



Parashat Shemini 5771 - #181

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Ha-Rav Aviner is set to publish a variety of new books in Hebrew.

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1. Zemiroth Shabbat and the Shabbat Table (B"H – within a month)
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3. Commentary to the Rambam's Introduction to the Mishnah

On the Parashah...

Shemini: Dedication of the Mikdash

The Mikdash/Mishkan is the site where the Nation of Israel meets G-d. Its function is dual: it is the place where G-d comes to us, revealing Himself to us as a Nation, and the place where we come to G-d, serving Him there as His People. (see Parashat Tzav. Rambam, Hilchot Beit Ha-Bechira 1:1).

The first aspect of this revelation is exalted, abstract and objective. When the Divine Presence "descends" to this world, it undergoes extreme humiliation and diminution (Orot HaTeshuva 11:4). Our service may be viewed as a construction of "tools" which enable us to experience the Divine Presence, and to raise "this-worldliness" back up to the level of G-dliness. It is as if the Divine Light is "primary," and human light is "reflected". The Holy One lowers a ladder from Heaven to Earth, and we climb it and meet Him as He descends that same ladder.

We achieve this revelation through the Mikdash: through the service of the Shewbread and the Menora – which represent our national economy and culture (see Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi, Kuzari 2:26). The service in the Mikdash encompasses all spheres of human endeavor. The workers are the Cohanim, who both represent and are part of the Nation of Israel. This may be

compared to a hand that both works for and is a part of one's body. Credit for work done is bestowed on the person, not to the hand.

In this week's Parashah, after all of the preparations described in the preceding Torah portions, we are finally ready to dedicate the Mishkan. The dedication takes the form of seven days of service by the Cohanim, which lead up to the revelation of the Divine Presence. The Hebrew word for dedication - Chanuka - comes from the same root as that for education - Chinuch. The way to educate the Nation to serve G-d is through performing the service.

And then, suddenly, as the Mishkan is being dedicated, something happens: Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, are killed. The world is only straight and simple to a drunk; we who are sober see that one crisis follows another (see Mishlei 23:31 and Yoma 75a). Birth itself is the first crisis for each individual (see Nidda 31a).

Indeed, the prototype of all crises is the Creation of the world, which begins "without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep." (Bereshit 1:2) All succeeding crises in this world are a result of the terrible descent from eternity and infinity to "formlessness and void."

The world is gradually heading towards perfection, and each crisis it undergoes constitutes an essential, integral part of reality. Of course, each individual is responsible for his own personal sins and imperfections, but in a world that is imperfect, such crises are unavoidable: "There is no saint in the world who does only good and never sins." (see Orot Ha-Teshuva 5:6)

According to the Gemara in Eiruvin (63a), Nadav and Avihu sinned by introducing humanly lit fire into the Sanctuary, "a strange fire which He had not commanded them." (Vayikra 10:1) Fire represents energy - the power behind all human spiritual and physical action. Although their motivation was to serve G-d, their energy was not directed into the correct channels. The way that they chose to connect to G-d was not one that G-d had commanded. Therefore, it was doomed to failure. The crisis of Nadav and Avihu thus teaches us how to relate to sanctity: Knowledge of the Absolute can only be achieved by our absolute faithfulness to the ways of the Torah.

The tragedy of Nadav and Avihu also teaches us how to react to crises. The philosophy of Judaism is not one of despair, but of hope. It is incumbent upon Man to overcome crises, and to utilize them as the mechanism that enables him to rise to higher spiritual levels. The fact that no words could explain what was made so vividly clear by their tragedy is reflected in Aharon's reaction. "And Aharon was silent." (Vayikra 10:3) By internalizing this lesson, Aaron was uplifted, and was privileged to experience prophecy on a higher level than previously (Rashi *ibid.*).

Rav Aviner on... I am a social worker

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Tzav 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

[At present, there is a nationwide strike of social workers in Israel]

I am a social worker. And I am proud of it. With all due humility, I am proud. It is hard work, but I love it. Already as a young girl I wanted to work in this field, because I love to help people. It's my nature. Therefore, even though it's hard for me, I go on. I come home burdened with all the troubles I heard during the day, and I am drawn into those troubles.

Sometimes I succeed in helping, and sometimes not. Sometimes people yell at me because I don't give them the money they demand. They think I'm an inconsumable gold mine. Sometimes they just yell at me and insult me for the heck of it, because their lives are hard, and they use me as a punching bag. Sometimes they even threaten to beat me or kill me. And I go on, because I love them, because I love to help. I work hours upon hours, even without compensation, because I can't abandon people suffering hardships. I use my own car and I pay all my own expenses except gas. It's just something I have to do.

It hurts me that I receive a minuscule salary of 4000 shekels a month for full-time work. I have girlfriends who earn even less -- 3500 shekels -- and even less than that too. My boss, who has many degrees, a high government ranking, and various pay increments, barely earns 6000 shekels. It hurts me.

I'm treating a girl who wants to kill herself. I'm treating drug addicts, dozens of them. My caseload is full to the point of exhaustion. I'm collapsing. I run around from morning till night. Sometimes I don't have time to eat anything but a quick sandwich, and I've got a stomachache besides my other pains, because my clients lash out violently at me, but I go on. Sometimes I pour out my troubles to my mother about my minuscule salary, and then she smiles at me: What's the problem? Go to a social worker!

I hug women. I hug them fiercely. Sometimes I weep with them. Sometimes, after I've consoled them, and they stop crying, I keep on crying. But sometimes I'm up against a brick wall, until a girl agrees to open up before me, and that's harder for me than weeping. Thus, I have no tears left to cry over the fact that I earn so little.

