

MORDECHAI 105A

MORDECHAI 12:28-34

BESB

Mark 12:28. And one of the Soferim [of the Pharisees] approached him (Yeshua) hearing them (Yeshua and his talmidim) studying (Heb. Drash), knowing (seeing) that he (Yeshua) taught them well [with chokhmah], asked him, which is the chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all?

29. And Yeshua answered him, The chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all is: "Hear, Israel. The LORD our God is one LORD,

30. And you will love the LORD, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means." (Deut. 6:4, 5) This is the chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah.

31. And the second is like this, "You will neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you will love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:18) There is not another mitzvah greater than these [two].

32. And the Sofer said to him, You are right Rabbi (Hakham). In truth you have said, "that God is one," Deut. 6:4, 5 and "You have been shown, in order to know that the LORD He is God; [and] there is none else besides Him." (Deut. 4:35)

33. "And you will love the LORD, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means." (Deut. 6:4, 5) "You will neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you will love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:18)" [as Hosea said,] "For I desire loving-kindness, and not sacrifices, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hos. 6:6)

34. And seeing that he (the Sofer) answered wisely [because he was a Hakham], Yeshua said to him, You are not far from [but near to] the [dynamic] governance of God. And no one was bold enough to question him anymore.

GREEK TEXT

28 Καὶ προσελθὼν εἰς τῶν γραμματέων ἀκούσας αὐτῶν συζητούντων εἰδὼς ὅτι καλῶς αὐτοῖς ἀπεκρίθη ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτόν Ποία ἐστὶν πρώτη πασῶν ἐντολῆ

29 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ, ὅτι Πρώτη πασῶν τῶν ἐντολῶν, Ἄκουε Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν

30 καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου αὕτη πρώτη ἐντολή.

31 καὶ δευτέρα ὁμοία, αὕτη Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν μείζων τούτων ἄλλη ἐντολή οὐκ ἔστιν

32 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ γραμματεὺς Καλῶς διδάσκαλε ἐπ ἀληθείας εἶπας, ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν Θεὸς, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ·

33 καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν αὐτὸν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς συνέσεως καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν τὸν πλησίον ὡς ἑαυτὸν πλεῖον ἐστὶν πάντων τῶν ὀλοκαυτωμάτων καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν

34 καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ὅτι νουεχῶς ἀπεκρίθη εἶπεν αὐτῷ Οὐ μακρὰν εἶ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οὐδεὶς οὐκέτι ἐτόλμα αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι

DELITZSCH HEBREW TRANSLATION

28 וְאָחַד מִן־הַסּוֹפְרִים שָׁמַע אֹתָם מִתּוֹכָחִים וַיִּקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּרְא כִּי הֵיטֵב הֵשִׁיבָם וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ מֵהֲיָא הָרִאשׁוֹנָה לְכָל־הַמִּצְוֹת: 29 וַיַּעַן אֹתוֹ יֵשׁוּעַ הָרִאשׁוֹנָה לְכָל־הַמִּצְוֹת שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד: 30 וְאָהֲבָתָ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מַדְעֶךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ זֹאת הִיא הַמִּצְוָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה: 31 וְהַשְׁנִית הַדְּמָה לָּהּ וְאָהֲבָתָ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹדְךָ וְאִין מִצְוָה גְּדוּלָּה מֵאֵלֶּה: 32 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הַסּוֹפֵר אֲמַנְס רַבִּי יִפָּה דְּבַרְתָּ כִּי אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד הוּא וְאִין עוֹד מִלְּבָדוֹ: 33 וְלֹא־הֲבָה אֹתוֹ בְּכָל־לִבְבִי וּבְכָל־מַדְעִי

וּבְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ וּבְכָל-מֵאֵד וּלְאַהֲבָה אֶת-הָרַע כְּנִפְשָׁךְ גְּדוּלָה הִיא מִכָּל-עֲלוֹת וּזְבָחִים: ³⁴ וַיֵּרָא יֵשׁוּעַ כִּי-
 עָנָה בְּדַעַת וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לֹא-רָחוֹק אַתָּה מִמְּלֻכוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים וְאִישׁ לֹא-עָרַב עוֹד אֶת-לְבָבוֹ לְשִׂאֵל אוֹתוֹ
 שְׂאֵלָה:

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INTRODUCTION

AND ONE OF THE SOFERIM [OF THE PHARISEES] APPROACHED HIM (YESHUA)

Hakham Tsefet's pericope masterfully weaves it way through the Torah with great alacrity and genius. I am amazed and appalled at the great amount of defunct scholarship, which has not yet learned to apply hermeneutic to text for commentary of translation.

A Scribe, apparently without the usual prejudices of his class, and impressed by his answer to the Sadducees, approaches Jesus with an honest question as to the first of the commandments of the Law.^a

Gould's prejudice reeks of anti-Semitic manure. Not only does Gould not apply any hermeneutic to the text, he allows anti-Semitic prejudice to permeate his comments here. While opinions are opinions, the depth of anti-Semitic prejudice, which permeates these commentaries, is intolerable.

What Gould fails to comprehend is that Yeshua and the "Sofer" (Scribe) are most likely from the same school of thought, i.e. the School of Hillel. While it is not impossible for the Sofer to be from the School of Shammai, it is most improbable. Here I base my thought on the fact that the "Golden rule" and logic of the Shema's position within the Mishnah give preeminence to the School of Hillel.^b

^a Gould, E. P. (1922). A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark (230). New York: Scribner's sons.

^b For my thoughts on Hillel and Yeshua's part in the placement of the Shema in the Mishnah see [Hillel's Mishnah & The Mishnah and Yeshua](#)

b. Shab. 31a On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot. Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit, which was in his hand.^a When he went before Hillel, he said to him, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: ^b that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.”

While it is possible to have derived a different conclusion, I surmise that the “Sofer” is from the School of Hillel. Yeshua’s logic is married to the logic of the School of Hillel. Because the “Sofer” and Yeshua harmonize in thought and halakha, I have derived that the Sofer is one of the P’rushim and that he is most likely from the School of Hillel as is Yeshua. I will further this notion later on in the interpretation.

HEARING AND THE SHEMA

HEARING THEM (YESHUA AND HIS TALMIDIM) STUDYING (HEB. DRASH), “AKOUSAS AUTŌN SUZĒTOUNTŌN”

συζητέω (and συζητέω) impf. **συνεζήτουν**; (1) *inquire together, discuss, question* (MK 9.10); (2) in a negative sense *dispute, debate, argue with* (AC 6.9)^c

“a discussion in the course of which disputants persistently advocate/sponsor a particular point of view, dispute, discussion.”^d

Timothy & Barbara Freiburg and note that the same word is used in Mark 9:10. I have translated that passage when we looked at Mordechai’s pericope #63.

Mark 9:10-11 And they kept (guarded and held) his saying to themselves, and they discussed (*drash*) with one another the rising from the dead would mean. ¹¹ And they inquired (*drash*) of Him, saying, Why do the scribes (*most likely the “scribes of the Prushim”*)^e say it is necessary for Eliyahu come first?

Consequently, the most logical Hebrew parallel for this words as used in this context is “*Drash.*”

However, we can derive deeper insights from this pericope. The pericope gives the distinct pleasure of seeing the teaching technique of Yeshua. I have translated the Greek phrase “*akousas autōn suzētountōn*” “hearing them (Yeshua and his talmidim) studying (*darash*).” It is clear from the Greek Lexical information that “*suzētountōn*” demonstrates a Socratic teaching style. In other words, Yeshua used the Socratic method of questioning the talmidim as his teaching style. This teaching style is engaging rather than perorate. By engaging the mind of his talmidim, Yeshua could teach them to think and *drash* for themselves. This line of reasoning and teaching would have require Yeshua to prepare questions that forces his talmidim to reach deeply into their mind for answers based on prior teachings. The cited passage demonstrates that Yeshua must have consistently used the Socratic method of teaching. The talmidim question, “Why do the scribes (*most likely the “scribes of the*

^a Rashi: a cubit to measure off the amount of work done by a builder.

^b The golden Rule; cf. Lev. XIX, 18: but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.- V. Hertz, Leviticus, pp.22 or 223, and cf. R. T. Herford, Talmud and Apocrypha, p. 148

^c Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament. Baker's Greek New Testament Library. Trafford Publishing, 2005 p.360

^d Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker." (3rd ed.) (954). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

^e Some versions read *ὅτι λέγουσιν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς*

Prushim) say it is necessary for Eliyahu come first”? This also intimates that Yeshua promoted learning the teachings of the Soferim. This would mean the writings and teachings of the Soferim (of the P’rushim) were in harmony with Yeshua on a much grander scale than previously understood. What is further revealed is that Yeshua must have used this system regularly as a teaching method. “And they inquired (*drash*) of Him” is not a simple question with a simple answer. The *drash* is that of exchange and deliberation.

Of course, this all begs a question. What was Yeshua teaching his talmidim when the Sofer became so intrigued? While a great deal of conjecture would be required to elaborate on such a question, we may be able to put together the partial pieces of what Yeshua was teaching.

Mark 12:24 And Yeshua answered them saying, have you not been led astray because of this, not knowing the Scriptures [and their oral elucidation] or the [dynamic and supernatural] power of God?

Materials associated with this pericope^a dealt with the inability to properly discern, know and interpret the scriptures. Therefore, we would conclude that Yeshua was potentially teaching “Corral Hermeneutics,” (the end is in the beginning and the beginning is in the end) or something in line with the “dynamic power of G-d.” By saying that Yeshua **could** have been teaching along the lines of the dynamic power of G-d I am purporting that Yeshua was teaching that the positive mitzvot as acts of building the world. This sits well with the fourth pericope of Mark that I have cited so many times.^b That pericope deals with the governance of G-d as it would soon be established in the future through the rabbinical system. This concept fits well with the present pericope as well. To be more succinct it would appear that Yeshua was teaching the Dynamic (positive) mitzvot. This would naturally have caused the Sofer, overhearing the teaching of *chokhmah* to his question.

SEEING OR KNOWING

“EIDŌS”- KNOWING (SEEING) THAT HE (YESHUA) TAUGHT THEM WELL [WITH CHOKHMAH]

I can only begin to imagine what it must have been like to listen to the lectures and discourse of Yeshua. Here we see (know understand) that he taught with wisdom. Mordechai has repeatedly taught us that Yeshua taught with wisdom and authority. The 104c pericope of Mordechai demonstrated that the Tz’dukim failed in their logic because they could not “see,” perceive or understand on a prophetic level. Here the Sofer has the ability to “Ra’ah” “see” through prophetic eyes. I believe that this statement is overwhelmingly important. I will elaborate more fully below.

The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Edition, (BDAG) defines εἰδώς as... **“be intimately acquainted with or stand in a close relation to, know”^c**

Therefore, we should read...

KNOWING [being intimately acquainted with and stand in close relation to, knowing] (SEEING) THAT HE (YESHUA) TAUGHT THEM WELL [WITH CHOKHMAH]

^a Pericope 104c

^b Cf. Mark 1:14—15

^c Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker." (3rd ed.) (693). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The Sofer was intimately acquainted with teachings of Yeshua? If so how could this be? The six entries of “*oida*” in the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Edition, (BDAG) further our understanding of what the Sofer “saw.”

