

FEEL THE MITZVAH

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on Hamaayan's 30th birthday

and in memory of

Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah ben Zev Ha'kohen Anemer z"l

This week's Parashah describes the dedication of the Mishkan and the death of two of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, on that occasion. Midrash Rabbah records four reasons why they died: They entered the Mishkan after drinking wine, they entered without washing their hands and feet, and they entered without wearing the full uniform of a Kohen. The sage Rabbi Levi adds: They entered not wearing the Me'il [see below]. (Until here from the Midrash)

Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel z"l ("Rosh"; 1250-1327; Germany and Spain) writes in a letter: You asked, "But the prohibition on entering the Mishkan after drinking had not been given yet, for it appears in our Parashah (10:9) after the death of Nadav and Avihu (10:2)?" The answer is that all the laws that the Kohanim needed to know were taught to them before they began serving. The fact that this law is written later is an example of the rule: "Ain mukdam u'me'uchar ba'Torah" / "The Torah is not written in chronological order." True, the Midrash teaches that the order of the verses is reminiscent of a doctor who tells a patient, "Don't do what he did so you won't suffer the same fate he suffered." However, writes Rosh, that is Midrash ("Midrash b'alma") [not the P'shat]. Necessarily, the Kohanim had been taught all required Halachot earlier.

Regarding Rabbi Levi's opinion that they were not wearing the Me'il, you asked: "Isn't that a garment worn by the Kohen Gadol alone?" Since they offered Ketoret / incense as if they were Kohanim Gedolim, that is how they were judged. This is sufficient basis for Rabbi Levi to say what he says, for such is the nature of Midrash. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Ha'Rosh 13:21)

"Do not make yourselves abominable by means of any crawling creature; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them [literally, 'in them']." (11:43)

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Russia; 1749-1821) writes: Before performing a Mitzvah, we recite a blessing, "Who sanctified us through [literally, 'in'] His Mitzvot." As soon as a person thinks of performing a Mitzvah, he makes an impression in the Heavens, at the "source" of that Mitzvah, and he is enveloped in holiness that comes down from that "place" in Heaven. This "Ohr Makif" / "enveloping light" assists the person in completing the Mitzvah, which, in turn, strengthens the "light." This is what our Sages mean when they say (Yoma 38b), "When one comes to purify himself, he is given assistance."

This "light" also makes his heart want to "capture" additional Mitzvot, since he is now sitting in Gan Eden--literally ("mamash")--and the Yetzer Ha'ra has no power over him. This is what our Sages mean when they say (Pirkei Avot ch.4), "A Mitzvah pulls another Mitzvah in its wake." A person who is sufficiently attuned to it can actually sense that he is surrounded by holiness at such a time. This is what the verse means (Vayikra 18:5): "You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which [literally, 'in which'] he shall live. The verse means that a person who observes Mitzvot lives among them, surrounded by them.

Conversely, a person who defiles himself through sin is surrounded by impurity, as our verse says, "Lest you become contaminated in them." Such a person is surrounded by the "air" of Gehinnom, just as his counterpart described above is surrounded by the "air" of Gan Eden. (Nefesh Ha'chaim Part I, ch.6)

R' Yitzchak Sorotzkin shlita (prolific author; former Rosh Yeshiva in the Telshe Yeshiva; now in Lakewood, N.J.) writes: The Gemara (Yoma 38b) states, "When one comes to purify himself, he is given assistance. When one comes to defile himself, he is given an opening." Commentaries note that the former person is given "assistance," while the latter is not given assistance, only an "opening," an opportunity.

Later, however, the Gemara (Yoma 39a) teaches: "If a person defiles himself a little, Heaven defiles him a lot." This implies that he is given more than an "opening"; Heaven actually defiles him actively. R' Sorotzkin explains: As soon as a person thinks of performing a Mitzvah, he is enveloped in holiness. In contrast, when he merely thinks of sinning, he is not yet enveloped in impurity. That is the point that the first Gemara is making. However, says the second Gemara, once he has begun to sin actively, then Heaven actively defiles him. (Rinat Yitzchak p.47)

From the Haftarah . . .