God forbid, I'm not jealous of my younger sister who is in occupational therapist working full-time at 26 hours a week, while I work 40 hours. I'm just sad. Sometimes I don't sleep at night. I'm afraid that a murder will take place or some other tragedy with the responsibility falling on my narrow shoulders.

So you see why I don't have the strength to fight over my salary. By the way, when I said I received 4000 shekels before taxes, that isn't precise. Welfare pays part of that because I otherwise wouldn't earn enough. In other words, I myself am a social case who receives welfare money. That is really insulting! After all, I do my job properly. I studied hard, and I have very respectable degrees. That means that even if they raise my salary it will still stay the same -- it's just that the welfare money will be cancelled. That will certainly add to my self-respect, but it won't add to my pocket.

Sometimes I think heretical thoughts about quitting and finding other work. But my heart breaks over those broken families, the drug addicts and the abused people. I toil so hard and I don't always see results. Intellectually, I know that that isn't right, and that every kind word has a result, but I don't feel it. What are you going to do? I'm human also... I want satisfaction. I want to see results with my own eyes. And all this toil in exchange for such as a small remuneration. That's aggravating. But I go on, for how are all of my sad clients to blame?

Yes! I have decided to devote myself to the weak, the poverty-stricken. They are people too. But in our country, they have forgotten that I too am human. I've got the feeling that they're taking advantage of me. And it's not just a feeling. It's the truth. Certainly they're taking advantage of me. And I, with my good heart, agree to an unbearable burden and a salary of 4000 shekels before deductions.

So that's it. I love my job so much! It's my mission. I don't know how I've got the courage to strike. I surprise myself. Sometimes I remember all those people who need me and miss me and my heart breaks. But good and wise people are encouraging me, "Keep up the strike!" and, "Good for you! Why did you wait so long, you goodhearted people." Don't think money

is all that interests me in life. It's just not pleasant for me that my parents have to help me. And also I'm getting worn down. It's a lucky thing that I'm a bit of a social worker for myself, constantly teaching myself to be optimistic and to see the good, the cup that is half full, and not to sink into sorrowful thoughts. That's my comfort: that compared to those families in distress that I deal with, I'm in good shape. All the same, it's no consolation.

With all of my optimism, I hope the day never comes when I break down. With all the best intentions, my family is growing, and we need an income, and as I already said, I don't enjoy taking from my parents. But I know I will keep on going, because what will happen to all the battered and abused women, rape victims, the victims of harassment and suffering -- and all the others, and all the others still? Enough! I've got to stop digging away at myself with all of these thoughts! The more I think, the more torn I am.

And altogether, this is a strange strike, which doesn't apply to emergency cases. Every day I've got an emergency case, sometimes in mid-meal, or in mid-sleep, or while I'm with my family.... I'm going crazy from the workload. So I am insulted that my work is not appreciated. Yes, I am truly insulted. It hurts me to the core. The issue is both the money and the insults. It's so hard for me to strike. I'm really not that way. It tears me up inside, and yet I go on striking.

Just don't get me wrong. I'm a woman, and my entire talk so far has been about female social workers, but obviously there are male social workers too, and they are wonderful, really wonderful. They deserve so much admiration for having entered our field... Oops. I didn't really mean that. Certainly this is everybody's field.

And in conclusion, a drop of consolation: My daughter, 16 years old, told me: "Mom, when I grow up, I want to be a social worker like you..."

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #44-45

[adapted by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

#44

In the third paragraph of Shema, we have five important themes. First, we have the Mitzvah of Tzitzit. This is a mitzvah we can do throughout the day, and that reminds us of all the other Mitzvot. Second, we are reminded about our being freed from Egypt. Third, we again accept the Mitzvot as the Tzitzit are to remind us of all of them. Fourth, we learn not to follow our hearts to bad and evil ideas. Fifth, we learn not to go after our eyes and give in to our evil inclination to do bad things. Because of these crucial ideas, we say this Parasha twice a day as part of Kriyat Shema.

#45

After we say Kriyat Shema we say "Emet" - It's true, correct, straight, beloved, wonderful, good, awesome, perfect and beautiful. To what is this referring? Everything that we have read before in the Kriyat Shema. We accept it and believe it forever. We say: "He is G-d of the world forever". He is involved in this world and cares about us. That's again accepting the Yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. We say that someone is happy when they listen to His Mitzvot. That is again accepting the Yoke of the Mitzvot. We say that we were freed from Egypt by Him. Notice that just like in the Haggada, we aren't saying our ancestors were freed. We were freed. So everything we have said in Shema, we state that it is true now and it is true forever.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Equality between Men and Women

Question: Some say that women were once inferior, but now they are equal and many Halachot should therefore be changed.

Answer: They were never inferior, and no Halachah needs to change.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

How are you, my sweet baby?

"How are you, my sweet baby?" It is not clear that your baby understands all of the words you are saying, but he understands a part of them. He also understands the intonation and the body language.

"I love you" – he certainly understands, especially when it is accompanied by a smile.

"One second and I will come to nurse you" – he also understands this on condition it is said with a truly pleasant tone and not in frustration.

"It is time for you to go to sleep, honey" – it is clear, since you are putting him in bed.

"Blessed are You, Hashem... who brings forth bread from the earth" – he sees his father and mother blessing Hashem with seriousness and a feeling of holiness before eating, and this prepares him for the idea that a Divine Being is above.

When he sees that his parents speak to one another in love, fraternity, peace and friendship, it purifies his world and builds it.

But if he sees his parents speaking angrily to one another – his world is destroyed.

This is horrible.

Remember: this little one is not deaf or blind. He hears everything and sees everything.

May his house be filled with goodness and blessing.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet



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