

שְׁמִינִי / Shemini

Luxuries and Distractions

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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: יִין וְשֵׁכָר אַל תִּשְׁתּוּ אֹתָם וּבְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ..."

"And Hashem said to Aharon... do not drink wine or liquor, neither you nor your sons, when you come into the Mishkan, so that you shall not die..."

"Excuse me Totty," said Ari Holtzbacher as he knocked on the door to his father's study. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Anshel Holtzbacher looked up from his sefer. "Sure, Ari," he smiled. "What's on your mind?"

"I wanted to talk to you about my upcoming seudas Bar Mitzvah," Ari said hesitantly.

"Ah, gevaldig!" said Totty. "Becoming a Bar Mitzvah is a tremendous occasion! We must make sure to properly celebrate it! I was thinking that we would rent out the brand new simcha hall in the basement of Kehillas Bnei Avigdor. We could hire Mr. Greenbaum to play keyboard - did you hear how nice he played at the shul's Purim Mesibah? And his wife has a catering business. She has a very nice Bar



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Mitzvah package with three different types of kugels, mini-schnitzels, and a wide assortment of cakes.”

Ari’s face fell. “Oh, that’s — that’s nice.” he said with a forced smile.

Totty looked at his son. “Obviously you had something different in mind, Ari. Why don’t you tell me what you were thinking?”

“Well,” Ari began slowly. “I was thinking about something really special. Like maybe at the new Horki hall, where they had the chasunah for the Rebbe’s daughter. And we could hire the full Menapetz Oznayim Orchestra, with Avraham ben David as the singer, and Chaim K., the child singer, as well!”

Totty raised his left eyebrow, but kept listening as Ari continued.

“We would have a smorgasbord with meat carving stations, a salad bar, and a sushi bar. Waiters would walk around with trays of little franks-in-blanks, hot knishes, and drinks. After the first dance we would have a meal with a first course of grilled Alaskan salmon, followed by French onion soup. Next we would serve a choice of Hawaiian chicken or Texas smoked brisket and for the main course there would be a choice of rib-eye steak, rotisserie chicken, or roast turkey. And of course an entire milchig section for the people who might want to go out for pizza and ice cream afterwards...”

“Of course it won’t be too fancy,” Ari finished, “but it’s my Bar Mitzvah - we need to show how important it is! Everyone knows we have a lot of money, and if we make a small Bar Mitzvah in the shul, it would seem like we don’t care about how special it is.”

Totty let Ari finish and then put a hand on his shoulder. “Ari,” he said. “I want you to take a look at something in this week’s Parsha.”

Totty opened the Chumash on his desk and Ari read:

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: יִין וְשֵׁכָר אַל תִּשְׁתֵּי אֹתָהּ וּבְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ: בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ...

“And Hashem said to Aharon... do not drink wine or liquor, neither you nor your sons, when you come into the Mishkan, so that you shall not die...”

Ari looked up from the Chumash. “I’m confused,” he said. “I didn’t say anything about serving alcohol. Even if you do have l’chaims for the adults, we can have a sign saying that Kohanim aren’t allowed to have any.”

Totty smiled. “No, Ari. That’s not what I meant. You see, Rav Avigdor Miller explains that the Torah is telling us something important here, not just for the Kohanim. The Torah is saying that we must be careful when we serve Hashem, not to get distracted by extra gashmiyus and things that we don’t need.

“Just like someone who drinks wine might be distracted and not serve Hashem properly, so too, any extra fancy things in our lives will only take our mind off of our main purpose of serving Hashem.

“Yes, Hashem has bentshed us with enough money to make the event you described, but we can’t get carried away with making too much of a big deal out of these things and forget about what being a Bar Mitzvah is all about! We are celebrating your new responsibility as a Bar Mitzvah who will now devote his life to serving Hashem. Of course Hashem put many delicious and beautiful things in this world for us to enjoy, but that is only to help us serve Hashem even better.”

Ari thought quietly to himself for a few minutes.

“I see,” he said to Totty, and his eyes suddenly lit up. “I have an idea! Can we then instead spend the extra money on buying Shabbos food that week for all of the poor Bnei Torah in town?”

Totty beamed. “What a wonderful idea, Ari, and a great way to celebrate becoming a Bar Mitzvah!”

Have A Wonderful Shabbos!

Takeaway:

Luxuries are a distraction from serving Hashem. While we enjoy all the gifts Hashem gives us, we have to be careful not to become overly attached to the pleasures of this world.



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