

EVOKING THE DESTRUCTION AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE SANCTUARY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony, which were counted at Moshe's command. The labor of the Levites was under the authority of Itamar, son of Aaron the kohen" (Shemot 38:21).

At first glance, we may ask why the Torah found it necessary to mention the term "Sanctuary" twice in the same verse. Rashi views this repetition as an allusion to the two Temples that would be destroyed over the course of the generations, for the Jewish people did not strive to respect the laws and precepts they had received during their journeys in the desert and at the giving of the Torah. Since the Children of Israel scorned His mitzvot, Hashem poured out His anger upon wood and stone by destroying both Temples. Nevertheless, the Rebbe of Sanz asks why it was precisely at this exalted time, as Israel was inaugurating the Sanctuary and was at the pinnacle of joy, that the Torah evoked the destruction of both Temples, thus diminishing the joy of the people. Indeed, this message could have been transmitted to the Children of Israel at a more appropriate time! Why announce the future destruction of two Temples and mar the joy of the people while they were immersed in such intense rejoicing? To answer this question, let us first underline that the term Mishkan ("Sanctuary") is formed by the same letters as nimshach ("continuity"). This teaches us that it is incumbent on every Jew to ensure that the Torah is maintained for three generations, and to adhere to the traditions of his fathers. Each of us is similar to the Sanctuary, for just as G-d made His Presence dwell in it, likewise He resides in each Jew who adopts the appropriate lifestyle and who honors Torah and mitzvot. Since the Shechinah [Divine Presence] is found within each Jew, he must feel responsible and perpetuate the traditions of his fathers by fulfilling mitzvot. When men scorn the commandments of Hashem and abandon the path of their fathers, the Shechinah leaves them as well as the Temple, thus precipitating its destruction.

Hashem wanted to convey this to the Children of Israel precisely during the inauguration of the Sanctuary, so that they would not grow proud as a result of their exaltation. On the contrary, evoking the destruction of both Temples – a truly painful thought – would encourage them to apply G-d's precepts with even greater intensity and to perpetuate the traditions of their fathers, who devoted their entire lives to the fulfillment of Hashem's word.

The same applies to a groom who evokes the memory of the Temple's destruction as he is standing beneath the chuppah, at the pinnacle of joy, ready to establish his home. This reminder teaches the young couple that if they want to build an exceptional home that is solidly founded for many years to come on the basis of love, mutual understanding, peace, and respect, then they must establish it according to the ways of the holy Torah. If not, their home is destined for destruction, G-d forbid, just as both Temples were destroyed

because the Jewish people did not continue to observe the Torah for three generations, but turned away from G-d's commandments. Once as I was staying in Lyon, France, a woman came to tell me that her mother had not had any children for numerous years. In her distress, she had gone to see the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto and asked him for a blessing to have a child. To her great astonishment, the Rav asked her for a specific amount of money, multiplied threefold, so that his blessing would be fulfilled by the merit of the mitzvah of tzeddakah. When the woman asked him about the threefold amount, he said that he wanted to include the woman's daughter and granddaughter in the blessing that he would give to her. Complying with the tzaddik's request, this woman gave him the stipulated amount. Thank G-d, she merited having a child not long afterwards. A few years later, all the newspaper headlines announced that a plane traveling from Lyon to Strasbourg had crashed, leaving but one survivor. It was a great miracle, for this survivor, a certain Mrs. Levy, was the woman who had come to see me along with her mother, who was telling me this story. She admitted that she now understands why the tzaddik had asked for the threefold amount. This money was destined to ensure her survival, as well as that of her daughter and the granddaughter she would have. In fact what benefit could there be in having a child, if that child were to die a generation later? Hence the tzaddik asked for the redemption price of all three generations.

I had the shivers when I heard this story. I also had a greater understanding of the tzaddikim's greatness and the extent of their vision. It's astounding how they can "see" what is going to happen and act accordingly. Along the same lines, the following story is told about Rabbi Akiva Eiger: He once met with a man who for years refused to give his wife a get [divorce], and she was forced to endure painful hardships over a long period of time. The Rav told this man that a woman can be released from a marriage in any one of two ways: By a get, or by her husband's death. The man in question, still refusing to give his wife a get, ridiculed the Rav's words and displayed enormous disrespect. Not long afterwards, the man suddenly died.

