

THE BLAME GAME

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Shemini

The Blame Game

By Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he descended (from the altar) from having performed the sin-offering, the olah-offering and the peace-offering. Moshe and Aaron came to the Tent of Meeting and they went out and blessed the people - and the glory of G-d appeared to the entire people!" (Vayikra/Leviticus 9:22-23)

On this eighth and final day of the consecration and inauguration of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), Aaron and his sons fulfilled their priestly duties for the first time. Yet following Aaron's conclusion of his service, but before the appearance of G-d's glory, Moshe returned and joined him to enter the Tent of Meeting and bless the nation. Why was Moshe's assistance appropriate at this time?

Rashi quotes the explanation of Toras Kohanim (1). Since Aaron had brought all of the offerings and performed all the acts he was instructed to complete, but G-d's glory had not yet descended from the heavens to the camp of the children of Israel, Aaron was distressed. He declared, "I know that the Holy One, Blessed is He, has become angry with me, and because of me, His glory has not entered the Jewish nation." He then appealed to Moshe, who had recruited him to perform the Divine service by which he was embarrassed. Moshe entered with him and prayed for mercy, and then G-d's glory descended into the camp of Israel.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (2) notes the unique lessons inherent in Aaron's reaction to his travails. It is commonplace that those who are not successful in their efforts - especially when their efforts are in a communal endeavor - blame others for their failure; had this person or that circumstance been more accommodating, the desired results would have been accomplished. Aaron did not look at the sins of the nation or blame any other cause for the lack of Divine response to his service; he looked to himself. He did not allow this self-condemnation to hinder his personal growth or serve as an excuse to concede failure. He turned it into an opportunity to grow in his service; he used it to

catapult himself to success.

The Talmud expounds on the basis of initiating the search for a cause with introspection. Tractate Makkos (11a) relates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had a daily Torah study session with Eliyahu HaNavi (the prophet Elijah). A person was once killed by a lion in close proximity to Rabbi Yehoshua's town, and Eliyahu did not visit for three days. Although Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had no direct connection to the tragedy, the Talmud is teaching us that had he completely fulfilled his role of improving the world around him, this tragic event would not have occurred. Ba'al Shem Tov (3) took this concept even further. He taught that one who sees a flaw or witnesses a misdeed on the part of another must appreciate that G-d arranged he should be privy to make that observation because of his own possession of the same blemish.

Certainly, Aaron and Eliyahu and Ba'al Shem Tov agree that blame can also be laid with someone else; certainly Rabbi Yehoshua was no criminal and Ba'al Shem Tov's "innocent" bystander is simply that. But the timeless Torah lesson they all convey is in those initial moments of facing failure, does the G-d conscious Jew look at whom he can blame, or does he look at how he can build himself and, thereby, fix the world?

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) also known as Sifra; Tannaitic halachic (Jewish legal) medrash to the Book of Vayikra

(2) 1875-1936; "The Mirrer Mashgiach (spiritual mentor)" was one of the most influential Mussar (Torah ethics) thinkers of his time. He believed a person's labor must be from within himself, not imitating others; by bringing the grandeur of Torah to ourselves we can attain all we need for our avoda (service) in attaining shleimus (wholeness).

(3) Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer; 1700-1760; his philosophy placed prayer as the center of Jewish observance, through which one could come to an ecstatic awareness of the Divine Spirit in every aspect of the world

Text Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig](#) and [Torah.org](#).

Kol HaKollel is a publication of The Milwaukee Kollel Center for Jewish Studies • 5007 West Keefe Avenue • Milwaukee, Wisconsin • 414-447-7999