1. to have information about, *know*
2. be intimately acquainted with or stand in a close relation to, *know*
3. to know/understand how, *can, be able*
4. to grasp the meaning of something *understand, recognize, come to know, experience*
5. to remember, recollect, recall, be aware of
6. to recognize merit, *respect, honor*

Each entry could bear a great deal of commentary. The key point here is that Yeshua and the Sofer were of the same mind concerning what Yeshua taught. Here again, I would postulate that Yeshua and the Sofer belonged to the same Pharisaic School of Hillel. This would explain all the possible entries noted above concerning, the Sofer’s “knowing” (seeing).

Sabin^a translates this εἷς τῶν γραμματέων (*eis tōn grammateōn*) to mean “some of the Scribes.” The Greek word *eis* can be translated as “some.” James Strong cites six times that the word *eis* is translated as “some.” Though the primary meaning of *eis*, is “one” the possibility of Sabin’s translation is intriguing. The best possible explanation would be that “some of the Soferim” approached Yeshua. Upon hearing (knowing) that Yeshua taught with chokhmah, “one” of the Soferim that had gathered, ventured the question concerning the mitzvot. Therefore, rather than having “one” Sofer” which agreed with Yeshua we would have a number of Soferim in agreeance with Yeshua. They could also possibly be from the School of Hillel. If there is any plausibility to the thought that the Soferim were in agreeance with Yeshua and from the School of Hillel, we must re-interpret Yeshua’s interaction with the Soferim and P’rushim. Here we might also postulate that the Soferim were a part of the Drash. From this, the Soferim knew that Yeshua taught with chokhmah.

A STORY IN 2ND LUKE (ACTS)

Hakham Shaul posits a story in the 2nd book of Luke (Acts).^b

Act 5:34-41 Then there stood up one in the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the Law honored among all the people. And he commanded the apostles to be put outside a little space. ³⁵ And he said to them, Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, boasting himself to be somebody; a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves to him; who was slain. And all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nothing. ³⁷ After this one, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the Registration, and drew away considerable people after him. Yet that one perished; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered. ³⁸ And now I say to you, Withdraw from these men and let them alone. For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will come to nothing. ³⁹ But if it is of G-d, you cannot overthrow it, lest perhaps you be found even to fight against G-d. ⁴⁰ And they obeyed him. And calling the apostles, beating them, they commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then indeed, they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be shamed for His name.

^a Sabin, Marie Noonan, Reopening the Word, Reading Mark as a Theology in Context of Early Judaism, Oxford University Press 2002 p. 93

^b For an in-depth Greek study on who wrote Luke/Acts see... Heber, Evans, Howard, St Paul the Author of the Acts of the Apostles and the Third Gospel, Wyman & Sons, 1884

Most scholars read this piece of material superficially. While they would like to show some similitude between Yeshua's talmidim and Gamaliel, they dare not venture to far from solid "doctrinal dogma." While we cannot easily venture into the Remez of this piece of text, we can apply some P'shat logic.

1. The text clearly sets Gamaliel in opposition with the Tz'dukim
2. Gamaliel was highly honored among the people (most likely the Nasi of the Sanhedrin at this time)
3. That Gamaliel was "honored among the people" implies that Gamaliel either taught or judged the people publicly.
4. Association with Gamaliel was honorable. Hakham Shaul cites Gamaliel as one of his teacher in an attempt to side with the P'rushim.^a
5. The above cited text clearly demonstrates Gamaliel's intervention on behalf of Yeshua's talmidim
6. Gamaliel frowns on other "so called" Messiahs discounting their possibility of legitimacy
7. Gamaliel suggest the possibility of Yeshua as Messiah by his comments or implication
8. Gamaliel is in possible harmony with of another member of the Sanhedrin who believed Yeshua to be the Messiah (Joseph of Arimathea)

We know from the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 15a^b that Gamaliel was Nasi of the Sanhedrin at some point in his life. Exactly when he became the Nasi is hard to determine. His father Simeon ben Hillel was also the Nasi of the Sanhedrin succeeding his father Hillel the Great. Therefore, we could surmise that Gamaliel was most likely the Nasi of the Sanhedrin some time near the death and resurrection of Yeshua. Whether this took place before or after the Acts event is difficult to determine. If we look carefully at the story, we can see that Gamaliel seems to possess a great deal of power over the Sanhedrin. Emil Schurer seems to believe that Acts 5:34 is evidence that Gamaliel was Nasi of the Sanhedrin at the point of interaction with Yeshua's talmidim.^c

"And he commanded the apostles to be put outside a little space."