Reading these two stories strengthens our faith in the Sages. However this effect cannot remain in the abstract, for we must concretize this faith. Each of us must draw a lesson from these stories and demonstrate great respect for the words of the verse: "You shall be careful to do according to all that they shall teach you" (Devarim 17:10). That is, even if a rabbi tells you something that seems a little surprising at first, what he says must be followed without question. This is because the great men of the generation, on account of their deep insight, are the only ones who can anticipate what will happen in the future.



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The Power of a Simple “Thank You”

It is written, “The glory of Hashem filled the Sanctuary” (Shemot 40:35).

Who has never seen a person running to a bus station to catch his bus, which is already waiting there? Yet almost always, he is one second too late. The bus takes off, leaving him just a few feet from the station.

The man doesn’t give up. He runs after the bus, catching up to it at an intersection where it has a red light. He stubbornly knocks on the door, gesturing with his hands for the driver to please let him on. Because the bus driver is kind, and because he wants to do him a favor, he opens the door.

A teacher in Bnei Brak writes, “I have often noticed that when this passenger gets aboard the bus, he pays his fare but forgets to do one thing: To say ‘thank you’ to the driver!”

We are often confronted by a lack of education. In fact in the above example, the driver acted out of kindness. It is even possible that he broke a regulation, and that he will later have to tell his supervisor why he allowed a passenger to board the bus outside of the station. The reason is that he had genuine compassion for him, and he didn’t want to leave him outside, sweating in the hot summer sun. In that case, why didn’t the passenger sincerely thank him?

Besides the Chillul Hashem which this causes, not saying thank you is also very wrong. “I have seen,” recounts the same teacher, “the driver grinding his teeth in anger, as if to say: ‘It’s not worth it to help someone like this.’” All this could have been avoided with a simple “thank you.” We have not come into this world to act without thinking. Be it in the spiritual or material realm, whoever acts without thinking will not get very far. Indeed, it is our Torah of life, contrary to other fields of knowledge, that teaches us how to think and act, and how to guide our steps during our life on earth.

A Simple Hello

The following story comes from an avrech living in Haifa. He recounts that one of his friends, a baal teshuvah who also lives in Haifa, fully credits his first step towards the world of Torah to a religious neighbor, a man who always made sure to warmly greet him whenever they met in the stairwell of his apartment building.

The avrech’s friend said, “This religious Jew lived on a higher floor, and he was the only observant person in the building. We passed each other every morning as he was returning from synagogue and I was leaving for work. Every day, I was constantly surprised to see the friendly and smiling face which this neighbor presented to me.

“His way of saying hello became even more endearing when I realized that no other neighbor looked at me in such a friendly way, or even said hello! All the neighbors on my floor, even those who lived next to my apartment, never said hello or even smiled at me. He was the only one! One day, I concluded that there was certainly a reason for this.

“It’s clear that someone who lives his Torah on a daily basis is rewarded with inner riches that are so vast, he becomes capable of pouring out this excess wealth upon those around him, making them benefit from the authentic joy radiating from inside. After a certain time, I reached the undeniable conclusion that if I yearn for life – for true life – then I have to return to Torah observance, and that’s exactly what I did.” Such is the power of a simple hello! Let us weigh the costs and benefits involved in this: How much did it cost this man to say hello every morning? Did he have to empty out his bank account for it? No, clearly not. He just

paid a little attention to someone, and there you have it – an entire family (parents, children, and the generations that follow) who are observant and close to the Creator, and all because of a simple hello from a single individual. Not a trivial thing, is it?

Shalom to Both Far and Near

Likewise, departing from a friend and saying goodbye in a foreign language, rather than saying shalom, constitutes a type of Chillul Hashem. In fact there exists no word other than shalom that can spread as any many blessings. Therefore why resort to the expressions of foreign peoples?

Our great teacher, the author of Chatam Sofer, affirms that the holy language is not accessible to everyone, for we must be worthy to use it. Whoever does not use it may therefore fear that he is unworthy. The Chatam Sofer finds an allusion to this in the words, “That it is my mouth which is speaking to you” (Bereshith 45:12). – Aleinu Leshabeach

In the Light of the Parsha

A Residue of Sin

It is written, “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony, which were counted at Moshe’s command” (Shemot 38:21).

