

Present Presence: Parshat Pekudei

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

The Book of Shemot concludes with Moshe's final actions for the Tabernacle's consecration. It describes the cloud that would always be above the Tabernacle and the interaction between this cloud and Israel in the desert:

"He erected the Courtyard around the Tabernacle and the Altar, and he placed the curtain of the gate of the Courtyard... The clouds covered the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of Hashem filled the Tabernacle. When the cloud rose up from the Tabernacle, the Children of Israel would embark on all their journeys. If the cloud would not rise up, they would not travel until the day it rose. For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Tabernacle by day, and fire would be on it by night, before the eyes of all the House of Israel throughout their journeys."

The *Mishchat Shemen* asks whether the cloud was always on the Tabernacle, or whether it did in fact rise up. Then, the *Mikdash Halevi* asks why, when the entire passage is written in the past tense, does the Torah then imply the future with, "For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Tabernacle." Finally, Rabbi Kanatopsky asks why the Torah uses the unusual term *Beit Yisroel* instead of *Bnei Yisroel*.

The *Mikdash Halevi* answers that this passage has two levels of meaning. It is a record of what happened in the wilderness,

and it is also directing us now as a guide for our path in life. The *Torah* is teaching us that Hashem was with us in the desert, and will also be with us in the future throughout our dark exile. Similarly, the *Siftei Re'em* notes that the cloud by day refers to the era when we had the *Beit Hamikdash*, whereas the fire at night refers to the dark stages of exile. Just as we felt the closeness to Hashem through the *Mishkan*, writes Rabbi Schlesinger, we can bring Hashem closer to us through *Torah* learning. *Pirkei Avot* testifies, "When ten people learn Torah together, God's presence rests among them." Just as the cloud was not directly on *Bnei Yisroel* when they traveled, but more symbolically within them, so will Hashem rest within us in our sojourn through life.

Rabbi Y. Belsky discusses the three things that Moshe did to consecrate the Tabernacle. Why are these actions recorded here, in *Sefer Shemos*, rather than in *Sefer Vayikrah*, where the *Torah* teaches the actual sacrificial service? He explains that since the purpose of the physical redemption was to lead us back to the spiritual level of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, it is fitting that these three areas be consecrated in reference to the redemption rather than in the tasks of the priests. He points out a parallelism to the three blessings of the Matriarchs. The show-bread reflected the blessing in the dough; the menorah paralleled the Shabbat candles that would never go out; and the incense offering

represented God's cloud on their tents.

However, it would appear that anointing these vessels would have sufficiently consecrated them. Why did Hashem command Moshe to actually use them? He wanted to teach us the difference between potential and actualization. Anointing the vessels conferred upon them the potential for sanctity but for the Divine Presence to rest upon it, it needed to be actualized through service.

Every Jew, continues Rabbi Belsky, has innate sanctity. Will it remain unfulfilled potential or will it be actualized? We have the tools to bring God's Presence to earth by utilizing the three pillars of the earth's continued existence, pillars that represent these same symbols of our Matriarchs and the vessels in the Tabernacle. We can spread the light of *Torah* through continued learning and teaching, we can do our service of the heart through prayer, and we can engage in acts of loving kindness by helping others.

Tov Hapeninim writes that even when *Bnei Yisroel* were encamped they were still traveling. For daily life is also a journey. In this context, the cloud was always with them. Similarly, we must seek to find Hashem wherever we may be on our journey. When we sanctify our physical activities they become an integral part of serving Hashem.



Mesilat Yesharim: Reaching Higher Levels

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Mesilat Yesharim explains the *middah* of *perishut* (abstention), the fourth rung in the ladder to self-perfection. You might say, "This is far above my reach. I'll never reach this level, so why discuss it?" Rav Nosson Wachtfogel asked a similar question to Rav Elchanan Wasserman. He felt he had not mastered the levels of *zehirut* (watchfulness) and *zerizut* (alacrity), which precede *anivut* (humility). How could he continue further? Rav Elchanan answered, "Go to Kelm, to Rav Daniel Movshovitz." In his first lecture, Rav Daniel said, "Going step by step is an achievement in itself. Even though one hasn't entirely completed the preceding level, the process alone changes a person. We may not master every step to perfection, but whatever we learn has an effect.

The Gemara Yevamot says *perishut* is a form

of *kedusha* (holiness). The Jewish people are "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Every Jew has a holy soul. *Chazal* say, "Sanctify yourself with what is permitted." In order to preserve the holiness inside us and to rise to a higher level, one should work to abstain from things that may not be prohibited, but may lead to evil. When the sacrifices were brought in the *Beit Hamikdash*, they created a *rei'ach necho'ach* (pleasing smell) for Hashem. Today we no longer have *korbonot*, but we can give that same *nachat ruach* to Him by small daily acts of self-control. Abstain from that second scoop of ice cream, don't look at that text message in the middle of prayer, fight the urge to sleep another five minutes. That's the kind of *prishut* Hashem wants from us.

The verse in *Tehillim* says, "A *tzaddik* eats to satiate his soul." He abstains from physical

enjoyment not because he doesn't want to benefit from Hashem's world, but because he wants to reach a higher level of pleasure, that of coming closer to Hashem. In *Kohelet* the *pasuk* says, "Righteousness shouldn't be flaunted." Rather, we should abstain from what is permitted so that the desires of this world shouldn't affect our spiritual advancement. Physical desires, if left unchecked, can overwhelm a person. When money and honor no longer tempt a person, he can experience tranquility. Everything a person does throughout the course of the day should be for the sake of Hashem. There is also a concept of separating oneself from desires as an atonement or in exchange for suffering. It may take a lot of work and hard effort to abstain from material temptations, but it will ultimately lead to a higher level in serving Hashem.

Simcha the Essence of Purim

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

We know there is an obligation to be happy on every *yom tov* as it says, "*V'samachata b'chagecha*." But Purim is unique in that the *simcha* starts on *Rosh Chodesh Adar* and continues to grow throughout the month until it peaks on Purim. Why is Purim different? In order to understand this we need to examine the story of the *megilah*. The *Torah* hints to Purim in the verse "*V'anochi hastir hastir et panai*...- I will hide my face..." The word *hastir* hints to Esther. It depicts a difficult time where Hashem was not seen as he should have been in this world. We find this hidden in the words of Haman when he comes to convince Achashveirosh to destroy the Jews. "Yesh no *am echad*...- There is one nation that is spread out among the nations." *Yesh* no comes from the root word *yashen* (asleep). Haman told Achashveirosh, the Jews are spiritually asleep. They are not careful or enthusiastic enough when performing *mitzvot*.

Hashem has abandoned them and will not save them. On a superficial level it looked like the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people was no longer what it was. This reality was based on the behavior of *Klal Yisrael* when they attended the party of Achashveirosh where immorality and physical indulgence abounded. It was a terrible desecration of Hashem's name; hidden as he was from the picture when in fact our mission is to reveal Him.

Chilul Hashem brings punishment in its wake and that in itself is a desecration of His name. The exile of the Divine Presence which cannot be with us due to our sins and the downward spiral of the Jewish nation should hurt us. When we cause Hashem to be hidden, other nations also fail to see Him, and that is *chilul Hashem*. The way to correct this lies in the blessing we say after the *megilah*, "Hadan et

dineneinu, hanokem et nikmateinu...- The one who judges our case and takes revenge for us." Hashem is above pain or anger and no creature can affect him. The revenge is for us, to help us correct what went wrong and return to Him. In this way we can move from a situation of *haster*, where Hashem is hidden, to a situation where He is revealed. *Megilah* comes from the root word *l'galot*, to reveal. The miracle of Purim caused Hashem to be recognized by us and all the nations which rectified the desecration.

It says, "*Kel nekamot Hashem*." *Nekamot* appears between two names of Hashem which indicate mercy. Although at times we may sin and cause *chilul Hashem*, Hashem has compassion and allows us to return. He helps us get closer to Him in a way that will be more revealed and in this way achieve rectification.