

# The Path To Follow

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## Batei Midrashim As A Refuge Against The Evil Inclination

It is written, "These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony" (*Shemot* 38:21). Our Sages explain that the Sanctuary was a testimony for Israel that Hashem had forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. Moreover, the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 2) explains that until the sin of the golden calf, G-d dwelled among the Children of Israel. After the sin, however, His anger prevented Him from dwelling among them. The nations would then say that He was no longer returning to His people, and therefore to show the nations that this would not be the case, He told the Children of Israel: "Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8). In this way everyone would see that Hashem had forgiven Israel.

I have several questions concerning this incident. First of all, G-d told Moshe: "Let them make Me a Sanctuary" well before the sin of the golden calf. So how could it be that He ordered the building of a Sanctuary in order to forgive a sin that had not yet been committed? Secondly, the Sages (see Rabbeinu Ephraim) explain this verse to mean that Hashem would dwell "among them" – not in it – which is to say that G-d would reside within every Jew. Yet since G-d would reside among the Children of Israel, why was it necessary to build a Sanctuary?

The Sages have also taught, "When He said to him, 'Let them make Me a Sanctuary,' Moshe replied: 'Sovereign of the universe, heaven and all the heavens together are not enough to contain You. Yet You want us to build You a Sanctuary to dwell in?' Hashem replied, 'It will not be as you think. There will be twenty beams on the north, twenty beams on the south, eight on the west, and I will descend and dwell among you' " (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana* 2:10). This conversation is surprising, for Hashem's answer does not correspond to Moshe's question!

### One Cannot Go Without the Other

We have often taught that a person must always study Torah and pray in a Beit HaMidrash, and that such study cannot be compared to that of a person who studies by himself at home. Thus our Sages have said, "Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was an elder and a member of the yeshiva, as it is said: 'Abraham was an elder, advanced in age' [*Bereshith* 24:1]. Our father Isaac was an elder and a member of the yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was an elder and a member of the yeshiva" (*Yoma* 28b).

The question arises: Were our Patriarchs unable to study anywhere, such that they had to carry their Batei Midrashim with them? From here, however, we learn that a man must study in a Beit HaMidrash. Likewise Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai asked Vespasian for only one thing during the siege of Jerusalem: The city of Yavneh and its Sages. He did not just ask for the safety of the Sages, but also for the city itself, since Batei Midrashim were there and they were essential for assuring the continuity of the Torah among the Jewish people. Yavneh was indispensable because of its Batei Midrashim, and the Sages were also indispensable for what they represented. One cannot go without the other. It is a general principle that we can only study Torah in a Beit HaMidrash, for that is where the evil inclination leaves a person, and that is where he can overcome it. Thus it is said, "If that wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit HaMidrash" (*Sukkah* 52b).

Moreover, what a person studies will only stay with him if he studies in a Beit HaMidrash, as it is written: "A covenant has been sealed concerning what we learn in the Beit HaMidrash, such that it will not be quickly forgotten" (*Yerushalmi, Berachot* 5:1). I have often seen men enter a place of study without the intention of learning, but simply to look at what was happening there. Yet they eventually take a book in hand and sit down among the students. This can only be due to the sound of the Torah and its power, a sound that emerges from Batei Midrashim and conquers their evil inclination, lighting a spark in the heart of man so he begins to study.

Furthermore, the Jewish people can only defeat their enemies when their voice is heard in houses of prayer and Batei Midrashim. On the verse, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (*Bereshith* 27:22), our Sages have taught: "When the voice of Jacob rings out in synagogues, Esau has no hands [i.e., he is rendered powerless]" (*Bereshith Rabba* 65:20). Otherwise there are "the hands of Esau."

Thus Hashem said to Moshe, "Since the Children of Israel received the Torah and rid themselves of their impurity on Mount Sinai [*Shabbat* 146a], I will dwell among them, among each of them. Yet even if I dwell among them, please build a Sanctuary for Me that will serve as a Beit HaMidrash for the people, so they can study there and distance themselves from the evil inclination. When you said that the heavens cannot contain My glory, I did not tell you to build a dwelling place for Me, but rather a Sanctuary where the people can go to distance themselves from the evil inclination. The only place where the evil inclination leaves a person is the Beit HaMidrash, the place where the *Shechinah* dwells."

