

torn it up into bits and pieces!

Bitul Torah does not simply mean wasting time from what we could have achieved but, rather, for destroying the Torah! Everything is done, completed, finished; we dismantle and destroy what is there. Potential conveys to us the image of what could have been. That is not accurate. It is there! We have destroyed it.

This is the ultimate tragedy of youth lost, a young person tragically taken before his time. Let us imagine that a person lives a full life, a good life, a studious life. He even manages to author a volume of novellae, commentary, original thoughts. At his funeral, he will be eulogized, and we will cry, "Where is the author of this 'one' volume?" This is how we have been led to think, but there is much more to it. We are saddened over the loss of the author of this one volume. Hashem is happy with this one volume. We lament for the other ten that he should have written! Potentially, he had authored ten more *seforim*, but he did not realize his promise. It is all there. He destroyed it.

Each and every one of us cries for what we could have achieved. Hashem, however, views it from a different perspective. He sees what was to be/is already; and He looks at it as if we have destroyed what was already there. Let this be a portent for all of us: As long as we are privileged to walk this earth, as long as Hashem grants us life, we may not waste a minute. It is not just our potential that we are not maximizing; it is our potential that we might destroy. Perhaps we can take this concept to the next level to include not only Torah, but all *mitzvah* observance. According to the above, Hashem creates perfection, then removes Himself from the scene, so to speak, allowing for man to make up what is expected of him. Thus, if Hashem grants an individual material excess, it is for the purpose of *tzedakah*, sharing generously with others. From Hashem's point of view, this individual has been granted sufficient wherewithal to support a number of institutions, erect buildings, establish organizations that promote Torah study or provide social welfare for those in need. If he leaves this world lacking in achievement, he has, in effect, destroyed these edifices, devastated the organizations, and undermined whatever good work they could have accomplished. We do not look at it this way, but Hashem does, and that is really all that counts.

Va'ani Tefillah

Laasos bahem mishpat kasuv, hadar hu l'chol chasidav – לעשות בהם משפט כחוב הדר הוא לכל חסידיו

To execute upon them written judgment; this will be a splendor to all His devout ones.

What is the *mishpat kasuv*, "written judgment," with which Hashem judges the nations? The **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, elucidates this with an analogy. The king's son once

became lost on the road and was captured by a group of highwaymen. This particular group of thieves would persecute their captives, humiliating them physically and emotionally. Nothing the prince did spared him from this fate. He emphasized that his father, the king, would punish them in the most strict manner. He would leave no stone unturned until he captured and punished them. All of this was to no avail. The thieves could care less. Miraculously, the prince was saved from their grasp and returned home to his father. When the king heard the particulars of his son's ordeal, he sought out the kidnappers. After incarcerating them, he was prepared to spare them no mercy. Yet, these audacious criminals asked for leniency, claiming that, in the end, the prince was spared. They had not killed him. The king responded, "Your goal was to kill my son. Your attempt was foiled and, by some miracle, my son is alive today. I am punishing you in accordance with your malevolent intentions.

The same scenario will apply in the End of Days when Hashem will ultimately vent His wrath on those nations who have persecuted the Jewish People. They will claim that, after all is said and done, the Jewish People are alive and well. Their evil intentions did not see fruition. Why should they be punished? Hashem will reply, "I saved them from your hands! Had you had your way, there would be no Jewish people. Therefore, I will repay you with the *mishpat kasuv*, the law you wrote against the Jews, the decree which you issued against them." This will ultimately be a "splendor to all His devout ones." Indeed, it is an appropriate and correct retribution to the nations for all that they have done to us.

