

The Path To Follow

Ki-Tisa

483

A Hevrat Pinto **Publication**

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Adar 20th, 5773

March 2nd, 2013

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The Sanctuary Teaches us How “I Will Dwell Among Them”

This week's parsha comprises numerous laws regarding the construction of the Mishkan [Sanctuary] and the Divine service that was to take place in it. We have already mentioned the Alsheich's interpretation of the verse, “Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them” (Shemot 25:8), namely that it does not say, “I will dwell in it,” but rather “I will dwell among them,” meaning within each Jew. The source of this interpretation is found in the Zohar: “The Sanctuary was fashioned like the body” (Zohar II:140b). In other words, the spiritual makeup and tendencies of a Jew resemble the structure of the Sanctuary.

Now the layout of the Sanctuary, its appearance, form, and the way in which the Divine service was performed in it enabled the Shechinah to dwell there. Hence the study of this subject teaches how we ourselves must serve G-d. It shows us how we must act in order to purify ourselves, sanctify ourselves, and become worthy of Him dwelling among us.

This week's parsha begins with the mitzvah given to the Children of Israel to donate a half-shekel for the census in the desert. This donation would also be used to make the adanim [sockets] of the Sanctuary, meaning its base and foundation. In regards to this donation, it is explicitly stated: “The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than a half-shekel” (Shemot 30:15). Thus each man gave exactly a half-shekel, not more or less. Why so? Da'at Zekenim explains, “To prevent the rich from saying that his share in the Sanctuary was greater than that of his neighbor.” Likewise the Torah commanded that a half-shekel be given, rather than one full shekel, in order to remove all feelings of pride and superiority from man. In this way, a person would always realize that he is but a half, that he is incomplete. Indeed, “A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise” (Tehillim 51:19). G-d asks only for sincerity, and He loves a person who is humble and contrite, not one who is arrogant.

The half-shekel also teaches us that an individual does not form a complete entity by himself, meaning that he can only attain completeness by connecting himself to others, and in this way to the community. A Jew only becomes complete when he is united to other members of his own people. This is the virtue that characterizes the Jewish people vis-à-vis others peoples.

These twin concepts – humility and unity – are codependent, for a conceited person cannot establish a true connection with anyone. In fact, a person who is proud will set himself up as judge and jury so as to always find ways to justify his own feelings of superiority. Under such conditions, how can he establish a connection to others, since he has no regard for anyone else?

Self-effacement and humility, as well as the unity that stems from these, are the virtues that allow the Sanctuary to endure. This is why the sockets that supported the Tent of Meeting were made from the half-shekel donations, which symbolized these virtues. Thus to maintain the Sanctuary that is found in every Jew, it is crucial to flee from pride, which is diametrically opposed of the Shechinah. In fact G-d says of the proud, “I and he cannot both dwell in the world” (Sotah 5a), whereas of a modest and humble person He says: “I abide in exaltedness and holiness, but I am with the contrite and humble of spirit” (Isaiah 57:15).

The unity and proper makeup of a group are also prerequisites for the presence of the Shechinah, since it can only reside among at least ten assembled men (a minyan). Likewise, it is only when Israel encamped “like a single person, with a single heart” that G-d could descend upon Mount Sinai.

Our parsha continues with the order to make a basin along with its pedestal, meant for the washing of the kohanim's feet and hands before they carried out their service, enabling it to be performed in a state of purity and holiness. Now each Jew has the status of a kohen when he serves G-d and when he prays, for our role in this world is to fulfill the will of our Father as perfect servants, with all of our actions being geared towards that goal. This status requires us to constantly think and act with a high degree of holiness and purity. In fact we must always be worthy of serving the King of kings, and “none may enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth” (Esther 4:2).

The fact that this basin was fashioned from mirrors can also teach us numerous things. When a person sees his face reflected in a mirror, it can awaken in him the realization that there is “an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book” (Pirkei Avot 2:1). Thus one who reaches the level of, “My eyes are always directed towards Hashem” (Tehillim 25:15), will perceive this open book and the hand that records, and he will maintain his purity and keep himself far from every sin and dispute, thereby meriting the dwelling of the Shechinah within him.