The Sages say that when the offerings were counted, it was discovered that a small amount was missing, and the Children of Israel immediately suspected Moshe of theft. They eventually counted the offerings again at Moshe’s command, and they discovered that they had been mistaken, for they had failed to count the hooks (Tanchuma, Shemot 38:21).

This is difficult to understand, for how could the Children of Israel have suspected Moshe of theft? He had led them out of Egypt, brought manna down from Heaven as well as the quail, guided them through the desert, and had been sent by Hashem to give them the Torah! How could Moshe have therefore put his hands on the offerings? After all, he was wealthy, as it is written: “Carve [pesal] for yourself two tablets of stone [Shemot 34:1] – the chips [pesolet] shall be yours. From here Moshe became wealthy” (Shemot Rabba 46:2). Furthermore, as they were plundering Egypt, Moshe took nothing for himself, forsaking all wealth so he could take care of Joseph’s remains (Sotah 13a). In that case, how could anyone have suspected Moshe of theft?

It seems that this happened on account of the Satan, which interfered by doing everything it could to disrupt the purity of the Sanctuary’s construction. It did this because it was terrified that the Sanctuary would be built, a place where every sinner could bring an offering as an atonement, and where the Jewish people would be forgiven on Yom Kippur.

Thus the kelipah [lit. “husk” – a reference to the force of impurity] was liable to lose much. That is why the Satan introduced a spirit of impurity that spread among the people from the time of the sin of the golden calf. Although Hashem had forgiven this sin, its residue still remained. The Satan therefore tried to infuse this spirit of impurity into the hearts of the Children of Israel as the Sanctuary was being built, the result being that they suspected Moshe of theft. The Satan thought that by doing this, the Children of Israel would rebel against Moshe. As a result, instead of the Shechinah descending upon the Sanctuary, the Holy One, blessed be He, would punish the Children of Israel. Hashem thus reminded Moshe to count the hooks, at which point the Children of Israel realized just to what extent the sin of the golden calf had affected them, such that they even suspected the tzaddik of theft!

Rebuilding the Temple

It is written, “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary...which were counted at Moshe’s command” (Shemot 38:21).

When the prophet Jeremiah asked, “Why did the land perish?” Hashem replied: “Because they have forsaken My Torah” (Jeremiah 9:11-12). In other words, the destruction of the Temple was caused primarily by the Torah being forsaken. Hence G-d says through the prophet Malachi, “Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe.... Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 3:22-23). That is: If you are careful to remember the Torah of My servant Moshe, you will be worthy of being immediately delivered.

The author of Toldot Yaakov Yosef states that this is what the Torah is telling us here: “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary – this is how the Sanctuary may be used and preserved; at Moshe’s command – by the Jewish people remembering the Torah of Moshe.” The Temple was destroyed when the Torah was forsaken, and therefore the Temple can be rebuilt when we return to Torah.

Deserving of a Blessing

It is written, “Moshe saw all the work.... And Moshe blessed them” (Shemot 39:43).

“Moshe saw” – what did he see? He saw the angels that had been created by the mitzvot performed by the Children of Israel when they brought their offerings to the Sanctuary, since a person who performs a mitzvah acquires an angel that will defend him. The Children of Israel attained a very high level of spiritual perfection, and Moshe realized that this mitzvah had been carried out wholeheartedly, just as Hashem had commanded, with extremely pure and sacred intentions. That is why he blessed them.

– Birkat Shamayim

No Modifications Needed

It is written, “Moshe saw all the work, and behold, they had done it. As Hashem had commanded, so had they done. And Moshe blessed them” (Shemot 39:43).

It would have apparently been better for Moshe not to have given them his blessing until after the Sanctuary was completed, at which point it would be clear whether they had made everything correctly. In that case, why did Moshe hasten to bless them as soon as everyone’s individual work was done, meaning before the Sanctuary was set up?

Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis explains that when a person hires a carpenter to make doors, windows, and other things for his home, then even after the work is done, he usually will not pay the carpenter in full until he has installed everything that he made.

