

Words of Blessing for Adielle: Forging a Personal Path in Avodat Hashem  
*VaYakbel-Shekalim 5779*

There are few occasions in life, if any, that can match the inarticulable joy of becoming a parent. I say inarticulable not only because the fatigue can make it difficult to string together words into sentences of any kind, let alone ones that conform with the norms of proper grammar, but because words simply cannot convey the depth of emotion of bringing a new life into this world.

And so, Temimah and Shachar, with respect to that joy which is uniquely yours today, we hope that you will cherish this special feeling for the rest of your lives.

And, we want you to know that your Adielle, that precious jewel from the Almighty, is so very precious to us as well, and to the entire community. May she be a fitting namesake, Temimah, for your beloved grandmother, of blessed memory, Aidel Zucker, and continue her own legacy of a profound commitment to Torah, to truth, to justice, and to the sacred bonds of family, and to be a link in the chain of those women of boundless faith, of indomitable spirit, that have been responsible for the very survival of our nation since the days of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah.

In sharing just a few words of blessing, *divrei brachah*, it is very much to a particular generation of these women from which I wish to draw inspiration. In the Torah portion that we read this morning, the Torah discusses, as it did in last week's *sedra*, *Ki Tisa*, the כִּיֹּר, the washbasin from which the Kohanim purified themselves every morning before engaging in the sacred Temple rite. This time, however, the Torah adds an additional detail, noting that the copper from which the כִּיֹּר was constructed was taken from the מִרְאֵת, the copper mirrors which the women of that generation contributed.

The Midrash *Tanhuma* tells us the story of these mirrors. In the darkest days of our bondage in Egypt, the Hebrew slaves had despaired of any hope for the future. Their days were filled with work of the most demoralizing and humiliating sort, and they had lost a sense of their very dignity and humanity. And yet, the righteous women of that

generation, to whom our Sages attributed the very redemption itself, בשכר נשים, צדקניות נגאלו אבותינו ממצרים, would hear nothing of helplessness, of hopelessness, of despair.

They took these mirrors and they beautified themselves, and, with the noblest of motives, they breathed life back into their deflated husbands and ensured that there would indeed be a future. And so, with thanks to their boundless faith and steely spines, and the copper mirrors which they carried, there was a future.

When the call came for donations to the Mishkan, the edifice we would build to bring the Divine presence into our midst, ושכנתי בתוכם, these women wished to donate the mirrors that had made this very day possible. And yet, they were met with rejection, as Rashi cites from the Midrash, היה משה מואס בהן, Moshe was repulsed by them, given their association with intimacy.

And yet, a Heavenly voice emerged and told Moshe that, on the contrary, not only were these mirrors acceptable, but, in the eyes of the Almighty, they were the most beloved contribution of any made to the Mishkan, אלו חביבין עלי יותר מכולן. These mirrors were not, as Moshe instinctively reacted, sources of impurity, tainted by a carnal area of life, but they would be used to comprise the very vessel which brought the requisite purity to the Kohanim so that they might perform the Avodah in the Mishkan altogether.

For, this was not a mere contribution of precious metal, or a skill, as was the case with respect to so many of the other gifts to the Mishkan, but of that which was most person in the lives of the women, something that spoke to the very depths of their souls, and it was, in this most intimate and personal way that they wished to serve the Almighty, and that the Almighty wished to be served.

Our Sages taught us, רחמנא ליבא בעי, the Almighty desires the heart. The Almighty desires that we serve him not generically, not by rote, מצות אנשים מלומדה, but by

attempting to forge a relationship with Him that is honest, that is personal, that is authentic.

Of course, as Parshat Shekalim reminds us, **העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט ממחצית השקל**, the wealthy could not exceed, nor could the indigent donate less, than the requisite half shekel that went to the annual upkeep and functioning of the Mishkan, there is an aspect of spiritual life that is incumbent upon all of us. Just a number of weeks from now, we will all gather in this room to hear the same Megillah being read. Just a few moments from now, we will all answer the same exact words to the same exact kaddish.

And yet, layered on top of that foundation of universal obligation, the **מראות**, these sacred mirrors remind us that what is **חביב מכולם**, what is most precious, is when we come before the Almighty with a desire to truly personalize our relationship with Him. While never neglecting all that is incumbent upon us, we must strive to cultivate those areas of our spiritual lives that speak most deeply to our own talents and abilities, **רחמנא ליבא בעי**, God desires the heart indeed.

**אין אדם לומד אלא במקום שלבו חפץ**, a person learns best where the heart most desires. What is true in the cardinal area of Talmud Torah resonates and radiates to the entirety of our Avodat Hashem, as we know that God is closest to us when we are being most fully ourselves with Him, **קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת**.

And, so this is our blessing for our new communal jewel, for Adielle. That she will indeed give the proverbial machatzit ha-shekel, to fully embrace all of those aspects of our spiritual life that are universally binding, but, to see that as merely the floor, from which she can aspire to build a connection with God and the community that speak to the strengths and blessings we all look forward to discovering.

We hope that she does so, in her mother's name, with a sense of *temimut*, of complete devotion to the Lord, as Ramban explained, **תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך**, with an unwavering belief in the power of the Almighty's mastery over the cosmos, and, in the

name of her father, with a sense of *shachar*, of unbridled hope and expectation in the possibilities brought forth by each and every new dawn.

For, it was precisely these two virtues melded together, boundless faith in the Almighty's power of deliverance, and an unshakable belief, *yesh shachar*, there would be a tomorrow, there would be a future, which inspired a generation of women to make use of copper mirrors some three and one half millennia ago when our people were being formed in the **כור הברזל** of Egyptian slavery.

It is in their footsteps that Adielle will one day walk, as the next link in the chain which stretches back to the Egyptian desert itself, and whose visage shall guide her, on her own personal path, in the service of her family, her community, the Jewish people, humanity, and Her Creator.