

INSPIRATION THROUGH COMMANDMENTS

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Demai 7:8/Kil'ayim 1:1

Orach Chaim 81:1-82:1

Daf Yomi: Sukkah 9 ,br> Yerushalmi Ta'anit 21

In this week's parashah, we read of the dedication of the mishkan. It was at this time that Hashem's presence came to rest on the handiwork of Bnei Yisrael - the Tabernacle.

As a prelude to this event, Moshe instructed the people: "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." Based on this verse, R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (long-time rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) taught:

Man is born with the drive to attain a lofty level. However, each person applies this drive where his heart leads him - some seek wealth, some, honor, etc. In reality, however, the only thing that can satisfy the soul is spiritual accomplishment. The soul desires that "the glory of Hashem will appear to [it]."

Many people think that their own need for fulfillment is sufficient impetus to attain lofty spiritual levels. In fact, one can reach these levels only if his inspiration is the fact that Hashem so commanded. Why? Because one who acts out of his own need for fulfillment also sets his own goals. He is not reaching for Hashem, but for something he himself has created. (This is what Chazal meant by the adage, "One who is commanded and acts is greater than one who is not commanded and acts.")

This is what Moshe told the people! "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." If your acts are based solely on Hashem's commandments, only then will the glory of Hashem appear to you. Thus the midrash comments on this verse: "Abolish that evil inclination and be of one mind and one heart to serve Hashem. Just as He is One, so your service of Him should be one." (Mei Marom V p.182)

"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the altar and perform the service of your chatat/sin-offering and your olah/elevation offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded'." (9:7)

R' Avraham Zusia Portugal z"l (1898-1982; the "Skulener Rebbe") asks: We know that a chatat provides atonement, but Chazal teach that an olah is primarily a gift to Hashem, not a sin offering. Why, then, does the verse mention the olah between mentioning the chatat and the reference to atonement?

Moreover, the "people's offering" included several different sacrifices, including a shelamim, which certainly is not a sin offering. How then can the Torah say that performing the service of the people's offering will "provide atonement"?

R' Portugal explains: Chazal teach based on Moshe's call at the beginning of our verse ("Come near . . .") that Aharon felt unworthy to serve as the Kohen Gadol. Moshe told him, "Come near! For this you were chosen," i.e., because of this, your humility, you were chosen. The gemara (Sanhedrin 43b) also teaches that humility itself atones for sins just as the sacrifices do. It follows, then, that every sacrifice that Aharon brought, whether it was a chatat, an olah, or a shelamim, atoned for sin, and thus our verse can be understood as written. (Noam Eliezer)

"The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, . . . brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them." (10:1)

R' Ovadiah Sforno (Italy; 1470-1550) comments: Nadav and Avihu reasoned that it was appropriate to bring an incense sacrifice on the inner altar. Even if their logic was correct, they sinned in that "He had not commanded them." (Be'ur Ha'Sforno Al Ha'Torah)

"For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you . . ." (11:45)

With this verse, the Torah closes out the laws of kashrut. Indeed, the midrash states that if one denies the laws of kashrut, he also denies the Exodus. What is the relationship of the Exodus to kashrut?

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; died 1806) explains: There are two types of impurity that can affect a person - impurity that enters a person and impurity that surrounds a person. An example of the former is non-kosher food; an example of the latter is idolatry.

Our sages teach that Hashem hurried Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt because they were about to become inextricably mired in the impurity of Egypt. Chida explains that our ancestors had reached the stage where the external impurity of Egypt was about to become an inherent part of their beings. Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt before the impurity could enter them. How then can one allow non-kosher food to enter his body? This is possible only if one denies the Exodus! (Quoted in Torat Ha'Chida)

Pirkei Avot

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua; Yehoshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets to the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah/Men of the Great Assembly. They [the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah] said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, develop many disciples, and make a fence for Torah. (Chapter I, mishnah 1)

R' Yehoshua Heller z"l (Lithuania, early 19th century) writes: This mishnah describes three stages in the Torah's history. In the first stage, Moshe transmitted the entire Torah to his disciple Yehoshua. Indeed, the gemara quotes Yehoshua himself as stating that there was nothing that Moshe taught that he (Yehoshua) did not receive. During this period when Moshe was teaching the Torah, Moshe was permitted to ask Hashem for clarification of anything that was not clear.

In the second stage, beginning with the death of Moshe, it was no longer permissible to present halachic queries to G-d. If a doubt arose regarding the halachah, the Elders could attempt to reconstruct the law using the principles that Moshe had taught. In such a case, the ruling of a majority of the Elders became the halachah.

In the third stage, Prophets enacted emergency decrees intended to strengthen a mitzvah that was being neglected. Whereas a prophet is ignored - indeed he is put to death - if he claims that Hashem has told him how to rule on a halachic question, a prophet may, through prophecy, enact a temporary emergency decree that is contrary to some laws of the Torah. Later sages who are not prophets also have this authority to a very limited degree.

The three teachings of the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah parallel these three stages in the history of the Torah. First, be deliberate in judgment, so that the halachah will be as clear to you as it was to Yehoshua when he heard it from Moshe. Second, develop many disciples so that if it becomes necessary to reconstruct a law of the Torah, the combined intellect of all of the students will meet that challenge. Finally, make a fence for the Torah, i.e., enact decrees that will protect the laws of the Torah from neglect. (Toldot Yehoshua)

"Be deliberate in judgment . . ."

R' Yisrael Hager z"l (1860-1936; the Vishnitzer Rebbe") explains: The gemara (Yevamot 109b) teaches that a judge should imagine that the gates of gehinom are open beneath him, ready to swallow him up if he fails to judge properly. To avoid this fate, a judge must weigh the evidence and the law deliberately.

This is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 75:3), "When I shall seize the appointed time, I shall judge with fairness." If a judge takes his time and does not rush to judgment, he will judge fairly.

The mishnah's word for "deliberate" is "matun". This alludes to the above teaching from the gemara, for the four letters of "matun" are the initials of the phrase (Tehilim 86:13), "You have rescued my soul from the nethermost depths." (Quoted in Yalkut Avhan Ila'een p.18)

Letters from Our Sages

This week's letter was written by R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (died 1986), the mashgiach of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. The letter is reprinted in Sifte Chaim: Pirkei Emunah V'hashgachah, p. 432. The letter is dated 26 Marcheshvan, 5746 (November 10, 1985). The identity of the recipient is unknown.

In whatever circumstances one finds oneself, it is possible to take advantage of the situation to serve Hashem. Even a condition of sickness, suffering and physical weakness is given to a person so that he can serve Hashem despite these limitations.

Strengthening one's prayer and one's faith and trust even a small amount in such circumstances is counted in Heaven as an enormous step, because [we are taught in Avot D'Rabbi Nattan 3:6], "One time with suffering is equivalent to one hundred times without suffering." My teacher and rabbi, the gaon and tzaddik R' Eliyahu Dessler zatzal explained in the name of his father zatzal (see Michtav M'Eliyahu III, p.14), that this is true of any kind of suffering. After all, our Sages said (Arachin 16a), "To what extent does suffering go? Even if one reaches into his pocket to remove three coins and he comes up with only two." In other words, when one has to reach into his pocket a second time, that should be viewed as Divinely-imposed suffering [and one is rewarded by Hashem for accepting this "suffering" and serving Hashem despite it]. If we add a little more suffering, then the reward may increase 100-fold. With a little more suffering, the reward increases another hundred-fold, i.e., to

10,000 times the original reward; with more suffering, another hundred-fold (i.e., 1,000,000 times), and so on.

If so, the reward for serving Hashem amidst suffering, when it requires extra effort, is beyond description. In such circumstances, the value in Heaven of a small amount of prayer, a small amount of Torah study, and a small strengthening of one's faith and trust is enormous. Under such conditions, one can accomplish in a short time what it ordinarily would take many years to accomplish. Sponsored by

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Shlomo Katz in gratitude to Hashem, and in honor of Alan and Fran Broder, Daniel Dadusc, and most of all, my wife, on the twelfth birthday of Hamaayan/The Torah Spring

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