

HOLY EXIT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

The entire congregation of the Bnei Yisroel left from before Moshe.

Be'er Mayim Chaim: It would have been much simpler to write that the Bnei Yisrael left, and came back with their donations. Referencing Moshe doesn't seem to add to our understanding. Even if he had to be mentioned, it would have been easier to just state that they left Moshe! What is the meaning of milifnei/ from before (lit. from the face of) Moshe?

In readying the people for the Mishkan project, Moshe had explained that constructing it was a momentous and mind-boggling undertaking. HKBH cannot be contained in any space; He has form, no boundaries, and is subject to no limitations or restrictions of time or space. The closest we can get to a sense of "location" for Him is to speak of His occupying the exalted, transcendent upper worlds. The function of the Mishkan was to serve as an alternative to His usual "place" of residence - which is no place as we know it at all! The Mishkan would invite Him to leave the upper worlds and find a place in our world. The excitement of contemplating what that means could make people's souls take leave of their bodies !

The Torah earlier described people seeking Moshe's guidance: "All who sought Hashem went out to the Ohel Moed." ² Chazal³ pick up on the Torah's calling this seeking Hashem, rather than seeking Moshe. They teach that receiving the presence of a great talmid chacham is the equivalent of receiving the presence of the Shechinah. The great tzadikim are called, as it were, the face of the Shechinah. Beholding them is, in some sense, like beholding the Shechinah.

This was especially true in regard to Moshe, whose face shone with the kedushah of the Shechinah! Who would ever want to leave his presence? Who could tear himself away from the closest experience people ever had with Hashem's presence?

Moshe's explanation of the purpose of the Mishkan changed all of this. The Mishkan would be a place in which Hashem's presence would be much more immediate! People would no longer experience the closeness to Hashem through Moshe, but directly, without Moshe.

Hearing this, it was no longer difficult for people to draw away from Moshe. They had been promised something even more powerful! So the entire congregation left the contemplation of Moshe's face, eager to move on to the next great thing. They hurried to bring back their donations, and get closer to the moment when they would behold the Shechinah directly.

Work is Blessed⁴

Like everything that Hashem commanded Moshe, do did the Bnei Yisroel...

Be'er Mayim Chaim: What could this be telling us? At every step along the way the Torah emphasized that the Bnei Yisroel scrupulously followed the instructions that were given to them.

Elsewhere⁵ the Torah instructs, "Six days you shall work." Are we to conclude that work is really obligatory? There are many people who, for one reason or other, get by without steady jobs. Are they in violation of the law?

Know this. The thirty-nine categories of labor recognized by halacha are rooted in the sin of Adam and Chavah. They were visited with thirty-nine curses. (Ultimately, all labor is a curse. Had Man not sinned, Hashem could have provided for all their needs without their expending any effort.) The correspondence between the two numbers tells us that our very activity in the physical world provides the tikun for these curses. As a result of the chet, kedushah is restrained, mired in shells of the mundane. Our efforts in this world free it up, release it.

For this reason, the six non-Shabbos days of the week are called yemei ha-ma'aseh/ days of activity. Indeed, activity and labor is obligatory in them, because this toil frees kedushah from the garb that envelops it and masks it.

After the destruction of the Beis Ha-Mikdosh, each day contains some kelalah.⁶ When it stood, the effect of our activity was to mitigate and lessen the original curses. Kelalah was not manifest each day, because it was neutralized by the positive effect of our labor. With the destruction of the Temple, however, kelalah sits in a position of prominence. It sometimes even gains in strength.

Even in this spiritually impoverished state of ours, however, it is important to know that our labor still has positive, holy effect. We don't succeed in the large triumphs, but we do contribute to a cumulative tikun of the kelalos which will only be completed in the coming of Moshiach.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Shemos 35:20
2. Shemos 33:7
3. Yalkut Shimoni #393
4. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Shemos 39:42
5. Shemos 20:8

6. Sotah 48A
