

## **You shall not ascend My Altar on steps. (20: 23)**

*Rashi* explains that a ramp was used for the *Kohanim* to ascend to the *Mizbayach*, Altar, as a provision to circumvent any suggestion of immodesty. A ramp allows for the legs to move evenly, thereby not allowing any inappropriate exposure of one's self. I think we might be able to add a homiletic interpretation to the closing *pasuk* of *Parashas Yisro*.

The *Mizbayach* symbolizes sacrifice. Indeed, to study Torah, to live a Torah lifestyle, does require a certain element of sacrifice. Before I continue, the sacrifice is only in the eyes of the beholder. A true *ben Torah* does not view his devotion to Torah as sacrifice. The correct word should be dedication. Every moment dedicated to Torah is a supreme moment of ecstasy. Sacrifice is in the eyes of the world, who fail to understand the beauty and sweetness associated with Torah.

Perhaps there is financial sacrifice, since one who devotes his time to Torah study has little time for anything else. A promising career in commerce, science or law eludes he who trades a financial portfolio for a *Gemurah*. The cost of Torah study for those who want to have *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, from their children is definitely a sacrifice. On the other hand, my heart goes out to all those who choose secular education over a Torah day school/*Yeshivah* education. The fruits we reap are often the results of the seeds we sow. After all is said and done, there might be sacrifice to a Torah life, but it is well worth the awesome reward: a reward that cannot be obtained any other way.

This perhaps explains the *Altar*, but what about the Ramp? Is there a difference if one ascends the heights of Torah via a stairway or a ramp? Regardless of the means, he has still made it to the top. There is a difference, however, in the quality of the ascent. More effort is exerted in climbing stairs. This is especially true if the space between the steps is high. There is less exertion in going up a ramp, since it is a gradual climb. On the other hand, it is more difficult to stop and rest on the incline of the ramp, while one who has reached the next step does not expend great effort in remaining there.

We, thus, have discerned one primary difference, which allows for a benefit in each means of ascension. Steps are more difficult to climb, but easier when one wants to stop and rest. The ramp is easier to ascend, but does not allow for comfortable resting along the way. Additionally, if the steps are slippery, one can still climb up; while a slippery ramp will prove quite difficult to escalate.

The Torah is teaching us an important principle in *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. The road to Heaven is not comprised of steps. It is more like an upward ramp. One who wants to ascend to the Torah peak must be acutely aware from the very beginning that there is no resting, no stopping, no vacations, no holidays. It is a steady, upward climb, at times slippery, whereby one could easily fall. He must be careful, focused on the "top" and not allow for status quo. On the other hand, it does not require one to jump from step to step, go from level to level, in one catapult. It means placing one foot in front of the other and keeping it up until he makes the "top." One

cannot say: “I have gone far enough”; “This is how religious I want to be”; “I am comfortable with my present level of *Yiddishkeit*.” If one stops his progression, he begins to slide backward until he is at the bottom.

This idea applies equally on the community level, as it does on an individual basis. The *shul* that wants to maintain a status quo, a certain level of religious commitment – no more, no less – will eventually have less. A community that refuses to go forward, to move upward, will eventually slide backward. There are no plateaus in Jewish life. One either grows, or he regresses.