That Gamaliel "commanded" to put the Yeshua's talmidim outside is indicative of his authority. For that reason, we could say that it is plausible that Gamaliel was Nasi in the Acts narrative. The exact year is most likely 30 C.E.

The Dictionary of the Ancient Rabbis attributes the origin of the rabbinic maxim "*tikkun ha-olam*" or the betterment and repair of the world to Rabban Gamaliel.^d This tells us that Gamaliel and Yeshua's message was the same. Hence, we would expect Gamaliel to show leniency to Yeshua's talmidim. Concisely, Yeshua's message concerning the Governance of G-d bears a great deal of similarity to Gamaliel's *tikkun ha-olam*.

While there is much more to say about these matters, we will suspend this avenue of investigation for the sake of space and time.

^a Cf. Acts 22:3

^b b. Shab. 15a Hillel and Simeon [his son], Gamaliel and Simeon wielded their Patriarchate during one hundred years of the Temple's existence.

^c Schurer, Emil, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ Division 2 Volume 1, Hendrickson Publishers. 2003 p. 365

^d Git. iv. 1—3, See also Neusner, Jacob, Dictionary of the Ancient Rabbis, Selections from the Jewish Encyclopedia, Hendrickson Publishers 2003 p.151 This Dictionary is based on entries from the Jewish Encyclopedia.

SHEMA AS A MITZVAH

THE CHIEF [HEB. ROSH] MITZVAH OF ALL IS: “HEAR, ISRAEL. THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD,

A superficial look at our pericope causes one to ask another question. What mitzvah is Yeshua really talking about? The only reason I present this question is that some parties do not have a clue, which Mitzvah Yeshua could be discussing with the Sofer of our pericope.

The Tetragrammaton is rooted in the idea that HaShem is the self-existent ONE. HaShem is the only self-existent ONE. No other creature, person or thing is self-existent. HaShem alone is the cause and reason for all things. He is the ONE who produced all existence without partnership or equal.^a

This mitzvah is a positive (dynamic) mitzvah. The mitzvah declares that we will believe in the ONE G-d and verbally announce that belief in the form of the Kariat Shema. From this material and the contiguity of the idea of the “dynamic power of G-d,^b that I have deduced the plausibility that Yeshua was teaching his talmidim the positive mitzvot when the Sofer overheard the teaching. This would fit the genre of the “Governance of G-d” through the positive mitzvot. A key point made concerning the Shema is that it is the acceptance of the “Yoke of the Kingdom” (Governance of G-d).

m. Ber. 2:2 Said R. Joshua b. Qorha, “Why does [the passage of] Shema precede [that of] And it will come to pass [if you keep my commandments]? “So that one may first accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and afterwards may accept the yoke of the commandments.

Accepting the “Yoke of the Kingdom” is the acceptance of the dynamic Governance of G-d. Not only does the observance of the dynamic mitzvot connect us with G-d, the observance of the dynamic mitzvot rebuilds the word (tikkun ha-olam). As noted above, this was the special message of Rabban Gamaliel. It is profound to note that this is a parallel thought to the Governance of G-d as taught by Yeshua and his talmidim.

In our reading of the Decalogue we note that the Decalogue not only introduces the Torah as a whole, or, all of the mitzvot can be found in the opening statement “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” In this concise statement, G-d summarily invests a single statement with all the 613 mitzvot. However, it logically leads to the “chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all,” the Shema. G-d establishes His sovereign identity as the Absolute, Eternal self-existent ONE. He furthers His omnipotence to tell us that He is our Redeemer.