### The Sanctuary Testifies About Them

Since the Children of Israel would enter the Sanctuary and thereby distance the evil inclination from themselves, they would immediately merit for Hashem to dwell among them, within each of them.

Since Hashem asked the Children of Israel to frequent Batei Midrashim in order to distance themselves from their evil inclination before the sin of the golden calf, how much more did this apply after the sin of the golden calf! The evil inclination was present in force at that point, and it was essential for them to build a Sanctuary in order to distance themselves from it. It was also built in order for them to enter it and study there at all times, thus perpetuating the Torah within them and meriting the *Shechinah* among them.

As soon as the Sanctuary was built, the entire world realized that G-d once again dwelled among the Jewish people. It also proved that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven. The Sanctuary was therefore built so the Children of Israel could go there, drive away their evil inclination that had returned after the sin of the golden calf, and return to G-d. The situation can be compared to a father whose son joined a band of thieves. The son eventually became like them, standing by the roadside waiting to attack travelers. When word of this reached the father, he threw his son out of his house. At one point the son asked his father for forgiveness, but nobody knew if he would agree. Yet when the father built a house for his son and made certain to protect it against thieves, everyone realized that he had accepted his son's repentance and would love him as before.

## Concerning the Parsha

### The Sanctuary and the Human Body

The Rambam establishes a correlation between the Sanctuary and the human body. It is written, "Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8) – within each individual. How? The Rambam explains this correlation in a letter to his son Avraham:

My son Avraham, you must realize that the Sanctuary alludes to the human body.

The Holy Ark, the innermost part, alludes to the human heart, which is the innermost part of the body. The Ark was the main part of the Sanctuary because it contained the Tablets of the Covenant. Likewise the human heart is the main part of man's body. It is the source of his life, his knowledge and his understanding.

The wings of the Cherubim, which spread over the Ark, allude to the lungs. The lungs are over the heart like wings and they provide it with air.

The Table in the Sanctuary alludes to the human stomach. Just as food and drink are placed on the table, so the stomach is filled with food and drink that a person consumes, and from there it is distributed to the other parts of the body.

The Menorah in the Sanctuary alludes to the human mind. Just as the Menorah gives light, likewise the mind enlightens the entire body. Three stems went out from the Menorah on each side. These allude to the three limbs that extend from each side of the human body: The eye, the ear, and the hand. The mind directs these three parts of the body.

The incense altar alludes to the sense of smell.

The sacrificial altar alludes to the intestines, which digest the food that enters the body.

The veil of the Sanctuary alludes to the diaphragm, which is like a barrier between the parts of the body.

The basin alludes to the moisture and other liquids in the body.

The goatskin hangings allude to the skin that covers the body.

The beams of the Sanctuary allude to the ribs.

### Eighteen

Our Sages say that the expression "as Hashem commanded Moshe" appears 18 times in *Parsha Vayakhel*, corresponding to the 18 types of work that were performed in the Sanctuary. These 18 commands also allude to the 18 major vertebrae in the human spine. This teaches us that the main objective of the *Shechinah* was to dwell in man, not within the wood of the Sanctuary.

We draw the following lesson from this: Since the Sanctuary and its furnishings allude to man and his limbs, we must be very careful not to render our bodies impure by committing sins or even by thinking of committing them. Likewise we must be careful with the food that we eat, as we read in the verse: "Neither shall you make yourselves unclean with them, that you should become unclean by them" (*Vayikra* 11:43). Here our Sages have said, "Read not 'that you should become unclean,' but 'that you should become dull-hearted'" (*Yoma* 39a), for unclean foods obstruct the heart.

How much more should a person be careful not to render his heart

impure by allowing evil thoughts inside. This is because the heart corresponds to the Holy of Holies, which contained the Tablets of the Law, the Ark Cover, and the Cherubim. A person must purify and sanctify his heart so as not to let even the slightest trace of an evil thought, pride, or jealousy inside. His heart must yield before Hashem, just like the broken Tablets of the Law which were in the Ark. Finally, he must fill his heart with Torah and *mitzvot* in order for the *Shechinah* to dwell within him.

### The Words of the Sages

#### Convincing Yourself to Give

It is written, "Take from yourselves an offering for Hashem" (*Shemot* 35:5).

We may learn something from the precise language that the Torah uses in this verse.

