

Shemos – 5772  
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Why, did HaShem reveal Himself to Moshe through the *sneh* [the burning bush]? The fact that HaShem chose the *sneh* out of all places, teaches us a powerful lesson in relating to G-d and to our fellow man.

There are many answers given to this question by many prominent Gedolei Yisrael. The meaning of the *sneh* that resonates most powerfully to me, sees the *sneh* as symbolic- but not of Sinai, or of Mitzrayim or of Israel- but of HaKadosh –Baruch –Hu in His finest hour. The message He is sending us is, that as long as Jews were enslaved, G-d could only reveal Himself in the lowly burning bush in the spirit of “I am with my people in their pain”. As Rashi puts it “ Imoh Anochi B’tzara”. G-d cannot be in comfort as long as His people are in distress. That message praises HaShem Elokeinu our G-d, our King [Malkeinu], and Avinu Sheh’ba’shamayim [our Father in Heaven], but it also challenges us to live up to that model, as “Ve’halachta Bid’rachav, You shall follow in His ways [Devarim 28:9].

Dovid HaMelech understood this very well when he stated “I will not enter my house, nor go to bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes nor slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for my G-d, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Ya’akov”. [Tehilim 132:3,4]. Dovid HaMelech took an oath saying he will not sleep comfortably in his kingly palace as long as the Shechina of HaShem does not have a prominent place to rest, meaning a Beit HaMikdash. He empathized with G-d, so therefore he endured the tza’ar, the pain, the anguish, and the uncertainty. That is the Ve’halachta Bid’rachav which Dovid internalized.

When a major fire broke out in the small town of R’ Simcha Bunim and many families lost the shelter of their home and had to sleep on hay in their barns, R’ Simcha Binum, the rabbi of the community, left the comfort of his home, took out his pillow and blanket, and slept in the barn. “As long as another Jew in this town does not have a bed to sleep on then I cannot sleep in my bed” he explained to his family, for that is what empathizing with another Jew means.

His wife argued with him and said, “But my dear husband I too feel badly for those homeless people and I sympathize with them, but that doesn’t mean I must sleep in the barn.” To which her husband the wise rabbi answered, “*Empathy* differs from *sympathy*”. In **sympathy** I remain who I am and where I am, and the victim remains who he is and where he is. **Empathy** means a merger of the two into one. His pain is my pain, his suffering is my suffering, and his joy is my joy.