

Practical Judaism: Respect For A Synagogue #14

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ari Jacobson

Through his prophets, Hashem promised that although the *Beit Hamikdash* will be destroyed, some of its sanctity will remain with us in the *mikdash me'at* (mini sanctuary), our synagogues and houses of learning. Many authorities maintain that this interpretation is not merely homiletic but has serious legal ramifications. Just as there is a prohibition against destroying any part of the *Beit Hamikdash*, there is a Torah prohibition not to damage a synagogue. Just as the *mikdash* was holy, there is sanctity in a *beit kneset*. The focal point of the *Beit Hamikdash* was the *aron habrit* (ark) containing the two tablets and a Torah scroll. Similarly, the focus of a shul is the *aron kodesh* which holds the Torah scrolls.

Although there is a general *halacha* that one may not study Torah or say a blessing in the presence of someone who is improperly dressed, the requirement of having a *mechitza* (physical barrier) between men and women is unique to a shul. This requirement applies even when all are dressed appropriately. The Mishna says that at the celebration of *simchat beit hosheava* a balcony was set up for the women in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The same applies in shul. There is a fundamental dispute between Rav Moshe and the Satmar Rebbe regarding what the purpose of the original *mechitza* was. Was it meant to prevent mingling or to prevent the men from

seeing the women? Rav Moshe maintained it was just meant to separate the men from the women and therefore a *mechitza* ten *tefachim* high is adequate. The Satmar Rebbe disagreed and said it should prevent men from seeing the women at all. The Rambam write in his commentary to the *Mishna* (as translated by Ibn Tibon) that the balcony in the *Beit Hamikdash* was erected so that the women wouldn't be seen. However, Rav Yosef Kapach's translation from the original Arabic of the Ramabm seems to follow Rav Moshe's opinion that it was meant to prevent mingling between men and women.

Rav Akiva Eiger cites an earlier source that it is improper to plant trees outside a shul following the prohibition not to plant trees outside the *Beit Hamikdash*. However Rav Chaim Brisker ruled that this opinion was incorrect. The *Mishna* states that when one ascends the Temple Mount one should not carry a wallet or a pack or wear shoes. Yet one is permitted to bring these things into shul. Rav Soloveitchik defines the difference based on a *gemara* that a shul has the status of like one's home, while the *Beit Hamikdash* is called *beit Hashem*, the house of Hashem. Therefore, walking into shul with a wallet or with shoes is acceptable just as it would be in one's own home.

Normally, people would allow a blind person to enter their home with a seeing-eye dog. On a

rainy day people would ask a guest to take off his rubbers at the door. The Rav therefore maintained that a seeing-eye dog would be allowed in shul, but entering with galoshes would be a violation of the sanctity of a *beit kneset*. Back in the days when floors consisted of unfinished stone or dirt, it was socially acceptable to spit. But today, just as one wouldn't spit on the floor of one's home one should not spit in shul.

A shul should be treated with special respect and honor and be kept clean and neat. The Chatam Sofer would say that not cleaning a shul is a desecration to Hashem's name. One should limit general conversation and avoid making calculations or accounting work in shul, except for the purpose of a *mitzva*. Just as in the *Beit Hamikdash* the great *menorah* was lit as well as numerous other smaller lamps, kindling many lights in shul brings honor to the Divine Presence.

One should avoid kissing young children in the *beit kneset*. The only love one should exhibit there should be towards Hashem. It is nice to bring children to shul as long as they can keep quiet. However, children who in any way disturb the prayers should remain at home. Our synagogues and houses of learning are miniature sanctuaries where the Divine Presence rests. May we always treat them with the proper awe and respect.

Mesilat Yesharim: Energetic Spirituality #12

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Zehirut (thinking before acting) is related to *sur mera*, abstaining from sin, which in turn corresponds to fear of punishment and the negative *mitzvot*. *Zerizut* (alacrity) is connected to *asei tov*, doing good, which corresponds to the positive *mitzvot* and serving Hashem with love. The *gemara* taught a principle that a positive *mitzva* can override a negative *mitzva*, *asei doche lo ta'aseh*. Therefore, according to the letter of the law one may wear *shatnez in tzizit*. (In practice, however, we avoid this today.) An additional example, the Torah permits a man to marry his brother's wife, which is normally a prohibited union, to fulfill the *mitzva* of *yibum*. We see that *ahavah* is greater than *yirah* and

that *zerizut* is a more elevated level than *zehirut*.

The *Mesilat Yesharim* quotes the *Gemara*, "*Zerizim makdimim l'mitzvot*." Anticipation and excitement for the *mitzva* is a prerequisite to the performance of the *mitzva*. The attitude towards the *mitzva* is just as essential as its proper performance. *Zerizut* completes the good deed. Why is this such a difficult *middah* to master? Man was created from *afar* (earth). There's a certain heaviness that pulls us down. Not being limited to any type of schedule seems to some people like the peak of pleasure. Hard work goes against our nature. Yet we need to plow, weed, plant, and harvest,

in order to enjoy the physical bounty of this world. Similarly, we need to invest *hishtadlut* to grow in spirituality. If Hashem sees we're trying, He will bless our efforts. Obstacles may block our path and prevent us from fulfilling the *mitzvot* properly. Yet we must rise like a lion, serve Hashem with *zerizut*, and fight against the evil inclination that seeks to pull us down.

