

## Removing the Roadblock: Parshat Shemini

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

In Parshat Shemini, Hashem commands Aharon and then Bnei Yisroel to bring the sacrifices, which signify the dedication of the *Mishkan*. But as all of Bnei Yisroel stands assembled, Moshe seems to warn them, "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." Moshe then continues speaking directly to Aharon, "Come near to the altar and perform your service." If Bnei Yisroel were already assembled to do God's bidding, asks Rabbi Bick, what did Moshe add with this admonition? What did he feel was still hindering Hashem's appearance?

Befi Yeshorim points out that Moshe's admonition is relevant for all generations for we are always standing before Hashem as Bnei Yisroel were at that moment. If we are to experience Hashem's presence, we must remove the *yetzer hara* within ourselves. We must also do the *mitzvot* that will clear the path for Hashem to enter. What did Moshe feel was problematic? Rabbi Goldwicht explains that while we may experience mixed emotions in the performance of a *mitzvah*, the overriding reason for doing a *mitzvah* must be that it is Hashem's command. Then the joy of His closeness will automatically follow. To maintain this focus, says the Shemen Hatov, we preface the performance of each *mitzvah* with the blessing that "He has sanctified us with His *mitzvot* and commanded us...." Since our minds are limited to focusing on only one idea at a time, if we channel our thoughts to doing Hashem's will, all other thoughts will

disappear from our minds. Then the joy of our relationship with Hashem will return as a natural byproduct of doing His will. This was the problem Moshe observed among Bnei Yisroel. They anticipated the joy of closeness to Hashem the *korbanot* would bring rather than concentrating on doing Hashem's command.

Rabbi Roberts points out that the *yetzer hara* first tries to prevent us from doing *mitzvot*. It also tries to blemish its performance by tainting them with extraneous motivations. If it does not succeed, it tries to undermine our performance post facto by filling us with arrogance. Pride will lead us to complacency and set the stage for future failure. Therefore we pray that Hashem remove the *yetzer hara* both from before us and from behind us, before and after doing a *mitzvah*. Perhaps what Moshe sensed that the Jews had a feeling of pride in the status they had achieved among the nations and in their accomplishment of building the *mishkan*.

Each of us has our own mission on this earth, our own way to create Godliness, which the *yetzer hara* tries to thwart. By focusing on trying to do what Hashem commands us to do to the best of our ability, we can come closer to achieving our goal. Meirosh Tzurim explains that the *yetzer hara* will always try to convince us that we do not have the skills or the wherewithal to accomplish much. If we keep saying, "If only I had the money, the ability, the time, etc.," we will never achieve anything, and the *yetzer hara* will win. Perhaps, as the

Kotzker Rebbe suggests, Hashem wants us to overcome our challenges in order to do His will. One of the surest ways we can learn what Hashem wants us to work on is to see where the *yetzer hara* has placed the most obstacles. Find those areas which are your stumbling blocks and place them one on another to create steps to climb higher in your service to Hashem. Foil the *yetzer hara* by using his tools to elevate yourself.

This may be the intent of Moshe's further urging Aharon to come near the altar and perform the service. Aharon hesitated, remembering that he had sinned with the golden calf. Moshe therefore urged him not to be afraid. The Imrei Emes points out Moshe's deeper intent. If this is where the *yetzer hara* once succeeded in getting you to sin, you must now use that experience to elevate your soul by bringing the proper *korbanot* on the altar. This will repair the distance in your relationship with Hashem.

Rabbi Schachter in *In All Your Ways* gives us guidelines for life based on the *Mishnah*. Which is the proper way for a man to follow? Whatever elicits beauty from the person. Act in a way which is pleasing both to you and to others. If one begins by focusing on doing what he knows to be right, Hashem will lead him on the path to fulfill his mission.

## Shir Hashirim Perek 1: The Banished Bride

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Our capacity for conceiving words and ideas creates limits. But there is a higher source that transcends limitations that brought everything into being. That source is accessible through song. A song is above words because it isn't constrained by concepts. Every individual, nation, and school of wisdom has its own songs, its unique connection to the root of all things.

Shir Hashirim is the Song of Songs. Rabbi Akiva said about it, "All the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holiest of the

holy." Holy means separate and above that which limits. Shir Hashirim can bring us to a level of infinite connection to Hashem. We read it on Pesach because redemption means reaching that place above limitation, the place of essential holiness.

