Enough”—so, too, man must invoke the power of the name **שד”י** within him in order to restrict and weaken his internal yetzer.

The Name **שד”י** Was Said on Shabbos

Let us investigate. On which day did the Almighty invoke the name **שד”י**, telling the creation, “Enough”? A definitive answer is provided by the Chasam Sofer in the complete version of the Toras Moshe (Parshas Kedoshim p.82.):

“בבורא יתברך שמו אין פלא במה שברא העולם, מי שהוא בלתי בעל תכלית ולתבונתו אין חקר, אך הפלא הוא במה שאמר לעולמו די, ונתן קץ ושיעור ואמר עד פה תבוא ולא תוסיף, כי לפי כוחו יתברך שמו יתפשט העולם עד אין סוף, והוא שבת ונח כפי חכמתו יתברך שמו, ומשום הכי שובתים בשבת ביום שאמר די.”

He says that it is no wonder that Hashem created the world; after all, He is omnipotent and omniscient. The wonder, however, is that He told the world, “Enough.” He set limits and boundaries, even though He himself has none. Nevertheless, in His infinite wisdom, he ceased his labor and rested. This is why we rest and refrain from work on Shabbos—the day HKB”H said, “Enough.”

We find this same explanation presented by the holy, gaon Rabbi Yonasan Eibshitz, zy”a, in his Ahavas Yonasan (haftaros Ekev): “כאשר הגיע שבת ויכולו השמים והארץ, לפי דביום השבת ירדה: שכינה למטה ועמדו כל מעשה בראשית במאמר שדי, וזהו שדי שאמר לעולמו די”

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This helps us understand the words of Rashi citing the Midrash on the possuk (Bereishis 2,2): **וַיִּבְלֵ אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִלְּאֲכָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, מֵהָיְהוּהוּ הָעוֹלָם חָסֵר מִנוּחָה, בַּאֲת שְׁבַת בַּאֲת מִנוּחָה כִּלְתָהּ**—throughout the six days of creation, the world lacked the concept of “rest”; since the heaven, the earth and the sea wanted to expand indefinitely.

Then Shabbos arrived and HKB”H said to all of creation: “Enough.” The expansion ceased and there was peace and rest; the world experienced Shabbos. We see, therefore, that on Shabbos man has a unique ability to overcome the powers of his internal yetzer horah that originate from the forces alluded to in the title **אֶרֶץ שָׁמַיִם יָם--אִי”ש**, the earth, the heavens and the sea. For, it was on Shabbos that the Almighty reined in these elements of creation and set boundaries for them by saying: “Enough.”

This notion is alluded to in the possuk (Shemos 16,29): **“אֵל יִצְאֵ אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי”**—“let no man leave his place on the seventh day.” We can interpret the possuk as follows: The seventh day, Shabbos kodesh, has a unique quality: **“אֵל יִצְאֵ אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ”**—on this day man should not overstep the boundaries of the elements inherent in the name **אִי”ש**—the earth, the sea and the heavens. He should not apply them where they do not belong. For, HKB”H has restricted them and told them: “Enough.”

Based on what we have just learned, we stand enlightened with regard to the rabbinical institution of “lechem mishneh” on Shabbos and the Jewish custom to eat fish at each of the Shabbos meals. The holy Zohar explains (Vayechi 246.): **“מֵאִי לֶחֶם מִשְׁנָה, אֵלֵא תְרֵי לֶחֶם - לֶחֶם מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ”**—we eat “lechem mishneh” on Shabbos to commemorate the bread from heaven and the bread from the earth. In other words, the bread of this earth that we consume on Shabbos possesses the sanctity of the “manna” which was bread from the heavens.

Concerning the fish, they can survive only in the seas and oceans. By consuming “lechem mishneh” and fish at every Shabbos meal, we cure all three aspects of the title **אִי”ש**. Consuming “lechem mishneh”—bread from heaven and bread from earth—corrects issues and defects arising from the heavens and the earth. Consuming fish, corrects all that pertains to the sea. Thus, at our Shabbos meals, we demonstrate symbolically that we are able to correct all three forces that lie within us. This is also the reason that we consume three meals on Shabbos—to correspond to the additional sanctity realized by each of the three compartments of our being on Shabbos.