

EGOS, LARGE AND SMALL

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

And you - draw close to yourself Aharon your brother...

Be'er Mayim Chaim: The verb is puzzling. Throughout the Torah, when Moshe needs to command someone or some group in the performance of a mitzvah, he does just that - he commands! (Think of the opening words of this parshah!) Why here does he draw Aharon close, rather than simply transmit the Divine instruction?

We may find a clue by looking at another "drawing close." On the eighth day of the consecration of the mishkan, Moshe tells Aharon to draw close to the altar, and perform the avodah. Chazal² unpack the background issues for us. Moshe notices that Aharon is reluctant to step forward and perform the avodah. He therefore turns to him, and tries convincing him that this was no time to be a shrinking violet.

Who was correct - Aharon or Moshe? It seems that both were. It is generally good practice to humbly decline any special position or task. Spurning the spotlight demonstrates that one is not fixated on fame and winning the accolades of others. Aharon's diffidence should be praiseworthy.

On the other hand, the gemara³ notes an exception to the rule. When a greater person tells someone to do something, the lesser person should respond with alacrity. Heeding the request of the greater person is itself an exercise in humility! If so, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Aharon was not correct for standing back! He should have listened to Moshe!

Aharon's point was that propriety may demand that one should respond quickly and positively to a request from a greater personality. Yet, reasoned Aharon, there is an exception to this exception! If acceding to the request of a gadol brings power and authority in its wake, it is appropriate to demur.

⁴ (In that particular case, Aharon had additional reason to spurn the job. He did not want to hurt the feelings of his brother who was not given the job.) Aharon, then, was apparently correct.

Moshe has the last word - without detracting from Aharon's position. "Indeed, Aharon, you should refuse the honor - but only initially." After demonstrating reluctance to be elevated above others, he should then submit to the greater authority.

The Torah hints at this with the expression "draw close to you." Aharon could not be persuaded to assume the role of central performer of the national avodah. Even though the request came from on

high, he still demurred. Moshe had to bring him close, to take him by the hand, so to speak, to walk him into the role.

Aharon's refusal was not just a matter of propriety and protocol. Aharon stood back because he found himself incapable to moving forward! His comprehension of the value of the avodah was so deep, and his awe for the greatness of Hashem so overwhelming, that he became paralyzed into inaction. Moshe drew him close, but building within him a pride that empowered him to act. (It is generally true that, of all bad traits, Hashem finds pride particularly odious. Yet everything can be utilized for the sake of Heaven. There is even a pride that is positive when it enables its owner to do things he would ordinarily not be capable of doing. ⁵)

We can suggest an entirely different way of looking at our phrase. Moshe is told to "draw close" Aharon and all his mitzvos and accomplishments, taking possession of them as if they were his own. He should look upon them with joy and happiness as if he had done them himself.

The reason for this is simple. One who truly loves Hashem cares only that His Will be done. He could not care any less whether it is himself or another who does the job, so long as the work gets done. Now, most of us cannot get to such a place. We cannot be expected to be completely self-effacing, to vanquish every last bit of self-interest. Our residual sense of self - even if we are not particularly selfish or prideful - demands that we put our own interests first. So we run for opportunities to do mitzvos, to be the one who walks off with the mitzvah trophy rather than the others who are also competing. On some level we believe that this will put us ahead of our fellow man in the way Hashem looks at us.

The giant, however, who has conquered every last bit of self-love will not grab mitzvos. To him, it is completely irrelevant who performs, so long as someone does.

We enshrine this attitude in the shacharis davening. We describe the angels: "All of whom accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. They lovingly give permission, each to the other, to proclaim the holiness of their Creator..." Because there is no jealousy or competition among these ethereal beings, they willingly encourage each other to sing Hashem's praises, rather than compete for the privilege of doing so themselves. Their concern is the praise, not who sings it.

They serve as a model of how we mortals should live our lives.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Shemos 28:1
2. Torah Kohanim, cited by Rashi Vayikra 9:7
3. Pesachim 86B
4. See Tosafos, ibid.

5. Rav Hutner used to call this "ga'avah de-kedushah," borrowing the phrase from his great rebbi, Rav Kook.
