

PART 8-9: SAYINGS OF ABBA BINYAMIN

by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld

A person should pray immediately after getting out of bed, but not next to his bed, because nothing should come between a praying person and the wall, as it says "Chizkiyahu turned his face to the wall and prayed" (Isaiah 38:2).

If two people go in to pray, and one finishes and does not wait for the other, his prayer is maimed, as it says "Your spirit is maimed; you deserted the land" (Job 18:4), and he causes the Divine presence to remove itself from Israel, as it says "The Rock (The Rock that bore you: Deut.32:18) will move from its place" (ibid.). But if he waits for him, he earns these blessings: "If you listen to My commandments, your peace will be like a river..." (Isaiah 48:18-19).

A person's prayer is heard in a synagogue, as it says "To hear the singing and the prayer" (1 Kings 8:28): Prayer should be in a place where praises are sung. G-d can be found in a synagogue, and if ten people meet to pray, the Divine Presence is with them, as it says "G-d stands in the congregation of G-d" (Psalms 82:1). If three people sit in judgment, the Divine Presence is with them, as it says "Amidst the judges, He judges" (ibid.). If two people sit and study Torah, the Divine Presence is with them, as it says "Then those who feared G-d spoke to one another, and G-d listened, and a memorandum was written about those who fear G-d and think of His name" (Malachi 3:16); "Think of His Name" means that if a person intends to perform a commandment but is prevented from doing it, he is credited as though he had done it. Even if one person sits and studies Torah, the Divine Presence is with him, as it says "Wherever I cause My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you" (Ex.20:21). For two people, it is recorded; for three, I might think judgment is mere peace-making, but in fact it is Torah; and for ten, the Divine Presence arrives even before they do.

9. G-d's "Tefillin" ("phylacteries") (6a-b)

G-d wears Tefillin*, because it says "G-d swore by His right hand and His strong arm" (Isaiah 62:8); "His right hand" refers to the Torah, as it says "From His right hand, a fiery law for them" (Deut.33:2); "strong" refers to tefillin, as it says "G-d will give strength to His people" (Psalms 29:11) -- tefillin are a source of strength, as it says "All the peoples of the world will see that G-d's name is on you and will fear you" (Deut.28:10): This refers to the tefillin on the head.

The verse "Who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation in the world" (1 Chron.17:21) is written in G-d's tefillin. G-d praises Israel, as it says "You honored G-d today... and G-d honored you today" (Deut.26:17-18): You made Me a unique entity in the world, as it says "Hear, Israel: Ha-Shem our G-d is

one" (Deut.6:4), and I will make you a unique entity in the world.

The four compartments of G-d's head tefillin contain the verses "What great nation... and what great nation..." (Deut.4:7-8); "Happy are you, Israel" (Deut.33:29) and "Who is like Your people Israel..." (1 Chron.17:21); "Or has G-d ventured..." (Deut.4:34); and "To place you high..."; and these verses are all in His arm tefillin.

[Obviously, this refers not to physical Tefillin, but rather to a metaphysical construct whose closest physical approximation is what we call Tefillin, or phylacteries. The same can be said of all anthropomorphic references to G-d, such as G-d having hands, arms, and a head.]*

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