

Parshat Shemot: Fabulous Flame

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

In Parshat Shemot we read how when Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yitro, an angel appeared to him in a blaze amid a bush. The bush was burning but was not consumed. Moshe turned aside to see. He then received his first prophecy instructing him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. What did the burning bush signify? Why did Hashem appear to Moshe in this way? The Sefat Emet explains that Moshe only received the revelation when he stopped to look why the bush wasn't being burned. Symbolically, Moshe was concerned that the Jews would be completely consumed by the Egyptians. Hashem showed him that just like the bush wasn't being consumed, the Jews would never be destroyed. Rav Nissim Alpert notes that every Jew must ask this question, why hasn't the Jewish nation vanished? The burning bush tells us why. There's an inner core of fire, the voice of Hashem inside us, that keeps us going.

The Netivot Shalom writes that this inner flame is expressed through *emunah*. *Emunah* gives us the strength to start again. When Moshe told Hashem, "The people won't believe me," he thought that they had lost their faith. But in truth, the inner core of fire, the spark of life which is *emunah*, remains alive within us forever. On the outside the Jewish people may appear at the lowest level of impurity. But on the inside they are eternally connected to Hashem.

The Darchei Noam notes that exile often has a dual component. On the one hand the challenges and struggles purify and refine us. Many people grow closer to Hashem during

difficult times. But on the other hand it can cast a gloom on our life. Rav Twersky compares this to a child learning to walk. The child moves closer, the parent moves farther away, and the child grows more frustrated. This too is our *galut* frustration. Increasing our spiritual capabilities necessitates distancing just when we happen to be close. So on the one hand a person understands that suffering is meant to change him. But on the other hand there's the fire of struggle consuming him. Yet inside there's the burning bush, the potential, the divine voice emanating from within bringing us closer to Hashem.

When the *galut* ends and the veil is lifted we will then be able to take the fire within and transform ourselves on the outside. Forty nine days after the Jews left Egypt they stood at Sinai to receive the Torah. How was it possible that a people who were on the 49th level of impurity reached such great spiritual heights in such a short time? In reality the transformation wasn't so dramatic. Throughout the exile they remained connected to Hashem. When the situation changed their inner essence was revealed.

Moshe asked Hashem, "I see the bush burning, the flame is alive inside, but on the outside it's bramble, it has no life." Moshe wondered, "If we are such a spiritual people and *galut* is meant to change us, why don't we see the signs on the outside? If we are so connected to Hashem, why is our service like dried bramble? The answer is two-fold. The first reason is routine. The doldrums of our daily routine suppress the urge to tap into what life is truly about. Our challenge is to fan the flames. It's not enough to know Hashem

intellectually, our awareness has to be alive within us.

The Leket V'halibuv says that in the period before Mashiach, our hearts will be closed. The bush isn't being consumed because we were hardened and cold and don't feel the pain of others. In the past when tragedies happened, there was a *mitzvah* to blow the *chatzozrot* (trumpets). Although we don't have this *mitzvah* today, the inner intent remains. *Chazozrot* can be translated to mean a half a figure. When tragedies happen we have to feel broken. Chazal say anyone who can ask for mercy for his friend and doesn't is called a sinner. Rebbetzin Neustadt suggests a way to open our hearts. Close your eyes for a few minutes and picture yourself in the situation of the person you want to daven for. Then cry out and pray to Hashem.

The Leket V'halibuv points out that only when Moshe turned to see Hashem, did Hashem reveal Himself to him. When we take a proactive step in the right direction we enter into the realm of *kedusha* and allow its fire to expand within us. A house full of books is like a Jew full of holiness. The entrances to that house, our eyes and mouth, must have a *mezuzah*. They must be sanctified. The Yaaras Devash says that inappropriate speech is like a cloud that prevents our tefilot from ascending to heaven. We can choose what enters into our minds and hearts. Let's make it positive and elevated.



Mesillat Yesharim: Alacrity in Our Service of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Torah says, “*U’shmartem et hamatzot*. On a simple level this means one must watch the *matzot* and prepare the dough swiftly so that it doesn’t become *chametz*. Chazal however read this verse, “*U’shmartem et hamitzvot*,” teaching us to perform *mitzvot* with *zerizut* (alacrity). Just as one who bakes *matzot* works quickly so the dough will not become *chametz*, one who has the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* should run swiftly to do it for fear of losing the opportunity. Much like someone racing to get to the bank on time, one should race to grab a *mitzvah*. Although there’s a *halacha* that one shouldn’t run on Shabbat, the Gemara says one may do so to perform a *mitzvah*.

Klal Yisrael left Egypt *b’chipazon* (in haste) at the exact point in time that Hashem intended them to leave. *Zerizut* too is the mindset, “The boss is waiting. Now is the time meant to do this particular *mitzvah*. Later, there may be other *mitzvot*.” A *masmid* (diligent person) is not defined by how many hours he learns but by the way every moment of his day is accounted for.

The Torah describes the details of how

Avraham ran to prepare food for his guests and how Rivkah quickly drew up water for Eliezer and the camels. The Torah teaches us that *zerizut* doesn’t only apply to matters of great consequence, but to minor every day actions too. Chazal say all the deeds of *tzadikim* are swift. The Midrash tells us how Klal Yisrael brought all the necessary materials needed for the *mishkan* to Moshe on Chanukah. Moshe put them away until Nissan, when they begin to erect the *mishkan*. Chazal explain that *zerizut*, being ready early, is an indication of enthusiasm for a *mitzvah*. This is why the *Mishkan*, unlike the *Beis Hamikdash*, was hidden away. The firm foundation of *zerizut* that it was built on prevented it from being destroyed. Klal Yisrael at their very essence are *zerizim*, having inherited the genes of passion and desire for *mitzvot* from our forefathers. Rav Yehuda ben Taima said, “*Ratz ka’zvi... lasot ratzon avicha she’bashamayim*.” Run like a deer... to do the will of your Father in heaven. The Gemara says the reward for learning Torah is running to the *beit midrash* to study. Although one may not understand anything being taught, one receives reward for the alacrity and desire one

shows for learning. It’s not the end result that counts but the attitude and effort a person puts in.

How can one acquire *zerizut*? If a person thinks about all the kindness Hashem has done for him throughout the years he will feel so indebted, he’ll look for any way to please his Maker. Even a poor person who has nothing, must feel thankful for his existence. The Gemara says that if one doesn’t perform *mitzvot* with *zerizut*, one’s wife may die. We learn this from Yehuda who said, “*Mah betza*. What will we gain by killing him?” He had in mind to save Yosef after he was thrown in the pit, but he lacked *zerizut* and didn’t follow through. Subsequently his wife and children died. When a person commits himself to do a *mitzvah*, it is as if he takes upon himself a *neder* (vow). He’s given life to fulfill his commitments and if he doesn’t, life is taken away from him.

Zerizut, doing *mitzvot* with passion and joy, brings a person closer to Hashem. May we merit to ascend higher in our *avodat Hashem*.

Legitimate Pride-the Devastation of Anger

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Several years ago the Highway Safety Traffic Administration did a study and estimated that uncontrolled rage is a factor in 28,000 highway deaths in America. Uncontrolled anger along with hatred are one of the most destructive human emotions. Rage separates the mind from the heart. It inhibits moral constraints. The Gemara says, if a person becomes angry it is as if he worships idols. Hashem is of no consequence to him. We’ve all said and done things in anger and regretted it afterwards. It’s hard for a person to take back damage already done. Anger expressed through words can destroy relationships, marriages, and friendships. In the old days, writing a letter was a cumbersome task. You had to find paper and pen, an envelope, and postage, sit down and

formulate your letter, and then walk to the mailbox. It took a lot of rage to write a scathing letter and mail it. Now one can just tweet a twitter, dash off an email, or text a message. It takes more self-control to think twice before sending an angry note. But think twice you should, because once sent, it can no longer be taken back.

A good way to get someone’s attention is not to scream but to express oneself in a pleasant manner. Speaking in a disarming way is most effective. We learn the great consequences of anger from the story of *Maaseh U’meriva*. When Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to the rock, he smote it in anger and was barred from entering Eretz Yisrael. Chazal teach us that one who gets angry will make mistakes. It’s difficult enough to avoid errors when we’re

thinking clearly. How much more so when rage is controlling our minds. A bad tempered person will cause people to lie out of fear. Such a person should not be in a position of authority. A boss with an anger problem will lose in the end. Employees will be afraid to point out his mistakes and this may prove injurious to his business. The most common reason children lie to their parents is because they’re afraid of the consequences if they tell the truth. If a child did something wrong and admits it, compliment him on his honesty and figure out another way to deal with the wrong. Pirkei Avot says, “A bad tempered person cannot teach.” Anger intimidates students and makes them afraid to ask questions. If one cannot ask, one cannot learn.