Although the people were to "give" an offering, the verse actually employs the term "take"! In *Parsha Terumah* we also read, "Let them take for Me an offering" (*Shemot* 25:2). In that case, we may say that the command was given to the leaders or treasurers who were occupied with that *mitzvah*. Yet in this week's *parsha* we read: "Moshe said to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, saying: '... Take from yourselves....'" That is, the command was given to all the Children of Israel. In that case, from whom were they to "take"?

This very issue was raised by Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, who explained it with the help of the following account:

"I heard this story directly from a former yeshiva student, a description of a journey that Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (a teacher at the yeshiva) had to take in order to collect funds for the yeshiva. He traveled to Minsk, to the home of Reb Baruch Zeldovitz, a philanthropist who supported the yeshiva financially. The amount of money needed for the institution to survive was enormous, but Reb Baruch took it upon himself to collect it, during which time he let Rav Soloveitchik stay at his home and learn Torah. As the days passed, Rav Soloveitchik began to worry about things, but Reb Baruch told him that he already had half the money they needed. Satisfied with this response, Rav Soloveitchik returned to his learning. More time passed, and Reb Baruch announced that he had collected all the money needed. At that point Rav Soloveitchik returned to Volozhin in joy. One day he learned that all these funds had come from Reb Baruch's own pocket. Stunned, Rav Soloveitchik went to see Reb Baruch and asked: 'Why did you keep me in your home during that time? Why didn't you give me the entire amount right away?' He replied, 'Do you think it's so easy for a person to give such a large amount out of his own pocket? I had to work hard just to conquer my evil inclination and offer half the amount. Later on, I again fought with my evil inclination until I could offer the second half.'"

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin said that from here we learn that even when it comes to giving *tzedakah* from our own pocket, some part of us still resists giving. This is the meaning of, "Take from yourselves an offering for Hashem." Hashem rightly asked for a donation from everyone so the Sanctuary could be built from the generosity of each person, not from contributions requested by an outside source.

### Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky

This week marks the *yahrtzeit* of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, who was among the great Torah figures in American Jewish life. He was a genius in matters of Torah and known for his exceptional character traits. His personality radiated the light of Torah upon everyone around him.

The attribute of *emet* (truth) directed all of his steps. The principle of remaining faithful to the truth guided him throughout his long life, even when it meant that he had to pay a high price. In this regard, we shall recount some amazing and impressive incidents from his life.

During Passover, Reb Yaakov did not eat soaked *matzah*. This custom surprised many of his students, who knew that he came from a Lithuanian background where such a custom was not usually practiced. To their great surprise, Reb Yaakov explained that in his youth, he had studied at the famous Slabodka yeshiva. Because of the great distance between the yeshiva and the homes of the students, most of them did not return to their families for each holiday, but remained in Slabodka. "One year," Reb Yaakov said to them, "I also remained in Slabodka for Passover, and I was invited to eat the holiday meal at the home of one family. On the night of the Seder, I was served some soup, but I suddenly had a doubt about its *kashrut*. I didn't want to eat it, but I also didn't want to upset my kind hosts. I therefore didn't tell them why I was not going to eat it. Instead, I told them that I did not eat soaked *matzah*, and since there were *matzah* balls in the soup, I preferred not to eat it. My hosts understood my reasons." Reb Yaakov concluded his account by saying, "So that no lie would emerge from my lips, I took it upon myself to never again eat soaked *matzah* on Passover."

#### He Never Imagined It!

During his life, Reb Yaakov never used to put on Rabbeinu Tam *tefillin*, only Rashi *tefillin*. In his advanced years, however, he asked his son to check the Rabbeinu Tam *tefillin* that he had in the house, for he wanted to start wearing them regularly.

Responding to the stunned look of his son, Reb Yaakov explained that many years earlier, a Jew had approached him and asked why he did not wear Rabbeinu Tam *tefillin*. He told him that this was not a custom among Lithuanian rabbis. Not satisfied with this answer, the man continued to question him: "The Chafetz Chaim – who is also Lithuanian and among the great *poskim* – wears Rabbeinu Tam *tefillin*!" Reb Yaakov explained to his son that in order for the man to stop pestering him, he told him that when he reached the age of the Chafetz Chaim (who was 90 years old at the time), he would also put on Rabbeinu Tam *tefillin*! Reb Yaakov never imagined that he would live so long, and yet here he was, close to 90 years old. He therefore felt obligated to start wearing them, just as he said he would some 50 years earlier!

