

The Glory of the Single Minded Person

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Most of us have at least one single-minded person in our lives. It may be someone at the office, a family member, a neighbor or a friend. The subject of their single-mindedness can be anything -- a cause, a political opinion, an obsessive hobby, a worshipped celebrity. It may be virtuous or ominous, fascinating or boring, intelligent or silly. Single-minded people come in many shapes and forms, but they all share a seeming inability to talk about anything else, even -- apparently -- think about anything else.

Single-minded people are not much fun. But there is something about them that elicits our amazement, even admiration. They have devoted themselves to something unequivocally. Imagine what we could achieve if we could make such a commitment to the things we truly care about!

Not that we'd want to become a single-minded person. But we would like to have some of that single-mindedness mixed into the concoction of our character. Perhaps one part in five, or one part in fifteen. Just enough to impart that extra oomph! to our lives.

Our sages tell us that, "Gold was created only so that it should be used for the Mishkan." The Mishkan was the portable "Tabernacle" built by the Children of Israel in the desert as a "home for G-d in the physical realm." According to the Chassidic masters, making a home for G-d in the physical realm is the purpose of everything that we do; the Mishkan was simply the prototype, the model which empowered us -- and taught us how -- to replicate it in our personal universe.

Fifteen materials were used in the construction of the Mishkan -- gold, silver, copper, three types of dyed wool, linen, goat hair, ram and tachash skins, acacia wood, olive oil, aromatic herbs and precious stones. Our sages explain that these represent a cross-section of the various "kingdoms" in creation (the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, and the animal kingdom) and also correspond to the various components of the human being and the heavenly bodies -- all of which are to be included in the home for G-d we make in the physical world.

"Gold was created only so that it should be used for the Mishkan." And yet, G-d also allows the use of gold in wedding rings, teeth fillings, and gilded moldings in ornate hotel lobbies. Apparently, G-d does not envision our world as a single-minded place.

4 February | 30 Shevat

Terumah

Shabbat Begins: 4:40 pm

Shabbat Ends: 5:46 pm

G-d already has single-minded creations -- they're called angels: there are angels of mercy and angels of judgment and angels of love and angels of awe, but no angel possesses more than one characteristic or serves more than one function. (That's why Abraham was visited by three angels -- one to inform Sarah that she will have a son, a second to heal Abraham and rescue Lot, and a third to destroy the evil city of Sodom -- no one angel can do two kinds of jobs).

Humans are not built that way. G-d wanted us to be multi-faceted beings -- beings who use the same material to build Him a temple, seal their marriages, fix their teeth and add some ritz to their travel accommodations -- and have it all somehow add up to this place for Him they're making in their lives.

Yet a bit of single-mindedness is always a good thing. That's why one of the materials used in the Mishkan was the hide of a tachash. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, the tachash was a gloriously colored animal that was created specifically to be used in the making of the Mishkan -- it did not exist before that moment, and has not existed since. If the purpose of creation is to make "home for G-d in the physical realm", then there should be at least one element in creation that is used exclusively for that end, in the most literal sense.

The interesting thing, however, is that the tachash is described as bedecked with many brilliant colors. Apparently, there's more to single-mindedness than meets the eye.

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