

פרשת בשלח

Maybe make your Sukka a little nicer? Buy the nicest Esrog. Do you have a silver Chanukiah?

Isn't it strange? My Sukka is kosher, *l'chatchila*. It meets every Halachic standard. Why should I do more? My Esrog is 100% kosher. I took it to the *Dayan* who has a specialty regarding the kashrus of the *Arba Minim* and he said, 'beautiful'. What more do you want from me?

I have a nice Chanukiah, I think. Why should I invest in a silver one that is so much more expensive?

The answer to all of these questions is found in our Parsha.

One who doesn't know the answer to these questions is likely to be perplexed. In Parshas B'shalach there is no mention of Sukka or Esrog and, of course, not of Chanukah.

Where is the answer?

We read at the very beginning of *Shiras HaYam* (Sh'mos Perek 15/Posuk 2):

עָזִי וְזַמְרַת קֹהַל יְיָהוָה לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה קִלִּי וְאֲנוּהוּ אֲ...לִקִּי אָבִי וְאֲרַמְמָנָהוּ:

G-d is my strength and my song and He was a salvation for me¹; this is my G-d and I will praise Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt him.

We translated וְאֲנוּהוּ as 'I will praise Him'. Contextually, that seems appropriate. But what does that word really mean?

Rashi tells us of two possibilities. He writes:

ואנוהו - אונקלוס תרגם לשון נוח, (ישעיה לג/כ²) נוח שאנו, (שם סה/י³) לנוה צאן. דבר אחר ואנוהו לשון נוי, אספר נוי ושבחו לבאי עולם, כגון (שיר השירים ה/ט-י⁴) מה דורך מדוד דודי צח ואדום, וכל הענין:

¹ The commentators differ on the translation of this first phrase. Our translation follows Rashi.

V'an'veihu – Onklos translates this word from the word *na'veh* – a dwelling. [We find it in the verse] ‘a tranquil dwelling’ and ‘dwelling of sheep’.

Another explanation - *V'an'veihu* is from the word נוי, beauty and thus the verse means, ‘I will tell of His beauty and praise to the entire world’ as we find in the verse in Shir HaShirim - What is so unique about the One Whom you love...The One whom I love is pure white with a ruddy face⁵; and the entire matter in the verse.

As Rashi noted, Onkelos says that *v'an'veihu* refers to a dwelling. What is that dwelling? This is how the relevant section of the Targum reads:

דין א...ל'קי ואבני ליה מקדש א...ל'קא דאבהתי ואפלח קדמוהי:

This is my G-d and I will build Him a sanctuary; the G-d of my fathers and I will pray before Him.

² The entire verse reads:

חזה ציון קרית מועדנו עיניך תראינה ירושלם נוה שאנן אהל בל יצען בל יסע יתדתיו לנצח וכל חבליו בל ינתקו:

See Zion, the city of our meeting; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a tranquil dwelling; a tent that will not be broken, its pegs will not be removed ever; its ropes will not be broken.

³ The entire verse reads:

והיה השרון לנוה צאן ועמק עכור לרבוץ בקר לעמי אשר דרשוני:
The *Sharon* will become a dwelling for sheep and the dirtied valley will be for the resting cattle and for My People who will seek me.

⁴ These P'sukim read in their entirety:

מה דודך מדוד היפה בנשים מה דודך מדוד שפכה השבעתנו: דודי צח ואדום דגול מרובה:
What is so unique about the One Whom you love, you most beautiful of nations; what is unique about the One Whom you love, that so you have sworn us? The One whom I love is pure white with a ruddy face; myriads surround Him.

⁵ As Rashi explains there, this praise of HaKodosh Boruch comes to defend Him Yisborach when He is attacked by the nations of the world.

That is, with these words, Moshe Rabbenu had a specific focus. The wonders that were beheld at the Red Sea inspired him and Israel to find a permanent place where they could serve HaKodosh Boruch Hu with the level of spirituality that they felt at this moment when they had been miraculously delivered from the Egyptian forces.

Those wonders are expressed very clearly in the Midrash (Pesikta Zutrasa B'shalach 15):

ר' אליעזר אומר מנין אתה אומר שראתה שפחה על הים, מה שלא ראו ישעיה ויחזקאל, שנאמר זה קלי ואנוהו.

Rabi Eliezer says, 'From where do you say that that which a maidservant saw on the sea was greater than the visions of the Prophets Yeshaya and Yechezkel?' Because it says, 'This is my G-d and I will praise him'.

And, of course, this explanation of Onkelos fits very well with the closing verses of the *Shira* where we read (ibid. P'sukim 17-18):

תבאימו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך מכון לשבתך פעלת ה' מקדש א...ד...נ...י כוננו ידיך:
ה' ימלך לעלם ועד:

Bring the nation and plant it on the mountain of Your inheritance; a place established for Your dwelling, You made, G-d; a sanctuary Your hands established. Hashem will reign for ever and ever.

