

SHEMINI, 1894

by Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff

Shemini, 1894, Paragraph 1

Parashas Shemini deals with many topics, among them, the inauguration of the Mishkan. In this spirit, Medrash Raba on Shemini gives us several derashos concerning construction of the Mishkan. Continuing with this theme, the Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar by alluding to a derasha in Medrash Raba (Perek 11) on this same topic.

That derasha works with a text in Mishlei (9:4): "Chochmos bonso beisa; chotzvo amudeha shiv'a (Wisdom has built her home. [Wisdom] has hewed out her seven pillars)."

The Sfas Emes follows the Medrash in reading "beisa" (her home) as a reference to the Mishkan-- Hashem's symbolic dwelling in this world. Similarly, he notes with approval the picture of "kohl he'chochmos" ("all wisdoms") as pillars providing intellectual support for Hashem's earthly domicile.

By contrast, the Sfas Emes seems to be bothered by a key feature of the: derasha the prominent role it accords to "chochmos (wisdoms)." Thus the derasha speaks of the Mishkan as being built by "wisdoms." In contrast, the Sfas Emes tells us that yir'a (awe, reverence, fear of Hashem) -- not chochmos--is what drives the system and makes good things happen in this world.

The notion that yir'a is more important than chochmos is not self-evident. Accordingly, the Sfas Emes looks through Shas for a text in its support. He finds powerful corroboration in a passage in maseches Shabbos (31a). Chazal there discuss the relative merits of yir'a and chochmos in terms of a metaphor in which chochmos is the entrance to a dwelling and yir'a is the actual dwelling. Chazal comment: Woe is a person who has the entrance to a dwelling (wisdom), but does not have the dwelling itself (yir'as Hashem).

The Sfas Emes goes on to generalize his perspective on yir'as dominance in our ruchniyus life. Thus he tell us: "Ki zeh hatachlis mikohl hamidos, lavo ahl yedeihem leyir'as Hashem (For that is the purpose of all good qualities (midos), that they enable a person to attain yir'as Hashem.)"

In view of yir'as importance and its dominance of all other midos, we would like to know how to get more of this good stuff. The Sfas Emes thoughtfully addresses our unspoken request and speaks of the sources of yir'a. (Note that because he was Gerer Rebbe as well as Sfas Emes, he had access to special knowledge and unique experience on practical aspects of Avodas Hashem.)

The Sfas Emes tells us that Yir'a comes from three sources; ahava (love), pachad (fear) - so far so good. But now comes a surprise--emes (truth). The idea that searching for truth will help a person gain yir'a's Hashem is implicit--or, indeed explicit--in many classical texts. What I find special in the Sfas Emes' presentation is the common-sensical, matter-of-fact way he gives us this idea.

Sfas-Emes, Copyright © 2008 by Rabbi Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff and **Torah.org**.

To subscribe to the Sfas Emes Weekly Email, send an email message to: sfas-emes-subscribe@torah.org or your fax number to: 973-471-8389

To unsubscribe, send an email message to: sfas-emes-unsubscribe@torah.org