

“Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps.” (8:2)

Aharon *HaKohen* was chagrined that every *Nasi* participated in the *Chanukas HaMishkan*, dedicating the Sanctuary, while he and the tribe of Levi had been excluded. Hashem reassured him that his service was greater than theirs, because he was to prepare and kindle the *Menorah*. We must endeavor to understand how the kindling of the *Menorah* represents a greater spiritual service than participating in the dedication of the *Mishkan*. *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, z.l.*, explains that every *mitzvah* that one performs is generally accompanied by a certain amount of physical benefit or pleasure. This physical dimension detracts from the spiritual dimension of the *mitzvah*. Indeed, the very fact that a human being is fashioned from earth, catalyzes a partnership of the physical and the spiritual in carrying out every *mitzvah* or spiritual endeavor. It is almost impossible to perform a *mitzvah* that does not involve an element of physical gratification. To the extent that one diminishes the physical component, one is thereby able to elevate the spiritual aspect of the *mitzvah*.

This is the underlying meaning of Hashem’s message to Aharon. In the simple act of preparing and kindling the lamps of the *Menorah*, limited physical benefit is involved. Consequently, this *mitzvah* has greater spiritual value for the individual who executes it. It is a simple act, unlike that of offering animals for sacrifice.

In his *Mesillas Yesharim*, the *Ramchal* elaborates on this theme. He explains that each one of us has the capacity to make our physical body simply a temporary repository for the *neshamah*, soul. The body should not have more intrinsic significance than a vehicle for the soul to execute its function of fulfilling the Divine Will. The body is not here to be satisfied, but rather, to be maintained, so that it can function at its maximum as an agent for the soul.

In addressing the virtue of *taharah*, purity, *Ramchal* explains that purity refers to the perfection of one’s heart and thoughts. This means that one should not anticipate the gratification of physical desires in his actions. One’s deeds should be performed with intelligence and with reverence for the Almighty. The *chassid*, pious devotee, about whom the *Ramchal* speaks, the one whom he considers to be at the zenith of devotion to Hashem, is an individual who partakes of no luxuries or excesses. His food is simple; his clothes are modest. Indeed, his whole way of life bespeaks austerity and unpretentiousness.

Eating the most simple food can be enjoyable, and, indeed, it should be. Food that is tasteless is inedible. Hence, taking pleasure in discerning between the savory and the insipid is a requisite for proper nutrition. There seems to be no escape from enjoying food. This does not preclude the *chassid*’s spiritual ascendancy. When partaking of anything physical, however pleasurable, he must

do so with the correct intention – only to fulfill the Divine Will. Self-gratification should not be a goal.

This is all part of Adam *HaRishon's* sin. The *Midrash* relates that when Adam ate the forbidden fruit for which he was cursed, "The land shall produce thorns and weeds, and you shall eat the vegetation of the land" (*Bereishis* 3:18), he began to cry, "I and my animal shall be eating from the same trough," he said. Once Adam had succumbed to temptation and eaten the forbidden fruit, he realized the abyss into which he had fallen, for now his consumption of food was no different than that of the common beast. In attempting to rectify Adam's sin, ideally one should elevate his "*achilah*," consumption of food, to a level at which even those actions that are essential to survival are not carried out for physical enjoyment, but only to fulfill the Divine Will.

The true *chassid* views all physical behavior as a concession to existence, which should be carried out grudgingly. One might think that this concept is something unusual, which applies to a previous generation. This is not true. The true *tzaddikim* of every generation attain this zenith of service. Indeed, everyone is capable of acting in this manner, commensurate with his own level. We do not have to immerse ourselves in total self-gratification! Every morsel that we give up for Hashem elevates our spiritual plateau. This alone should more than compensate for the loss of some enjoyment.