

SAVING FACE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Terumah begins with Hashem telling the Jews to donate materials and construct a Mishkan/Tabernacle:

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, let them take an offering - every man whose heart motivates him, they shall take My offering." (25:1-2)

Why, mefarshim ask, does the Torah use the verb to take when clearly they are being asked to give?

One of the many wonders of the Mishkan (and later the Mikdash/Temple) was the cherubim, two child-like figures that were sculpted out of the cover of the aron in which the tablets of the Ten Commandments rested. Usually, Chazal, our Sages, say, the faces of the cherubim faced each other, in the way they were sculpted. However, when the Jews began to stray and serve idols (among other sins), the faces of the cherubim turned away from each other - a sign of Hashem's dissatisfaction.

While miraculous, why is our standing in Hashem's eyes represented by the positioning of the cherubim? Perhaps the paroches (curtain that shielded the Holy of Holies) could have gone rigid, or some other miraculous event? If the Torah-ordained 'affection' of the cherubim - that their faces were to be turned towards each other - is a metaphor for Hashem's love and affection for Israel, then it stands to reason that the relationship is (to the extent we can express it) that of two counterparts in which both sides take an active role. It is not enough, R' Aaron Kotler zt"l explains, for Hashem, in His great love, to turn His face towards us. We must in turn position ourselves to face Him, without which the love He exudes is lost. Sealing off the Holy of Holies with an iron curtain would imply that Hashem distanced Himself from us, when in fact we were the first to turn away.

The Mishkan, and later the Mikdash, inasmuch as they were Hashem's 'dwelling places' upon earth, held untold opportunity to draw close to Hashem - to see and to be seen - as Chazal say. Yet that closeness was not to be had without some form of effort on our part. As Chazal say, "To the extent that he came to see - so he was seen." The preparation and yearning with which one approached the holy place played a pivotal role in its effect on him. Preparation to "be seen" served both as a means to ready one's body and soul for the experience of coming closer to Hashem, and as a conduit through which one would receive his 'measure' of kedushah/holiness - the greater the preparation, the stronger the experience. Returning to the metaphor of the cherubim, to the extent that one cherub turned to face the other, the other would turn towards him. Turning brings the other cherub

into clearer view; it also causes it to turn towards him in like.

Although the Mishkan/Mikdash is presently in a state of ruin, our tefilos (prayers) still ascend on High only after passing through the Temple Mount (see Melachim/Kings 8). Thus, R' Kotler says, although perhaps we can't achieve the same closeness experienced by our ancestors when they ascended the Temple Mount, to the extent that we conduct ourselves in a manner of kedushah that allows us to draw close to Hashem through prayer and Torah study, we 'reunite' the cherubim and rebuild in some small way the Mikdash. Conversely, if we distance ourselves from Hashem through inappropriate behavior, we contribute to the Mikdash's destruction. When Nebuchadnezzar arrived to destroy the Temple, they told him: You grind already-ground flour (Sanhedrin 96b).

If we contribute to the reconstruction of the Mikdash through Torah study, this is multiplied when we study the laws and sections of the Torah that deal with the Mishkan and Mikdash. As Chazal say, "One who studies the laws of the burnt offering - it is as if he has given a burnt offering, (Menachos 110a)."

Is it not exceptional, notes the Nesivos Shalom, that the Torah dedicates five parshios (portions) to the construction of the Mishkan - at times repeating itself almost verbatim - while other sections of the Torah are cryptically brief. The Mishkan/Mikdash, as Hashem's dwelling place on earth, mirrored the Heavens. When we study the laws of its construction, and strive to understand its seemingly mundane (yet complicated) details - all the while reminding ourselves that the blueprint for Hashem's earthly abode is anything but mundane - we to some extent draw upon ourselves the Mishkan's kedushah.

Note this exceptional Midrash (Tanchuma, Tzav 14): The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Israel, "Even though the Holy Temple will one day be destroyed, and the sacrifices will stop, do not forget to codify their laws. Read them, review them - if you study them, I will count it as if you are doing them. And if you want to know [that this is so], come and see this: When the Holy One, Blessed is He, revealed to Yechezkel (Ezekiel) the form of the Temple, He said, "Tell the House of Israel about the Temple - let them be ashamed of their sins, and let them measure its implements..."

Said Yechezkel to Hashem, "Master of the Universe, we are in exile, in the land of our enemies, and You tell me to go and make the form of the Temple known to the Jews... What shall they do [with this knowledge?] Let them be, until the exile is over and they return - then I will tell them!" Hashem said to Yechezkel, "Because My children are in exile - the construction of My House should stop? Reading about it in the Torah is as great as building it! Teach them to study about the Mikdash, and I will consider it as if they are involved in its construction."

Perhaps the Torah's unusual wording, Let them take for Me an offering - alludes to this. To the extent we can express it, the Mishkan is "for Me," to enable Jews to accomplish the impossible - to in some way draw closer to the Infinite. It is a timeless task which never ceased, even as the Temple burned to the ground. And second, that the closeness and kedushah we achieve is an act in which

we play an active roll - to take and not to be given - and in which the fruits we bear correspond to the effort we exude. Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2008 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **Torah.org**