

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Having just eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam was confronted by G-d for the violation of the sole Divine instruction which he was commanded to maintain. Given the opportunity to explain his lapse, Adam attempted to evade blame. "The woman whom You gave to be with me - she gave me of the tree and I ate." (Beraishis/Genesis 3:12) While the Talmud (Avoda Zara 5b) notes Adam's ingratitude, Sforno (1) observes Adam's shift of responsibility to G-d Himself: "she", whom you gave me as a helpmate and assistant, gave me from the Tree and served as a stumbling block. With this he traced back his sin to G-d, instead of answering appropriately as King David did when he told Nosson (Nathan, the Prophet) "I have sinned to G-d." (Samuel II 12:13)

Upon reflection of the myriad kindnesses bestowed by G-d upon Adam in that one day, this intransigence seems unfathomable. G-d formed him out of earth and blew into him a living soul, gave him a spouse as a helpmate, placed him in the Garden of Eden, and gave him free choice to follow the Divine command, with which he could reach such lofty levels of spiritual achievement that G-d's own administering angels were intimidated by his presence. What did Adam do with these gifts? He abused his free choice to sin, thereby introducing the phenomenon of death to creation. And even though he recognized the enormity of his sin - the realization that "they were naked" (3:7) was actually an overwhelming sense of anguish and remorse for their abysmal failure with their lone commandment (see Kol HaKollel Beraishis 5764) - he still possessed the audacity to deflect responsibility for this tragedy to G-d.

Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz (2) elucidates that this demonstrates the fantastic difficulty inherent in admitting transgression, in conceding failure. As our own human experience reveals, it is much easier to deny responsibility than deal with the myriad consequences of such an admission.

In fact, notes Rabbi Leibowitz, Sforno's point of comparison, King David's admission to Nosson, was not easily achieved. Nosson first offered the King a parable, but David did not realize he was the subject of the allegory; it was only when Nosson directly confronted him that the King grasped his error. King David, whose Torah knowledge was so profound and whose relationship with G-d was so intense that he was able to author Psalms, may not have ever comprehended had Nosson not spelled out the indiscretion.

But we know we can accomplish it, because we already have. We just finished the four most intense

weeks of the Jewish calendar. This most benevolent Divine gift - the mitzvah (Divine commandment) of teshuva, regretting one's misdeeds and resolving to return to G-d's path - defies human logic. Yet during the past month, we have capitalized on multiple opportunities to renew our relationship with our Father in Heaven, casting away the sins of the past year and fortifying our new relationship and resolve for the coming year. As we head into the cold darkness of winter, we cannot let the heated emotions of the Tishrei holiday season fade; we must capture the passion that will keep our spirituality warm, remembering the entire process hinges on two straightforward - yet exceedingly complicated - words: I erred.

Have a Good Shabbos and a Good Yom Tov!

- (1) 1470-1550; classic Biblical commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno of Rome and Bologna, Italy
- (2) Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills, New York; in Chidushei HaLev, the collection of his ethical discourses

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