

# SHEMINI, 5631

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*Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Parshas Shemini, 5631*

It helps to begin with some background information.. This ma'amar is built on an insight that the Sfas Emes had from his grandfather. The Chiddushei HaRim offered a comment based on an explanation that the Toras Kohanim gives on a pasuk in our parsha. (Note: Toras Kohanim is a classic commentary -- from Tana'itic times -- on Sefer Vayikra.). Because of its layer-upon-layer structure, to understand this ma'amar, we must first see the pshat pashut (simple/surface understanding) of the pasuk that the Toras Kohanim presents. Then we can proceed to the (very different) reading of the pasuk that the Sfas Emes and his grandfather offer.

Early in the parsha (Vayikra 9: 6), the Torah tells us: "Zeh hadavar ta'asu veyeyrah aleichem kevod HaShem." (ArtScroll: "This is the thing that HaShem has commanded you to do; then the glory of HaShem will appear to you.") The Sfas Emes quotes the comment of the Toras Kohanim on this pasuk: "Oso yeitzar hara ha'aviru mile'vavchem, ve'siheyu kulchem be'eitza achas le'shareis lifnei HaMakom. Kesheim shehu yechidi ba'olam, kach tiheyeh avodaschem meyuchedes lefahnav. Ah'sisehm chein? Veyeyra aleichem kevod HaShem."

(That is: "Rid yourselves of that evil inclination and be united in your service [of HaShem]. [Further,] just as there is only one HaShem, so, too, shall your service be totally unique and single-minded. If you achieve that quality in your service, you will have access to the glory of HaShem.")

As you see, the Toras Kohanim is working with the pasuk's word "zeh". And the Toras Kohanim reads "zeh" as: "this -- and only this -- shall you do." I suggest that this reading leads the Toras Kohanim to see the pasuk as a warning against two specific evils. One pitfall to avoid is factionalism. The Toras Kohanim voices its concern about divisiveness with the words: "vesiheyu kulchem be'eitza achas" ("and be united"). That "eitza achas" follows from the pasuk's word: "zeh" -- this and only this -- way shall you proceed.

The other danger against which the Toras Kohanim cautions is ambivalence -- i.e., being of two minds about our relationship with HaShem. We see this admonition in the use of the plural in the word "levavchem" (your 'hearts'). And again we see the Toras Kohanim is working with the word "zeh." That is, this -- and only this -- shall be your avoda; i.e., be single-minded in your relationship with HaShem.

So much for the pshat pashut (simple/surface meaning) of the Toras Kohanim's comment. Citing his

grandfather, the Sfas Emes offers a different reading . The Sfas Emes focuses on the word "ta'asu" - "you shall do". The Sfas Emes explains. The Torah is commanding us to do all our "asiyos" -- our physical actions -- as "asher tziva HaShem" : with an awareness of HaShem's Presence. In reality, everything in this world conveys a message of HaShem's Presence. For we know something about that 'everything' -- namely, "Hakohl bara lichvodo". ("Everything that HaShem created was to proclaim His glory") . Thus, if only by implication, analogy, or allegory, accurate perception of reality can enable us to perceive HaShem's Presence. Hence, it should be feasible to live our lives in a constant, interactive relationship with HaShem.

Note that the Sfas Emes is saying something very different from the familiar: "Kohl ma'asecha yiheyu lesheim shamayim" In that standard principle we are told: "Let everything you do -- your eating, your sleeping, etc. -- and as the Ba'al Shem Tov added -- even your Torah study and your tefila -- be to serve HaShem".

The Sfas Emes is telling us that HaShem is present in all creation. But the Sfas Emes is also fully aware that HaShem's Presence is hidden. From these two facts of life, the Sfas Emes draws a powerful conclusion: that we bear a responsibility to reveal to the world that HaShem is really there. How do we do it? By being aware in our mundane, everyday activities of HaShem's Presence. In other words, we are all called to perceive HaShem's Presence -- not in remote mountains nor in isolated Bah'tei Medrash -- but "toch ha'asiya mamash". Thus, "zeh hadavar ta'asu " is telling us to be aware of HaShem while we go about our normal human activities.

The Sfas Emes concludes: by so doing we can reach a state in which "Ve'yei'rah aleichem kevod HaShem" (the glory of HaShem will appear to us.) You may ask: what is so wonderful about that? The answer is straightforward. Living one's life with a constant sense of being in the Presence of HaShem must truly be wonderful.

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