Certainly, this juxtaposition of verses referring to the Beis HaMikdosh and Hashem's eternal rule has a meaning. It is not for naught that Chazal refer to the Beis HaMikdosh as *Beis Olomim*, the Eternal House⁶.

Seemingly, this commentary is unrelated to the second explanation that Rashi prefers and the one that we intimated in our opening words.

That explanation means that we are to 'beautify G-d'. That means that we are to express His greatness before all people as we saw in Rashi.

⁶ See for example Masseches Makkos 12 a.

However that type of beautification seems somewhat amorphous. The verse in Shir HaShirim that Rashi quotes deals with presenting a defense of HaKodosh Boruch Hu when He Yisborach is being defamed. Is this beautification only defensive in nature, only reactive? Can there not be a proactive opportunity to fulfil this dictum of Moshe Rabbenu?

In fact, Chazal translated this aspect of *זה קלי ואנוהו* into Halachic terms. They taught us (Yalkut Shimoni B'shalach 225):

זה קלי ואנוהו התנאה לפניו במצות עשה סוכה נאה ולולב נאה ושופר נאה כתוב ספר תורה לשמו בדיו נאה בקולמוס נאה בלבלר אומן וכורכו בשיראות נאין.

This is my G-d and I will beautify Him – Be beautiful before Him in fulfilling positive commandments: have a nice Sukkah and Lulav, have a nice Shofar, write a Sefer Torah for His Name with nice ink and a nice quill, with a skilful scribe and wrap it with nice silk.

Throughout the Shulchan Aruch and Mishnah B'rurah we find descriptions of actions that we can take to add beauty to various Mitzvos, even if without those additions the Mitzvah could be fulfilled completely. The term *נוי מצוה* is what is used in this regard and we find it in many aspects of Mitzvah accomplishment⁷.

However, a careful reading of the way that Chazal chose to express themselves reveals an additional, perhaps more fundamental, level of 'beautifying' Hashem.

⁷ This term has applications in other aspects of Halachah not connected to our subject.

For example, in Orach Chaim Simanim 301, 303 and 305 we find a number of instances where the Halachah determines whether an object 'worn' on the body on Shabbos is considered a form of clothing or ornamentation, *נוי*, and then may be worn when a person goes from *רשות היחיד* to *רשות הרבים* or as neither and then may not be 'worn' because it is an act of 'carrying'.

Another example is found in Yoreh Deah 139, 142 and 148 in the laws of Avodah Zarah. One may not use or get any benefit from anything that is used to serve idolatry. However, that which is *נוי*, whether for the priest or for the service, but not necessarily an offering, may not be inherently forbidden.

הַתְּנָאָה means 'make yourself beautiful'. That is, the thrust of this statement doesn't mean, for example, have a Shofar that when one looks at it one remarks 'how beautiful'. It means that the sounding of this beautiful Shofar makes the fulfilment of the Mitzvah more beautiful.

The Halachah is not discussing collectors' items. It is not referring to museum pieces or Judaica collections. Its thrust is the person who is doing the Mitzvah activity and when doing such *he* is beautified before Hashem with his Mitzvah act.

Since it doesn't say הַתְּנָאָה only, make yourself beautiful, but לְפָנָיו, before Him, the thrust is our relationship with HaKodosh Boruch Hu when doing the Mitzvah.

Seeking the praise and accolades of others regarding the beauty of an Esrog, the intricate designs on the silver of a *Chanukiah* or the penmanship of the scribe is not the point.

הַתְּנָאָה לְפָנָיו

Be beautiful *before Him*.

That which may be considered beautiful to the flesh and blood observer may not necessarily be beautiful לְפָנָיו. So, we find examples of inappropriate beauty in Mitzvah fulfilment.

Mishnah Brurah writes in Siman 24 (s'if koton 9):

אסור לרקום פסוקים של תורה בטלית

It is forbidden to embroider verses from the Torah on a Talis⁸.

He writes in Siman 638 (s'if koton 24):

אסור לחקוק פסוק בסוכות תשבו על דלעת וכיוצא בו ולתלותו בסוכה דיבוא לידי בזיון וגם שאסור לכתוב פסוקים מן התורה אלא אם כן יש בהן ספר שלם כמו שנתבאר ביורה דעה סימן רפ"ג...

⁸ See the following excerpt from Mishnah B'rurah. The second explanation there is relevant to this Halachah.

