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בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
ACHAREI MOS

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
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AWE AND REVERENCE

Our Parshah opens up with a directive to Aharon HaKohein. "Do not come into the area of the Aron HaKodesh, for if you do, you will die."¹ Rashi explains, "Since the Shechinah is there, be careful not to accustom yourself to coming there."²

It appears from Rashi that the reason Aharon was to avoid the area where the Shechinah resided was simply due to the fact that if he were to consistently visit the area, it would erode the awe and reverence he was supposed to have. This erosion would inevitably cause Aharon to act in a way that was not befitting the holiness of the place, and thus he would die.

Reb Chaim Shmulevitz³ (1902–1979) points out that this is not a simple scenario of 'familiarity breeds contempt.' This is Aharon HaKohein, a man who was equal to Moshe, a person who most certainly understood the seriousness and solemnity required in such a place. Yet, Aharon was still a human being, and like all human beings, we lose a touch of reverence as we become more accustomed to a person or situation.

We find Klal Yisrael were told that when they come to visit the Beis HaMikdash, they should not leave through the same gate they had come through.⁴ This, explains the Chassid Yavetz,⁵ (Reb Yosef Yavetz, 1440–1508) is to avoid the feeling of familiarity. By simply seeing the same gate twice, a person may come to view the House of Hashem as his own home!

There are places that require awe, like a shul or a beis medrash, and people that require awe, like a parent or a rebbi. These are places and people that we interact with frequently, but we should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of familiarity. By having the proper respect for these, we will keep ourselves on the path of avodas Hashem.

1 Vayikra 16:2

2 *ibid.*, s.v. כי בענין

3 Sichos Mussar 5731

4 Yechezkel 46:9

5 Avos 1:4

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Though there is great value in the feelings associated with a first-time experience, the frank reality is that we must *daven* every day, and we interact with our *rebbeim* and parents on a daily, if not even more frequent, basis. This being true, how is one supposed to engender the proper feelings of awe, reverence, excitement, and so on?

Oftentimes, our inner feelings follow our actions and our thoughts. Therefore, even if we don't truly feel a certain way, we can still act in a manner, or think in a way that will stir up certain feelings.¹

Thus, acting with excitement will bring about those feelings of excitement. Imagining oneself as standing before Hashem when one stands before a *rebbe* or parent will inspire the reverence they deserve.

This exercise is a simple but impactful way to shake off the familiarity and jumpstart one's *avodas Hashem*.

1 Shelah, Ki Savo, Derech Chaim

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Learning Mussar is not a chumrah or middas chasidus. It is a mitzvah from the Torah, and all are obligated in it. - R' Mattisyahu Salomon, Matnas Chelko on Mesillas Yesharim, pg. 9

THE LONG LOST MINYAN

"And because of the aforementioned reasons," the email read, "we will once again have our *minyán*, starting tomorrow, though for safety reasons it will be outside under a tent." I read the email again. Could it be? Our *shul* had closed abruptly when news spread that there was a global pandemic, and though I *davened* every day, I had no access to a *minyán*.

Finally, and almost out of the blue, I received an email that they were having their *minyán* again. Yes, it would be in a limited capacity, and one had to register beforehand, and so on. But nevertheless, *minyán* was starting!

Tears sprang to my eyes, and I quickly wrote an email asking if I could sponsor the tent. I just felt so much gratitude to Hashem for bringing us to this point, I needed to do something!

The next day I made sure to arrive on time, found my designated spot, and waited for the others. The tent officially had capacity for fifty people, but because each person needed space around them, the *minyán* was limited to fifteen. I looked around and saw my excitement wasn't my own, all those around me were in a similar place.

Davening started, and I *davened* with precision, focused on every word, pouring out my heart to Hashem. And even at that moment, I knew that these feelings, at some point, will dissipate, and I'll go back to *davening* the way I always did.

And, as expected, that did indeed happen. I'm not sure if it happened immediately, or over the next few months, but all of that excitement, the depth of those emotions, were simply gone.

But I had a secret weapon. I was prepared, as I knew this would happen. And although I let my guard slip, I didn't let it down completely. Instead of simply relying on the inspiration of the moment, I made concrete plans. I started learning the *halachos* of awe and reverence for a *beis haknesses*. I spent a long time, starting with the *Gemara*, down to the *Mishnah Berurah*, and even the more modern day *posskim*. And although the excitement is gone, it's been replaced with a serious sense of duty, and even reverence for the place where we *daven*.

My *tefillah* needs constant work, but that one-time shot in the arm, coupled with a steady infusion of understanding what it means to *daven*, has certainly elevated what was once, unfortunately, mundane.

And even at that moment, I knew that these feelings will dissipate...

**Based on a true story.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Familiarity is a challenge in regards to knowledge as well. A person may be familiar with the general ideas of a subject, but overlook its particulars, thinking they already know what there is to know.¹
- Good friends may become enemies if they spend too much time together.²

¹ *Mesillas Yesharim*, Introduction

² *Rashi* on *Mishlei* 25:17, s.v. הוקר רגלך

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