

"But they shall not come and look as the holy (object) is inserted, lest they die." (4:20)

Rashi explains that this *pasuk* refers to the insertion of the holy objects into their coverings, a task performed by the *Kohanim*. The *Leviim* are not permitted to view this procedure. The *Ibn Ezra* adds two similar opinions. One view suggests that this *pasuk* is an admonition against the *Leviim* entering to see the dismantling of the *paroch'es*, partition/ curtain from before the *Aron Ha'Kodesh*. The other view contends that the *Leviim* are prohibited from seeing the *Aron* when it is uncovered or revealed. This opinion is confirmed in the *Midrash*, which cites the *Navi* in *Shmuel I 6:19*, in which Hashem strikes down the men of *Beis Shemesh* for gazing at the *Aron* Hashem. What is really the reason for this prohibition, and what lesson may be derived from it ?

A number of commentators suggest that this restriction is related to the admonition to keep a distance from *Har Sinai* during the giving of the *Torah*. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, offers a profound insight into the rationale behind this prohibition which has implications even in contemporary times. The *klei kodesh*, such as the *Aron*, should be viewed by the *Leviim* as being completely spiritual in nature. They are not to view them with the limited vision of their eyes, but rather to perceive them in their minds. To view the holy objects while they are being covered, profanes the inherent sublimity that they represent.

Let us explain this idea. Undeniably, the sacred objects were beautiful. Anyone who looked at them beheld their brilliance and splendor. These objects provided great spiritual contentment to those who gazed with love and devotion. However, there is a dangerous aspect to this physical contemplation. One may mistakenly confuse the spiritual essence with its physical symbol. One might become content with artistic beauty and accept it in place of the spiritual message it should engender.

The physical beauty of the *Mikdash* and its various appurtenances, the procedure and ritual of the service in the *Mikdash*, the *korbanos* and various methods of sacrifice, are all vehicles for bringing us closer to Hashem. They enable us to do His will in all aspects of our daily endeavor. By no means are they to serve as an end in themselves. He who brings a *korban* does not receive instant absolution without prior *teshuvah*, repentance. There is no such thing as a quick solution which enables an individual to go on with business as usual. He may not allow his *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, to govern his life, while every once in awhile he makes out a check for *tzeddakah* in order to expiate his sins.

Unfortunately, we have taken the physical aspect of our sacred edifices/objects and venerated them to the point that we have relegated their underlying spiritual motif to antiquity. Insofar as the physical enhances our spiritual appreciation of the object, it is to be tolerated -- but never at the expense of its spiritual consequence. Hence, to focus on the physical aspect of the sacred objects is an approach that can incur serious repercussions.