In fact it is possible that changes and minor modifications may still have to be made during installation. As for the work of the Sanctuary, everything was done with the close help of Heaven, as the verse states: “Every wise-hearted man, whose heart Hashem endowed with wisdom” (Shemot 36:2). This means that all the work was done with extreme precision.

It was therefore clear that no modifications would have to be

made when the Sanctuary was being set up. Hence Moshe did not wait until after all the work was done before blessing them as they deserved, but instead he blessed them immediately.

Only a Means to an End

It is written, “Behold, they had done it. As Hashem had commanded, so had they done” (Shemot 39:43).

The construction of the Sanctuary fully demonstrated the Children of Israel’s great love for Hashem, as well as their generosity and tremendous wisdom, lofty virtues that allowed the Shechinah to rest upon the Sanctuary. Nevertheless, notes the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna Zatzal, as soon as the work was completed and the Torah complimented the volunteers and those who performed the work, it did not deem it necessary to indicate their great level of generosity or wisdom. Rather, it states only that they did what Hashem had instructed Moshe.

This shows us that doing “as Hashem had commanded” is a very lofty virtue, superior to all others. These other virtues are only a means at arriving at this goal, namely to perform Hashem’s command as it was given, “as Hashem had commanded.”

In the Light of the Zohar

It is written, “The silver of the census of the community” (Shemot 38:25).

Rabbi Yitzchak put the following question to Rabbi Shimon: “Seeing that, as we have learned, no blessing rests upon anything numbered or measured, why was everything connected with the Sanctuary numbered?” Rabbi Shimon replied, “Wherever holiness abides, if an act of numbering comes from the side of holiness, blessings will continuously abide there, not passing away.

“We learn this from the tithe, which is a cause of blessing, the reason being that the act of counting is performed for a sacred purpose. Thus how much more in the case of the Sanctuary, which was a sacred edifice and emanated from the side of holiness! Not so with worldly matters, with things not from the side of holiness. No blessing rests upon them if they are numbered. For then the ‘other side’ – that is, the evil eye – may control them; and wherever the evil eye rules, blessings cannot reach....

“Hence it is written, ‘The silver of the census of the community.’ Indeed, the census was conducted without fear of the evil eye, without fear of any evil consequences, for blessings from above rested upon everything there.”

– Zohar II:225a

Guard Your Tongue

Plugging Your Ears

If a person finds himself among a group of individuals who have begun to speak forbidden things, and he believes that reprimanding them will be completely useless, then he must leave if possible or put his fingers in his ears, which will be a great mitzvah on his part. If it is impossible to leave, and if he feels that plugging his ears is equally difficult because he will be ridiculed, he should at least find the strength within himself to fight his evil inclination by not succumbing to the sin of listening to and believing Lashon Harah. – Chafetz Chaim

Protecting the Money of the Community

It is written, “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony, which were counted at Moshe’s command” (Shemot 38:21).

Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim notes that the term pekudei (“accounts”) in this verse is written in full, meaning with a vav, indicating that Moshe counted all 600,000 half-shekels so that no one would suspect him of having taken any money.

The Midrash states, “Why did Moshe render an accounting to them, seeing that the Holy One, blessed be He, trusted him so implicitly? Does it not say, ‘Not so is My servant Moshe. He is trusted in My entire house’ [Bamidbar 12:7]? Then why did Moshe tell them, ‘Come, let us discuss the Sanctuary and examine its cost’? It was because Moshe overheard some Israelites scoffing behind his back, for it says: ‘When Moshe would arrive at the Tent, a pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, and He would speak with Moshe’ [Shemot 33:9]. ‘And they would gaze after Moshe’ [v.8]. ... [They would say,] ‘What – do you expect a man in charge of the construction of the Sanctuary not to be rich?’ When Moshe heard that, he said: ‘As surely as I live, I will give you an accounting for everything as soon as the Sanctuary is completed’” (Shemot Rabba 61:6).

The Shelah writes that from here, we may logically infer from Moshe’s conduct that a person must be beyond reproach in the eyes of Israel. The Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka Zatzal, was extremely meticulous in regards to the money that he received for tzeddakah, as well as money destined for sacred things, especially in regards to what belonged to the yeshiva. Even when he needed to make a long-distance phone call from his office, and the conversation pertained to matters affecting the yeshiva (not personal matters), he would pay for it with his own money, since he was afraid of using sacred things for his own benefit. He would immediately give this money to his secretary, Rav Yosef Halabi, and say to him: “This is for the phone call that I just made.” One day a Jew arrived from Italy and approached him as he was immersed in learning. He insisted that the Rosh Yeshiva accept a small contribution for the yeshiva in cash. The Rosh Yeshiva calmly interrupted his learning, accepted the money from the man, and counted it. He then took out a small personal notebook from his pocket and recorded the amount. Never at any time did he lose his patience, even when this man later wanted to see with his own eyes that the Rosh Yeshiva had recorded the correct amount in his notebook. Nor did the Rosh Yeshiva get upset later on when this same man returned to see him on two separate occasions and disturbed his learning each time, his pretext being that he wanted to donate a few coins to a yeshiva. Nor did this man refrain, each time that he gave a donation, from demanding to see the inscription in the Rosh Yeshiva’s notebook, as if he suspected that something was shady. In the end, this man gave him a very large donation for the yeshiva, setting a packet of money down on the table before the Rosh Yeshiva and saying: “I don’t need you to record it in your notebook. I’ve seen the loyalty and integrity with which you handle money destined for sacred things, even when it consists of a few cents.”

Being meticulous with money is something that must be learned. Very large sums of money passed through the Rosh Yeshiva’s hands, monetary donations and gifts for tzeddakah, but he himself never benefited from any of it. The notebook that he always carried with him had two columns: “Credits” and “Debits.” In this notebook he would record every amount

that he received from people, in order to use it judiciously, as best he saw fit, and likewise with every amount that he distributed to those in need.

Each time that he had to borrow money from someone – and it was usually in order to perform mitzvot – he made certain to stipulate with the lender beforehand: “I’ll pay you back on condition that you remind me of this debt. If you don’t remind me of it, I will be exempt.” Nevertheless, he never forgot about a debt. Furthermore, for many years the Rosh Yeshiva was a “monthly subscriber” to the mikveh of the Satmar chassidim, which was located near his home. Contrary to other men, who paid their membership fee at the end of each month, he made sure to pay this fee in advance, immediately at the start of each month. In fact he would say, “Who knows what the future holds, G-d help us! If I don’t pay what I owe in advance, who will pay it for me?”

In the same spirit, it is said that when Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler became the mashgiach of the Ponevezh yeshiva, he did not want to use the Torah for personal gain, and so he refused to be paid for this work. He therefore told the Rav of Ponevezh, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahane-man Zatzal, that he would only accept a salary on condition that he works at the yeshiva’s office. Indeed, the yeshiva students initially saw him seated at his desk. The Rav of Ponevezh, who naturally was not satisfied with this situation, succeeded in convincing Rav Dessler that he was needed for other “sacred tasks,” such as giving va’adim and the like. This would constitute his “work” at the yeshiva, and that is what he would be paid for.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

A Faithful Guardian

One day Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, met someone in the streets of his city and asked him to give some money for tzeddakah. However the man replied that he didn’t have any money on him. The only problem is that it wasn’t true, for he did have money.

It wasn’t long before this man lost his wallet, where he kept all his money. All his efforts to find it proved futile.

In his misery, he tearfully went to see Rabbi Haim, asking the Rav to help him. Rabbi Haim looked at him and said, “Hashem provides man with money so he can be its guardian, using it to perform mitzvot and good deeds. If he is not a faithful guardian, Hashem will retrieve this money and give it to someone who is more faithful.”

What the Rav said took place, for the man never found his wallet again.

On another occasion, as Rabbi Haim was collecting money so a young woman could get married, he arrived at a jewelry store and asked for tzeddakah. The owner said to him, “I don’t have any money to give you.” Upon hearing this, Rabbi Haim immediately replied: “You don’t have any? It is forbidden to say, ‘I have none.’”

Rabbi Haim then added, “I’ll wait here until a woman comes and buys all the gold that you have, and from that money you will give me some tzeddakah.” As it turned out, a few minutes later a wealthy woman arrived and purchased almost everything in the store. Rabbi Haim then told the owner, “Now you have enough to donate money for the mitzvah of chanassat kallah.”