Consequently, the G-d gives us the Torah as a means of His Chesed. The loving-kindness of G-d gave us the mediator of the Torah. The Jewish soul never faces G-d without the mediator of the Torah.^c Threshing this concept effusively causes us to see the splendor of the Torah given by G-d. We can further establish that G-d chose Yisrael to be a nation invested with the Torah. This week’s pericope of Mordechai connects to the Torah Seder in a special way. Both Hakham Tsefet and Balaam attribute Yisrael with being the chosen people of G-d. Balaam does this through his prophecy in which he “sees” Yisrael and the Messiah as G-d’s chosen people. Hakham Tsefet “sees” Yisrael as being the chosen people of G-d by his proclamation of the Shema as the “chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all.”

^a Rabbi Aaron haLevi of Barcelona, Sefer haHinnuch, , Feldheim Publishers, Volume 4 pp. 249—251

^b Cf. Mordechai 12:18-27

^c I have given here a summary paraphrase of statement made by Abraham Joshua Heschel in his work God in search of Man, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955

The chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all the Torah is that there is no other G-d but HaShem. This statement forms the basic constitution of Monotheism, the belief in ONE G-d. Here I would like to interject that monotheism should not be confused with henotheism.^a

This is what I call henotheism, a worship of single gods, which must be carefully distinguished both from monotheism, or the worship of one god, involving a distinct denial of all other gods, and From polytheism, the worship of many deities which together form one divine polity, under the control of one supreme god.^b

In Greek, the contrast would read as follows, εἷς θεός (one god) as opposed to the Shema, which reads κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν **κύριος εἷς** the L-RD our G-d is ONE! Henotheism has at its core the idea of adoration of one god as opposed to G-d (HaShem) is ONE. Judaism cannot be accused of henotheistic practices. We must assert that the Shema declares that G-d is the ONE and only cause of all things. Unwitting people might think that because they worship or adore one god that they are monotheists. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Worship or devotion to one god merely makes one a henotheist rather than a monotheist.

There are other affirmations of the Shema. However, any emendation to the Shema nullifies it as the Shema and the “chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all.” The Shema means ONE G-d and ONE Torah. All other emendations are annulments of the Shema and the Torah. Because there is ONE G-d and His Torah is ONE we must read and understand that the Shema declares that, the imperative of G-d is unconditional. The Torah, which records the Shema, is the universal statement of truth. No other truth exists outside of the Torah. By the Torah G-d created the universe. Consequently, the Shema as the chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all, teaches us that man is subject to an absolute ethical and monotheistic imperative. Perhaps we could state that because “G-d is ONE, truth (Torah) is one.

Modern political orders are polytheistic imperial states, but the churches are not much better. To hold, as the churches do, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, and all others virtually, that the law was good for Israel, but that Christians and the church are under grace and without law, or under some higher, newer law, is implicit polytheism. The Joachimite heresy has deeply infected the church. According to this heresy, the first age of man was the age of the Father, the age of justice and the law. The second age was the age of the Son, of Christianity, of the church, and of grace. The third age is the age of the Spirit, when men become gods and their own law.

Dispensationalism is also either evolutionary or polytheistic or both. God changes or alters His ways with man, so that law is administered in one age, and not in another. One age sees salvation by works, another by grace, and so on. But Scripture gives us a contrary assertion: "I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). To attempt to pit law against grace is polytheistic or at least Manichaeic: it assumes two ultimate ways and powers in contradiction to one another. But the word of God is one word, and the law of God is one law, because God is one.^c

I believe that Rushdoony has succinctly stated the matter concerning the singularity of the G-d and the Torah. While Rushdoony’s “monotheism” is not in perfect alignment with Jewish definitions, his point here is insightful.

The Shema and declaration of G-d’s unity is so great that every Jew is duty bound to declare the ONENESS of G-d. Failure to declare the ONENESS of G-d is tantamount to being a heretic.^d

^a (Greek εἷς θεός heis theos "one god") is the belief and worship of a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities.

^b Muller, Max, Lectures on the origin and growth of religion as illustrated by the religions of India, Longmans, Green, Oxford University 1878

^c Rushdoony, John Rusas, The Institutes of Biblical Law, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1973 p. 18

^d Rabbi Aaron haLevi of Barcelona, Sefer haHinnuch, , Feldheim Publishers, Volume

THE SHEMA AND SEEING

I am fascinated with this pericope and the pericope's of contiguity. So much emphasis has been put on "seeing" and Hakham Tsefet places the Shema at the core of his discussion and on the ability to "see," know the Scriptures (Torah). Every observant Jew recites the Shema two or three times daily with his hand over his eyes to focus on the word Shema (hear, listen obey).

The Theological Workbook of the Old Testament cites the following entry for Shema.

shāmā' has the basic meaning "to hear. "This is extended in various ways, generally involving an effective hearing or listening: 1)"listen to," "pay attention," 2)"obey"(with words such as "commandment" etc.), 3) "answer prayer," "hear," 4) "understand" and 5) "hear critically," "examine (in court)," The derived stems have appropriately modified meanings. ^a

The Hebrew word "Shema" as used in D'varim 6:4 is a declaration of "knowing" that G-d is ONE. While we focus on "hearing" that G-d is ONE we "know" that, He is not two, three, or any other number. Hence, Hakham Tsefet makes a wonderful play on words and concepts in this present pericope. The Ramchal (Moshe Chaim Luzzatto) defines the need to "know" G-d and His unity in the following manner.

Among the things, that it is also necessary to know is that God must be absolutely one.

It is impossible that there exist more than one being whose existence is intrinsically imperative. Only one Being can possibly exist with this necessarily perfect Essence, and therefore the only reason all other things have the possibility of existence is that God wills them to exist. All other things therefore depend on Him, and do not have intrinsic existence.

We therefore see that there are six basic principles [involved in our understanding of God].

1. *They are: The fact of His existence*
2. *His perfection*
3. *The necessity of His existence*
4. *His absolute independence*
5. *His Simplicity*
6. *His Unity^b*

While we cannot place these words in the mouth of Hakham Tsefet, we can certainly understand the vitality of Ramchal's words and their relevance to this week's pericope of Mordechai. "Knowing" prophetically is integral to Hakham Tsefet's pericope. Hakham Tsefet's choice of words is a careful integration of ideas found in the readings associated with the Torah Seder. Balaam's prophecy cites the prayer "Mah Tov u-halekha" (how goodly are your tents). Our Targum interprets "how goodly are your tents" to mean "**How beautiful your houses of instruction.**" Consequently, the place of learning and knowing is elevated in Hakham Tsefet's mind. This connection re-enforces the idea that Yeshua would have been teaching his talmidim rather than debating with the Tz'dukim.

^a Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999, c1980). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (electronic ed.) (938). Chicago: Moody Press.

^b Luzzatto, Moshe Chaim, Derekh HaShem (The Way of G-d) Feldheim Publishers 1999 p. 35

WHEN A QUESTION IS NOT A QUESTION

AND ONE OF THE SOFERIM [OF THE PHARISEES] APPROACHED HIM (YESHUA) ... ASKED HIM, WHICH IS THE CHIEF [HEB. ROSH] MITZVAH OF ALL?

Above I have suggested that it is plausible to believe that the Sofer or Soferim were from the School of Hillel. While this bears further research, I see another fascinating point. The Sofer or Soferim was listening to the lesson of chokhmah taught by Yeshua with admiration.

Hakham Tsefet's speech unveils his intention. He shows the Sofer or Soferim in a positive light. The language of the text suggests another interesting observation. It would appear, at least superficially, that the Sofer or Soferim are actually a part of the lesson.