#### In Their Honor

There was nothing that underlined Reb Yaakov's modesty and humility as much as his distaste for people rising whenever he entered the Beit HaMidrash or some other place. One time, it happened that he actually wanted people to rise for him!

This is what happened: Reb Yaakov was at the annual meeting of *Agudath Israel of America*. Accompanying him was Rav Shneur Kotler *Zatzal*, who suggested that they enter the hall through a side door in order to prevent the audience from rising in their honor. Imagine Rav Shneur Kotler's shock when he heard Reb Yaakov refusing his suggestion. Reb Yaakov explained, "Our wives are also in the hall,

and they take great pleasure in seeing people rise in our honor. Let us do this for them, for this will ease the constant burden that rests upon their shoulders throughout the year, when people come to our homes."

The book *Reb Yaakov* by Yonason Rosenblum describes the mutual concerns that Reb Yaakov and his wife had for one another, even when it consisted of apparently mundane matters.

When the Rebbetzin would go to buy groceries, Reb Yaakov would listen carefully for the sounds of the car when she returned from the market. As soon as he heard the car pulling into the driveway, the old Rosh Yeshiva would hurry out to help her carry the groceries.

On the eve of one Sukkot, Reb Yaakov went outside to verify the *sukkah* so that everything was ready for the holiday. He mistakenly allowed the door to close behind him, and since it did not have an exterior handle, he could not open it from outside. Reaching for the doorbell, he suddenly stopped and thought, "Why should I bother my wife?" He then went around to the front and entered through the front door, which was unlocked.

#### Closer to the Ape

Reb Yaakov once found himself on a long airplane flight seated next to Yeruham Meshel, who at the time was the General Secretary of the *Histadrut* (Israeli Labor Federation). They became acquainted and had a long conversation on the flight, during which time Reb Yaakov's children and grandchildren often came to see if he needed anything. Upon landing, Yeruham Meshel expressed his admiration for the respect that his children and grandchildren had shown for him. Meshel admitted that his own children and grandchildren did not show him anywhere near such respect. With a smile on his face, Reb Yaakov explained to him that the difference stemmed from the way they saw life: "You believe in Darwin's theory, which holds that man comes from the ape. In the eyes of your children, you are closer by one generation to their ancestor, the ape, whereas they are more advanced and closer to the image of man, noble and deserving of respect. As opposed to this, we believe that Adam, the first man, was a creation of G-d. In the eyes of my children, I belong to a generation that is closer to Adam than they are. I am therefore greater than them and deserve their respect."

## Guarde Your Tongue

### A Mitzvah to Judge Favorably

We have learned from our Sages that the Torah forbids us from believing negative remarks that have been made about a person. The same applies even if we know that such remarks are true and may be interpreted in a positive way, but the speaker is interpreting them in a negative way and therefore criticizing the person in question. It is a *mitzvah* for the listener to judge the person favorably.

One who fails to do this, and who agrees with such negative remarks, thereby transgresses the obligation to "judge your fellow favorably." He is also included among those who are called "acceptors of *Lashon Harah*."

– Chafetz Chaim

### Exactly as Hashem Demands

It is written, "Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded" (*Shemot* 35:10).

In his book *Pardes Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Patsanovski explains this verse in the following way: "A man's greatest wisdom lies in not being too clever, but in doing exactly what Hashem asks of him, neither more nor less."

This is what the verse is alluding to here: "Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded" – without adding a thing.

### Knocking at the Door

It is written, "To devise designs; to work with gold, silver, and copper" (*Shemot* 35:32).

The Midrash explains that "gold" refers to Abraham, "silver" refers to Isaac, and "copper" refers to Jacob. While the craftsmen were fashioning sacred objects from what the people brought to the Sanctuary, they said the names of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob aloud. As a result, they awakened a love for this *mitzvah* in the hearts of the Children of Israel.

In regards to this subject, it is said that in the time of Rav Avraham Heschel of Apt, there was a *shamash* who would go to wake people up for prayer. When this *shamash* knocked at the Rav's door, he awakened in him such a love for Hashem that he thought the *shamash* must be one of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim* of the generation. The *tzaddik* turned to the *shamash* and asked, "What were you thinking of when you knocked at my door?" The *shamash* replied, "I received a tradition from my father, which he received from his father, that we must think of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when knocking at the door."

