

This week's *Parashah* opens with the dedication of the *Mishkan*. We read (9:7), "Moshe said to Aharon, 'Approach the *Mizbei'ach* / Altar and perform the service . . ." *Rashi z"l* writes: "Aharon was ashamed to approach. Moshe said to him, 'Why are you ashamed? For this you were chosen!'" R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) elaborates: "Aharon was sanctified to *Hashem*. He had no sins on his conscience except for making the Golden Calf, but that sin was always at the forefront of his thoughts. Moshe therefore told him, 'Have some pride and do not be so humble, for *Hashem* has already forgiven you.'"

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) writes: It is true that our Sages have taught (*Avot*, Ch.4), "Be very, very humble!" We see here, however, that there is a limit to humility. When humility impedes a person's service of *Hashem*, it is no longer appropriate. The first key to serving *Hashem* is to recognize one's worth and importance. This is stated expressly in the work *Sha'arei Ha'avodah*, which is attributed to Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263): "The first step is for the person who is serving [*Hashem*] to know his own worth, to recognize his elevated level and the elevated levels of his forefathers, and their greatness and importance to the Creator and His affection for them. A person should then always strive and strengthen himself to live up to that level and to always act accordingly. If, G-d forbid, a person does not recognize his level and that of his ancestors, he can easily go in the ways of lawless people." (*Shi'urei Chumash*)

Shabbat

This week, we resume our discussion of "Oneg Shabbat" / making the Shabbat a "delight"--a *Mitzvah* fulfilled specifically through physical pleasures such as eating and drinking.

As discussed in prior issues, this *Mitzvah* is not telling us to use *Shabbat* as an excuse for overindulgence. However, warns R' Eliyahu E. Dessler *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the *Michtav M'Eliyahu*), the *Yetzer Ha'ra* sometimes tries to lead a person to the opposite extreme--convincing him that physical pleasure is generally sinful, but that he nevertheless must force himself eat and drink on *Shabbat* solely for the sake of this *Mitzvah*. Thinking that way completely uproots the essence of the *Mitzvah*, which is to enjoy physical pleasures on *Shabbat*.

On this note, R' Dessler quotes R' Srayah Deblitzki z"l (1926-2018; Bnei Brak, Israel), who writes: *Hashem* commanded us in His holy Torah to be joyous and in good spirits on *Yom Tov*, and our Divinely-inspired Sages explain in the *Gemara* how this *Mitzvah* is to be fulfilled: in the times of the Temple, by eating the meat of *Shelamim* sacrifices; in our times, with meat and wine, new clothes for women, and toys for children. Likewise, the *Mitzvah* can be fulfilled with other things that bring a person pleasure. There is no question, R' Deblitzki writes, that the intention is that a person enjoy physical pleasures in the most literal sense, for that is the Will of *Hashem*!

The same is true, R' Deblitzki continues, regarding *Oneg Shabbat*. The *Mitzvah* is to give oneself pleasure. What does it mean to give pleasure to *Shabbat* and not to oneself, or to eat in honor of *Shabbat* but to have no pleasure from it? R' Deblitzki asks rhetorically. Rather, the more one enjoys additional physical pleasures on *Shabbat* in the most literal sense, the more he fulfills the teaching of our Sages: "One who delights in *Shabbat* is given an inheritance with no limits." [To be continued . . .]

(*Sha'arei Ha'zemanim: Shabbat Kodesh* p.29)

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“Do not make yourselves abominable by means of any crawling creature; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them [literally, ‘in them’].” (11:43)

R’ Chaim of Volozhin z”l (Russia; 1749-1821) writes: Before performing a *Mitzvah*, we recite a blessing, “Who sanctified us through [literally, ‘in’] His *Mitzvot*.” As soon as a person thinks of performing a *Mitzvah*, he makes an impression in the Heavens, at the “source” of that *Mitzvah*, and he is enveloped in holiness that comes down from that “place” in Heaven. This “*Ohr Makif*” / “enveloping light” assists the person in completing the *Mitzvah*, which, in turn, strengthens the “light.” This is what our Sages mean when they say (*Yoma* 38b), “When one comes to purify himself, he is given assistance.”

This “light” also makes his heart want to “capture” additional *Mitzvot*, since he is now sitting in *Gan Eden*--literally (“גן עדן”)--and the *Yetzer Ha’ra* has no power over him. This is what our Sages mean when they say (*Pirkei Avot* ch.4), “A *Mitzvah* pulls another *Mitzvah* in its wake.” A person who is sufficiently attuned to it can actually sense that he is surrounded by holiness at such a time. This is what the verse means (*Vayikra* 18:5): “You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which [literally, ‘in which’] he shall live. The verse means that a person who observes *Mitzvot* lives among them, surrounded by them.

Conversely, one who defiles himself with sin is surrounded by impurity, as our verse says, “Lest you become contaminated in them.” Such a person is surrounded by the “air” of *Gehinnom*, just as his counterpart described above is surrounded by the “air” of *Gan Eden*. (Nefesh Ha’chaim I, 6)

Pirkei Avot

“Moshe received the Torah from Sinai . . .” (1:1)

All the laws of the Torah are from Sinai! Why, then, does this tractate in particular begin with this declaration?

R’ Dov Cohen z”l (1911-2005; first Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force) answers: *Hashem* commanded Moshe at Har Sinai (*Shmot* 18:20), “You shall caution them regarding the decrees and the teachings, and you shall make known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do.” Besides “decrees and teachings”--*i.e.*, the laws that one can find in the *Shulchan Aruch* / Code of Law--the Torah also contains “a path and deeds.” This latter pair refers to lessons not found in the *Shulchan Aruch*, which are nevertheless crucial instructions for leading a Torah-based life. These lessons are the subject of *Pirkei Avot*. And, since the idea that the Torah instructs us regarding character traits and emotions may be less apparent than the idea that the Torah contains laws, the opening phrase of *Pirkei Avot* emphasizes that this tractate’s lessons, too, are from Sinai.

(*Avot El Banim*)

“And a bull and a ram for a peace-offering to slaughter before *Hashem*, and a meal-offering mixed with oil, for today *Hashem* appears to you.’ They took what Moshe had commanded to the front of the *Ohel Mo’ed* / Tent of Meeting, and the entire assembly approached and stood before *Hashem*. Moshe said, ‘This is the thing that *Hashem* has commanded you to do; then the glory of *Hashem* will appear to you.’” (9:4-6)

Rashi z”l comments on the words “for today *Hashem* appears to you”: “To make His *Shechinah* rest upon your handiwork; on this account these sacrifices come as an obligation for this day.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yehoshua Rokeach z”l (1823-1894; *Belzer Rebbe*) asks: What is *Rashi* adding to our understanding of the verse, which says expressly that *Bnei Yisrael* should bring sacrifices “for today *Hashem* appears to you”?

He explains: The *Chassidic Rebbe* R’ Zvi Elimelech Shapira z”l (the *Bnei Yissaschar*; died 1841) is quoted as saying, “There is no *Mitzvah* to have Eliyahu Ha’navi appear to oneself.” [See below.] Perhaps, says the *Belzer Rebbe*, the *Bnei Yissaschar* meant that our responsibility is to perform the *Mitzvot* with a great desire solely to fulfill *Hashem*’s command; to what extent a person attains lofty spiritual levels as a result is *Hashem*’s concern, not ours.

The *Belzer Rebbe* continues: One might have read the words, “for today *Hashem* appears to you,” as the reason for bringing the enumerated sacrifices. To disabuse us of this notion, *Rashi* says that it is true that these sacrifices will make *Hashem*’s *Shechinah* rest on *Bnei Yisrael*’s handiwork; nevertheless, the reason for bringing the sacrifices is that they are the obligation of the day. Thus, Moshe said, “This is the thing that *Hashem* has commanded you to do”--do it because *Hashem* has so commanded. “Then,” as a matter of course, “the glory of *Hashem* will appear to you”--but that should not be what motivates you. (Quoted in *Lekket Imrei Kodesh*)

The *Bnei Yissaschar* writes about the commandment not to ascend the *Mizbei’ach* / altar on steps: In my opinion, this *Mitzvah* hints that a person should not seek lofty spiritual levels such as *Ruach Ha’kodesh* or the revelation of Eliyahu Ha’navi. If he is honored by Heaven with such attainments, he should thank *Hashem*, for He is good. However, one’s only intention should be to serve *Hashem* out of love and awe, and with simplicity, as a son serves his father and mother. If, G-d forbid, a person thinks he is worthy of lofty levels, his “account book” will be opened in Heaven, and, inevitably, his shame will be revealed. Therefore, a person should be content to do what he is commanded.

(*Derech Pikudecha: Mitzvat Lo Ta’aseh* 41:11)