

The
CHASSIDIC
PERSPECTIVE
 with Reb Yoel Kahn



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SERVING THE EIBERSHTER IRRATIONALLY

BUILDING OUR MISHKAN

The whole of this week's *parsha*, *Teruma*, concerns the construction of the *Mishkan*: "They shall make Me a *mikdash* and I will dwell in their midst."

The Frierdiker Rebbe issued the *maamar* entitled *Basi LeGani* for the day of his *histalkus*, *Yud Shvat*, *Taf-Shin-Yud*, and on every *yahrzeit*, our Rebbe explained part of that *maamar*. Citing the *Midrash*, it describes how the *Eibershter* was initially in the heavens (*kivyachol*), until eventually He "came to His garden" – He descended to This World. As the *Midrash* teaches, this was either at the Giving of the Torah ("HaShem descended upon Har Sinai"), or at the construction of the *Mishkan* ("They shall make Me a *mikdash* and I will dwell in their midst"). The Rebbe explains: After Sinai the *Shechinah* abided in This World to a lesser degree, but mainly this took place when the *Mishkan* was built.

Now, the *Mishkan* exists not only on the physical level, but also on a *ruchniyusdiker* level. Thus *Chazal* point out that we would have expected the *possuk* to say, "and I will dwell in *it* (*besocho*)."
 Why, then, does it say "in **them**" (*besocham*)? To teach us that the *Shechinah* desires to dwell within **them** – within every single Yid: Every Yid is obligated to make of himself a Sanctuary in which the *Eibershter* can dwell. It goes without saying that every individual's *avoda* in building his personal *Mishkan* should follow the blueprint for the building of the physical *Mishkan*.

BREAKING OUT OF THE BOX

Of what material was the *Mishkan* made? Its vertical beams were made of *atzei shittim*, acacia wood. What does the name *shittim* signify? And what does it mean on a personal level? The Frierdiker Rebbe explains: The root of this name in *Lashon Hakodesh* means both **deviation** and **foolishness**.

These two meanings are linked to each other. There is a middle path, the conventional path that people follow – the rational path. Indeed, in this lies the superiority of man over beast. The link between the two meanings of *shittim* is thus obvious, for to **deviate** from the rational path, the middle path, is **foolish**. One can deviate to a path that is inferior to the middle path, or superior to it. That is, a person's conduct can be either below reason, or above it. The task of a Yid is to transform conduct that is beneath reason into conduct that is higher than reason. Conduct that is lower than reason needs no explanation. As the *Gemara* says, "No one

sins unless a spirit of foolishness enters him." But what is the meaning of conduct that is *higher* than reason? A person can do his *avoda* in an orderly manner, or in a manner that transcends orderly norms.

The Frierdiker Rebbe cites an example from the *Gemara* in *Kesubbos*: At weddings, R. Yehuda bar Ilai would twirl a sprig of myrtle as he danced before the *kalla*. So, too, Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak would juggle three twigs of myrtle as he danced. So eager were they to fulfill the *mitzva* of gladdening *chosson* and *kalla*, that they clowned in a manner that

was wildly unconventional. R. Zeira expressed his disapproval of the latter *amora*: "This venerable sage is embarrassing us," by making light of the respect due to *talmidei chachamim* through his undignified behavior. However, the *Gemara* records, when the same Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak passed away, "a pillar of fire appeared, separating him from everyone else." Seeing this, R. Zeira retracted his previous remark. His response is recorded in three versions: "The venerable sage has been well served by his sprig" (*shutisei* – his sprig of myrtle); "The venerable sage has been well served by his folly" (*shtusei* – because he clowned like a fool, to the

extent that R. Zeira actually criticized his antics); "The venerable sage has been well served by his spiritual lifestyle" (*shitasei* – his customary conduct). The Frierdiker Rebbe cites this *Gemara* as an example of unconventional conduct that is *higher* than reason.

WHEN NORMAL IS NOT ENOUGH

The Rebbe, our Rebbe, analyzes those three expressions, and explains the meaning of the pillar of fire. The Rebbe asks: Why should one need to serve the *Eibershter* in a superrational manner? What is lacking in *avoda* according to *seichel*, in which a *Yid* studies Torah and does his *mitzvos*, all in a reasonable and orderly and conventional manner? The first answer: If a person were to act consistently, in all worldly matters, according to *seichel*, there would be no need for *avoda* that transcends *seichel*. But what if someone acts not according to *seichel*? All would be fine if his animal soul was in fact just as a *Yiddisher nefesh habahamis* should be, which means (as in *Tanya*) that he desires only permitted things, not forbidden things. The trouble is that he acts in a way that is lower than *seichel*. In such a case, it is doubtful whether by orderly rational thinking ("Such conduct isn't appropriate for a *frum* Yid") he will be able to overpower his animal soul. It must be met in its own style: with the obstinacy of *am k'shei oref*, and with *mesirus nefesh*. That is, with tactics that are higher than *seichel*. That was the Rebbe's first answer to

the question: What is lacking in *avoda* according to *seichel*? That answer implied that if we could manage with *seichel* alone, we would need no more, but since we cannot manage that way, we must resort to *avoda* that transcends *seichel*.

The Rebbe now gives a second, deeper answer: As stated in *Tanya*, the infinite *Ein-Sof* is beyond the reach of mortal reason. We can understand only such a level of *Elokus* in which the *Eibershter* has veiled Himself via *tzimtzum*, in a way that can be filtered down into This World. The *Ein-Sof*, by contrast, which is higher than the world, we cannot understand at all. But a Yid needs to connect with the infinite *Ein-Sof*, with the *Eibershter* Himself, and not only with the lower levels of *Elokus* that are related to *seichel*. And this connection can be made only through simple *emunah*, which reaches higher than *seichel*.

In *Tehillim* we read: "I am a mere brute, and know not; before You I am like a beast. And I am always with You." The common meaning of these words is: *Even though* my mortal understanding is as limited as that of an animal, *nevertheless*, "I am always with You." The Alter Rebbe states the reverse: Precisely *because* my mortal understanding is limited, "I am always with You" – because my approach to Him and to His *avoda* is not rational, but leaps *over* mortal reason. The Rebbe points out that this approach of *shtus dikedushah* is thus not a default option. Rather, it is the route that enables finite man to connect with the *Eibershter* Himself.

TOTAL COMMITMENT

In plain language, what does this mean? Suppose a person has his fixed times to learn, say, half an hour morning and evening. One day he comes home from work exhausted, and he tells himself: "Anyway I won't get much out of it tonight. I'll go to sleep early; tomorrow I'll do double." Now, this thinking sounds quite reasonable. Nevertheless, a Yid's regular study times should be immune to any such calculations. His *kvius itim leTorah* must be as planned; they can't be otherwise. Plain reason wouldn't lead him to that conclusion. So why must he leap beyond reason? One answer: This time he'll allow himself one double session; the next time, who knows...? The second answer is deeper than that practical reason: If he wants to connect to the *Eibershter*, Who is beyond worldly limitations, he must conduct himself likewise: "I am a mere brute, and know not." Calculations are irrelevant. When the current challenge relates to studying Torah or doing a *mitzva*, no limits stand in his way.

This is what is hinted at in the story of the *Gemara*. When Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak passed away, a pillar of fire separated him from everyone else – literally, "from the whole world." Usually, when a *tzaddik* passes away, the Divine light is revealed to him more intensely than when his *neshama* was clothed in the body that had previously veiled that light.

Nevertheless, it is a light that is limited by worldly parameters. The Rebbe teaches: In this case, R. Zeira saw a pillar of fire separating this *tzaddik* from the whole world. He realized that this was a new and unique kind of light, which is not seen with other *tzaddikim*. What made it unique? This light transcended all worldly bounds. So R. Zeira wondered: What is it that generates such a light? Now, the revelations that a person experiences in *Gan Eden* mirror his *avoda* while he was down here. So R. Zeira realized that this venerable sage had indeed been well served by his uninhibited folly, by clowning like a fool, because gladdening bridal couples was a favorite *mitzva* of his. This was why the pillar of fire separated him from everyone else.

RISING ABOVE THE WORLD

The Rebbe takes this concept further. If a Yid simply lives his life according to the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Rebbe calls this "a worldly mode." True, his world is a *frumer* world, but his mindset is dictated by worldly conventions. In fact, his world may even be a *chassidisher* world, but his mindset is still worldly. Chassidus speaks of breaking out of one's own limitations. Whether regarding his study of Torah, or his *davening*, or his

tzedaka, he feels an urge to break free of his box. And from time to time he actually does just that. And in due course, when he is in *Gan Eden*, he is rewarded proportionately, but only at a particular time or situation. In the case of Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak, however, R. Zeira realized that for him, the pillar of fire was not a one-time reward. Rather, this was what constituted his *Gan Eden*. The revelation granted to him was like the pillar of fire that separated him from the whole world, because

this had always been his spiritual lifestyle – *shitasei*, his standard mode of conduct, as in the third version of R. Zeira's response. For him, leaping irrationally over the rational conventions of his peers was not unusual. It was his constant mode of conduct, and that was why his reward in *Gan Eden* was so exceptional.

Thus, just as the *Mishkan* was made of *atzei shittim*, so too, with the personal sanctuary of every Yid. His task is to transform the raw energy of the irrational *shtus* (foolishness) of the Other Side, which is lower than *seichel*, into *shtus dikedusha*, the superrational "foolishness" that enables him to build his own personal *Mishkan*, and then the *Eibershter* can say, "I will dwell within *them*."

"If he wants to connect to the *Eibershter*, Who is beyond worldly limitations, he must conduct himself likewise. Calculations are irrelevant."

מוקדש לחיזוק ההתקשרות לנשיאנו

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