



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Letter's Lessons

"Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad — Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our God; Hashem is One." (Devarim 6:4)

This grand verse has been found on the lips of countless Jews throughout the ages. Notably the letters "*ayin*" at the end of "*shema*," and "*daled*" at the end of "*echad*," are written larger than the other words in the Torah. Many of the commentators explain that these two letters, *ayin* and *daled* form the word *eid*—witness, as the Jewish people stand witness to the veracity of this statement. At the same time, however, there is much to learn from each of these letters independently.

Rav Shmuel Brazil in *B'shivili Nivra Ha'ol-am* offers a fascinating insight that highlights the significance of the *daled*. He teaches that when Hashem created Adam, there was absolute clarity and certainty of Hashem's presence in the world. After Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, reality became distorted, good and evil became mixed and difficult to discern from one another. This confusion is hinted at in Adam's punishment, "*arurah ha'adamah ba'avurecha... kots v'dardar tatzmi'ach lach* — cursed be the ground for your sake...And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you..." (Bereisheet 3:18).



Rav Shmuel Brazil

The word "*dardar*" is spelled *daled*, *reish* and again, *daled*, *reish*. Rav Brazil explains that the letter *daled* here alludes to the enlarged *daled* in the word *echad* in the Shema. The letter *reish* alludes to an enlarged letter *reish* at the end of the word *acher* in the verse, "*Ki lo tishtachaveh le'eil acher* — for you shall not prostrate yourself before **another** god," (Shemot 34:14). There is never a random placement of letters and words in the Torah; each detail is exceedingly precise and related to the other. **Dardar** expresses the obscurity included in the earth's curse. Can we recognize Hashem as *echad*, the sole authority of the universe? Or is our allegiance to *acher*, another? This is the distinction we must constantly determine as we go through life making choices



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and decisions. Do our thoughts, actions and deeds take us closer to Oneness or are they leading us toward another path?

Even the numerical difference between the letter *reish* (200) and the letter *daled* (4) is compelling. If we subtract 4 from 200, we are left with 196, the same numerical value as *kotz*, a thorn, that tiny little piece that sticks out of the top line on the *daled* that distinguishes it from the *reish*. Sometimes the feature that qualifies Oneness as opposed to “another” can be so small, yet, provokes us until we find it and make it our primary focus.

It is certainly not arbitrary that the Torah describes the war with Amalek as lasting, “*m’dor dor* — from generation to generation.” (*Shemot* 17:16) The word *dor* is spelled *daled*, *reish* as well. The biblical war with Amalek not only symbolizes the constant clash between the forces of evil and good



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in the world, but it also represents the daily struggle in us all to reveal truth and *kevod shamayim* in everything that we do. ■



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