

ENCOUNTER YOUR "SELF"

by Rabbi Yisroel Roll

A friend and I were visiting Israel and we went to daven at the Kosel together. At the time, my friend was spiritually inclined, but not yet completely committed to Torah life.

He was somewhat skeptical about Jewish thought and observance. We walked toward the Wall and, in hopes of inspiring him, I suggested that he go up to the Wall and daven next to its timeless soul. Perhaps its soul would touch his. He refused, saying, "God is just as present at the back of the Kosel plaza as He is by the Wall itself. I will pray where I am."

I was struck by his adamance — and also by his logic. Maybe he was right. Isn't Hashem everywhere? Why is the *Makom HaMikdash* holier than anywhere else? After all, don't we say, "His Glory Fills the earth?" Of course. But how close we get to that *kedushah-sancity*, depends on how much we tap into it. It depends on how much God Consciousness we have.

The Kosel is adjacent to the place where Adam's body was formed, where Avraham performed *Akeidas Yitzchak*, and where Yaakov dreamt of angels ascending and descending the ladder.

If we contemplate this, then we are more likely to focus our thoughts and prayers on this place as the portal where G-d Communicates with man. And then our life force will more readily connect and bond with its Source.

Bilaam blessed the Jewish People with the famous words: "*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov mishkenosecha Yisrael* — How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisrael" (*Bamidbar 24:5*). Bilaam saw the *kedushah* of the Jewish homes. Each family's home can be uplifted into becoming a *mikdash me'at*, a mini center of God Consciousness. The Alter of Slobodka states that if we raise ourselves up to a level of *kedushah--God Consciousness*, then Hashem will cause His Shechinah to dwell within us. As the *pasuk* says: "Make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them" (*Shemos 25:8*).

Hashem does not dwell in buildings. Hashem dwells in the heart and mind of each member of *Klal Yisrael*. If we learn the Torah — which is an expression of Hashem's Will — and fill our minds and hearts with the mitzvos, then G-d Will Dwell within our very beings.

The capacity of a Jewish *neshamah* to bring the Shechinah into his or her own mind through Torah study and observance is a crucial aspect of what the Alter of Slobodka calls *gadlus ha'adam--the greatness of man*. This sense of Shechinah can actually be experienced. The words "*bilvavi mishkan*

evneh — I will build a sanctuary in my heart" can be lived; we can actually build a consciousness of God's *kedushah* within our own psyche and soul.

If our hearts are a Mishkan, then there must be a *Kodesh HaKedoshim* and a *Kodesh* residing within our very essence. The Malbim explains that the *Kodesh HaKedoshim* is the *sechel*— the repository of the Godly intellect. When I fill my mind with Torah learning and knowledge, I bring the Shechinah into my mind. My heart, composed of emotions, values and *middos* correspond to the Menorah--my spiritual light. My personality is my *mizbei'ach* — my offering to Hashem. My limbs are the instruments of performing and living Torah.

According to Rabbi Shimon Schwab, *zt"l*, the different sections of *Shacharis* correspond symbolically to the four parts of the Beis Hamikdash. As we journey through the four parts of *Shacharis*, we move ever closer, in a spiritual sense, to the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*.

Birchos HaShachar: Brings us into the *ulam*, the antechamber leading to the *Heichal*.

Pesukei D'Zimrah: Elevates us into the *ulam* itself.

Birchos Kerias Shema: Bring us into the *Heichal*, where we find the menorah, *shulchan*, and *mizbei'ach*.

Shemoneh Esrei: We enter the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*.

As we journey through *Shacharis*, as we go deeper into the mindset of *Mikdash*, we experience a greater closeness to Hashem. As we go through the *Shacharis* process, we go ever deeper into the inner *mikdash* of "selfhood" and sense the Shechinah as the Source of our "self," within. This is the meaning of "*Bilvavi mishkan evneh* — I will build a Sanctuary in my heart."



Once we arrive at the *Shemoneh Esrei* and we come to a silent embrace of Hashem in the Holy of Holies — in that Inner Chamber we can find our inner self, the place above the *kapores*, the ark cover, where we find the outstretched wings of the *keruvim*. Hashem asks us to enter between the outstretched wings of the *keruvim* and receive His embrace, to receive His Infusion of *tzelem Elokim*—*Godly Potential*. It is here, in the midst of Hashem's Embrace, that we can experience Hashem's love

for us and ask Him to Reveal to us our portion in His Torah.

BRING IT HOME

- Hashem does not dwell in buildings, but in the hearts and minds of each and every Jew. Learning Torah with our minds and performing mitzvos with our heartfelt actions, will allow Hashem to dwell within our very being.
- We can encourage our children to bring the Shechinah into their lives through learning and davening, setting an example for them of how we are growing into, and appreciate the power of prayer. Similarly, by once a week having a *chavrusah* in the house, children see and feel that the home is truly a *mikdash me'at*.
- Through prayer we can penetrate the superficial levels of our personality and, as we recite the *Shemoneh Esrei*, reach the Holy of Holies, in which we are enveloped in Hashem's Embrace.

(Drawn from the essay "*Hashra'as HaShechinah*" in the *Ohr HaTzafun* by the Alter of Slobodka)