"David danced with all his strength before Hashem . . . Michal, daughter of Shaul, looked out the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before Hashem, and she was contemptuous of him in her heart. . .

"Michal daughter of Shaul went out to meet David and she said, 'How honored was the king of Yisrael today, who behaved publicly today in the eyes of his servants' maidservants as one of the

boors might behave publicly!' David answered Michal, ' . . . Before Hashem did I rejoice. Had I held myself even more lightly than this and had I been lowly in my own eyes--with the maidservants of whom you spoke, among them will I be honored!' (Shmuel II 6:14, 16, 20-22)

R' Avraham Yoffen z"l (1887-1970; Rosh Yeshiva of the Novardok Yeshiva in Bialystok, Poland; New York; and Yerushalayim) writes: There is a certain order in the world, and there are times when it is very important to maintain that order. On the other hand, there are times when one must set aside that order for a higher purpose. Recognizing when to apply each approach requires having a deep understanding of every situation.

The Nesi'im / Princes of the Tribes failed this test. Our Sages teach that when Moshe said that every generous person should bring donations for the building of the Mishkan, the Nesi'im disapproved. They felt that Moshe should have asked them first. Therefore, rather than bringing gifts for the Mishkan together with everyone else, they waited until the end, expecting to make up the shortfall. Much to their chagrin, there was no shortfall, because Bnei Yisrael were so eager to donate!

The Nesi'im were not being haughty when they reasoned that they should have been asked first. Proper "order" does require showing honor to leaders. Rather, their mistake was their overly rigid adherence to what is "proper" even at a time when spontaneity was called for. They erred because they failed to grasp completely the situation before them. They were used to leading their tribes with a certain "order"--and they no doubt did so for the sake of Heaven--but there are occasions when "order" must be set aside in favor of acting spontaneously and emotionally.

R' Yoffen continues: King David's wife, Michal, made the same error in our verses. She believed correctly that a king must behave in a dignified manner that will earn him the respect of his subjects. But, she did not grasp that there are times when honoring Hashem requires setting aside the king's honor. King David did understand that, as his behavior in our verses reflects. (Ha'mussar Ve'ha'da'at: Parashat Vayakhel p.120)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"David and all the people that were with him arose and went forth from Ba'al Yehuda to bring up from there the Aron / Ark of Elokim . . . They placed the Aron on a new wagon and carried it from the house of Avinadav, which was in Givah." (Shmuel II 6:2 – from this week's Haftarah)

"Kiryat Ba'al is Kiryat Ye'arim." (Yehoshua 18:14)

"Ba'alah is Kiryat Ye'arim." (Yehoshua 15:9)

"The men of Kiryat Ye'arim came and brought up the Aron of Hashem, and they brought it to the house of Avinadav on the Givah / hill." (Shmuel I 7:1)

R' Yehosef Schwartz z"l (1805-1865; Germany and Eretz Yisrael; Torah scholar and geographer)

writes: West and slightly north of Yerushalayim is the village of Abu Goush, which is Kiryat Ye'arim.

He writes further: There is a town call Givat or Geva in the district of Kiryat Ye'arim. That is the birthplace of King Shaul (from the tribe of Binyamin), that is where his father's home was, and from there he departed to search for his father's donkeys (see Shmuel I). This town, also known as "Givat Shaul" [not to be confused with the Yerushalayim neighborhood of that name], was on the boundary between the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin and belonged to both of them.

In my studies, continues R' Schwartz, I found with G-d's help that Kiryat Ye'arim-Abu Goush is on the southern slope of a mountain. Nearby, is a medium size slope, on which are the ruins of a town, which was Givah or Geva. Kiryat Ye'arim and Givah were once one city; one (Kiryat Ye'arim) was on the southern slope of a hill and one (Givah) was on the northern slope of a hill. Between them was a valley, through which ran the boundary between Yehuda and Binyamin and where today [in the mid-1800s] the road from Yaffo to Yerushalayim runs. In this light we can understand the verse: "The men of Kiryat Ye'arim came and brought up the Aron of Hashem, and they brought it to the house of Avinadav on the Givah," for they are one place. (Tevuot Ha'aretz p.116 & 160)