

Parshat Pinchas 5776

Shabbos Mevarachim: The sedra (28:11-15) describes the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. Unlike all the other sin offerings enumerated here, the Torah adds one word, 'LaHashem', in its description. Rashi cites two reasons for this:

1. It atones for those who don't recognise their own sins which are known only 'LaHashem'.
2. Rashi quotes a midrash where Hashem says 'bring an atonement for Me for My having reduced the size of the moon'. The sun and moon were initially created equal in size but when the moon complained, Hashem instructed the moon to diminish itself. 'Hashem needs us to bring an atonement' every Rosh Chodesh when the moon is at its smallest point. Only in future will the moon once again have the same dominion as the sun.

Rav Dessler explains that 'a parable is a tale of events which never happened. Its only claim to truth is to help the reader arrive at its underlying messages. However, listening to the story but missing the message is a failure to which we all are prone. We take the outer shell but lose the inner fruit.

There is plenty of illusion in our worldly strivings for the material or for honour. Even people who think themselves above this pursuit of honour are still unhappy if those around them consider them less important than they think they are. True honour is possessing intrinsic worth so of what import is it if others think people reputable or not? Because if others consider such individuals esteemed, they can more easily persuade themselves that they are. The lines of illusion are drawn.

People pursue prestige and worldly pleasures because they have a soul longing to attain a state of perfection, and indulgence in such is a delusory substitute for this. We channel our desire into more things and into self recognition to satisfy our deeper desire to connect to Hashem.

But taking this further, even life itself, the world itself have no purpose or reality in themselves, they are nothing but a means to an end. We live the parable and live it well but often miss the essence of life. Rav Dessler quotes the author of the Tanya who says that instead of referring to the world as 'Yeish meayin' (something from nothing) we would be nearer the truth to call it 'ayin me Yeish' (the nothing created out of Something!). The novelty of creation was something negative, the restriction of the Supreme Essence and the obscuring of His light. 'Yotzer ohr uVorei choshech', it was the darkness that needed creating, (the light was there all the time,) the nothing

created from Something. But people are afraid to confront reality and fill the void with any occupation engaging them aimlessly. Instead of vain striving, our challenge to achieve real satisfaction is to go beyond the mirages of the physical world and to pursue the Yeish, the connection with Hashem. This is the secret of Rosh Chodesh which reminds us to escape 'the parable without meaning, the existence which is a non existence.' The Shem MeShmuel says that on Shabbos we have a neshama yesaira, on Yom Tov, a ruach yesaira and on Rosh Chodesh a nefesh (desire) yesaira. Rosh Chodesh is the quintessential time to direct our desire for closeness to Hashem. We want forgiveness to look beyond the form to find the substance. Rosh Chodesh is thus a celebration of newness and renewal (hischadshus related to the word Chodesh, month)

Rosh Chodesh was given to the women because they refused to contribute their jewellery to the golden calf but gave freely and enthusiastically of it to build the Mishkan. The disparity of each action shows that a conscious effort was being made to go against their natural tendencies in their desire to honour Hashem. This idea relates to the midrash at the beginning of the Sedra. After Pinchos killed Zimri he was granted the covenant of peace but Rav Ashi says that only when Pinchos later made peace with the two and half tribes who built an alter away from Bnei Yisrael, was this covenant actually given. The reward given could be explained in light of Pinchos's natural temper where the glory of Hashem impelled him to act violently. But according to Rav Ashi, the merit for this great reward was earned by overcoming his zealous nature and restoring peace among Israel.

Rosh Chodesh celebrates the emotional; and as women by nature have this emotional intuition it is fitting that women were given this holiday to celebrate. Maharal explains that the argument between the sun and moon is really an argument symbolically between mind (sun) and heart (moon). It was initially destined that both should serve Hashem equally but Hashem decreed that this is the world of the intellect with a diminished emotional aspect.

On Rosh Chodesh we have to come close through avoda shebalev (a Korban) which is brought when the moon is smallest. This shows that emotional smallness is the time to draw near to Hashem which is best exemplified by the trait of humility. Its greatness is in essence its smallness. Only in our submissiveness can we find room for something besides ourselves and look at ourselves perceptively to see if we indeed have the proper credentials to find true meaning in life, to find the 'Yeish meYeish'.

Based on a shuir by Rebtz Shira Smiles