Next comes the order to prepare the sacred anointing oil, and to anoint the Sanctuary and its vessels. Now oil symbolizes good deeds, as it is written: “A good name is better than good oil” (Kohelet 7:1). We also read in Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba: “Oil always represents good deeds. In fact, ‘Your oils are better than fragrance’ means: ‘Your deeds are better than fragrance.’” Everyone must seek to perfect his character traits and improve his deeds so they can surpass his wisdom. Likewise, a person must try to acquire a good reputation and be loved by G-d and appreciated by man. In this way, following the example of the oil that sanctifies the Sanctuary and its vessels, a person's deeds can make him holy and allow the Shechinah to dwell within him.

The incense that burned upon the altar teaches us that the Children of Israel are responsible for one another, and the mutual responsibility that the tzaddikim have for the impious is even greater. We learn this from the chelbenah (galbanum), which was used as an ingredient in the incense despite its unpleasant odor. Our Sages have also deduced, “A fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast. For behold, the odor of galbanum is unpleasant, and yet it was included among the spices for the incense” (Keritot 6b). Rabbeinu Bechaye makes the following point on this subject: “The incense comes to teach us that we must not ignore the impious and sinners by excluding them from our fasts and our prayers. Our Sages also say that every assembly which is devoid of sinners is not an assembly. In fact the Name of G-d is exalted and sanctified when the impious repent and join the ranks of the tzaddikim. When that fails to happen, the tzaddikim are held accountable due to the responsibility that every Jew has for his fellow Jew.” Thus the responsibility that everyone has for bringing the impious closer to G-d enables His Name to be sanctified and glorified, magnifying His Kingdom in the world. This is precisely the meaning of making the Shechinah dwell on earth.

Tablecloth, Candleholders, and a Healing of the Heart

It is written, “For six days may work be done, but the seventh day is a day of complete rest; it is sacred to Hashem” (Shemot 31:15).

In this column, we have spoken several times about the importance of welcoming Shabbat early, the special segulot that pertain to this good approach, and the numerous accounts of deliverance experienced by those who have committed themselves to it. In parallel to this, there is good reason to awaken and warn people who still delay in their preparations for Shabbat, allowing themselves to be caught by its arrival while still returning from the market or waiting for a bus.

“Come, Let us go to Welcome Shabbat”

As long as there is still time, we must eagerly await Shabbat Kodesh. More precisely, we would await its arrival as we await an important guest, a person of high-rank. The home should be polished and radiant, the meals of Shabbat already in place, and everyone waiting for the evening sounds that announce the arrival of the Shabbat Queen. It is neither proper nor respectful for the Shabbat Queen to cover us with her wings while we are still not prepared to welcome her with the song: “Come, O Bride; come, Shabbat Queen.”

In the book *Leshichno Tidreshu*, Rabbi Simcha Kaplan, the Rav of Sefat, tells the following story:

While studying at the Mir yeshiva, I was living with a family that had only one son. One Friday, as I was leaving for yeshiva, the master of the house was getting ready to leave for work at the marketplace. I then heard his wife telling him, “It’s the eve of Shabbat, so come home early.”

When I returned from the yeshiva in the afternoon following Mincha, I saw the lady of the house waiting by the window for her husband. She was whispering, “It will soon be Shabbat. It will soon be Shabbat.” Surprised by this, I said to her: “It’s broad daylight outside. There’s still several hours before Shabbat starts.”

She said to me, “Sit down. I want to tell you our story so you can better understand why I’m worried.”

“We were married for a long time, but still had no children. After several years of suffering, we merited a son, thank G-d. Yet to our great regret, the child didn’t develop normally, and it was very difficult and agonizing for us to take care of him. Diagnosing him with a heart defect, the town doctor referred us to a renowned specialist who had a practice in Vilna.

“After various tests, the specialist told us: ‘This child won’t live for more than a few years. There’s no cure for his condition. Return home and accept the situation.’

“We left his office overwhelmed and broken. We were lost. With great difficulty, we returned to the inn where we were staying and broke down in tears, inconsolable. When the clients at

the inn overheard our distress, they suggested that on our way back to Mir, we should stop by Radin, where the Chafetz Chaim lived. We were advised to see him, for he would certainly save us from this trial.

“We therefore immediately traveled to Radin. Imagine our disappointment, however, when we heard that the Rav wasn’t receiving people! In fact he felt extremely weak and wasn’t in any condition to welcome anyone.

“We were again disappointed, but Hashem intervened: We saw the husband of the Chafetz Chaim’s granddaughter, a young avrech who had studied in Mir not long before, and who had been living with us at the time. And so, ‘Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it’ – he introduced us to his wife’s grandfather. The Chafetz Chaim was sitting down when we saw him, the book of Ezra in his hands.

