

## **And the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it. (6:2)**

The fire of one's *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, should burn passionately *bo*, "within him." In other words, he should do nothing during his service to Hashem that in any way offends, takes advantage of, or imposes upon someone else. The well-known *Chazal* (*Sukkah* 28) relates the level of intensity evinced by the Torah-study of the *Tanna*, Yonasan ben Uziel. His intensity was to the extent that when he studied Torah, birds flying over the roof of his house would be burned. The **Sfas Emes** was presented with the *Chazal* accompanied by the following question: If this was the level of intensity of the student (Yonasan ben Uziel), what level did his holy *Rebbe*, Hillel *HaZakein*, attain? The *Sfas Emes* replied that Hillel's level was so sublime that he maintained the fire well within him, such that no bird was harmed as a result of his learning.

This is a powerful lesson concerning our *avodas HaKodesh*. It may not adversely affect another person. Moshe *Rabbeinu* held out for seven days, refusing to accept the leadership over the Jewish people, lest it impinge on the honor his older brother, Aharon *HaKohen*. Moshe empathized with the pain and persecution of his brothers in Egypt. He identified with their every adversity, yet he could not bring himself to acquiesce to Hashem if it meant that Aharon's feelings would be affected. Only after Hashem assured him that Aharon would be overjoyed with Moshe's appointment did he accept the position. This, explains the **Alter m'Slobadka**, is the extent to which one should go in order not to infringe upon another Jew.

*Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, met with the *Chidushei HaRim* in Warsaw. The *Gerrer Rebbe* treated the founder of the *Mussar* (ethical character refinement) movement with great deference, which was immediately noticed by his *Chassidim*. Word spread quickly that the *Rebbe* had accompanied *Rav Yisrael* outside of his house all the way to the street. This was unusual, indicating that *Rav Yisrael* was a distinguished Torah personality.

Soon, everyone in the community knew that a distinguished Lithuanian *gaon* was in town. Everyone ceased what they were doing: businesses closed; craftsmen left their work; and everyone went to the *shul* where *Rav Yisrael* was *davening Minchah*. The entire *shul* was filled from wall to wall. There was standing room only, as everyone came to view the exalted sage whom the *Gerrer Rebbe* had honored. It was therefore a surprise – almost a letdown – when the *Chassidim* saw *Rav Yisrael* conclude his recital of *Shemoneh Esrai*, the silent prayer of eighteen benedictions, very quickly – almost as quickly as the simple worker who was rushing to return to his job.

*Rav Yisrael* sensed their bewilderment. He gave them a lesson in *mussar*, ethical imperative: "I saw that people were losing time from their work due to my presence: the shoemaker left his shop to attend *shul* with me; the tailor left his work to be with me; the blacksmith left his smithy to come to *shul*; the storekeeper closed his store – all because they wanted to *daven* with me. If I were to prolong my prayers, it would have an adverse monetary effect on the people's livelihood. What right do I have to do that?"

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Religious observance is what defines the Jewish people. Nothing is more important than our commitment to Hashem, His Torah and His *mitzvos*. This should not, however, come at the expense of another Jew's feelings or his livelihood.