



February 24, 2024



Parshas Tetzaveh

15th of Adar 1 5784

The Courtesy Bells

Upon entering the Bais Hamikdash for the first time and catching a glimpse of the holy Kohen Gadol, one would have been in awe. The sheer beauty. The utter holiness. The saintliness that he exuded. The majestic eight intricate garments he wore so regally. But when one would glance at the very bottom of the Kohen Gadol's outfit, one may have been struck by something odd. The hem of the Me'il, a four cornered blue-wool garment, was adorned with an alternating array of 72 golden bells and pomegranates. With every move the *Kohen Gadol* made, the bells would jiggle and create a loud sound. What were these bells doing there? What purpose did they serve? What did the Heavenly designer have in mind?

We turn to the Midrash for clarification, but the explanation it gives does not exactly alleviate our bewilderment. The Midrash Bechor Shor (28:35:1) says that the bells were there in order to teach us a moral lesson: one should announce himself before entering a room. But this fine lesson in decency may seem out of character in the Mishkan. Does the sanctuary of Hashem, Who knows absolutely everything, really need a "knock before entering" sign hung on the doorway? Why would the Torah choose this exact location to teach this lesson? Why not teach it at a slightly more mundane location?

I saw a beautiful explanation given by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (the Rosh Yeshiva of South Shore). In the eagerness to enter the Kodosh HaKodashim, the Kohen Gadol may become so transfixed on attaining a high level of spirituality that he forgets common courtesy. He may forget to knock before entering. The Torah is telling us that the search for spirituality can never supersede simple etiquette. We often have lofty spiritual aspirations. How many toes do we step on to get there? By specifically placing this message right before the Kohen entered Hashem's Presence, the Torah is telling us that even when searching for the holiest of the holy we are never to forget to act like a mensch.

The Urgent Widow

A young widow once entered the study of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. She was not only feeling immense loneliness and pain due to the passing of her husband, she felt a tremendous sense of urgency. She felt

guilty and wanted desperately to do something for her husband's memory. Perhaps she should start a free-loan gemach. Perhaps she should accept upon herself an act of spiritual self-improvement.

Rav Shlomo Zalman looked at this sad, broken, young woman and told her the following: "I understand your need to do something spiritual to uplift your husband's soul. This is my advice to you: go buy some toys for your children, take them to the park, and enjoy life with them. Forget the quest for the great spiritual tikkun and help your children rejoice in life. That will uplift your husband's soul the most."

Every single day, thousands upon thousands of people begin their day with learning Torah. People learn in shuls, on trains and in massive yeshivos scattered around the globe. Right before they learn, they all whisper a prayer. The same prayer. It is printed on the inside cover of every Gemara and Shulchan Aruch. What is said in this prayer? Is it a plea to Heaven that our holy words of Torah should soar straight to the Heavenly Throne? Is it a prayer that heavenly angels should come down and enjoy listening to the words of Torah coming out of our mouth? Is it a prayer that the Torah we learn should elevate our souls and uplift our spirit? No, no and no. It is a small, fifteen-second prayer in which we ask Hashem to help us steer clear of making fun of our friend's mistakes. We beg Hashem to save us from misleading others with learning incorrectly and taking enjoyment from intellectual blunders our peers make.

Why is it that moments before we learn Torah, which is considered the most intimate embrace with Hashem, we place such emphasis on our interpersonal relationships with others and not on our relationship with Hashem? The answer is that if our relationship with Hashem is built while climbing on the backs of others, then Hashem is not interested.

I remember hearing Rabbi Yosef Tandler, the Menahel of Mechinas Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, remark once that at the very beginning of davening it says, "*L'olam Yehei **Adam** Yerei Shomayim B'seiser U'bagalui,*" one should forever have fear of Heaven both in public and in private. He would say, "Notice how it adds the word Adam. Meaning to say that one must firstly be an Adam – a man, a mensch – before one can even attempt to have proper yiras shamayim."

The ultimate prerequisite for developing our relationship with Hashem is to develop our relationship with others.

In our never-ending quest for spiritual growth, we must always remember those little tinkling bells on the bottom of the Kohen Gadol's outfit, reminding us to never forget the people around us. We must be considerate of the people who look up to us, those that see us as exemplary. If we stop to bend down to help them, to love them and respect them, Hashem will surely do the same for us.