

DO GOOD!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shemini

By Shlomo Katz

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Happy Birthday Hamaayan
"Baruch she'higianu la'zman ha'zeh"

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Today's Learning:
Terumot 1:10-2:1
O.C. 328:47-49
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Berachot 33
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Batra 31

We read in this week's parashah of the dedication of the Mishkan and the death of two of Aharon's sons. In the ensuing halachic discussions regarding the effect of this event on the sacrificial service, we read (10:20), "Moshe heard and he approved." Rashi z"l comments: "He admitted his error and was not ashamed to do so."

Is this something the Torah needs to tell us about Moshe? asks R' Leib Chasman z"l (1869-1935; rabbi in Lithuania and mashgiach of the Chevron Yeshiva). If the Torah had told us, "Moshe did not tell a lie," would we be impressed?

A similar question: The Gemara (Sotah 13a) states: "Look how Moshe loved mitzvot! At the time of the Exodus, when all of the Jewish People were collecting booty from the Egyptians, Moshe was searching for Yosef's coffin to take it out of Egypt." Could we imagine the Chafetz Chaim passing up

the chance to do a mitzvah and running to collect gold and silver? Do we need to be told that Moshe preferred mitzvot to money?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us the depth of Hashem's judgment. No action, however small, is lost when He makes an accounting. [Telling the truth or running to do a mitzvah may not have been a "big deal" for Moshe, but Hashem rewards for it anyway.] We learn this from a verse in Kohelet (12:14), "For G-d will judge every deed--even everything hidden--whether good or evil." The Gemara (Chagigah 5a) explains: Even a minor act such as squashing a louse becomes a sin if it disgusts another person in front of whom it is done. Of course, concludes R' Chasman, if Hashem is so exacting when our minor sins are involved, how much more so can we count on Him to reward even our minor good deeds! (Ohr Yahel II p.93)

"The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them." (10:1)

R' Yehuda Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; the second Gerrer Rebbe) quotes his grandfather, R' Yitzchak Meir Alter z"l (the Chiddushei Ha'rim) as follows: Nadav and Avihu were great men and certainly had deep thoughts in mind when they offered their sacrifice. Nevertheless, they were punished because they were doing something that G-d had not commanded them to do. We can learn from this that it is not the deep thoughts that accompany a mitzvah that matter so much as the mere fact that one is doing Hashem's Will. Thus, even a simple person who has no idea of the deep kavanot / thoughts that relate to a mitzvah cannot excuse himself from fulfilling the mitzvah.

We read in Shir Ha'shirim (1:2), "Your friendship is dearer than wine." "Wine," says R' Alter, refers to the reasons for the mitzvot. This what our Sages meant when they said that Nadav and Avihu entered the Mishkan intoxicated. In other words, they acted based on their understanding of the reasons for the mitzvot, rather than based on what Hashem actually commanded.

Before performing a mitzvah we say a berachah that contains the phrase, "He has sanctified us through His mitzvot." We are not sanctified by using our reasoning to arrive at our own conclusions about what is spiritual, but rather by fulfilling G-d's commandments.

(Sefat Emet: Year 5639

as elucidated by R' Aryeh Hendler shlita in Sefat Ha'gan p.139)

"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Of this did Hashem speak, saying, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me; thus I will be honored before the entire people",' and Aharon was silent." (10:3)

Rashi z"l comments: Moshe here said to Aharon, "My brother, Aharon! I knew that this House was to be sanctified by those who are beloved to the Omnipresent G-d and I thought it would be either through me or through you; now I see that these [Nadav and Avihu] are greater than me and you!"

R' Leib Chasman z"l asks: How could the humblest of all men make such a statement? If a king says that he wants to honor one of his advisors and one specific advisor assumes that the king is referring to him, wouldn't we conclude that that advisor is egotistical?

R' Chasman answers: Clearly, a humble person is not someone who does not know his own strengths. Such a person is a fool. Rather, a humble person is one who understands that all his strengths and accomplishments are a gift from Hashem. The more a person recognizes this, the more humble he is.

In this light we can understand a perplexing story related by the Gemara (at the end Tractate Sotah). The Gemara states: "When the sage Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi died, humility ceased to exist." The Gemara then relates that a later sage, Rav Yosef, said, "Don't say that, for I am still here." How are we to understand this? Isn't Rav Yosef's comment the antithesis of humility? The answer is, "No!" What Rav Yosef meant was that he was humble because he truly understood that his many accomplishments were possible only because of Hashem's gifts.

R' Chasman adds: Everybody knows that he has nothing except what Hashem gives him. However, the distance from the mind to the heart is as great as the distance from heaven to earth. This is why so many people do not feel humble or act humbly.

(Ohr Yahel II p.93)

Pesach

At the end of the Pesach Seder, we sing the song "Chad Gadya," the enigmatic story of "the kid that father sold [some say: 'bought'] for two zuz." R' Mordechai Twersky, the Maggid of Chernobyl z"l (died 1838) explained this song as follows:

The word "gadya" / "kid" is related to "haggadah" / "statement." "Chad gadya, chad gadya," refers to two statements, specifically, the first two of the Ten Commandments: "I am Hashem" and "You shall not have other gods." These two statements encompass all of the mitzvot; "I am Hashem" encapsulates all of the positive commandments, and "You shall not have other gods," all of the negative commandments.

"That father sold" alludes to the Sages' teaching that the Torah is unlike any other acquisition. Ordinarily, when one sells an object, the seller's connection to the object ends. Not so, however, when Hashem "sold" us the Torah; He, our Father, sold Himself to us with the Torah. In other words, through the Torah, one connects himself to Hashem.

However, one who wants to come close to Hashem and His Torah must experience yearnings / kissufim for that goal. This is alluded to by the "two zuz," as those coins are made of silver / kesef.

Moreover, it is not enough to yearn for Hashem and His Torah. One must also hate evil, i.e., he must be a "soneh ra." This is alluded to by the cat (or weasel), referred to in the song as a "shunra." Of course, the yetzer hara will not stand by idly while a person attains these spiritual accomplishments. Rather, the yetzer hara, represented by the kalba / dog, will attack the shunra.

When the yetzer hara threatens to defeat a person, the surest way to prevail is to strengthen one's emunah / faith. This is the chutra / the staff on which one can lean and with which one can hit the dog, i.e., the yetzer hara. However, the yetzer hara is tenacious and does not give up easily. Thus, the nura / fire of the yetzer hara may burn the staff of emunah.

What should one do to protect himself? Study Torah, which is likened throughout Rabbinic literature to maya / water.

Our sages teach that the Torah can be an elixir of life if one studies it with the proper motivation, but it can be poisonous if one approaches it with the wrong intentions, for example, if one studies Torah so that he can attack Torah scholars on their own ground. The tora / ox that drinks the water in the song represents the animal that one can become if he misuses the Torah. [Ed. Note: The Aramaic word "tora," meaning ox, is related to the Hebrew word "shor," but is unrelated to the Hebrew word "Torah."]

The shochet who slaughters the ox represents one's slaughtering of the yetzer hara that caused him to act like an animal. However, the "angel of death" (who is one and the same with the yetzer hara) may slaughter the shochet, i.e., it may cause a person to act hypocritically. This is alluded to by the Gemara's teaching that one who slaughters an animal on Shabbat is liable for the act of painting (i.e., painting the skin of the animal with the animal's blood). The word "tzavua" / "painted" also means "hypocrite."

In the end, however, Hakadosh Baruch Hu / The Holy One Himself will destroy the angel of death and the yetzer hara.

(Likkutei Torah)

Pesach Stories

(From Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

Once, when a student of R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik z"l (the Brisker Rav; died 1959) was leaving Yerushalayim to return to his home in Bnei Brak, the Brisker Rav said, "Please tell your father that I wish him a `Chag Sameach.' Also, please give him my wish that the holiday should pass with no shailos [i.e., that no questions should arise regarding whether chametz had found its way into the

food or into the pots and pans]."

The Brisker Rav added: "Do not think that this is a small blessing. I remember that when I was a child, my father [R' Chaim Brisker z"l] once said to my mother after Pesach, 'Thank G-d the holiday passed with no shailos.' He spoke then the way a person speaks after successfully undergoing difficult surgery."

The Brisker Rav also added: "A shailah in those days was not like a shailah today. I remember as a child in Volozhin that a question arose in someone's kitchen, and all of his pots and dishes were declared chametz. Today, rabbis are so much more likely to accept a lenient opinion among the poskim / halachic authorities."

The 19th century chassidic rebbe, R' Yechiel Meir of Gostynin z"l, barely slept all of Pesach. His family was worried about his health and asked him why he would not sleep. He replied, "If I had won the lottery, would you ask me why I couldn't sleep? Believe me! Every minute of Pesach is like winning the lottery."

What did he mean by this? Why did he feel more fortunate on Pesach than on any other day? The Amshinover Rebbe explained: Our Sages say that chametz represents the yetzer hara. Thus, Pesach is a time that is free of the yetzer hara. Every minute of such a time is priceless.

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