



Parades's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Tzav. The Power of Immersive Environments

In this week's Parsha (we find Aharon and his sons unable to leave the house for 7 days and nights! (Actually, it is not their own private dwelling; it is the Tent of Meeting!))

"You shall remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days, keeping the Lord's charge—that you may not die—for so I have been commanded." (Lev. 8:35)

This is part of the seven-day Milu'im ritual which inaugurates the Tabernacle and the priests themselves.

But why are the priests restricted to the Tabernacle for seven days and nights?

What does this achieve?

Is it possible to gain sanctity by totally immersing, by being enveloped by the Tent of meeting for an entire week's cycle?

(Some commentators assert that the restriction on the priests was only to leave during the time of the Temple service i.e. not taking breaks. In that case, this command is about staying focused, on-mission, understanding the essential nature of your work. See Ramban.)

Rav Hirsch comments:

"Happy are those who dwell in Your house;

they forever praise You. Selah!

...Better one day in Your courts than a thousand [elsewhere];

I would rather stand at the threshold of God's house

than dwell in the tents of the wicked." (Ps. 84:5,11)

"...to live in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,

to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord,

to frequent His temple..." (ps.27:4)

Quite clearly the "dwelling; tarrying in the House of God" implies that one gives oneself over to the idea that the House of God represents, becoming suffused by the thoughts and decisions taught by it; only so can the "living in the House of the Lord" be an object of great yearning.

...living at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting ...for seven days long, giving oneself up entirely to grappling, accepting, and adapting oneself to the whole abundance of thoughts, ideas and ideals represented by the Tent of Meeting, and internalizing these ideas becomes the very essence of the priestly service."

Rav Hirsch is interestingly using Tehillim as the basis, the model for his understanding of this "indwelling". He understands that being in an environment, immersing oneself in it, has an effect on the person.

THE CALENDAR AS A SIMULATION GAME/REALITY SHOW

I have always felt that that is what our 7-day chagim do to us. On Pesach, for 7 days, just like the priests, we transform our kitchens and our diets. On Sukkot, for 7 days we alter our living room, our dining room, and for some, even our bedroom. Living out in the Sukkah does something to us, as we abandon the experience of our protective walls and air-conditioning, and expose ourselves to the night air, the rain, and the sounds coming from the neighbor's Sukkah. I find that this is a sort of "Reality game" where we are meant to be transformed a little, certainly provoked into standing outside, and reconsidering our familiar lives. This is intensified further in other periods of the Jewish calendar with a more extended timespan: the 3 weeks, the 40 days of Elul and the 10 days of penitence.

Please discuss:

Have you ever been immersed in an environment that has profoundly changed you? Summer camp? A period in a yeshiva or seminary? Another intense all-encompassing experience?

Do we expect that our festivals/holidays act as immersive, transformative experiences?

OUR CORONAVIRUS LIFE

At some level, this is the total inverse of what we are doing during these weeks of Corona. Aharon and his sons were segregated from their families, away from their homes, confined to God's House, relegated to a sacred zone, where we have been thrust deeply into our homes, into the family.

These weeks, WE are also immersed in OUR homes.

How are we changing our homes?

How are our homes affecting us?

Are we growing or shrinking? ascending or descending

What values, ideas and ideals are we absorbing?

What values, temperaments, mindset, are we emitting?

(And yes... this is hard. I am not preaching.

I am thinking, dreaming, trying to reach higher...)

Shabbat Shalom!