

PARSHAS SHEMINI - CHILLING OUT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Chilling Out¹

Moshe said: This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do. Then Hashem's Glory will appear to you.

We struggle to find the purpose of Moshe's exhortation. The people had already responded to Moshe's instructions. The parshah of inauguration had been prepared and assembled; all that remained to be done was their offering. What was Moshe asking of them?

Chazal clearly were concerned with this problem when they authored this comment: "Moshe said to Yisrael, 'Remove that yetzer hora from your hearts, so that you will all be reverentially of one mind and purpose, to minister before Hashem. Just as He is Singular in the universe, so shall your service be unified before Him. Why? Because Hashem your G-d is the G-d of the powers and the Lord of lords [2].'" This explication, however, is even more difficult to understand than the verse it attempts to elucidate!

Here is what it means. Already in the days of Moshe, groups of people whose love for Hashem led them to act in a manner transgressing limits prescribed by the Torah. (We will later see a blatant example of this in the behavior of the two hundred and fifty [3] who so desired the connection with Hashem they expected would come through the avodah of the ketores, that they risked their lives - and ultimately paid that price - against overwhelming odds. They were all completely righteous, and yet still wrong. They "sinned against their souls [4]" by offering their very lives to evidence their intense love of Hashem and achieve even more of it. They did this even though they contravened the expressed will of the Torah that only Kohanim offer the ketores. They apparently thought that individuals were not barred from finding their own ways to show their devotion to Hashem, entirely outside the demands of the Torah.

Moshe understood that similar sentiments were already brewing in various parts of the population, although these feelings had not yet burst out in open expression. Moshe wished to suppress their passion, and proactively deal with a nascent problem before it got out of hand. He recognized that the events of this special, final day in the period of the Mishkan's inauguration would inflame those dangerous feelings. People wanted to draw close to the Shechinah as they watched it manifest its

closeness to them as a fire that descended from Heaven. Moshe could tell that some people were prepared to act unilaterally and precipitously to invent home-grown ways of achieving spiritual elevation and connection with Hashem.

Moshe therefore cautioned them to "remove that yetzer hora" from their hearts. No matter how lofty their objective, if it was not part of Hashem's expressed Will, it has to be seen as a form of yetzer hora! Moshe expands upon this thought by adding, "Just as He is Singular in the universe, so shall your service be unified before Him." In other words, it is fitting that Hashem's people share a common form of service. If it would be proper for each person to serve Hashem differently according to the depth of passion and excitement that he felt in his heart, many different Torahs would be generated, rather than the one Torah that is suitable in serving the One G-d.

Moshe bolsters his plea with a proof text that doesn't seem to prove his point. "Hashem your G-d is the G-d of the powers and the Lord of lords." Moshe's intent becomes apparent in the end of the pasuk. "The great...G-d Who does not show favor, and Who does not accept a bribe."

What could we offer Hashem as a bribe? Money? Is there anything that does not already belong to Him? Do we pledge to multiply our righteous acts? Whatever we are capable of doing we are obligated to do! Such a pledge doesn't offer Hashem anything that is not already owed to Him - and therefore cannot be considered a bribe. The only item we can offer Him that He makes no claim upon is our very existence. We can offer Him our lives when He does not ask for them, as a sign of our devotion and our eagerness to become joined with Him. Yet He does not take any pleasure, as it were, in such sacrifice. Moshe throws cold water on any such enterprise by terming such behavior "bribes" that He does not accept.

Chazal [5] understand the phrase "This is the thing/davar" as a double entendre. Davar means not only "thing," but "word." They derive from this that Moshe read the actual words of this parshah to the Jewish people. But if we are to understand the phrase as referring to a presentation of the verbatim instructions of Hashem, we must accordingly tweak our reading of the next phrase: "that Hashem has commanded you to do." How can we "do" a group of sentences, a section of text?

We can show similar constructions elsewhere. In each case, "doing" text means exactly comprehending the intent and message of that text, and acting upon it. This, too, was part of Moshe's message to Klal Yisrael on the eighth day of the milu'im. Sensing the anticipation and eagerness of his people for the service of korbanos and the spiritual benefits they believed they would glean from the indwelling of the Shechinah, it fell to Moshe to put things in perspective. He presented the parshah to them as he had heard it, and then urged them to "do" that parshah, i.e. to accurately digest all of its details, lessons, and implications, and act upon them. Then and only then "Hashem's Glory will appear to you."

The message is that when the kernel idea behind korbanos is understood fully in the manner that it was intended at Sinai, then the Glory of Hashem becomes available even without the medium of

korbanos! In their desire to feel the closeness of the Shechinah, it would not be necessary of appropriate for people to sacrifice their lives. (There are several reports of Heavenly fires descending in places of intense Torah study, such as Moso Mechasya [6], and in the vicinity of talmidei chachamim rejoicing in the Torah with the intensity of the celebration at Sinai [7]).

While passion for Hashem is a wonderful thing, He wants it always to be constrained by the limitations of His expressed wishes in the Torah.

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1. *Based on Ha'amek Davar, Vayikra 9:6*
 2. *Devarim 10:17*
 3. *Bamidbar 16:2*
 4. *Bamidbar 17:3*
 5. *Yoma 5B*
 6. *Berachos 17B - see Tosafos*
 7. *Tosafos Chagigah 15A*
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