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in memory of his father

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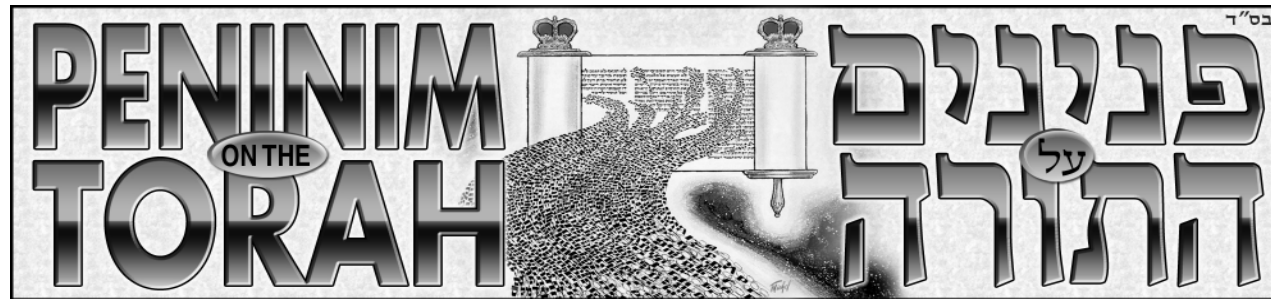
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Parashas Shemini

תש"ע

פרשת שמני

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

ויהי ביום השמיני

It was on the eighth day. (9:1)

"That" eighth day was a very special day. Indeed, as *Chazal* say in *Meseches Shabbos* 87b, "This day took ten crowns." This is a reference to ten unique occurrences which took place on that day: (1) it was the same day as the first day of Creation, which took place on Sunday; (2) it was the first of the offerings brought by the *Nesim*, Princes; (3) only the *Kohanim* performed the *avodah*, service; (4) the *Korban Tamid*, Daily *Korban*, was initiated; (5) the descent of the Heavenly fire; (6) the requirement to eat *korbanos* only in certain prescribed areas; (7) the Presence of the *Shechinah*; (8) the *Kohanim* blessed the people (*Birkas Kohanim*); (9) the prohibition of *Bamos*, private altars; (10) it was first of the month (*Rosh Chodesh*).

Most of these ten crowns are worthy of distinction in that they are unique, historic, milestone occurrences. What is the significance, however, of the fact that all of this took place on a Sunday – the same day of the week as the first day of Creation? It is not as if this were the first day of Creation. Over 120,000 Sundays had passed since that "first Sunday," on which the world was created. What was so special about "that" Sunday?

In his latest anthology of *Rav Pam's shmussen*, ethical discourses, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the *Maharam Schiff* in his *Derashos Nechmadim*, who addresses this problem. He explains that the Torah describes the first day of Creation as *yom echad*, "one" day, rather than the "first" day, as it does with the ensuing five days of the week, to which it refers as: second day, third day, etc. The reason for this distinction is based upon the words of the *Midrash* at the beginning of *Sefer Bereishis*.

The *Midrash* explains that Hashem created the world to serve as a resting place for His *Shechinah*, Divine Presence. Regrettably, due to the sins of the wicked, this plan was unrealized until the glorious day of the *Chanukas HaMishkan*, the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. On that day, the first *korban*, sacrifice, was offered by Nachshon ben Aminadov. The Torah in *Bamidbar* 7:12 records this event using the words, *Bayom ha'rishon*, "on the first day" as opposed to "on day one." The Torah places the emphasis upon the "first day," because the consecration of the *Mishkan* catalyzed the fulfillment of Hashem's original plan of making a world which began on a Sunday.

"That Sunday," *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, on which the

Mishkan was inaugurated, brought Creation full circle. Finally, after over 120,000 Sundays, a resting place for the *Shechinah* was established in this world, something that had not been achieved since the creation of the world. No longer was there a deficiency in the "first day." No longer would it need to be referred to as *yom echad*, but rather, as *yom rishon*. The "first day" was finally corrected. This is the significance of the first of the ten crowns of that auspicious inauguration day. The first day essentially completed the act of creation.

Rav Pam takes this concept to the next level. The *Mishkan* was the embodiment of Hashem's resting place in this world. The *Kohanim* served Hashem – first in the *Mishkan*, and later – in the *Bais HaMikdash*. When we had been privileged for these holy edifices to exist among us, we were able to say that Hashem rests among *Klal Yisrael*. Today, we are no longer blessed with the *Bais HaMikdash*. We must, therefore, look to the *shuls* and *batei medrash*, the *mekomos ha Torah*, places where Torah is studied, as the contemporary replacements for Hashem's resting place. Building a place designated for prayer and study, however, does not necessarily grant it the status of a resting place for Hashem's *Shechinah*. We must consecrate these edifices through meaningful prayer and intensive study. If these sanctuaries serve as nothing more than a meeting place for socializing; if strife and discord reign among the congregants, or between the membership and its spiritual leadership; if the atmosphere is not one in which fear of G-d, camaraderie and respect for one another prevail; if promoting spiritual integrity is not a quality which describes the goals and objectives of the organization, then one can hardly expect Hashem to rest His *Shechinah* there.

Perhaps the standards are too exacting. People are only human and, as such, prone to human frailty. It is difficult for one to float above water if the muck at the bottom is pulling him down like quicksand. The solution is twofold. We must aspire to more than simply "wading" in the water. When one wades, he risks the possibility of sinking. If he jumps in with the intention of taking a vigorous swim, ready to fight the current, willing to use all of his muscles to achieve his goal – he will succeed. We also need role models, someone to follow, someone to hold on to when the going gets rough. In order for our mini sanctuaries to be worthy of Hashem's *Shechinah*, we must all work together. Those who serve as role models, together with those who are focused on achieving spiritual integrity in their lives, must work

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together to create an environment which not only invites the *Shechinah* to rest there, but encourages the *Shechinah* to remain among us.

Kiddush Hashem is an enviable *mitzvah*. Each and every Jew has the opportunity and obligation to sanctify Hashem's Name. We are aware of two types of *Kiddush Hashem*: one is to die for Him; the other is to live for Him. Our history is replete with individuals – and even communities – who gave up their lives to sanctify Hashem's Name. Living a life of holiness seems to be more difficult. **Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita**, illustrates this in a most inspirational manner.

Treblinka was one of the worst concentration camps. The Nazi beasts took the lives of over 800,000 innocent Jewish victims in less than a year. These fiends were not satisfied to simply kill Jews; they sought every way to destroy them emotionally, to break them, so that they would not die as proud Jews, but as wretched, servile creatures. They hung a *Paroches*, the curtain that normally drapes the *Aron Kodesh*, at the entrance to the gas chambers. The words inscribed on the *Paroches* read, *Zeh ha'shaar l'Hashem, tzadikim yavo'u va*, "This is Hashem's gate, the righteous shall pass through it." The perverted Nazis thought they could succeed in humiliating the Jews in the very last moments of their lives, hoping they would repudiate their religion and their G-d. They were so wrong! The exact opposite occurred, as even those Jews who previously had been lacking in their observance – or had been completely assimilated – went to their deaths singing the words, *Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu*, "How fortunate are we that we are being killed as Jews." The Nazis could not believe their eyes, but it was true. These Jews were proud to die as Jews, to sanctify Hashem's Name.

When we think about it, one who is about to die might as well leave this world with pride, with love, with faith and resolve. Almost every Jew accepts his religion when he is lying on his deathbed. The diehards think that they can carry on the ruse all of the way to the next world. The greatest challenge was not for the Jew who died in Treblinka but for the Jew who survived it. He had to continue on, having lost everyone and everything. He had to believe in Hashem without complaints, without bitterness. All of those who did, created for themselves a new *Paroches*, a cover of hope, a cover of faith, a cover of gratitude. They go on living al Kiddush Hashem. This takes greater tenacity, greater commitment. They have not only outlived Hitler, but they have outlived his diabolical plan to destroy the Jews' relationship with Hashem.

When we enter a *shul* or a *bais medrash*, when we live as *erlich*, *frum Yidden*, sincere, observant Jews, we are sanctifying Hashem's Name and sharing with Him in the act of Creation. We are making our own *Paroches* for His *Aron Hakodesh*. Perhaps this is the thought that we should entertain when we enter these holy places. Let us keep them holy.

יודם אהרן

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

A tragedy of the most epic proportions occurs, and the *Kohen Gadol*/father, remained silent. He understood the exacting nature of Hashem's judgment. As **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, so aptly puts it, "The more a person stands out from among his people as a teacher and leader in relation to Hashem, the less Hashem will show him indulgence in his errors." Even with the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Hashem has demonstrated that His will is absolute, and that not even – indeed, least of all –

those who are nearest to Him may permit themselves the slightest deviation from His will. This will cause the entire nation to realize the full, solemn import of the obedience they owe Hashem. With this in mind, we understand the reason for Aharon's silence. He understood the spiritual plateau his sons had reached. He understood the responsibility that accompanies the territory.

Had Aharon's sons not been so close to Hashem, He might have made allowances for their error in judgment. They had always aspired to reach the pinnacle of spirituality, the apex of achievement, the ultimate relationship with Hashem. This sharply contrasts the view of contemporary society with its bankrupt code of morality. Contemporary culture regards intellectual achievement as license for increased moral laxity, for allowing one to violate G-d's moral code, if the individuals happen to be men of intellect and stature. Unlike the secular world, we view higher intellect as reason for placing greater demands on a person, not less.

Nonetheless, I am still bothered by Aharon's "non-reaction" to the tragic deaths of his sons on what was supposed to have been the most glorious day of his life. It was the culmination of years of toil and leadership. It was the moment for which he had strived for so long – the moment of anticipation. Not only was he to serve Hashem as the *Kohen Gadol*, but his sons were to be inducted as *Kohanim*. All his hopes were shattered, the joy of his life marred, as his sons died before his eyes. And he remained silent. What incredible fortitude; what outstanding obedience. We now know why he was chosen to be the *Kohen Gadol*, the spiritual exemplar of the Jewish people.

This response required prodigious self-control borne from obedience and devotion. Such an individual is meticulous in his *mitzvah* observance, taking great pains to see to it that it is his life's greatest priority. His devotion to Hashem means everything to him. Thus, he unequivocally accepts any decree that Hashem makes. When life throws him a curve, he does not just "quit." He does more than acquiesce; he welcomes whatever Hashem "throws" at him, because he trusts that it is for a good reason.

A number of years ago, I quoted the following article which is about a secular ceremony that is performed regularly in Washington, D.C. Upon coming across it again, I feel it characterizes the meaning of commitment, devotion and allegiance. Washington, D.C./Arlington National Cemetery is the place where the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is located. The honor guard salutes this tomb daily. The following is the procedure the honor guard who salutes the tomb must follow: In his walk towards the Tomb, the guard takes exactly twenty-one steps, alluding to the twenty-one gun salute, which is the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary. He then makes an about-face, hesitating for exactly twenty-one seconds, before commencing his return march. His gloves are moistened to prevent him from losing his grip on the rifle which he carries on his shoulder. After his march across the path, he executes an about-face and transfers the rifle to the outside shoulder.

The guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5'10" and 6'2" tall, and his waist size may not exceed thirty inches. He must commit two complete years of his life to guarding the tomb and living in barracks beneath the tomb. He may not drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of his life. He may not publicly use foul

language of any sort for the rest of his life, and he may not disgrace the uniform he wears or the tomb that he guards in any way. After two years of service, the guard is given a wreath pin he wears on his lapel, signifying that he has served in the guard. Presently (four years ago), only 400 pins are worn. The guard must adhere to these rules or forfeit his pin.

The shoes worn by the guards are made with thick soles in order to protect their feet from heat and cold. Metal heel plates extend to the top of the shoe, so that a loud click may be heard when the soldiers come to a halt. The uniforms may not have any wrinkles, folds or lint on it. Indeed, guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.

During his first six months of duty, the guard may neither talk to anyone nor watch television. They spend all of their off-duty time studying the lives of the 175 notables interred in Arlington National Cemetery. They must memorize who they are and where they are buried. Every guard spends five hours each day preparing his uniform for guard duty.

An added vignette emphasizes how far a secular person can go with a sense of commitment to a secular ideal: In 2003, as Hurricane Isabelle was fast approaching Washington, D.C., the United States Congress took off two days in anticipation of the storm. Due to the clear and present danger, the military members assigned to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend their assignment. They respectfully declined the offer, declaring, "No way, sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm gone wild, they firmly asserted that guarding the tomb was not simply an assignment; it was the highest honor that can be accorded to a serviceman. The tomb has been patrolled continually for the last seventy-nine years.

If this is the level of commitment expressed by an individual who does not possess inner *kedushah*, holiness; of whom it is not demanded that his thoughts, not just actions, must be pure; that every aspect of his life must be devoted and immersed in *kedushah* of the highest caliber, is it any wonder that Aharon *HaKohen*, the paradigm of *kedushah*, was able to "weather the storm" of tragedy decreed by Hashem for a purpose beyond our ability to grasp? Indeed, this lesson can-- and should-- be applied to many areas of our service to Hashem.

ואחיהם כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ד' And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)

"All of the House of *Yisrael*" is a reference to every Jew for all time. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to mourn the tragic deaths of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, not only for their passing, but also to reflect upon the various elements that played a role in catalyzing this eternal tragedy. Mourning those who have passed is a foregone conclusion. It is an opportunity for personal introspection. We learn from the lives of the deceased, applying the lessons to improve our own personal journeys. We celebrate their accomplishments and lament their missed opportunities. It is conceivable that one who has been privileged with longevity will leave a greater legacy than one who has passed from this world at a young age. In his brief stay in this world, he has not had the opportunity to transmit as much to others.. When one leaves this world at a young age, with an "unfinished" life, so to speak, it is great cause for lament. Thus, when Nadav and Avihu were taken suddenly in the prime of their lives, it was a tragedy of epic proportions. When Sarah

Meinu died at a ripe old age, concluding a full life of achievement, both personal and communal, we find Avraham *Avinu* refraining from effusive expression of grief. The **Baal HaTurim** writes that this is why the "*chof*" of *v'livcosa*, "and to bewail her" (*Bereishis* 23:2) is diminutive. Avraham *Avinu* felt that his wife had successfully completed her mission on this world and was returning her soul to its Source.

Nadav and Avihu died at a young age, magnifying the tragedy. They did not achieve their potential. They neither raised families nor established students who would be inspired by them, leaving an even greater void. **Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, explains that, from a personal perspective, the loss is even greater than we think. He offers a penetrating insight regarding the concept of *bitul Torah*, wasting precious time from Torah study.

In the *Talmud Niddah* 30b, *Chazal* teach that, in his mother's womb, a child studies the entire Torah with an angel. As he is about to leave the womb, the angel taps him on the mouth, causing him to forget all that he had learned. In other words, we spend a lifetime reconnecting with what we had already acquired. This is an important principle concerning the attitude we should manifest when learning Torah. At one point, we had achieved it all. We had reached the apex of success in Torah achievement. We are capable of enormous potential. Thus, whatever we do attain must be measured in contrast to what we had once already managed to perfect. Potential no longer means something that we could have – or should have – achieved, but rather, something that we already did achieve!

There is a well-known story concerning the **Netziv, zl**, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Volozhin, and pre-eminent Torah scholar. When he completed his magnum opus, the *Haamek Shealah*, he celebrated with a lavish party and delivered an inspiring speech. He said that he was not just celebrating the completion of his *sefer*, but an incident that had occurred when he was a young boy. Apparently, he was not the most diligent student as he did not take his Torah learning very seriously. One night, he overheard his parents conversing. "What is going to be with our Naftali Tzvi? He does not seem interested in studying Torah. We have no other choice than to apprentice him to a craftsman, so he will at least learn a trade," his father said. When Naftali Tzvi heard this, he became very disconcerted and decided to prove them wrong. He worked to alter his lifestyle, and the rest is history. He became one of the greatest scholars of his generation.

The *Netziv* explained what had motivated him. "Imagine, if you will, that I had not ever heard my parents' conversation. I would have been enrolled as a shoemaker, tailor, whatever, and I would certainly have continued on as a Torah observant Jew. Only I wouldn't have been that much into learning. When I would have left this world and come before the Heavenly Tribunal I would have been shown the *Haamek Shealah* and asked, 'Do you recognize this volume?' I would gaze at it and reply, 'No.' I would then be told, 'This is the volume that you were supposed to have authored had you not become a tailor!' What would I have been able to answer? I am, therefore, grateful that I overheard my father's lament and reacted accordingly."

Rav Pincus observes that we derive from this episode an important lesson. Had the *Netziv* not written the *Haamek Shealah*, he would not have been chastised for not writing it but, rather, for destroying it! The *Haamek Shealah* was written in potential. By not continuing with his Torah studies the *Netziv* would have taken this brilliant volume of Torah novellae and