“We sat down and told him about the situation with our only son. He answered us, ‘How can I help you? I have no money. What can I do for you?’ I burst into bitter tears, and his granddaughter’s husband – who had introduced us to him – added: ‘But he’s their only son!’

“The Chafetz Chaim then turned to me and said with tenderness, ‘My daughter, devote yourself to welcoming Shabbat early.’ I asked him to explain what he meant, and he said to me: ‘Friday at noon, the tablecloth should already be spread upon the Shabbat table, and the candleholders set in place. Also, as soon as the Shabbat candles are lit, no more work should be done, regardless of what happens!’

“The words spoken by the Chafetz Chaim were firm, and so I committed myself to applying them to the letter.

“As soon as we returned to Mir, we noticed a clear improvement in our son’s health. Then, little by little, he began to eat and develop like other children of his age. We returned to see the doctor who had sent us to Vilna, and what he saw left him speechless. Trying to control his dismay, he himself gave us money to go back to Vilna to see the specialist.

“Upon our return to Vilna, the specialist said to us: ‘You’re mocking me! This isn’t the same child that I examined before!’ We replied, ‘We only have one son!’ The specialist then asked us if we had gone to Vienna, since there was an international medical center there at the time. When we told him that we hadn’t, he asked us: ‘Where did you go?’

“‘We went to see the Chafetz Chaim, who gave us some advice.’

“Upon hearing this, he confided in us: ‘We physicians have the power to improve what already exists. On the other hand, the Chafetz Chaim has the power to create ex nihilo. For now, I can tell you that your son’s heart had been completely “worn out,” almost non-functional.’”

The lady of the house ended by telling me, “Since those events, we finish our preparations for Shabbat very early. That’s why I’m worried about my husband, because he’s late in returning.”

The Half-Shekel

It is written, “Every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them” (Shemot 30:12).

Because the Children of Israel were liable to death on account of the sin of the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them.” When the Children of Israel heard this, some began saying: “We worked for nothing to gather the spoils of Egypt and the spoils by the sea. Now we’ll have to give everything as an atonement for our souls!”

Others said, “If someone who rapes a young virgin must give 50 shekels, and someone who slanders his wife is punished by having to give 100 shekels, then how much more should each of us – we who violated the words of G-d, as it is written, ‘You shall have no other gods before Me’ [Shemot 20:3], and who slandered Him by saying of the calf, ‘These are your gods, O Israel’ [ibid. 32:4] – give as much and more!”

They also said, “When an ox gores a slave, it is said of its owner: ‘He shall give to his master thirty shekels of silver’ [ibid. 21:32]. Thus how much more should we, who exchanged His glory for that of a calf [which evokes an ox]!”

The Holy One, blessed be He, knew what the Children of Israel were thinking. He said to Moshe, “Go tell the Children of Israel that they must not give too much. By your life! Neither a talent of silver, nor 100 shekels, nor 50, nor 10, not even a whole shekel. Rather: ‘This they shall give – everyone who passes through the census – a half-shekel’ [ibid. 30:13].”

The Holy One, blessed be He, then took a half-shekel of fire from beneath the Throne of Glory and showed it to Moshe, saying: “This they shall give.”

– Midrash Aggadah

Guarding Shabbat

It is written, “You shall guard Shabbat” (Shemot 31:14).

This “guarding” consists of adding a little time before and after Shabbat. The Sages have said, “We add mundane to sacred and are strict in calculating the time of twilight which precedes Shabbat and which follows Shabbat, and we ‘guard’ it so that nobody works on it.”

– Yalkut M’or Afeila

Remembering Torah

It is written, “He gave to Moshe” (Shemot 31:18).

Rabbi Yishmael said, “The angel, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: When Moshe ascended to the Heavens, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded that he be given from his stature 70,000 by 70,000 myriads of parangs. Moshe learned the Torah in the 70 aspects of the 70 tongues, as well as the Prophets and the Writings. In 40 days he learned everything, but in a single instant he forgot it all. The Holy One, blessed be He, sent him the Prince of the Torah, who studied with him until it was all given to him as a gift.”

