

“AND THEY SHALL TAKE FOR ME A PORTION...” (SHMOS 25:2)

THE MIDRASH (Shmos Rabbah 33:3) on this verse quotes Shir HaShirim (5:2), “I sleep but my heart is awake,” and gives three explanations: Firstly, the Jewish nation “sleeps,” – or despairs – over the Messianic redemption; but Hashem – our heart – remains awake to redeem us. Secondly, the Jewish people have given up hope on the *mitzvos*; but our forefathers’ merit stands in good stead for us. Finally, the Jewish nation gave up hope that they will ever be forgiven for the sin of the golden calf; nevertheless, Hashem gave us the opportunity for atonement by asking us to build the Mishkan. This introduces our *parasha*, “Take for me a portion,” to build the Mishkan.

**The Jewish people felt despair**

The Yefeh Toar quotes a variant of this Midrash with an alternate second explanation: The Jews have given up hope on the *mitzvos*; but our heart is awake from acts of *chesed*, davening Shema and Shmoneh Esrei, going to shul, and going to learn in the *beis midrash*. In other words, even though the Jewish people felt despair over the *mitzvos* – which they felt were uninspired and not accomplishing anything – nevertheless they continued to keep these *mitzvos* (*chesed*, Shema, etc.), which reawakened them to do all the *mitzvos* properly.

The Midrash tells us that Jews did not have a positive outlook on their *mitzvah* observance. They felt that their *mitzvos* did not carry meaning. If this was their outlook, how could these few *mitzvos* that they were doing reawaken their excitement? How did their *mitzvah* observance become more meaningful, just by continuing to perform them, without any outside input? Furthermore, the *mitzvos* listed in the variant Midrash were not the *mitzvos* we tend to consider exciting, inspirational *mitzvos*; they were the seemingly routine, mundane acts of *chesed*, daily prayers and study. How could these “run-of-the-mill” *mitzvos* reawaken the Jews from their “deep sleep” of tired *mitzvah* observance?

**We sometimes fall into the trap of waiting for rare and “exotic” mitzvos to inspire us**

We sometimes fall into the trap of waiting for rare and “exotic” *mitzvos* to inspire and energize us. We look for unusual customs and *segulos* (mystical practices) to adopt, or concentrate on newly-discovered stringencies, in hopes of raising our spiritual level and meriting success in our endeavors. In truth, however, every single *mitzvah*, done with simple, straightforward sincerity, has explosive power latent within it. Even ordinary, everyday *mitzvos* have the ability to awaken us out of our stupor and breathe fire into our souls to perform all the *mitzvos* with fervor and zeal. A simple gesture of holding the door open for the next person, or giving *tzedaka* with a warm smile, can change our emotional attitude towards serving Hashem. Coming to *shul* on time, saying the daily prayers with attention to the plain meaning of the words, and learning Torah on a daily schedule are all basic practices that can have life-changing effects on a person, injecting fervor and meaning into his actions and thoughts.

**We must each attempt to unleash the power of the mitzvos that we are presently performing**

The very same routine *mitzvah* that we feel lacks gusto and seems humdrum can often generate the spark that ignites a chain reaction of enthusiasm for Torah and *mitzvos*. Focusing on infrequent *mitzvos*, or on practices that have popular appeal, is not necessary. Instead, we must each attempt to unleash the power of the *mitzvos* that we are presently performing. This will infuse our lives with the exuberance and joy of rising each morning to greet a new day, appreciating the incredible privilege bestowed upon us, to serve the Creator of the universe with all our heart and soul.