

RELENTLESS STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

"Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the elevation offering: It is the elevation offering that stays on the flame, on the Altar, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it." (Vayikra/Leviticus 6:2) Rashi quotes the Talmudic (Kiddushin 29a) explanation for G-d's emphatic instructions to Moshe. The term "command", in contrast to "say" or "speak", implies a special alacrity to be utilized in performing this service, at that time and through the generations. The Talmudic sage Rabbi Shimon said that special urging is necessary for this commandment since it involves a monetary loss. Unlike the other offerings, of which the Kohanim (priests) receive a portion, the elevation offering is totally consumed by the fires of the Altar, with no benefit to those who assist in its preparation.

Lev Eliyahu (Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian; 1876-1976; Mashgiach/spiritual mentor of the Etz Chaim Yeshiva in London and Yeshiva Keneset Chizkiyahu in Kfar Chasidim, Israel; He emphasized the importance of developing and improving character and never ceased trying to improve his own "midos" (character traits) and sensitivity to others) is bothered by the notion that Aaron - the father of the Jewish Priesthood and one of the greatest leaders in Jewish history - needed to be urged to be zealous in light of losing such a trivial sum. Rabbi Lopian explains that a component of the maxim that Torah is the complete Divine truth is the understanding that it is equally applicable to all, young and old, wise and simple. Every detail in Torah is equally relevant to every Jew, and every Jew has the freedom to choose between fulfilling a mitzvah (Divine command) or not, and will be faced with these choices throughout his life. As one grows in his spiritual identity, the challenges grow commensurately, such that every Jew finds himself equally challenged relative to his own spiritual achievement.

Thus, even Aaron, as great as he was, had to struggle in his own way to fulfill the mitzvos with which he was charged. If he would relax in his quest for spiritual perfection for even one moment, no matter how much he had accomplished to that point, the potential spiritual downfall would be incalculable.

One of Rabbi Lopian's colleagues once noticed him repeating to himself "Do not bring an abomination into your home". (Devarim/Deuteronomy 7:26) Asked why he was saying that, the great sage replied he was about to enter his Yeshiva (Talmudical academy), where his students would extend him a great deal of respect and he feared that he might have, even for one fleeting moment, a feeling of haughtiness. Mishlei/Proverbs (16:5) declares, "All who are haughty hearted are an

abomination to G-d," so he repeated the verse from Devarim to himself to fortify himself for the challenge. Surprised, the colleague asked, "Surely, old broken men like you and I need not consider this a hazard!" The great Rabbi answered, "Consider a meeting hall containing a highly explosive charge, with hundreds of people entering and exiting unscathed. Does their safe passage in any way minimize the danger of the situation? Even a negative character trait that we have managed to successfully harness for many years can break free in mere moments if our vigilance is relaxed, all of our toil rendered worthless in seconds!"

Our Sages taught in Pirkei Avos/Ethics of our Fathers (2:5): Do not trust yourself until the day of your demise. As long as we live and breathe, so does our "yetzer hara" (internal desire to act contrary to G-d's will; in many experiences, it is the side of the internal tug-of-war that pulls us to do what we know we should not). We must always confront that inclination, lest we fall into its clutches.

Have a Good Shabbos!

This issue of Kol HaKollel is dedicated in memory of Rabbi Michel Barenbaum, ztvk"l, who passed away last week. His "derech erez" and "midos tovos" serve as a paradigm to all who merited knowing him.

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