

You shall make two Cherubim... from both ends of the Kapores...The Cherubim shall be with wings spread upward... with their faces toward one another. (25:18,20)

The *Baal HaTurim* writes: *Keruvim* – *Kravya*, like young children. He cites the *pasuk*, *Ki naar yoraei v'ohaveihu*; "When *Yisrael* was a lad I loved him" (*Hoshea* 11:1). The purpose of the *Mishkan* is to draw and continue *hashroas haShechinah*, the Divine Presence, into the earthly sphere (thus, bringing sanctity and deeper spirituality into our midst). The primary place where the *Shechinah* reposed was between the *Keruvim*, whose facial features were that of young children. The *Keruvim* aroused *Klal Yisrael's* attribute of *naarus*, an exciting, exuberant and passionate drive to serve Hashem and observe His *mitzvos*. This is the merit by which we warrant Hashem's repose within our midst.

In his commentary to *Shemos* 25:5, *Vayishlach es naarei Bnei Yisrael*; "He sent the youths of *Bnei Yisrael*." (*Onkeles* says this refers to the *Bechoros*, Firstborn, who were charged with slaughtering the *Korbanos Shelamim*.) *Ramban* defines *naarei Bnei Yisrael* as the "young men who had not yet tasted sin, never having approached a woman, (never having any immoral thought or action,) for they are the *mivcharim*, choicest, among the people and the holiest among them." Thus, *Ramban* implies that the advantage of youth is purity and sanctity, not yet having been tainted by sin.

The *Talmud* (*Bava Kamma* 92b) quotes *Rava* asking *Rabba bar Mari*: "From where is this matter derived whereby people say, 'When we were small, we were considered to be men; now that we are old, we are considered to be children?' Rabbi Mari answered that it is written in the Torah (*Shemos* 13:21), that when *Klal Yisrael* initially traveled in the wilderness, Hashem Himself guided them with a Pillar of Cloud and a Pillar of Fire. The Almighty Himself guarded the Nation. At the end, however, when the nation had "aged" and become more distinguished, they were guarded and led by an angel dispatched by Hashem. (The problem he posed was: It appears that when we were young we were important; when we aged, however, we lost our significance and were treated like children.)

Obviously, the above dialogue in the *Talmud* requires serious commentary. *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, quotes *Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl*, who addresses Hashem's initial guidance of *Klal Yisrael*, then transfers it over to an angel. Should it not be the opposite? Youth bespeaks strength and independence. Age evinces infirmity and weakness. A nation that has aged and weakened requires more significant assistance than one that is in the bloom of youth. *Rav Pogremonsky* explains that age is a term applied to sin. *Rashi* comments concerning the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* (71:9), *Al tashlicheini l'eis ziknah*; "Do not cast me off in time of old age," "If I have aged with sin, do not reject me."

When one is young, i.e. with little to no accumulated sin, he has a greater ability to recognize and acknowledge Hashem via the medium of what transpires in the world – especially in that which

occurs in the immediate proximity of his personal life. His rationales and excuses, the cynicism that comes with aging, does not hamper his ability to see with clarity. In other words, as we age, we conjure all kinds of reasons for our errors of “omission or commission.” As we age, the blinders become larger and thicker, obviating our ability to see lucidly and acknowledge Hashem.

This is what *Rava* lamented: When a person is young, pure of sin, his vision of Hashem is clear and not myopic. When he ages, it becomes stunted, imprudent and indulgent. He has a *teretz*, answer, for everything, with cynicism abounding in his every word. When *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt (when they were “young”), Hashem led them. Once they sinned with the Golden Calf, they lost that special closeness. They were now transferred to the care of an angel. *Naarus* is thus defined as purity from sin, which engenders Hashem’s love for us.

The *Alter, zl, m’Kelm* quotes his *Rebbe, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, who posits that the advantage of *naar*, youth, is a constant drive to learn, to amass more, greater and deeper knowledge. *Klal Yisrael*, regardless of their erudition, seek to delve deeper into the Torah, to swim in the sea of *Talmud*. They never know enough; they never have enough. They always want more Torah. This is the benefit of youth. [It is not reserved for youth. Indeed, the greater one is, the more he has learned, the more he realizes and acknowledges that he has so much more to learn. Youthfulness is an attitude which can and should be shared by young and old alike.]

Rav Svei supplements this with his own caveat. A young child views everything as “new.” Everything that he learns and observes is new to him. This is the attitude of *naar*, youth: excitement concerning everything that he learns. It is special; it is precious; it is new! This emotion should permeate every aspect of our service to Hashem. I remember a few months ago, when I finally left the pandemic-generated isolation of my home to go to *shul* for the first time, the excitement of *davening* with a *minyan*, of hearing *krias haTorah* was overwhelming and palpable. Can I say the same thing now? *Hischadchus*, newness; excitement, exuberance, spirited, eager, etc. These are the words that should define our *avodas hakodesh*.

Perhaps we may add another understanding of *naar*. *Hisnaari mei’afar*, “shake off the dust” (*Lecha Dodi*). Young people live lives that are unfettered by cynicism. Optimism reigns when one is filled with youthful ardor; avoiding the skepticism and misanthropic moods that often accompany someone who has been blindsided by the vicissitudes of human life. Shake it off! Act! Ignore the pessimists and naysayers. This is youth.

One *gadol* particularly exemplified the vitality of a youth – despite his being beset with illness, old age and heavy emotional baggage; it was the *Ponovezher Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl*, who can be credited with reestablishing Torah in *Eretz Yisrael* following the destruction of the Torah centers of Europe. The *Tchebiner Rav, zl*, said of him, “The *Ponovezher Rav* showed us what Torah vitality is!” He had every reason to escape to *Eretz Yisrael*, retire from public life and learn all day, but, as he himself said, “I sacrificed the greatness of the ‘*Ponevezher Gaon*’ for the sake of the *Ponevezh Yeshivah*.”

The *Ponovezher Rav's* achievements are beyond incredible. He demonstrated that a person is imbued with mighty willpower and unlimited resources with which he can accomplish so much. What prevents him from realizing success? The perceived and realistic obstacles and barriers that affect little people. One who places his trust in Hashem, as did the *Ponovezher Rav*, can surmount and overcome all challenges. Hashem will grant him success if he will "shake off" the fetters that attempt to separate him from achievement.