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein once said that he studied the chapter of *zerizut* in *Mesilat Yesharim* 100 times. If we would recognize that Torah and *mitzvot* are meant to elevate us to a higher degree of perfection we would embrace them with passion, alacrity, and boundless desire to do Hashem's will.



Parshat Va'eira: The Greater Good

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Va'eira begins, “*Vayidaber Elokim el Moshe... v'yomer ani Hashem. Elokim spoke to Moshe and told him I am Hashem.*” How do we explain the shift from judgment, as signified by the name *Elokim*, to mercy, as signified by the name *Hashem*? The Arizal says that if Hashem would appear to us in His full glory and honor we would not be able to withstand His great presence. Therefore, He diminished his awesome light and power and concealed Himself within nature. This is expressed as *Elokim*, the attribute of judgment. The Gemara says in the future Hashem will take the sun out of its covering and allows its full glory to shine upon the world. The *tzaddikim* will bask in its light while the *reshaim* will be burned by its intensity. This is what happened in Egypt. The last verses of the previous parsha, Moshe asked, “*Lama harei'ota*, Why have You made it difficult?” Hashem answered, “*Ani Hashem.*” Until now I was *Elokim*, I concealed myself. But now I will act as Hashem, I will reveal my full power. I will punish the Egyptians and heal the Jews.

The ten plagues corresponds to the ten utterances with which Hashem created the world. The plague of darkness parallels, “*Vayehi ohr.*” The Egyptians were blinded by Hashem’s light while the Jews were drawn closer to Him. The verse in Az Yashir reads, “*Yemincha Hashem nedari b'koach, yemincha Hashem tir'atz oyev.* Your right hand, Hashem, is powerful in strength, your right hand Hashem smashes the enemy.” The same right hand that powerfully supported the Jews also destroyed the Egyptians. The Ibn Ezra relates a parable of a man who stood in the sun hanging his clothes to dry. The same

sun that bleached his garments darkened his skin. Hashem will do one action and for one person it will be a punishment and for another it will be a tremendous elevation. It depends on the recipient. For the Egyptians, the plagues were a punishment, for the Jews they were a lesson of faith.

The Baal Shem Tov said that life is like the red heifer. It can make one pure and the other impure. The same event can happen to two people, one will be drawn closer to Hashem and the other will draw away. There are people who have gone through terrible suffering yet they’ve risen above it and brought strength and hope to thousands. Others who experience suffering find religious observance a challenge afterwards. Our challenge is to ask ourselves, “What type of recipients are we? What lessons have we gained from our tests?”

The Ibn Ezra explains that when Moshe said, “*Lama harei'ota*,” he was really asking, “I understand it won’t get better immediately, but why is it getting worse?” Hashem answered, “*Ani Hashem.*” I am kindness. The exile was meant to be 400 years long but Bnei Yisrael were only slaves for 210 years. The suffering came from a place of mercy. The work intensified to such a degree that it was as if they worked 400 years and this sped up the redemption. We have to understand that everything that happens is for the good and with a larger plan in mind. The Arizal explains the verse in Tehilim, “*Dimini Elokim chasdecha b'kerev heichalecha.*” We thought that which we saw was *Elokim*, *midat hadin*, but in reality it was *chasdecha*, kindness. Sometimes we will see it in our lifetime and sometimes we’ll only understand *b'kerev heichalecha*, when we get to heaven.

The Torah says Klal Yisrael didn’t listen to Hashem, “because of their shortness of breath.” The *yetzer hara* tries to distract us from our true life goals by keeping us busy with mundane day to day matters. From time to time we must stop and introspect and ask ourselves, “How can I be a better person?” We must ponder our desires and aspirations and examine them, asking ourselves if they are they rooted in the *yetzer hara* or the *yetzer tov*? When we look at our experiences and ask ourselves, “How can I take this and learn and grow,” then we’re on the road to reaching our purpose.

Rav Pincus notes that there could be a lapse of time from *Elokim*, the point of *din*, when Hashem promises something, to receiving the goodness, represented by the phrase *ani Hashem*. If we have *emunah* then we can merit seeing the promise fulfilled. This is encapsulated in Parshat Shemot when Hashem appeared to Moshe with the name *Ekeh Asher Ekeh*. Rashi explains this means, “I will be with you in these circumstances and in future circumstances.” Hashem says, whatever name I manifest myself with, you must learn to recognize that it’s all for the good and I’m with you holding your hand all along the way. The *din* itself is good for us. We can survive those dark moments with faith by recognizing that some challenges are beyond our human comprehension, yet they are ultimately for the best. When we’re going through the darkness of *din*, but we hold fast to our faith and allow the challenges to form us into better people, we can merit to see *ani Hashem*, the full glory of Hashem’s everlasting kindness.