It is forbidden to engrave the verse 'Sit in Sukkos' on a pumpkin or something similar and to hang it in the Sukkah because it will come to be treated disrespectfully, in addition to the prohibition of writing Torah verses not within a complete *sefer* as is explained in Yoreh Deah Siman 283.

Beauty *is* in the eye of the beholder. But in the case of התנאה לפניו במצוות, it is Hashem Who is the Beholder.

And now we are faced with a challenge, not a small one at all.

Having a nice Esrog, Shofar, etc. means, in most cases, spending a considerable amount to attain that which is nicer than which is required. In fact, spending more for Mitzvah fulfillment is, in and of itself, a Mitzvah.

We learn in Masseches Bava Kamma (9 a):

אמר רבי זירא אמר רב הונא: במצוה - עד שליש. מאי שליש?...אמר ר' זירא:
בהידור מצוה - עד שליש במצוה.

Rabi Zera said in the name of Rav Huna, 'In regards to a Mitzvah pay up to one-third more. One-third of what? In order to beautify a Mitzvah up to one-third of the Mitzvah itself.

Rashi writes:

בהידור מצוה עד שליש במצוה - שאם מוצא ב' ספרי תורות לקנות ואחד הדור מחבירו יוסיף שליש הדמים ויקח את ההדור דתניא (שבת דף קלג:): זה קלי ואנהו התנאה לפניו במצות עשה לך ספר תורה נאה לולב נאה טלית נאה ציצית נאה.

To beautify a Mitzvah up to one-third of the Mitzvah –If one finds two Sifrei Torah to purchase and one is more beautiful than the other, he should add one-third of the price and buy the nicer one as the Braisa teaches, 'This is my G-d and I will beautify Him' –be beautiful before Him in Mitzvos – make a beautiful Sefer Torah, a beautiful Lulav, a beautiful Tallis, beautiful Tzitzis.

Tosfos argues with Rashi and writes:

עד שלישי במצוה - פירוש שאם מצא אתרוג כאגוז כמו ששיערו חכמים ואחד גדול ממנו שלישי יקנהו.

Until one-third of the Mitzvah – The explanation is that if one finds a tiny Esrog, the size of a nut that the Chachamim said meets the size-requirements of the Esrog, and one a third bigger, buy the bigger one.

That is, according to Rashi the sole determinant is the price – if one Sefer Torah is nicer, then pay up to one-third more than the minimal price. Paying more for the Mitzvah object is an act that shows that you are beautifying the Mitzvah.

Tosfos says that the object is the determinant. If the Esrog is one-third nicer, purchase it. Perhaps the added price will be more than one-third, perhaps less.

In any case, however, *hiddur Mitzvah* will most likely incur added expenditure. If so, there is a tendency to show off the extra beauty. Unquestionably, people show their Esrogim to others when they have particular גוי and seek admiration when they have a particularly nice silver Esrog box or one that is especially designed just for you. Is that wrong?

Obviously the question is one of motivation. Why? Why do you want a nicer Esrog? Why do you wish a silver case to hold the Esrog?

You have the zechus to write a Sefer Torah and lend it to your shul for daily and weekly use? Wonderful! Why do you seek the most expert *sofer* and choose to have silver ornamentation on the *Atzei Chaim*?

Is to beautify G-d's Mitzvos or to see accolades for the one who is doing those Mitzvos?

The challenge is obvious. How many wonderful people choose to make sure that their actions are totally anonymous so that nobody, nobody whatsoever, not even their children know their magnanimity? If absolutely no one knows of their largesse then they cannot seek praise and reap recognition.

It is likely that most of us can identify with this dilemma. Of course we do the Mitzvos for HaKodosh Boruch Hu. Otherwise who would pay a preposterous price for a lemon-lookalike and spend a fortune for a box of precious metal to hold it?

One can buy tea candles for a few cents each and they supply light no differently in a Chanukiah than the vastly more expensive olive oil, *and* the tea candles have their own holder and their own wicks and you don't even have to assemble them.

So, it is clear that we are not absent of dedication to Hashem in our Mitzvah performance. However, if that dedication is diluted and we wish to enhance, what can we do?

It seems that Chasam Sofer (Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah 5661 d.h. *zeh keili*) had this in mind when he wrote the following commentary.

In his commentary, Chasam Sofer does not focus only on the first phrase of our verse, *זה קלי ואנוהו*, this is my G-d and I will beautify Him, but on the second phrase as well:

אלקי אבי וארוממנהו

The G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.

Is this second phrase merely a poetic repetition of the one that preceded it or does it have its own value and teaching, distinct from the first phrase? He writes:

זה קלי ואנוהו א...ל'קי אבי וארוממנהו, פירוש אזכה לייחד שמו עלי להמשיך שכינתו ושפעו למטה בזכות עצמי מבלי שאצטרך לזה לזכות אבותי וישאר לי זכות אבות להוסיף כח בפמליא של מעלה, וזהו זה קלי-במה ששמו מיוחד עלי ואנוהו - אבנה לו מקדש כתרגום אונקלוס, ובזכות שהוא א...ל'קי אבי וארוממנהו להוסיף כח למעלה...

