

פניני חיים

Pearls of Life

Weekly Divre Torah Harav Eliyahu Ben-Haim
Based on his teachings at the SBM Kollel



To sponsor future editions, please contact Josh Levian

שמות
Shemot

כ"א טבת תשפ"ג
January 14th
2023

Zemanim in
Great Neck:
Latest Shema:
9:40 am

Latest Tefilat
Shacharit:
10:28 am

Shabbat Ends:
5:40 pm

Earliest Mincha
(Lechumra):
12:34 pm

SBM
SEPHARDIC BETH MIDRASH

Keeping Our Jewish Identity

וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל-פְּרַעֲהוֹ וְהוֹצֵאת אֶת-עַמִּי
בְּגִיּוֹשְׁרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Come, therefore, I will send you to Shemot 3:10) Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."

The Jewish people were in servitude in Egypt for many years. There were so entrenched in slavery that it was difficult to even imagine being redeemed. So what exactly caused them to be meritorious to be redeemed from their servitude? The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba 32:5*) notes that there were four main reasons which set them apart from everyone else in Egypt: 1) The Jewish people continued to name their children with Jewish names, 2) they kept loyal to the Jewish language and they did not change their Hebrew language, 3) they did not speak slander against each other and 4) they kept sexual purity and did not intermarry with the gentiles. All of these characteristics maintained a strong sense of Jewish identity and preserved proper boundaries with the gentiles in order to prevent assimilation.

These four elements: making sure our children have Jewish names, keeping alive the holy language of Hebrew, refraining from Lashon Hara against each other, and refraining from intermarriage are the four key ingredients to maintaining our Jewish identity when we are outside of Israel. If the Jewish people had not held on to these four critical elements when they were in Egypt, their children would have completely assimilated and become Egyptian *chas veshalom*. When the time would come for Moshe Rabbenu to be sent to save them, there would be no Jewish nation to save, since they would not have even maintained a Jewish identity.

As Jews who are living in the Diaspora, we must keep these four critical elements in mind if we want to survive for the future. When the Persian Jews, especially the Mashadi Jews were in Iran, the most important value to them was to be steadfast not to intermarry. This is one of the main reasons that our community is thriving to this very day. The only way to save our generation and fight against intermarriage is through proper Jewish education. We need to educate our children with proper Torah knowledge from a young age. We must all keep our Jewish names, we must all strive to know how to read and speak Hebrew, we must all be united and not speak lashon hara about each other, and we must make sure to only marry Jewish.

Rambam (*Issure Biah 12:7*) stresses that we must understand the severity of intermarriages. If one *chas veshalom* has extra-marital relations with a Jewish woman, the child will under most conditions be considered an illegitimate child (mamzer), yet at the very least the child is considered his child. An illegitimate child cannot marry into the Jewish community, but at least is still considered to be Jewish for all purposes. If a Jewish man intermarries with a gentile woman, however, the children are not even considered to be his children. They do not even inherit him; they are lost and are no longer part of the Jewish nation.

The Jews in Egypt may have fallen to a spiritually low level, but the one thing they did not let go of was their Jewish identity. They stood strong to their basic principles and did not intermarry. In this merit, they were ultimately redeemed from Egypt. May we always merit to keep our Jewish identity strong, so that we see blessing and good fortune in our future.

הליכות חיים

Halachic Topics addressed by Harav Eliyahu Ben-Haim
At the SBM Kollel

Putting on Tefilin—Standing Or Sitting?

The General Sephardic Custom

The Zohar (Parashat Bemidbar Page 120b) writes: “the prayer which is said sitting down parallels the hand tefillin, while the prayer which is said standing parallels the head tefillin.” In other words, the hand tefillin are parallel to the Shema Yisrael which is recited sitting down, while the head tefillin are parallel to the Amida which is recited standing up (*Halacha Berura* v2 *Siman 25 Berura Halacha #20*). Based on the Zohar, the kabbalists say that the hand tefillin should be donned while sitting, and the head tefillin should be donned while standing.

The Ben Ish Hai (*Vayera #8*), Kaf Hachaim (*OH 25 SK 33*), and Yalkut Yosef (*Halachot Tefilin Halacha #68*) all record that the general Sephardic practice is to sit while wearing the hand tefillin, and to stand while wearing the head tefillin, in accordance with the Zohar. Kaf Hachaim (*ibid.*) and Yalkut Yosef (*ibid.*, *Halacha #71*) both note that the beracha of “Lehaniach Tefilin” should be recited while sitting as well.

The General Ashkenazi Custom

The Rama (*OH 25:11*) notes that there are some opinions that one should don the hand tefillin while sitting, and the head tefillin while standing. However, the Rama says that the prevalent practice amongst the Ashkenazi community is to wear both tefillin only while standing. The Magen Avraham (*OH 25:20*) attempts to find a compromise between the two opinions and suggests that one should put on the tefillin while sitting, and then stand up for the beracha and tie the tefillin while standing as well.

The Vilna Gaon’s Reading of the Zohar

The Vilna Gaon (*Beur Hagra OH 25 SK 29-30*) asserts that there is no proof from the Zohar that the hand tefillin must strictly be donned while sitting. The Zohar says that the hand tefillin is parallel to the Shema Yisrael, which can be

recited either sitting or standing, whichever way one prefers. Therefore, the Zohar only means to say that the hand tefillin can be donned while sitting, i.e. it is ok for a person to choose to sit or stand while donning the hand tefillin. This is contrast to the head tefillin, which is parallel to the Amida. Since the Amida must be recited while standing, the Zohar notes that one must stand when donning the head tefillin in the same way. At any rate, there is no proof from the Zohar that one must sit while donning the hand tefillin, since the Zohar only means to say that one has the choice to sit or to stand when donning the head tefillin. [The Mishna Berura (*OH 25 SK 42*) records the Gra as additional support for the Ashkenazi custom to stand for both the hand and head tefilin.]

The Practical Halacha

In practice, the general custom of the Sepharadim is to follow the Zohar and to sit while donning the hand tefillin and to stand while donning the head tefillin. Yalkut Yosef (*ibid. Halacha #69*) also notes that a Sepharadi may follow his practice of sitting down while wearing the hand tefillin even if he is praying in an Ashkenazi minyan where everyone else is standing. However, if it is difficult (i.e. there is no chair available) or a person strongly prefers to stand while wearing the hand tefillin, as well he may do so.

Can One Sit When Donning the Head Tefillin?

Yalkut Yosef (*ibid. Halacha #70*) also notes that if a person is sick and is not able to stand up when putting on the head tefillin, it is permissible in such a situation to wear the head tefillin while sitting as well. Since the primary source for standing while wearing the head tefillin is based on the Zohar, this is not halachically binding for one who is sick and unable to stand. Therefore, one who is sick and cannot stand may wear the head tefillin while sitting, and if he is not even able to sit, he may wear it while laying down in bed to fulfill the mitzvah.