### Great Efforts

It is written, "Everyone who offered a portion of silver and copper brought...and everyone with whom there was *shittim* wood for any work of the service brought" (*Shemot* 35:24).

This is surprising, for why is the *shittim* wood mentioned separately in this verse? Why does the verse not state, "Everyone who offered a portion of silver, copper, and *shittim* wood brought"? Furthermore, why is the expression "for any work of the service" mentioned only in regards to the *shittim* wood? In his book *Ben Ish Hai*, Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad answers these questions by noting that in the Midrash our Sages ask where the Children of Israel could have obtained *shittim* wood in the desert. The answer is that Jacob had told them to plant *shittim* trees in the land of Goshen, and when they left Egypt they took the wood of these trees with them. According to this explanation, those who carried the wood from the time they left Egypt had worked much harder, a hundred times harder, than those who offered their gold, silver, or copper. Because of the effort they made in carrying this wood, Hashem regarded their offering as if they had brought gold, silver, and every other material, and as such they would be greatly rewarded. Hence the verse signifies: "Everyone with whom there was *shittim* wood," and had therefore made a great effort, was considered to have brought everything.

### Like a Pomegranate

It is written, "On the robe's hem they made pomegranates of turquoise" (*Shemot* 39:24).

The *Yalkut Shimoni* states that these pomegranates atoned for the transgressions of the sinners among the Children of Israel, as mentioned in the Gemara: "It is said in Scripture, '*Rakatech* [your cheeks] are like a slice of pomegranate' [*Shir HaShirim* 6:7]. ... Read not *rakatech*, but *rekanim* [the empty ones] – even the worthless among you are filled with *mitzvot* as a pomegranate [is filled with seeds]" (*Eruvin* 19a).

This is why bells were placed within these pomegranates, alluding to the sinners among the Children of Israel. As soon as they act in a positive way or perform a *mitzvah*, they cause a great commotion, just like a single coin in a jug makes a loud noise.

### The Hall of Women's Mirrors

It is written, "He made the copper basin and its base of copper from the mirrors of the assembled [women]" (*Shemot* 38:8).

When Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of the *tzaddik* Rabbi Shalom of Belz, reached the age of marriage, his father suggested that he marry the granddaughter of Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt. The entire *shidduch* was arranged without his son or the family knowing about it, such that they didn't even have a chance to see the young woman's face.

The mother of Rabbi Yehoshua, who was not satisfied until she could at least meet the young woman, as is customary, turned to her husband and asked: "How can you make a *shidduch* even before seeing the girl?"

Her husband gave her a tactful reply: "In Heaven there is a special place called 'The Hall of Women's Mirrors.' Inscribed in that hall are the names of all the young wholesome women of Israel. There I saw the name of that girl, and I found her appropriate for our son."

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Why Couldn't Moshe Enter the Sanctuary?

It is written, "Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it and the glory of Hashem filled the Sanctuary" (*Shemot* 40:35).

This is surprising, for Moshe had spent three periods of 40 days and 40 nights at the top of the mountain and was not afraid. Furthermore, our Sages have said: "When Moshe ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the universe, what business has one born of woman among us?' He said to them, 'He has come to receive the Torah.' They said to Him, 'That secret treasure, which was hidden by You for 974 generations before the world was created, You wish to give to flesh and blood? ...' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: 'Give them an answer!' Moshe replied, 'Sovereign of the universe, I am afraid that they will consume me with the breath of their mouths.' He said to him, 'Hold on to the Throne of Glory'...as it is said, 'He put walls around the Throne. He spread out His cloud over it' [*Job* 26:9]" (*Shabbat* 88b).

This means that G-d covered Moshe with sanctity, which enabled him to answer the angels.

As long as Moshe was in Heaven, where there was no evil inclination, he was not afraid of sinning. Yet when he returned below, he was afraid of approaching Hashem's presence. He was afraid that at that point, he could have a negative thought or some taint of sin.

From here we learn just how careful we must be not to have a light-minded attitude when in synagogue, for the presence of Hashem is there at all times.

If Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because he was afraid of sin, how much more should we act in a way that is devoid of all light-mindedness in the presence of the *Shechinah*.