

פרשת ויקהל-פקודי

Based on Harav Menachem Azoulay's "Ohr Ha'Emunah"

"וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל... (לה, א)"

Reb Moishe of Pshevorsk taught that Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the *Beis Hamikdash* was eventually going to be destroyed due to the sin of baseless hatred; therefore, he preceded the building of the *Mishkan* with the term **וַיִּקְהַל** - "and he assembled." Moshe Rabbeinu hinted to the Jewish people that assembling, being unified and maintaining peace, is a preconditioning to the building of the *Mishkan*.

We build *Mishkans*, both the communal *Mishkan* and the *Mishkan* within each of our own hearts. How do we build these *Mishkans*?

"כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה" (לט, מב)

A *Mishkan* is built with **מסירות נפש** - giving of one's self, risking one's life. A Jew starts each day with the story of Yitzchok being bound as a sacrifice (in *korbanos*). A Jew is prepared to die so as not to give up his *Yiddishkeit*. The icon of the *Akeidah* is the knife (המאכלת). *Chazal* ask why we refer to the knife as a **מאכלת**. The word **מאכלת** comes from the same root as the word for "eat" (אכל). The Jewish people have been "eating" the rewards of the *Akeidah* through the generations. In the essence of every Jewish soul there is an extremely strong desire for Hashem. That desire is a result of being children of Yitzchok Avinu who was bound on an altar with the complete and pure will to do Hashem's will.

A Jew must be prepared to do a bit more than he believes he is capable of. When a Jew feels tired, exhausted, like he's done, he has nothing left, he starts again. With his little remaining strength, he starts and Hashem helps him finish.

In today's world, we are generally not asked to jump into a furnace, to sacrifice our lives for Hashem. What is expected of us? One more song, one more smile, some additional honor and respect towards our spouses even though we're not in the mood, another kind word to a friend or a neighbor, a little more time spent on *tefillah* even though we have so much to do today, to withhold that comment that we're itching to make, to fight off sleep for a few extra minutes in order to concentrate a bit more intently on *krias shema*. These little extras, when a person reaches beyond his limitations, the little extra effort, when he no longer has the strength but finds a drop more, bring a person to greatness that he could never have expected.

The foundation and the secret of *Chassidus* is to actually forget ourselves, to forget our desires, to consider at all times whether our desires are in sync with Hashem's will. What does Hashem want? The natural inclination of every person is to grow, to feel accomplished. However, real growth is being non-existent, knowing that there is nothing except for Hashem. Being a simple Jew means doing many things but not thinking that "you" are doing anything. Hashem told Avrohom Avinu to go, leave everything, throw away your senses and go where I send you. We must constantly go, advance, make progress, be in motion, never standing still. We must guard the bond, our attachment to Hashem.

Hashem is not interested in winners - He measures success differently. He wants Jews who persist, who

invest, who are determined, not those who give up. Hashem wants a Jew who falls to get up and start anew. We are not measured by the number of *dafim* of *gemara* that we have completed, we are measured by the number of hours that we sat and learned. Our talent is not important because our talents are gifts that were given to us, we did not earn them. Perseverance and determination are what count. As the Vilna Gaon said, "the stubborn will succeed."

Without a doubt, self-sacrifice (מסירות נפש) is the highest level in *Yiddishkeit*. When a person acts with self-sacrifice he helps prayers to be accepted, judgments to be sweetened and miracles to occur.

We tend to imagine the concept of self-sacrifice as being limited to holy people, exceptional individuals. Rebbe Nachman corrects us with the following teaching: Every Jew exhibits devotion and self-sacrifice every single day and every single hour. For example, when we *daven* we work hard and battle greatly with distracting thoughts and confusion. A person stand in *tefillah*, his mind and heart are a turbulent tangle of thoughts and confusion. He fights valiantly to say the words of the prayers and think of their meaning, struggling and trying to concentrate. He is successful for a line or two and then drifts back into a whirlwind of thoughts. He gets frustrated and is disappointed but he does not give up. He finishes *davening* with an unpleasant sense of missed opportunity, but who can imagine the satisfaction and pleasure that Hashem has from such prayer. As Rebbe Nachman said, when a person wants to pray but he is unable to, he becomes confused and he must struggle greatly, even if he did not merit to pray properly, the struggle and toil that he exhausted himself with all of his strength and self-sacrifice to pray properly become like sacrifices themselves. The exertion itself becomes a sacrifice.

The phrase "כאשר ציוה ה' את משה" - "as Hashem commanded Moshe" appears eighteen times in *Parshas Pikudei*. "Exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe, so did the Jewish people" and "We will do and we will listen" - these are the mottos of the Jewish people. Every time that we do Hashem's will, we reconnect anew. A Jew blesses every *mitzvah* with the term "אשר קידשנו במצוותיו וציוונו" - "that you sanctified us with your commandments and commanded us." A son who meticulously follows his father's will provides his father with tremendous satisfaction.

"כָּל נְדִיב לְבוּ יְבִיאֶה אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה'" (לה, ה)

The *Mishkan* must be built with heart, the entire heart. It's not enough to merely do acts of kindness, we must reach the level of loving to do kindness. To reach the heart, we must start with our thoughts.

A person's entire job in this world is to escape negative thinking and acquire positive thoughts. The answer to life is to think positively. To think about Hashem, to think about one's spouse, to think about one's parents, to think about one's neighbors. How can I cheer them up? How can I give Hashem some satisfaction? Every time we transform a negative thought into a positive one, each time we separate ourselves from a bad thought, we draw abundance into our lives. Holiness demands that we want everyone to have only good and that no one should be missing anything in their lives. Impurity demands that we focus only on ourselves, on our own success and our own pleasure.

We must learn forgiveness from Hashem. The *pasuk* says, (לח, כא) "אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכָּן הָעֵדוּת" - these are the countings of the *Mishkan*, the *Mishkan* of testimony. What testimony is the *pasuk* referring to? It is the testimony that Hashem forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf. The very existence of the *Mishkan* testifies to Hashem's acceptance of us. It is an open declaration of

Hashem's affection for us. Immediately after we committed a horrible mistake and sin, Hashem is appeased and declares to the world that his love and affection for the Jewish people is not lost. He comes to rest His Presence among us.

Just as Hashem is appeased and forgives us, just as Hashem declares his love for us, so must we conduct ourselves towards other people. It appears as if someone hurt you, let it go, forgive. Think that what the person did was not intended to cause you harm, he meant well. Give him the benefit of the doubt, return to the love that you had for each other. Learn to forgo. That is the greatest wisdom. A person should be flexible, to give into what the other wants, to give in to what Hashem wants. A person should recognize that he is put in this world to help others, not to be stubborn. The more connected to the true source a person becomes, the easier it is to let go. A person who is disconnected from Hashem has difficulty conceding. He feels that he is losing by relinquishing his rights. In truth, he loses nothing, rather he receives many multiples of what he gave up.

Begin to think positively about others. Each Jew is amazing. Each Jew is righteous. Our initial reaction to another person is to assume that we are superior. Instead, think the opposite. Each Jew that I meet is greater than me. It's simple, it's basic. I know how little I really try. I know what goes on inside my own head. Why should I assume that someone else is like me? By nature, people take comfort in their disdain for others. Change that. Exchange joy for joy. Take joy not in the fact that you are superior to another Jew but in the fact that you are a Jew. Take joy in the knowledge that you will have a share in *Gan Eden*, I am a Jew, I have billions, I have a Father who bequeaths me billions. Consider that the other Jew, despite his tribulations, still learns and *davens*. If I had to overcome his trials and tribulations, who knows whether I would do anything. On the other hand, we must not despair in viewing others as superior to us. Even if I see him doing *mitzvos* in a better way than I do, that does not make my *mitzvos* worthless. What I do is also precious to Hashem.

The *Mishkan* is built with with generosity of the heart. We must put a lot of heart into our lives. We must inject our lives with a lot of love, encouragement and support. Children must constantly hear how successful they are. They must be praised often, but truthfully. Children recognize insincerity very quickly. Yelling, screaming and negative comments only help diffuse the anger of the parent, they do nothing for the good of the child. When a parent has a difficult situation with a child, the parent must sacrifice of himself and struggle and *daven* profusely from the depths of his heart. When a child sees what his parents do for him, he realizes that he is not alone, that his parents are with him. He realizes that the parents are not merely preaching but are struggling with him. That causes him to strengthen himself greatly. Constantly rebuking a child only serves to weaken the child.

This is true not just of children, this is true with all of our relationships, with our spouses, with our friends and neighbors, with everyone, most of all, with ourselves. If you want to *bemekarev* another Jew or encourage another Jew (including yourself), you can only do so by seeing the good in that Jew (including yourself), to use positive language, show him the value of the good you see within him (including yourself). This gives him (you) the ability to be happy with himself (yourself). This opens the heart. It is true that children need boundaries. The *gemara* tells us to push away with the left hand and draw close with the right hand. But, the primary tool is drawing close. Reward brings far greater results than punishment ever can. The less we rebuke and the more we show warmth the better the results. To do this we must inject a lot of heart into our lives.

It is critical for a Jew to connect his mind to his heart, so that they act as one. The heart is naturally lethargic. The distance between the mind and the heart is great. When a person praises Hashem, he

must do so with his entire heart. When he requests something from Hashem, he must request it with his entire heart, from the depths of his heart. If one fails to do so, G-d forbid, Hashem brings troubles to open the heart. Then, a person finds the time to talk to Hashem. Then, everything else fades away and we remember that we have a Father who loves us, a Father who can help, a Father for whom nothing is too difficult. Then, the tears flow freely and the words pour out and the heart opens. Hashem loves us so much that He wants to live with us. Hashem tells us, turn to me, ask of me and I will listen to your prayers. That is how a Jew lives - **with Hashem**. That's how we build a *Mishkan* - with, and only with, our hearts.

Have an awesome and uplifting Shabbos,

Dov

NOTICE: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the parsha sheet disseminated by Harav Menachem Azoulay Shlita and should not necessarily be viewed as an exact translation of the sheet or even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented. The sheet is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azoulay has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions, or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy it.

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