

# SELF-EVIDENT LESSONS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

If one were to examine the text of the prayers we recite, one would notice that we oft request from G-d that He assist us in instilling in ourselves the proper level of fear of heaven and the ability to serve Him with love. However, in one place in the prayers, this request is somewhat qualified. In the prayer "Ahava Rabba" that precedes our recitation of She'ma, we ask that G-d "dedicate our hearts to love and to fear" His name. We do not merely ask that G-d assist us fear and love properly; we ask that our hearts be dedicated to such.

The reason for this special prayer of dedication, Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt"l said, can be better understood by examining a law in the Talmud. In the beginning of the tractate Zevachim, we learn that a divorce document written lacking intent for a specific woman is invalid, but an animal that is sanctified without intent for a specific offering is nonetheless sanctified and may be offered. An animal that is sanctified is merely awaiting to be used for the holy purpose to which it was dedicated, and therefore specific intent is not needed. It is self evident what will occur. However, a woman, so to speak, is not "waiting to be divorced." If a husband desires to divorce his wife, the divorce document must be drafted with her in mind. The lack of specific intent invalidates the document. The only way a man can evidence his desire to divorce is with the document itself, and therefore the evidence must be clear and convincing. There is only one way to accomplish this, and that is with manifest intent.

Very often, in our service of G-d, we may go through motions without thinking what we are doing. We act out of habit and custom. It does not outwardly appear that our actions are motivated by love or fear of G-d. Do we deserve credit or acknowledgment that we are devoted servants of G-d for such actions? The answer should be no. That is why we ask G-d specifically to dedicate our hearts to his service. If our hearts are dedicated to Him, then we are akin to that animal that is sanctified without specific intent. That specific intent is not necessary as the very nature of our beings, a heart dedicated to G-d, makes it evident that all we do is motivated by our love and fear of G-d. Even when no specific motive or intent is clear from our actions and deeds, if we have a heart dedicated to G-d, our love and fear of G-d is self-evident.

The concept of self-evident motivation is true as well in a certain service of G-d that is in focus as the holiday of Shavu'os approaches. The Talmud states (Sukkah 21b) "The conversation of Torah scholars is worthy of study, as it states (Tehillim 1:3) "and whose leaves never wither (meaning that even the conversation of a scholar, which is compared to a leaf, does not wither, and has Torah

content itself)." The Talmud is telling us that the Torah scholar, whose life is dedicated to acquiring more Torah knowledge with a thirst and passion, has conversations of a sort that differ from the layman. The scholar is dedicated to Torah, and therefore some Torah lesson can be extracted from that which he says. Even if the scholar has no clear intent to impart such a lesson, the very nature of his being makes it self-evident that there is something to learn from his utterances.

On Shavu'os, we celebrate the anniversary of the nation of Israel being given the Torah at Sinai. During the weeks leading up to Shavu'os, we have been preparing ourselves for our personal re-acceptance of the Torah come Shavu'os. By seriously dedicating ourselves to Torah, we are imbued with a new spirit: all we say has some Torah lesson contained within. We are sanctified to G-d and His Torah, and our devotion becomes self-evident. This is the goal for which we should all be striving, and one on which to focus as Shavu'os rapidly approaches.