



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

One of the purposes of the Tabernacle was to allow each person to sense the Divine Presence in his personal life. However, as we try to fulfill the religious destiny of becoming a kingdom of spiritual leaders and a Holy nation, we must remember to do so for pure motives, and not for personal glory. When we take on new responsibilities for the sake of G-d's honor — and not for our own self-interests — then we will merit to have G-d dwell within us, and not just in our synagogues.

The central feature of the Tabernacle was the Holy Ark. G-d commanded that there be three such Arks, each one larger than the other; two Arks were to be made of gold, and one of wood. In assembly, the wooden one was placed between the two gold ones, thereby being completely surrounded by gold. This arrangement provides a lesson for every individual. Just as the Ark was golden both inside and outside, so too should every person be righteous “inside and outside.” We must remember to be “consistent,” and to behave virtuously not only

when people are watching, but even in private when nobody else can see.

The Ark represents the Torah scholar, the central figure around whom our religious life revolves. The carrying-poles represent those who financially support Torah scholarship. By applying this metaphor to all details of the Ark, we see that the Torah patron is perhaps more important than the scholar himself. The carrying-poles were not simply the means for transport, which would only be necessary when carrying the Ark from one place to another. They were never allowed to be separated from the Ark because they were essential to that which the Ark represented. So much so, that they needed to be attached to the Ark even before the Tablets were placed inside. In the Book of Kings we read that the front-ends of these poles pushed the curtain outward, and hence, although covered, were visible. To anyone in the Sanctuary they were the sole evidence of the existence of the Ark of the Covenant behind the curtain. Similarly, the Torah patron is more than just someone to carry the Ark. He is an integral part, a

fundamental force that precedes the scholar himself. He is someone who “stands out” and deserves credit for the Torah that is learned.

*Haftara Parshat Shekalim
Melachim II: 11:17 -12:17*

Unlike the Half-Shekel that was collected yearly from every Jew to support the national offerings made in the Temple, the righteous King Yehoash wanted to institute a high national tax to be collected by the Kohanim to repair the Temple. During the evil reigns of the previous monarchs, the Temple had fallen into disrepair. The Kohanim opposed forcing the nation to “donate” and they did not think it was wise for them to become fiscal tax-collectors, fearing it could damage the relationship of the people to their religious leaders. The Book of Chronicles explains that the Kohanim refused to collect money. In fact, no money was collected until the King revised his strategy for repairing the Temple, by placing a box for voluntary donations in the Temple. The Jewish People quickly filled the box, preferring to give voluntarily. The Temple was renovated and restored to its former glory.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

Hillel said... "Don't judge a friend until you reach his place." (*Pirkei Avos* 2:5)

One of the obstacles to judging people favorably is our certainty that if we would be in that person's place we would never behave that way:

"You'd never catch me doing that..."

"No one in my family would ever..."

"I simply don't understand how anyone could..."

Although we might feel our situation to be similar to that of another person, can we ever be in exactly the same situation? Can we bring to it the exact same back-

ground, experience and disposition and circumstance?

An aide of the Skulener Rebbe, Rabbi Eliezer Zusia Portugal, once related: Among the many people whom the Rebbe had rescued from Europe was a woman who had informed the Rumanian government of his religious activities, which led to his arrest and imprisonment. Why go to such effort and expense to save a person of her ilk?

"You have no idea how much she suffered beforehand, and how tempting the authorities make it to inform," the Rebbe said with tears in his eyes.

If we see someone stumble, we shouldn't judge him until we have been in the same situation and successfully passed that test. Until then, we have no right to judge.

Response Line

Is a Medium Rare?

Robert Liberman wrote:

I once saw a well-known medium, James Van Praag, on the Larry King TV show. He is supposedly able to communicate with the dead; he took several calls where he was able to relate very specific information about the deceased to the callers. As skeptical as I am about these sort of things, I was very impressed by his ability; he seemed very genuine. My question is this: The Torah specifically forbids communication with the dead. But, the mere fact that it is prohibited makes me wonder if it is, in fact, possible. Otherwise, why would G-d mention it? Thanks!

pute between Maimonides and Nachmanides.

Nachmanides indicates that certain occult practices can be effective, but that they are forbidden by the Torah. G-d created a universe which follows an ordered structure called "nature." Nachmanides writes that sorcery and the occult "contradict" G-d's will because they act in opposition to the simple, plain structure and order of nature. The Torah forbids these things because G-d wants us to conduct ourselves in this world according to natural laws.

Maimonides indicates otherwise. Writing about occult practices such as communicating with the dead, Maimonides calls them

Dear Robert,

Regarding your question, there's an apparent dis-

"falsehood and deception" used by idolaters to deceive the masses and gain their loyalty. He writes that it's wrong for the Jews, who are extremely wise and rational, to think there's any benefit in these things.

This comment of Maimonides seems to contradict explicit passages in the Talmud and Midrash that refer to departed spirits communicating with the living and revealing things about the past and future. Some commentators explain that Maimonides is referring to an ideal person who lives totally according to the truths of the Torah. Such a person will rise above all these practices, and from that exalted vantage point see that these practices have no reality. However, these forces of falsehood can indeed affect a person who has not yet reached this level.