Rashi translates, "L'Shlomo," as 'the King to whom peace belongs.' When a person's mind, body, heart, and speech are not in synch with each other he cannot be at peace. We often aren't where we believe we should be. Our feelings lag behind our minds. The opposite of

*shalom* is *mirma*, deceiving ourselves into thinking that we have achieved integration. One form of *mirma* is rationalizing that *hefkerut* is freedom. Your mind might feel as if it's adhering to an ideal, when in fact it's really your body saying, "I want to do what feels good." True *shalom*, says the Maharal, is integration. In an individual this means that all his attributes are unified. In the world it would mean that all the various forces are doing what they're created to do. The world is a place of parallel entities. When the different elements in creation function in harmony, we can say it is

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at peace.

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, because your love is better than wine.” The Midrash says this refers to *Matan Torah* when the Jewish people achieved absolute unity with Hashem. There we received two kisses. *Anochi Hashem* was the kiss of connection. Hashem chose us from all the other nations. He saw beauty in us that we did not see in ourselves. *Anochi Hashem* connotes the positive *mitzvot*, while *lo s'iyhe* signifies the negative *mitzvot* and the kiss of exclusivity. By accepting this commandment, the Jewish people expressed their commitment to stay away from things that would impede their relationship with Hashem. We would bond

with Hashem, and we would peel away all the things that prevent us from having real connection. These two commandments are the source of all the *mitzvot*. *Yayin* is the same numerical value as *sod*, secret. When we keep the *mitzvot* with the intent of bonding exclusively with Hashem, then we can feel something of the sweetness of Hashem's love.

“Because of the fragrance of your goodly oil, oil poured forth is your name. Therefore the young women loved you.”

The seven branches of the menorah parallel a person's two eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. The light signifies the light of Hashem's presence projecting outward. A person's

*menorah* is his inner life as manifested through the life he lives through his senses. Our eyes should be focused on seeing the hidden challenges and beauty concealed in every experience. Our ears should be focused on hearing good things, by discerning the positivity and blessing in our experiences. Our speech should be holy, directed, and focused.

Finding Hashem in this way requires transcendence, letting go of things that limit us, not listening to what distracts, and not speaking destructively. Hashem created us to bring light to dark places. When we transcend physicality and elevate our senses to follow Hashem's will we bring honor and glory to His name.

## Honorable Mention: Hatred is Self Destructive

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Hatred is a very destructive emotion. When it is the cause of anger against an individual, group, or a nation it can become a lethal weapon. Jews know this very well. Throughout Jewish history, we have been accused of every evil on earth. Whether it was the Crusades, the Inquisition, or Arab anger, the result was destruction, murder, and mayhem.

Judaism teaches the opposite. Hillel the Elder said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend.” It is well known that the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred. The things that can help us avoid hatred, such as not speaking *lashon hara* and giving the benefit of the doubt, must become part of our behavior and outlook.

The Rabbis teach that hatred makes the straight crooked. When people are consumed with hatred they are unable to think clearly. There are divorced parents who will deny money for *bar mitzvah* expenses, camp, or tutoring just to spite their ex-spouse, while hurting their children in the process. In 2003, Iran suffered a major earthquake. They

desperately needed help, but they refused to accept assistance from Israel, even though Israel was expertly trained and equipped in disaster recovery. They were afraid that would trigger Arab animosity. In Megilat Esther we find Haman consumed with hatred against Mordechai. Haman had wealth, family, influence, and stature but all of it was worthless to him. He couldn't be mollified until the entire Jewish people would be wiped out. In the end he was destroyed by his own animosity.

People think a hero is someone who vanquishes his foes. The Rabbis teach us in Avot D'rav Nosson that a hero is someone who turns his enemy into his friend. We could have had plenty of reasons to despise the Egyptians, and we even have a *mitzvah* to recall what they did to us, but we can't abhor them. The Torah says this because they sheltered us in their land. The Talmud teaches that if you see two animals suffering under a load and one belongs to your friend and the other to your enemy, you must first help your enemy. The Torah commands us not take revenge nor bear a grudge. This is explained

in the Talmud through an analogy. Imagine a person is cleaving meat and he inadvertently cuts his left hand. Will he try to take revenge against his right hand? Of course not. That's how we have to view our fellow Jews. We're all part of one body.

An alcoholic who is filled with rage will turn to alcohol to mollify his temper. Many of us will turn to other destructive behavior when we're overcome with anger. A more constructive approach would be to ask the offender directly to explain what he did. This forces the person to confront his own behavior, and hopefully realize he was wrong.

When Sarah Schenerir founded the Beis Yaakov movement, some Jewish leaders opposed her actions. When she walked with her students in the street, her opponents would throw rocks at her. She would bend down, pick up the stones, place them in her palm and caress them. Then she would say, “We'll take these rocks and build Beis Yaakov with it.” She took opposition and turned it into opportunities for growth.