



Parshat Shmini: Removing the Roadblock

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.



Parshat Shemini: Moshe and Aharon – Two Forms of Strength

Based on Rabbi Hershel Reichman's shiur on Chassidut on Naaleh.com

The Midrash writes that because Moshe argued for seven days with Hashem in an attempt to refuse to lead the Jews, Hashem punished him by taking away the *kehuna gedola* and preventing him from entering Eretz Yisrael. The Shem Mishmuel explains that these punishments were measure for measure. Moshe was very humble. He thought Hashem was specifically selecting him to lead the Jews because they had sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity and did not deserve anything better. He was afraid that his flawed leadership would cause the Jewish people even more suffering and pain. However, he should have realized that if Hashem commanded him to go, he was obligated to fulfill His will. This is why he was punished.

The Gemara in Sotah states that Moshe

desired to enter Eretz Yisrael because he wanted to fulfill the commandments that could only be performed in Israel. Rav Chaim Vital explains that the body and soul of a Jew has 248 limbs which correspond to the 248 positive commandments. Each *mitzva* creates a spiritual energy and perfects its corresponding soul and body part. Therefore, Moshe yearned to enter Eretz Yisrael so that he could achieve perfection of the soul. The Midrash writes that if he would have entered, he would have prevented the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*. His punishment was a blessing in disguise. Hashem poured out his wrath on the *Beit Hamikdash* and not on the Jews. He did not want to lead the Jews for fear of causing them pain and punishment. His not entering into *Eretz Yisrael* prevented the Jews from suffering ultimate retribution.

Moshe wanted to be the *Kohen Gadol* so he

could fulfill the special mitzvot associated with the position and thereby perfect himself on every level. Moshe symbolizes *moach-neshama* – the highest level of the soul. Aharon corresponds to *lev-ruach* – a secondary level of the soul. Aharon was not only the High Priest but he was an *ohav shalom v'rodef shalom*, he loved peace and pursued peace. He was involved with the people at their level and worked to promote peace among them. Moshe was at a higher level, detached from the people, and could not be as good a bridge as Aharon was to bring the people closer to Hashem.

Moshe's sin was that he had the Jewish people's well-being in mind and did not want to cause them pain. Therefore, he needed to relinquish his longing to be the High Priest for the betterment of Israel.

Words That Build: Being A Positive Person

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

One may not speak in a degrading manner about one's friend even if it is true and he is not present. The *issur* applies even if it is something of the past, and the person has likely changed his ways. If one witnessed the act recently, and the chances are less that the sinner repented, it's still not permitted to speak about it. In certain cases, where it's certain the person hasn't done *teshuva*, the Chofetz Chaim delineates how one can speak about it in a constructive way. One may not talk about a *baal teshuva*'s past sins even with the intention to praise him and even if the listener won't feel negatively towards the person after hearing about them. This is because if you would say it to the *baal teshuva* himself he'd be embarrassed. The Netivat Chaim points out that nowadays this may be different. Many people are proud of being *baalei teshuva*. So if the speaker's

intention is positive and the person listening will take it that way and the person being spoken about won't take it personally, it may be permitted.

One may not talk about another person's sins even if they are minor and even if many people are similarly careless. The Chofetz Chaim says one should not degrade the sinner in front of others but rather one should give him constructive criticism. Even if something is well known, it's still not permitted to speak about it.

Rav Hirsh explains that the motivation to talk negatively about others comes from the soul's natural tendency to strive higher. If a person is actively involved in *Torah* and *mitzvot*, the soul is at peace. But if he is lazy and doesn't actively work to grow, he feels inner discontent and seeks the illusion of self-grandeur by

making others appear smaller.

It's important to be positive and to get in the habit of praising others. This is especially critical for good parenting. A parent should train himself to praise his children at least three times as much as he points out their mistakes. A *baal lashon hara* focuses on negativity and the flaws of others. We have to rectify this by working on ourselves to always see the good in people. When you see someone doing something wrong and you know he's usually careful, you could assume it was a mistake or done out of ignorance. One is not allowed to speak about it further or degrade the person in front of others. Instead one should endeavor to judge the person favorably as the Torah writes, "*B'tzedek tishpot et amitecha.*" (In righteousness shall you judge others.)