

PARSHAS SHEMINI: BACK TO BASICS

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Parshas Shemini opens with a series of pesukim describing the events that transpired on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. The sequence begins as Moshe assembled the kohanim and the elders (Vayikrah 9:1) and informed them of the specific korbanos that were to be brought on the final day of the inauguration (9:2). Moshe then told Aharon (9:3) to share this information with all the Jews, and perhaps most importantly, to inform them (9:4) that the glory of Hashem's Divine Presence will appear before them on that special day. The Torah (9:5) notes how Moshe's instructions were faithfully carried out, and that all the Jews assembled and stood before Hashem.

A striking question arises, however, as we read the sixth pasuk in this progression. There does not seem to be any new information contained in that pasuk. The Torah relates (9:6) that Moshe addressed the assembled Bnei Yisroel and told them, "Zeh hadavar asher tzivah Hashem ta'asu, ve'yera alechem k'vod Hashem - this is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; [and] then the glory of Hashem will appear before you." Moshe was informing them to simply follow the instructions previously given and told them that Hashem's Presence would appear to them, of which they were already informed. Why would there be a need to repeat these commandments and to inform the Bnei Yisroel for the second time that they will see the Presence of Hashem?

Walking and Talking Torah

Several weeks ago, while preparing for this dvar Torah, I was having difficulty with the question noted above and I was unsuccessfully researching the meforshim (commentaries) looking for a deeper understanding of that pasuk. One Shabbos morning, I posed this question to my chaver Rabbi Shraga Solovietchik, who is a direct descendant of the illustrious "Beis Halevi," Rabbi Chaim Solovietchik z'tl.

He shared with me that this very question was posed to his great uncle, Reb âVelvel' Solovietchik z'tl, many years ago. Rabbi Solovietchik was vacationing in Switzerland during the summer months and went out walking one day in the majestic surroundings of the Alps. His walking companion was an American businessman and the conversation turned to the sixth pasuk in Parshas Shmini. The man asked the Brisker Rov why Moshe Rabbeinu needed to repeat the instructions regarding the korbanos brought on the final day of the inauguration of the mishkan and why it was necessary for him to tell the Jews that they would see the presence of Hashem.

Reb Velvel responded that Moshe was sharing a poignant and important message with the Bnei

Yisroel, and that some context was needed to fully understand the significance of his words.

Following the Torah's Instructions

The Jews were on a spiritual plateau when they left Egypt and Hashem's presence surrounded them. Sadly, this elevated state did not last for long as the Jews sinned by serving the âegel' (the golden calf). At that point, Hashem's Shechinah left the Bnei Yisroel and did not return until the mishkan was inaugurated. Understandably, the Jews were very eager to have the Shechinah back in their midst. When they initially heard from Moshe Rabbeinu (9:4) that the glory of Hashem's Divine Presence would appear before them on that special day, they were naturally overcome with joy and assembled (9:5) to bask in the glow of the Shechinah. In fact, the Sifri comments on the level of their excitement and simcha as they prepared to greet the Shechinah.

Reb Velvel explained that at that point, Moshe realized that the understandable excitement of the Jews regarding the reappearance of Hashem was overshadowing the important mitzvos of that special day - the korbanos that were to be brought and the inauguration of the mishkan. To bring focus to the Bnei Yisroel, Moshe informed them, "Zeh hadavar asher tzivah Hashem ta'asu, ve'year alechem k'vod Hashem - this is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; [and] then the glory of Hashem will appear before you." He reminded the Jews that should not concentrate on the byproduct of the mitzvah - Hashem's Shechinah - but rather on the actions that would cause Hashem to rest His presence among them.

We were fortunate to have been given the Torah of Hashem. It is our mission in life to follow its eternal lessons and live meaningful lives. The spiritual byproducts of following Hashem's Torah will surely come as a result of keeping it. We need not concentrate on the results. We ought to do what Hashem instructed us. His presence in our lives will surely follow.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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