YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Geulat Yisrael**

**Rav Moshe Taragin**

**Shiur #15: Children of Hashem**

Every human is God's creature. *Parashat Re'eh* describes an additional status for Jews: we aren’t just Hashem's creatures but are also His children – a status that had already been alluded to during the early stages of the Exodus from Egypt. Hashem initially demanded (*Shemot* 4:22-23) that Pharaoh release His imprisoned child – the Jewish people – and cautioned that if he didn’t accede, his own firstborn would be taken. In *Re’eh*, that implicit message is articulated explicitly: we are Hashem's children.

Every human is gifted with Divine traits: intelligence, emotion, consciousness, creativity, free will, hopes, and personality. Crafted in the image of Hashem, every human must be respected and protected. More so, we believe that humans are created righteous and upright. Humanism – the belief in human virtue and human potential – is a cornerstone of Jewish faith. However, in addition to bearing the Divine image, Jews are chosen for a historical mission, to call humanity to a higher ground. We alone accepted the Divine invitation and His mission, and because of our acquiescence, we are uniquely cherished. To demonstrate His love, God adopted us as His children.

Balancing our respect for all humanity with our unique and chosen status as children of Hashem can be delicate. Some Jews are so universalistic that they have all but abdicated any sense of "choseness.” To them, the notion that a Jew possesses a unique status or is more beloved, as God’s child, feels racist and bigoted. Sadly, many other Jews are so nationalistic in their outlook and parochial in their experience that their view of non-Jews indeed borders on xenophobia or outright racism. Our greatest visionary, Rabbi Akiva, threaded the needle between these two complementary truths: "Every human is beloved (*chaviv*) [to God] because he was created in the Divine image…. The Jewish people are beloved (*chavivin*) because they are called God’s children; a greater love was made known for them…” (*Avot* 3:14). Our selection as children should not diminish our respect or care for Mankind. If anything, our mission, the basis for our status as children, demands greater sensitivity for general human welfare. Alternatively, our shared experience with other human beings cannot blur our pride in being selected.

How does this preferred status as children affect our religious identity and practice? Firstly, it should bolster our faith in the face of tragedy. This designation as "children to God" is embedded in a section of *Parashat Re'eh* (*Devarim* 14:1) that cautions against overreaction to death or excessive grieving by disfiguring our bodies. When facing devastating and perplexing tragedies, we may not possess all the answers, but we should maintain confidence that our lives aren’t random; our fate has not been cast to chance or whim. Poise and confidence lie at the core of faith. Reminding ourselves that we are God’s children should provide confidence that we are cared for, even if we can't fully decipher the outcome.

Being a child of God doesn’t only steady our faith; it also demands that we behave with dignity and "class.” As Hashem's children, we represent Him and His majesty. In addition to obeying Him, we must also honor Him through lives of nobility and grace. Any mutilation of the human body, even when self-inflicted or even in response to grief, is vulgar and incompatible with our profile as children of Hashem. Interestingly, after prohibiting bodily mutilation, the Torah restates the laws of kosher food. Beyond the specific details of kashrut, there is great benefit to the general idea of limitation on the range of foods we consume. Limitation lends dignity and restraint to the experience of eating – an experience that, if left unregulated, can become animalistic and degrading. Presumably, the idea is that with more limited food options, Jews will become less prone to gluttony, drunkenness, and other forms of vulgar behavior that can stem from overindulgence in eating. If the Torah is meant to help us even slightly dislodge from the sway of the flesh, laws governing our eating habits are central to that goal.

Most of all, being a child of Hashem doesn’t carry an expiration date. Many of our relationships in life fluctuate, transition, and even cease. Once a child, however, always a child. The Gemara in *Kiddushin* (36) cites Rabbi Yehuda, who claimed that our betrayals forfeited our status as God’s children. Regrettably, this formed the basis of the Christian assault against the Jews: we were once the chosen people, but the ensuing exiles indicated that Hashem had discarded us, due to our repeated rebellions, and chosen another.

Responding to Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Meir lists four verses in Tanakh that portray us as children of Hashem *even when we stray or betray Him*. Once a child, always a child. Thousands of years have passed, and we have always been Hashem's children even when it wasn’t historically apparent. The curtains of history have now been pulled back, and it is obvious that our Father is beckoning us home. Once a child, always a child.