This is my G-d and I will beautify Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him – the explanation is that I wish the merit to 'make G-d's Name One' for me and to draw down His Shechinah and abundance in my own merit, without having to require the merit of my fathers. And that *zechus ovos* –

the merit of my fathers will remain for me to add strength to the hosts above.

This is the meaning of 'this is my G-d' in that His Name will be One for me and I will beautify it. I will build a Mikdosh for Him, as Onkelos translates. And in the merit that He is the G-d of my father, I will exalt him to add strength above...

Yichud Hashem refers to a complete and undiluted dedication to HaKodosh Boruch Hu without any other goal or interest⁹.

If an individual is able to ascertain complete and utter dedication to *Yichud Hashem* in his Mitzvah performance, his merits are sufficient in and of themselves. He does not require outside help.

If that is so, then this unique person still has *zechus ovos*, the merit that we have from our forefathers, in his possession. He did not utilize them for his own accomplishments because he is self-sufficient. If so, what is he to do with *those* merits?

Chasam Sofer answers that since this extraordinary person did not need *zechus ovos* for himself, he has freed them up for other purposes.

What are those purposes?

Those merits rise up to heaven, undiluted. They encourage and strengthen the heavenly hosts, פמליא של מעלה. What is the purpose of that encouragement and support? It is clear-it will bring the Redemption much, much faster.

The words of Chasam Sofer are awe-inspiring and we hope we did them justice in this brief explanation.

However, the fact remains that how many unique individuals are there who meet this level about which Chasam Sofer talks?

⁹ See for example Rambam Mishneh Torah Hilchos Krias Shema Perek 1/Halacha 4 and Hilchos Melachim Perek 7/Halachah 15. See also the definition of Yichud HaShem in *Kad HaKemach* of Rabbenu Bachye in the entry bearing that title.

We know the answer – not too many at all.

That is why we can suggest an additional, not alternative explanation to the words א...ל'קי אבי וארוממנהו.

I seek to fulfill זה קלי ואנוהו. I buy the beautiful Esrog and light *neiros Chanukah* with a stunning Chanukiah.

However, sadly enough, I have not reached the level of ייחוד השם; my dedication to the Ribbono Shel Olom is serious and sincere, but incomplete. When someone admires my Esrog, I am happy that they know that I spent a lot of money on it. When they *ooh* and *ah* on my Chanukiah, I am pleased that they know that I treat Mitzvos so well.

That is, I am dedicated to Hashem, but incompletely.

How can I boost myself in an intermediate step so that I will be able to more closely approach *Yichud Hashem* and have my service to Him become purer?

That is what א...ל'קי אבי וארוממנו teaches.

If I do not possess the wherewithal internally to have total dedication, I look to the Forefathers and my more immediate ancestors for inspiration. I look to those who dedicate their prayers this week on Tu Bishvat so that they would have a kosher Esrog months later on Sukkos.

I look to those who scraped to have oil and candles to light *neiros* under the most dire of circumstances, with incredible hardship, sometimes risking their lives.

I look to them to remind me when I acquire my Esrog, when I take my Chanukiah from its showcase, of that which Hashem instructed Sh'muel HaNovi (Sh'muel I Perek 16/Posuk 7):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל אֵל תִּבֹּט אֶל מְרֹאֵהוּ וְאֶל גְּבוּהַ קוֹמָתוֹ כִּי מֵאִסְתִּיהוּ כִּי לֹא אֲשֶׁר
רְאָה הָאָדָם כִּי הָאָדָם רְאָה לְעֵינָיִם וְהוּא רְאָה לְלֵבָב:

Hashem said to Sh'muel: 'Do not look at his appearance and at his physical height because I have rejected him because it is not what man sees; because man sees the external with his eyes and G-d sees to the heart.

If we allow the inspiration of our Fathers and our fathers to penetrate our neshomos they will provide us with the drive to be more dedicated to G-d in our Mitzvah performance and less dedicated to our egos.

As we ascend those *madreigos* that bring us closer to Hashem, then we can go to the second stage of the explanation of that verse, the explanation that Chasam Sofer has bestowed upon us.

We can deserve Divine approval for our actions in their own merit and then 'splurge' with the *Zechus Ovos* that we will still retain, complete and undiminished, for our eternal benefit and the eternal benefit of the *Klal* to give strength to the heavenly hosts to retrieve us from *our* Egypt and cross us over *our* Yam Suf to the Land that He has promised.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock