



5784 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Shabbat Chol Hamoed

A Pathetic Shadow

The *Gemara Sotah* (14a) famously asks why *Moshe Rabbeinu* so desperately desired to enter *Eretz Yisrael*:

Rebbi Samlai taught: Why did *Moshe Rabbeinu* desire to enter *Eretz Yisrael*? Did he need to eat from its produce, or did he need to satisfy himself from its goodness? Rather, this is what *Moshe* said, “Many *mitzvot* were commanded to the Jewish people, and some of them can only be fulfilled in *Eretz Yisrael*, I will enter the land in order that they can all be fulfilled by me.” *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* said to him, “Do you ask in order to receive reward (for performing these *mitzvot*)? I will consider it as if you have performed them.”

This Talmudic passage is quite strange, but one question particularly stands out. Of all the Jews in history, the last person I would accuse of being preoccupied with his own reward is *Moshe Rabbeinu*. As the Torah itself attests, *Moshe* was the most self-effacing and selfless leader that humanity did and ever will produce. His self-sacrifice on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*, to the point of endangering himself physically *and* spiritually in confronting the *Ribbono Shel Olam* on their behalf, is unparalleled. *Moshe* doesn't seem to be the reward-accurring obsessed Jew who is preoccupied with *sechar*.

To understand this *Gemara Sotah*, we need to have a more mature and sophisticated understanding of what *sechar*, heavenly “reward” really means. As the *Maharal* explains at length (see his magnificent *sefer*, *Tiferet Yisrael*), *sechar* really means *sheleimut*, wholeness and spiritual maximalization. With each *mitzvah* that is performed, a person achieves a higher degree of spiritual completion and *deveikut* with the Almighty. *Sechar mitzvah* isn't about racking up points on a scoreboard in heaven. The “reward” of a *mitzvah* is really the natural consequence of someone purifying himself and achieving higher levels of *deveikut*. It is the spiritual bliss that unfolds from a life well spent in purity and sanctity.

Moshe's acute desire for *mitzvah* performance was due to his desperation to achieve total *sheleimut* and *deveikut* to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. As pointed out by the *Shem MiShmuel*, most Jews cannot perform all 613 commandments alone. A *yisrael* cannot fulfill the *mitzvot* of a *kohen* and a *kohen* cannot be a king. But *Moshe* was able to perform most *mitzvot* by himself; he temporarily served as the *kohen gadol* and was a makeshift king. On the cusp of entering into *Eretz Yisrael*, the prospect of total connection to *Hashem* was within his reach. Seeing his pure intentions, *Hashem* rewards His loyal servant with the natural consequences of the *mitzvot* that *Moshe* wouldn't be privileged to physically perform.

Why am I writing about this? Because it is particularly this time of year that I am annually reminded about how *pathetically incomplete* the Jewish people are without *Yerushalayim* standing in her full glory. We sit at



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our *sedarim* with excitement, anticipating this beautiful night filled with so many *mitzvot*, only to be reminded how little we have. The *matzah* is sublime and wonderous, yes. But that *zeroa* sits as a painful reminder of what is supposed to be the centerpiece of our meal, and our *avodat Hashem*. The *karban Pesach* is gone. The bitter *marror*, over which we say so many *divrei Torah*, is only a rabbinic commandment when the *Beis HaMikdash* is absent. And that egg sitting on the table reminds us of the delightful *karban Chagiga*, also no longer present. While *Hallel* in our shuls may be wonderful, it pales in comparison to the magnificent *hallel* of the *leviim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* while bringing the *karban Pesach* and *mussafin*. A night that should be filled with *mitzvot*, *sheleimut*, and *deveikut* feels awfully...lacking.

Along comes *sefirat ha'omer*, another *mitzvah* which is possibly only rabbinic in times of *churban*. And we begin to count towards the sublime *karban* of the *shtei halechem* which is supposed to be brought on *Shavuot*, with the painful prospect of another year in which no *karbanot* will be brought on the culminating fiftieth day. Another year without the *mussafin*, *shalmei hachag*, *olot reiyah*, and *karbanot chagigah*.

This *Pesach*, as too many precious Jews sit in pain and suffering, we should remind ourselves that *Klal Yisrael* is incredibly lacking. We are a pathetic shadow of what we can and should be. Without *Yerushalayim*, we are incomplete and broken. Our *tefillat mussaf* should be recited carefully and desperately, the prayers heartfelt and real. "We cannot ascend to appear and to prostrate ourselves before You, and to perform our obligations in the house of Your choice...Compassionate King, have mercy on us!...rebuild Your house as it once was...show us its rebuilding and gladden us in its perfection." May the pathetic shadow be enlightened by the shining *sheleimut* of the Jewish people in the perfect Jerusalem, speedily in our days.



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