

# WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

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BS"D  
Yitro  
Volume 32, No. 17  
18 Shevat 5778  
February 3, 2018

Sponsored by  
Gil and Faith Ginsburg  
in memory of her father Herzl Rosenson  
(Naftali Hertz ben Avraham a"h)

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her mother Fradel bat Yaakov Shulim (Reiss) a"h  
and his father Chaim Eliezer ben Avigdor Moshe Hakohen a"h

In this week's parashah, we read about the revelation at Har Sinai. Near the end of the parashah (20:17), Moshe Rabbeinu tells Bnei Yisrael that Hashem appeared to them "so that yir'ah / fear (or awe) of Him will be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin."

R' Meshulam Feivish Heller z"l (1740-1795; Zbarazh, Ukraine; early chassidic rebbe) notes that people often misplace their feelings of yir'ah. For instance, sometimes a person sees a vicious dog charging toward him, and he is afraid. In reality, writes R' Heller, one should not fear the dog. Rather, one should realize that Hashem sent that dog to alert the person that his yir'ah of Hashem has become weak and must be strengthened.

To what may the person who focuses his fear on the dog, rather than on Hashem, be compared? R' Heller answers: To someone who is summoned before a king to face some charge or other, and who attempts to bribe the arresting officer in order to get a lighter sentence. Who is the officer that he should be feared? He doesn't sentence criminals. Rather, it is the king who should be the subject of the person's yir'ah.

The same is true, continues R' Heller, regarding the middah of ahavah / love. If the king's messenger calls someone to receive a gift from the king, is it the messenger who deserves to be loved? Of course not! Rather, it is the king who should be loved. Similarly, all love ultimately must be directed

toward Hashem. (Yosher Divrei Emet No. 17)

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***“You shall be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to Bnei Yisrael.” (19:6)***

R' Klonimus Kalmish Shapira z"l Hy"d (chassidic rebbe of Piasetzno, Poland; killed in the Holocaust in 1943) writes: There are some people who do not feel that they are lacking anything spiritually. Even if they would occasionally look into a book of mussar / character development and read that a certain middah / character trait is bad, it would never occur to them that they possess that middah and should correct it. Know, that if a person feels no pain or worry because of bad middot, it is a bad sign for him, for he is equivalent to someone who is so ill that he has lost all sensation.

R' Shapira continues: Then there are people who do feel that they are lacking, who do feel pain or worry. But, they quickly console themselves by saying, in the words of King Shlomo (Kohelet 7:20), "There is no man on earth so wholly righteous that he always does good and never sins." Such a person, writes R' Shapira, is in league with the yetzer hara.

The root of both of these illnesses, continues R' Shapira, is that people do not demand greatness from themselves. They think that perfecting oneself is for great tzaddikim, not for the average Jew, who (they think) can be satisfied because, "That's how I am." This is a grave error, R' Shapira writes. Even if all a person wants to be is an "average Jew," he should understand what that means. G-d made the very same covenant with every Jew, even with the woodcutters and water carriers (see Devarim 29:9). Every Jew is identified by the Torah as a member of the "kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation." (Chovat Ha'talmidim ch.3)

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***“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Descend, warn the people, lest they break through to Hashem to see . . .’***

"Moshe said to Hashem, 'The people are unable to ascend Mount Sinai, for You have warned us, saying, 'Bound the mountain and sanctify it.'

"Hashem said to him, 'Go, descend . . .'" (19:21, 23-24)

R' Menachem Mendel Morgenstern z"l (1787–1859; the Kotzker Rebbe) explains: Hashem had already commanded (verses 12-13) that Har Sinai be cordoned off. Moshe could not understand why it was necessary for Hashem to repeat that earlier direction, as it was inconceivable to Moshe that any of Bnei Yisrael would even think of transgressing Hashem's command. This is what Moshe meant when he said, "The people are unable to ascend." In Moshe's humility, he thought all of Bnei Yisrael were on his level. Therefore, Hashem told him, "Go, descend," i.e., go down to their level and see that they do need to be reminded of My command. (Emet V'emunah)

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***"Even the kohanim who approach Hashem should be prepared (literally, 'sanctified')." (19:22)***

Rashi z"l comments: "Sanctified - to remain at their posts."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) asks: What sanctity is involved in standing at one's post? He answers:

The chassidic rebbe R' Aharon of Karlin z"l (1738-1771) said, "What should I ask of Hashem--that He make me like Avraham Avinu? What would I be accomplishing? Avraham Avinu already existed; will I improve the world by being a second Avraham Avinu? Rather, I want to be Aharon Karliner and accomplish what Aharon Karliner was meant to accomplish!"

Similarly, unlike Moshe, the kohanim were meant to surround Har Sinai, not to ascend it. That, writes R' Wolbe, is kedushah / sanctity--not wanting to be someone else; rather, "remaining at one's post" and wanting to be the best "oneself" that one can be. (Shiurei Chumash)

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***"I am Hashem, your Elokim . . ." (20:2)***

R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (1269-1343; the "Ba'al Ha'turim") writes: This is a mitzvat aseh / affirmative commandment that requires us to know and believe that there is a G-d, that He exists and always existed, that everything that exists comes from Him, that He is our Elokim, and that we are obligated to serve Him. The verse continues, "Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt," because that fact is evidence of His existence and His will, for He took us from there with yedi'ah / knowledge of what is happening in our world and with hashgachah / providence. The Exodus also is proof of Creation, because, if the world had existed forever, it necessarily would be unchanging. And, it is proof of His ability to do whatever He pleases, which, in turn, is proof of His Uniqueness. (Peirush Ha'Tur Ha'Aroch)

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***"For in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth . . . , va'yanach / and He rested on the seventh day." (20:11)***

R' Avigdor Tzarfati z"l (France; 13th century) writes: In Bereishit (2:3), the same idea is expressed in different words, "Elokim blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it shavat / He abstained from all His work . . ." The word "shavat" is related to the word "yeshiva" / "sitting," and alludes to the midrash that Hashem sat the "angel of Shabbat" on a throne, and all of the other angels danced before it. Since Shabbat is called a "bride," writes R' Avigdor, this verse and midrash provide a source for the custom that a bride sits on a "throne" facing the groom, and people dance before them singing praises of the bride. (Peirushim U'pesakim Le'rabbeinu Avigdor Tzarfati)

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## Zemirot Shabbat

***"Yom Shabbat im tishmoru / If you observe the Sabbath day you will be My segulah / most beloved treasure." (From the zemer Mah Yedidut)***

We read in our parashah (19:5), "And now, if you listen well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the segulah / most beloved treasure of all peoples, for the entire world is Mine." There is no mention in this verse that Shabbat observance, in particular, makes us Hashem's segulah. Where, then, did the author of this zemer derive a connection between the two?

R' David Falk shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: The Torah commentator Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) defines a segulah as something so precious that its owner does not entrust it to any watchman. Instead, he keeps it nearby at all times so that he can guard it himself. Similarly, when we say that Bnei Yisrael are Hashem's "segulah," we are referring to the fact that all other nations have "guardian angels" and are affected by the zodiac, while we do not and are not. Instead, Hashem watches over us directly, as we read (Devarim 4:19-20), "Hashem, your Elokim, has apportioned [the stars and other heavenly bodies] to all the peoples under the entire heaven. But Hashem has taken you . . ."

Shabbat is the sign that we are His segulah, for Shabbat belongs exclusively to the Jewish People. Thus we read (Shmot 31:17) and say in kiddush, "Between Me and Bnei Yisrael it is a sign forever." In this light, as well, we can understand the midrash which says that the covenant mentioned in the verse from our parashah (19:5) quoted above is the covenant of Shabbat. (Kinor David p.92)