– Sefer Heichalot

Rabbi Ishmael said, “When I was 13 years old, my teacher Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah saw me in great distress, in great danger, and in great affliction. I would read a [passage from] Scripture one day, but forget it the next. . . . What did I do? When I saw that the Torah was not remaining with me, I took hold of myself and refrained from eating and drinking, from bathing and anointing. . . . I did not sing or laugh, nor did any song or melody leave my mouth. Rabbi Nechunya then approached me and took me from my father’s house, brought me into the Chamber of Hewn Stone, and had me adjure by the Great Seal that belongs to an angel, thus revealing Torah mysteries to me. Immediately my heart was illuminated by a great light, and my eyes looked upon the depth and breadth of Torah, and I no longer forgot anything. Everything that my ears heard from my teacher, and from the study of Torah, and all that I did with it, I never again forgot.” – Ma’aseh Merkava

The Beit HaMidrash of the Sanctuary

It is written, “Moshe took the Tent” (Shemot 33:7).

It is written, “The materials were enough for all the work, and more” (ibid. 36:7). Moshe said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Sovereign of the universe, we have completed the work of building the Sanctuary. What shall we do with what remains?”

The Holy One, blessed be He, replied, “Go make a Beit HaMidrash for the Sanctuary,” as it is written: “Moshe took the tent” – this being Moshe’s Beit HaMidrash.

– Midrash Hagadol

In the Light of the Parsha

Moshe’s Kindness

When the Children of Israel made the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: “Go, descend” (Shemot 32:7). Here the Sages say: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: ‘Moshe, descend from your greatness. Have I given you greatness other than for the sake of Israel? Now that Israel has sinned, what do you need with greatness?’ ” (Berachot 32a). They also say that Moshe was judged by the Celestial Court at that time (Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 22), meaning that prior to the end of these 40 days, he was judged by Hashem, Who made him descend from his greatness. Moshe’s learning was then interrupted, and he forgot what he had learned. Hence he was obligated to return to the mountain for another 40 days and 40 nights, in order to relearn what he had forgotten.

What did Moshe do during those 40 days? He immersed himself in prayer and asked that mercy be shown to the Children of Israel. At the same time, he reviewed what he had learned in order to rediscover the great understanding that he had obtained during the initial 40-day period. Since he completely devoted himself to the Children of Israel by praying for them at the same time as he studied, the skin of his face began to shine. Moshe’s first ascent was not similar to this, for at first he learned Torah from the mouth of G-d, which he repeated, and there was nothing in him other than Torah. During his second ascent, however, Moshe reviewed his learning while praying at the same time for the Holy One, blessed be He, not to destroy Israel. At that point Moshe was serving G-d and demonstrating kindness, since he devoted himself entirely to his people.

Not only that, but in the Mishnah we learn: “The world stands on three things: On Torah, the service [of G-d], and deeds of kindness” (Pirkei Avot 1:2). We learn these three things from Moshe: When he stood upon the mountain, Moshe studied Torah, prayed for the people, and was occupied with saving the Children of Israel from being destroyed by G-d’s anger. Can there be a greater act of kindness than this, to have given all that he had for his people, such that the Sages said: “Moshe implored – this teaches us that Moshe stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, until he wearied Him” (Berachot 32a; also the HaGaot of the Bach). The Sages also say (ibid.) that Moshe was ready to die for them. From here Shimon HaTzaddik learned of the three pillars upon which the world stands, for it was only due to Moshe that Hashem did not destroy His people.

Because Moshe spent the second period of 40 days engaged in this act of kindness, he merited many things: The skin of his face began to shine; the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “I have forgiven according to your word” (Bamidbar 14:20); and he obtained a day of forgiveness for all the generations. Not only that, but the second Tablets contained what the first Tablets did not, as the Sages have said: “[Moshe] began to feel remorseful for having broken the Tablets, but G-d reassured him, saying: ‘Do not grieve over the first Tablets. They only contained the Ten Commandments, but in the two Tablets that I am now about to give you, there will also be Halachah, Midrashim, and Aggadot. . . . Not only that, but you are now being told that I will forgive your sin’ ” (Shemot Rabba 46:1).

Prayer

In a village close to the city of Mezhibuzh, there lived a pious Jew who was guided by a fear of G-d. To earn a living, he was forced to dwell alone in this village, completely surrounded by non-Jews. Nevertheless, once every year, as soon as the month of Elul arrived, he would leave his tiny village and travel to Mezhibuzh, where the Baal Shem Tov lived. He would usually stay there until after Yom Kippur, and the Torah which he was infused with during that time nourished his soul for the rest of the year.