"a discussion in the course of which disputants persistently advocate/sponsor a particular point of view, dispute, discussion."^a

In the process of συζητέω – *suzētountōn*, *Drash* questions are often posited which cause the discussion to move in a particular direction. This can be for several reasons, such as, a talmid wanting further elucidation on a particular thought, or simply because the talmid already knows, but wants the teacher to elucidate on behalf of the other talmidim. I believe that the latter is possible in the present case. The Sofer asks a question that he already has the answer to for the sake of the talmidim and audience rather than needing personal elucidation.

AND SEEING THAT HE (THE SOFER) ANSWERED WISELY [BECAUSE HE WAS A HAKHAM],

It is also possible that the Sofer, a Hakham was present with some of his own talmidim. And, for the benefit of his talmidim he asks the question. He may have already taught his talmidim this lesson and wants Yeshua to reiterate what he has taught. I realize that there is plenty of room for conjecture here and I have conjectured a fair amount. Nonetheless, I have said nothing outside of the realm of the plausible.

CONCLUSION

As is usual we always want to know, what is Hakham Tsefet trying to say in this pericope? In a matter of speaking this is a busy Torah Seder and pericope. In short, I believe that Hakham Tsefet is trying to establish a couple of important thoughts.

1. Yeshua was NOT in discord with all the Soferim. He was only in discord with the School of Shammai and those Soferim who were legitimately "painted ones."

Yeshua and the Sofer or Soferim have more in common than most Bible scholars have admitted. It would be a worthwhile study to plumb the depths of the parallel teachings of the P'rushim and Yeshua

2. Hakham Tsefet is trying to reiterate the core principle of Judaism, which is the Unity and Oneness of HaShem

The chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all is the Shema or "Unity of G-d." This is the central theme of monotheism. Judaism does not fall under the category of henotheism, and Jews can never be accused of henotheistic practices.

^a Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker." (3rd ed.) (954). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

3. By means of contiguity, Hakham Tsefet is trying to teach us the beauty of having a Hakham as a Torah teacher with its great reward.

The proximity of this pericope to the previous pericope where Yeshua is dealing with problems of poor teaching and learning skills shows the reader just how powerful a positive interaction with a real Hakham can be.

BS”D (B’Siyata D’Shamaya)
Aramaic: With the help of Heaven
Paqid Dr. Adon Eliyahu ben Abraham

CONNECTIONS TO TORAH READINGS

TORAH SEDER

This week's pericope of Mordechai connects to the Torah Seder in a special way. Both Hakham Tsefet and Balaam attribute Yisrael with being the chosen people of G-d. Balaam does this through his prophecy in which he "sees" Yisrael and the Messiah as G-d's chosen people. Hakham Tsefet sees Yisrael as being the chosen people of G-d by his proclamation of the Shema as the "chief [Heb. Rosh] mitzvah of all."

The Sofer "sees" prophetically as Balaam "sees" the Bne Yisrael prophetically.

TEHILLIM

The Psalm 105:4 says "seek the LORD" using Strong's H1875 *darash*, (דָּרַשׁ/ζητήσατε) which is a parallel to Mordechai 12:28 thereby bring a continuity with the opening thoughts of Mordechai.

The Targum connects in a solid way by saying...

Psalm 105:3. Sing praise in His holy name; may the heart of those who ***seek instruction from the presence of*** the LORD be glad. 4. Seek ***the teaching of*** the LORD, and His Torah; welcome His face continually.

Thus, the Targum strengthens the idea of positive teaching by a good Hakham.

ASHLAMATAH

Yeshayahu 50:4 The Lord God gave me a tongue for teaching, to know to establish times for the faint [for His] word; He awakens me every morning, He awakens My ear, to hear according to the teachings. 5. The Lord God opened my ear, and I did not rebel; I did not turn away backwards.

This passage connects to Mordechai through the idea of teachings (thematically) and hearing verbally. Mordechai 12:29

QUESTIONS OR REFLECTION

1. What was Yeshua teaching his talmidim when the Sofer became so intrigued?
2. Was the Sofer was intimately acquainted with teachings of Yeshua?
 - a. If so how could this be?
3. What mitzvah is Yeshua really talking about when citing the Shema?