

# MINOR GREATNESS

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Shemini

## Minor Greatness

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Today's Learning:

Avot 4:16-17

O.C. 110:8-111:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nazir 9

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yevamot 37

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)

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*"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'." (Vayikra 10:3)*

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1741-1804; the Dubno Maggid) explains that this verse contrasts Hashem's expectations of the righteous with His expectations from the "ordinary" Jew. Those closest to Hashem are held to a standard that measures whether they sanctify Him through every deed; if they do not, they are judged harshly, as Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu were. In contrast, "ordinary" Jews are measured by whether they honor Him by adhering, at a minimum, to the letter of the law.

R' Kranz explains further that there are three reasons why G-d holds the righteous to exacting standards. The first may be understood by means of a parable in which two subjects of a king committed the same offense against their ruler. One offender was a peasant while the other was one of the king's advisors. Would we not expect the king to judge his advisor more harshly because the advisor should have had a greater reverence for the king after being granted access to the throne? Similarly, one who has been blessed with closeness to Hashem is held to a higher standard than is one who is distant from Hashem.

Second, others view one who is close to Hashem as a role model. When he sins, he not only violates the law, he causes others to do so. This is not true when an "ordinary" Jew sins.

Third, R' Kranz writes, not all neshamot / souls originate from the same "level." Those that come from a higher source are more delicate, so- to-speak. Therefore, they are more prone to being damaged by even minor sins, just as a delicate piece of equipment is more susceptible to damage from minute dust particles and as a white garment is more susceptible to permanent damage from small stains. This is alluded to by the verse (Kohelet 1:18), *"For with much wisdom comes much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases pain."* (Sefer Ha'middot: Sha'ar Ha'yirah chapter 12)

Also from the Dubno Maggid:

*"Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting . . ."* (Vayikra 10:9)

The Bet Hamikdash was the paragon of beauty, a joy to the whole world (paraphrasing Eichah 2:15). A kohen who drinks wine before entering the Temple acts as if he needs an external stimulus - a

foreign fire - to kindle joy in his heart over performing the sacred service. According to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yishmael, this was the sin of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu. (Kol Rinah Vy'shuah to Esther 1:10-12)

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From the Haftarah . . .

*"So I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed among the lands; according to their ways and their doings did I judge them."* (Yechezkel 36:18 - haftarah for Parashat Parah)

What is meant by, "according to their ways and their doings did I judge them"? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (rabbi in Brody, Galicia; died 1869) explains: R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; 1380-1444) writes (in Sefer Ha'ikkarim Part IV Ch.36): Logic dictates that the degree of reward for a mitzvah and punishment for a sin should bear some relationship to the mitzvah or sin. For example, if A insults B, the harm is usually short-lived; thus, the punishment should be short-lived. On the other hand, if A blinds B, the harm is permanent; thus, the punishment should be permanent. Similarly, some mitzvot would seem to deserve a longer-lived reward than others.

Why then, asks R' Albo, is man's reward in Olam Ha'ba eternal? Perhaps one will justify this on the grounds that man's reward should be proportionate to the greatness of the King that he has served. Since Hashem's greatness is unlimited, those who serve Him deserve unlimited reward. But, in reality, we give G-d nothing when we serve Him, as the verse (Iyov 35:7) states, *"If you were righteous, what have you given Him, and what does He take from your hand?!"* Moreover, the same logic would dictate that those who defy G-d's will and sin should receive an unlimited and eternal punishment. [Yet, our Sages say that this is not the case, except for the very worst sinners.]

The answer, writes R' Albo, is that Hashem's system of reward and punishment is not based on Din / justice alone, but also on Chessed / kindness. As a result of His kindness, reward, which should be temporary, is eternal, while punishment, which should be eternal, is temporary. [This concludes the excerpt from Sefer Ha'ikkarim.]

R' Kluger suggests, to the contrary, that ever-lasting reward and relatively short-lived punishment both are dictated by Din / justice. It is true that Hashem does not need our service. However, He designed the world in such a way that, as the Kabbalists teach, our mitzvot further His goals by multiplying the amount of kedushah / holiness in the world. And, kedushah, once created, makes an eternal impression on the universe. Our sins likewise have a cosmic (albeit, negative) spiritual effect; however, that effect is temporary and we are assured that, at the end of time, evil will be eliminated from the world. It therefore is logical that the reward for our good deeds should similarly be everlasting, while the punishment for our sins is short-lived. This is what the quoted verse means: I, Hashem, do not base punishments on My nature, which is everlasting, but rather, *"according to their ways and their doings did I judge them."* (Kohelet Yaakov - Parah: Drush No.1)

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## Pesach

In every generation, one is obligated to regard himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt, as it is written (Shmot 13:8), *"And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt'."* It is not only our fathers whom the Holy One redeemed [from slavery]; we, too, He redeemed with them, as it is written (Devarim 6:23), *"He took us out of there in order to bring us, to give us the Land that He swore to our forefathers."* (From the Pesach Haggadah)

R' Yehuda Amichai shlita (Director of the Torah Ve'ha'aretz Institute, formerly located in Gush Katif) observes: The language of the Haggadah implies that there are two parts to the obligation discussed. The first is taught by the verse, "And you shall tell your son," while the second is found in the verse, "He took us out." But what is the difference between these two obligations?

He explains: The first part of the paragraph refers to personal redemption. I must regard myself as if I personally was a slave and I was redeemed. The second part refers to communal redemption. G-d took us, the community of Yisrael, out of Egypt in order to give us the Land that He swore to our forefathers.

Significantly, the verse connected with the first part of the obligation is the verse that the Haggadah lists as the answer to the wicked son. To him we speak of the personal aspect of the Exodus, for we cannot hope that he will ever appreciate the communal aspect of the redemption. The second verse, on the other hand, is the source of the answer given to the wise son.

R' Amichai adds: Rambam z"l appears not to agree that there is a two part obligation here, for Rambam's version of the Haggadah is different. Instead of, "In every generation, one is obligated to regard himself . . .," Rambam's text reads, "In every generation, one is obligated to show himself." According to Rambam, it would seem, the entire obligation described in this paragraph is directed outward, referring exclusively to the communal redemption. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Gush Katif p.30)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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