This man had an only son, but he didn't give him any satisfaction. In fact the boy seemed to be born with a closed mind, for he wasn't receptive to learning. He couldn't even learn the alphabet.

Out of desperation, the man would only entrust his son with simple tasks. The boy therefore became a shepherd, caring for animals and always carrying a whistle around his neck, which he used to gather the flock.

A few years passed, until his son reached the age of 13. For his Bar Mitzvah, the man decided to do something unusual: His son, now a young man, would accompany him to Mezhibuzh! The light that radiated from there could perhaps pierce the shell that covered his soul.

Hence that is precisely what he did. However the adolescent was not impressed. He even refused to go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, and he wasted his time paying games. Nevertheless, on Yom Kippur he finally agreed to accompany his father to synagogue.

Upon entering this place of prayer, the boy was completely stunned: The hall was packed with Jews dressed in white and standing, each at his own place, and swaying tirelessly in prayer. From time to time, they would raise their voices, weep, and cry out. Emotions began to arise in him. He took a seat and remained there in silence, his eyes wide open, completely absorbed by what was happening around him. He sat like this for hours, his heart filled with a strange feeling that he himself didn't understand. He didn't know how to deal with the emotional tension that was sweeping over him.

Unable to bear it any longer, he decided to reach for his whistle, which he had never been able to part with. Indeed, whenever he was in the field and felt anxious for any reason, he would blow his whistle in order to calm down. However his father, seeing what he was about to do, prevented him from taking hold of this forbidden object.

For long hours, the young man felt trapped in a whirlwind of indescribable emotions, which he tried to contain. It then came time for Neila, at which point the emotions in synagogue became tangible. The faithful observed their Rav, the Baal Shem Tov, who seemed unable to open the gates of Divine mercy. They were all seized by a sense of foreboding that was growing ever larger. Then suddenly, unable to control himself, the young man gave free reign to his emotions, quickly taking out the whistle

from his pocket and shattering the atmosphere in the hall with the grating and prolonged sounds of his whistling. The congregants were stunned, and the poor man, ashamed, began to tussle with his son as he tried to remove the whistle from his hands. The Baal Shem Tov then brushed his tallit behind him, signaling to the man that he should leave his son alone.

The chassidim recount that at the end of Yom Kippur, the Baal Shem Tov confided in them: "Hashem answered the whistle of this young man more than the prayers of the tzaddikim and chassidim. This prayer, emitted by his whistle, also shattered the Heavens and opened the gates of Divine mercy."

Supernatural Healing

During a dispute between the gaon Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz and representatives of the Church, a cardinal asked the Rav: "Why do you conclude the eighth blessing of the Amidah with the words, 'Who heals the sick of His people Israel'? You make it seem as if G-d only heals the sick of Israel. Yet the sick among the nations of the world also recover, so who heals them?"

Rabbi Yonatan replied, "The blessing of *refaeinu* [heal us], the eighth blessing of the Amidah, was instituted for the mitzvah of circumcision, which takes place on the eighth day of a baby's life. As our Sages write, 'What was their reason for mentioning healing in the eighth blessing? Rabbi Acha said: "Because circumcision, which requires healing, is set for the eighth day. It was therefore placed in the eighth blessing"' [Megillah 17b]. Hence it is clear that this concerns only the people of Israel, not the uncircumcised nations of the world."

The Real Reason

The cardinal was satisfied by this answer, but afterwards the Rav's disciples approached him and asked: "Did you actually give him the real reason?"

"No, not at all. It was only meant for the cardinal," he replied. "The real reason is the following: G-d established natural laws in the world that concern health, and which benefit all the nations of the world. Furthermore, we conclude the *Asher Yatzar* blessing with the words: 'Who heals all flesh.' On the other hand, healing for Jews may occur contrary to all the natural laws recognized by medicine. Jews may annul a decree or accelerate the process of normal healing. That's why we conclude our blessing with, 'Who heals the sick of His people Israel.'"

Guard Your Tongue!

Disparaging a Talmid Chacham

If a person disparages a talmid chacham, the transgression is far worse. In fact by speaking scornfully of him, a person prevents the community from serving Hashem, for people will say: "Why should we go ask him [the talmid chacham] to clarify an issue for us, since he is not qualified to render judgment?" Thus everyone will "build their own altar" [a reference to the days of the Judges, when people followed rules of their own making].

– Chafetz Chaim