

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שמיני

ויאמר משה זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' תעשו וירא אליכם כבוד ה'

“Moshe said: This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you” (9:6)

What is "this thing" that Moshe referred to? The Or HaChayim writes that this is tied to the previous posuk that speaks of Bnei Yisrael approaching "before Hashem" rather than "before the Mishkan." The fact that they came to the Mishkan is obvious. The posuk is telling us that they prepared themselves to come before Hashem on this special day. When Moshe saw this mental preparation and the awareness of Hashem that the people had, he told them that this was what Hashem wanted of them at all times in order to merit the Divine Presence among them. It is this principle of "I place Hashem before me constantly" that must form the foundation of every person's daily life. This is why the Rema begins his commentary on Shulchan Aruch with this idea. He writes that a person behaves differently in front of a king than he would at home. Therefore, one should remind himself constantly that he stands before Hashem, the King of Kings. In this way, he will always think of Hashem and dedicate his actions to His will, from the moment that he gets out of bed until he goes to sleep. It is said that while everyone believes that Hashem is with us wherever we go, some people think that Hashem is in the far corner of the room and facing the other way, while others feel that Hashem is right in front of them and staring at them. We should strive to bring ourselves closer to the latter feeling.

The Or HaChayim gives a second explanation. When the posuk says that they stood "before Hashem," it means that they stood directly in front of Hashem without any wall built by their sins. We have a direct connection to Hashem, but if we act improperly, we break this connection. They had done proper teshuva for the sin of the Golden Calf and had restored their connection with Hashem. Moshe stated that this repentance was what Hashem wanted of them in order that the Divine Presence should dwell among them.

This second explanation clears up a puzzling midrash. The midrash asks the same question as the Or HaChayim: What is "this thing" that Moshe referred to? The midrash answers that he referred to milah, circumcision. This is hard to understand. They had circumcised themselves one year earlier in Egypt and Chazal tell us that the Jews did not circumcise themselves in the wilderness. What does the midrash mean? The Or HaChayim explains that it refers to the circumcision of the heart, a reference to repentance. We should fully understand the ramifications of our sins. If we sin, we distance ourselves from our Father in Heaven. When we do teshuva and perfect ourselves, we are able to remove the wall that we have constructed.

ויאמר משה אל אהרן קרב אל המזבח ועשה את חטאתך ואת עלתך וכפר בעדך ובעד העם ועשה את קרבן העם וכפר בעדם כאשר צוה ה' את משה

“Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your burnt-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded” (9:7)

Why were Aharon's sacrifices an atonement for both himself and the whole nation? Didn't the people have their own sacrifices? The Or HaChayim answers that Aharon's sacrifices atoned for his involvement with the sin of the Golden Calf. They served to atone for both Aharon and the people because both were held responsible for Aharon's wrongdoing. One who causes someone else to sin shares the burden of responsibility with the one who committed the act. Since the people had bullied Aharon into helping them, they needed atonement for his sin too.

This is a powerful message that we must take to heart. There are many sins that involve many people and one should not think that he is free of guilt as long as he did not actually do anything. One common example is loshon hora, gossip. Loshon hora always has an accomplice. When one listens to loshon hora, he sins by listening to it, but he also shares in the responsibility of the speaker. Without any listeners, there is nobody to tell gossip to. Another common example to avoid is inciting anger. We should not try to rile people up in an effort to get them angry. Those who cause a sin are also responsible.

ויאמר משה אל אהרן קרב אל המזבח ועשה את חטאתך ואת עלתך וכפר בעדך ובעד העם ועשה את קרבן

העם וכפר בעדם כאשר צוה ה' את משה

“Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your burnt-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded” (9:7)

The Daas Zekainim writes that as Aharon approached the altar, the Satan showed him an image of a calf to remind him of the sin that he had committed. This is why Moshe had to encourage him to continue and to bring the sacrifices. The Satan tries to convince people to see things that are not there in order to prevent them from doing the right thing. Even today, the Satan still comes to us and makes things appear to us in a distorted fashion. We have to be ready for him and not allow ourselves to be fooled.

The Satan came to Aharon at the dedication of the Mishkan, one of the most momentous occasions in the desert, in order to prevent the Divine Presence from resting among the Bnei Yisrael. We find that the Satan frequents important occasions. Chazal tell us that a greater person faces tougher tests from the Satan. Similarly, important occasions draw a heavier challenge from the Satan. We should not allow arguments to get in the way of our happy occasions. In fact, a wedding is very similar to the dedication of the Mishkan because it also brings the Divine Presence down to this world, as Chazal tell us that a union between a man and a woman can bring the Divine Presence to dwell among them. We should realize that it is the Satan attempting to disrupt our simcha and we should prepare ourselves beforehand to be ready for him.

ויקרב אהרן אל המזבח וישחט את עגל החטאת אשר לו

“Aharon came near to the altar and slaughtered the sin-offering calf that was his” (9:8)

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel translates this posuk: "Aharon approached the altar quickly." Even though Aharon was initially apprehensive because he believed himself unworthy, once Moshe reassured him and urged him to continue, he rushed to do his job. When a person is faced with a decision, he should carefully weigh his options and calculate which choice is the best one. However, once he has ascertained the correct path to follow, he should disregard his initial uncertainty and act upon his decision quickly. Doubting previous decisions can only harm a person and cannot help. One must have confidence that he is doing the right thing and not question his original decision. Once the right path becomes apparent, he should follow it without delay.

ואת החסידה האנפה למינה ואת הדוכיפת ואת העטלף

“The chasida, the anafa according to its kind, the duchifas, and the ataleif” (11:19)

The chasida, generally identified as the stork, is called “chasida” because it acts kindly and does “chesed” toward its friends. If this is so, asks the Chiddushei HaRim, why is this bird not kosher if it is so virtuous? The answer is that it only deals kindly with its friends but not with anyone else. We can learn an important lesson from this thought. We should not restrict our generosity to our cliques and our small circle of friends. We should be willing to help all Jews from all walks of life and from all over and not limit our acts of kindness.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann