

Are Our Shuls Really Closed?

We have been taught that in challenging times the call of the hour is to cry out to Hashem in Tefillah. Our Sages tell us that this Tefillah has an even greater power to cause an end to our suffering when said together with a Minyan and in a Shul. When faced with difficulty, every Jew has been armed with the weapon of Kaddish to eradicate evil decrees. The sweet melodious sound of Amen Yehei Shmei Rabbah reverberates in our ears. It seems that Covid-19 has disarmed us and stripped us of our greatest channel to evoke Hashem's mercy and compassion. Furthermore, the Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo tells us that the entire purpose of creation is fulfilled through our Shuls. He writes, "The purpose of all of the Mitzvos is that we believe in Hashem, and admit that He created us. This is the purpose of the world.... And the intention of raising our voices in Prayer, our Shuls, the merit of the public prayer, is that people have a place to gather and admit to Hashem that He created them. Through this it will be publicized, and everyone will say to Hashem we are Your creations." However, based on a Sifri in Parshas Eikev, it is clear that this channel is not closed, and there is no need to despair and lose hope.

The Sifri comments on the Pasuk in Eikev (11:22), which says, "To walk in His ways", as follows: "These are the ways of Hashem, as it says (*Shemos 32*), 'Hashem Hashem, a merciful and compassionate G-d, slow to anger, abundantly kind, truthful, He preserves kindness for two thousand generations, tolerates all different types of sin, and cleanses'. It says (*Yoel 3*), 'Anyone who is called by the name of Hashem will be saved.' How is it possible to be called by the name of Hashem? Rather, just like Hashem is called merciful and compassionate, so too you should be merciful and compassionate, and give free gifts to everyone....It also says (*Yeshaya 43*), 'Anyone that is called in My name I created him, and that brings honor to My name. It says (*Mishlei 16*), 'All Hashem did was so people would praise Him.'"

In summary, the Sifri says that when a person conducts himself with the Middos of Hashem, the name of Hashem is upon him, as he is expressing G-dliness. Through a person expressing these Middos, he fulfills the purpose of creation, which is that the world will come to recognize and appreciate Hashem.

We can glean a powerful insight into the importance of character refinement from this Sifri. The purpose of Middos are well known. Rav Chaim Vital ZT"L writes, "One needs to exert greater caution in staying away from bad Middos than he does in regards to Aveiros and Bitul Mitzvos. When someone has good Middos he will be able to do all of the Mitzvos, and Middos are the root of all Avodos Hashem." The Vilna Gaon says, "Everything is dependent on Tikkun Hamidos, and it is the purpose of life." Our Sages tell us further that the purpose of Middos is not merely to be the vehicle to help us do the Mitzvos, but is actually the end goal of all the Mitzvos, as they say, "That the Mitzvos were given to refine a person." The Sifri goes a step further and tells us that the purpose of Tikkun Middos is to increase and spread Kavod Shamayim in the world. When people see us following in the ways of Hashem, we have publicized Hashem in the world.

Based on this Sifri we need not feel broken that we are unable to express Kavod Shamayim through Amen Yehei Shmei Rabbah. We need not mourn our inability to fulfill our purpose of creation, which is to recognize Hashem and broadcast this to the world, for we have a valid substitute. Through following in the ways of Hashem, acting kind, being merciful and generous, and all the other Middos of Hashem, we will not only be saved from suffering, but the whole world will recognize Hashem. **People will come to see G-d through seeing G-dly people.**

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUESS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא