

CLASS 47 - SHEMINI

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On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the eighth day of the ceremonies and sacrifices that inaugurate the new Mishkan, Aharon HaKohen is called by Moshe to bring a Korban of his own. His offering includes an Egel, indication that the sin of the Golden Calf has been atoned for.

"And Moshe said to Aharon: 'Approach the altar'... - for Aharon was ashamed, and afraid to come close. Said Moshe: 'Why are you ashamed, for this you have been chosen!' (Rashi, VaYikra 9:7)

"And I have seen an explanation: 'For this itself, the fact that you are ashamed, is why you have been chosen'." (Rabbeinu Tzaddok HaKohen)

Aharon fears for sin. Embarrassed of his misdeed, he is reluctant to serve in the Mishkan, feeling unworthy and incapable of standing before his Creator.

Moshe teaches him otherwise; the sin he fears is actually his saving grace.

In our shiur this week, we will explore this concept, describing the nature and dimensions of Yiras Shamayim.

1

Why do we not fear for our own sins? Why are we confident and carefree, without misgiving, certain that G-d will understand our shortcomings?

Let us first examine why the attitude of Aharon was so different than ours:

"And the reason for this is because Aharon was a Divine saint, without a single sin other than the act of the Egel. It was that sin that was set in his mind, as is written (Tehillim 51:5): 'And my sin is always before me'. It seemed to him as if the image of the Egel was blocking his atonement...." (Ramban, VaYikra 9:7)

The Torah's description of our ancestors' sins, severe as they may seem, must be understood in context - these single mistakes were the only faults of their lives.

While the average man dulls his senses to the spiritual ramifications of sin, blissfully unaware of the damage he wreaks, the righteous fathers of our nation were keenly sensitive to the slightest nuance of impropriety.

It is a sign of Aharon's greatness that he feels unworthy of service, for it is evidence that he knows the consequence of his deeds.

The man who knows that G-d is watching recognizes that all of life has a price, and nothing can be taken for granted. While the 'Appikores' sees everything as 'Hefker', freeing himself to pursue his heart's desire, one who is close to G-d is obligated at every turn.

Life may be a party, but it is not his. As a guest in the garden of G-d, he either adheres to the rules, or ignores them at his peril.

It is this realization that puts him before his creator. With this he achieves his potential, the goal of daily living:

" 'I place G-d before me, always' (Tehillim 16:8) is an overriding principle of the Torah, and one of the qualities of the righteous, who walk before G-d..." (Rema, Orach Chaim 1:1)

This fundamental of good living parallels precisely a second characteristic of the righteous: (Tehillim 51:5): 'And my sin is always before me'. The Tzaddik lives with G-d, in thought and in deed, and for this, he lives with fear.

With the Avodah complete, Klal Yisrael feels disappointed and rejected when G-d's presence fails to appear. Though the sin of numerous individuals is greater than his own, it is Aharon who feels guilty, certain that responsibility for a national debacle lies personally on his shoulders.

This is the mark of greatness, the trait of a leader. Refusing to pin the blame on others, Aharon is thus chosen to be G-d's servant, agent for the nation.

2

"Aharon, my brother, though Hashem has accepted an atonement for your sin, you must give something to the mouth of the Satan. Before you enter the Mikdash, send a gift before you, so that he does not despise you when you come..." (Sifra, Shemini 3)

Chazal reveal a second aspect of Aharon's offering. In addition to being a sacrifice that atones for his sin, his Egel is a gift to the devil, a prize that buys his silence.

Let us explain this puzzling concept.

Why is it Aharon, rather than Moshe, who is privileged to serve as Kohen Gadol, performing the Divine service?

Perhaps, we should first ask this: What are the desired traits of the servant of G-d?

Included in the laws of Rosh HaShanah, are the preferred characteristics of the Shaliach Tzibbur, the modern-day Kohen Gadol. He should be married, and at least thirty years old, great in both Torah and good deeds.

"For then [at thirty] the Levi was fit for Avoda, and prayer is in place of Avoda. In addition, at that time his heart is broken and depressed." (Mishna Berura 581:12)

G-d adores the man whose heart is broken.

Though sin is abominable, and distances man from his Creator, ironically, it also becomes the catalyst for his ultimate return, for the introspection and regret that it spawns brings man closer than he had ever been before.

Moshe sees before him a reluctant brother, hesitant to approach the altar, fearful of sin and its consequences.

"But, why are you ashamed, it is for precisely this reason that you have been chosen!"

Moshe is our teacher, and as such, his role is to demonstrate the Torah ideal, the law and deed most desired by G-d, the word revealed in heaven.

But, in addition, Hashem seeks out His devoted servants, the pious and penitent faithful of this world. Having strayed from the path of justice, and far from the truth, they feel lost and abandoned in a physical world.

It is at this point that Avoda begins, and it is here that man rebuilds the Holy Temple.

It is Aharon, and not Moshe, who enters the Kodesh HaKodashim on the Day of Atonement.

This is the offering that Aharon sends to the devil. As the inciter of sin, the Satan agitates mankind to rebel against their Creator. But, this as well, is part of the Divine plan. From the darkness of evil will burst a new dawn, as man returns from the depths to find Hashem's waiting embrace.

The Satan is powerful, but easily fooled. In charge of this world, he cheerfully proffers his wares, tempting man with the promise of a life without care. Unbeknownst to him, this world too belongs to its Creator, and even the sins of the Satan ultimately reveal the inescapable unity of the King of all Kings, our Father in Heaven who waits for our return.

"Zivchei Elokim Ruach Nishbarah, Lev Nishbar V'Nidkeh Elokim Lo Sivzeh" (Tehillim 51:19)

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