

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Emor

Striving For Excellence

By Rabbi Elly Broch

The Kohanim (Priests), because of their idealism and self sacrifice, were rewarded with the service in the Mishkan (1). With their position came added responsibility. "They shall be holy to their G-d and they shall not desecrate the name of their G-d" (Vayikra/Leviticus 21:6)

The contrast within the verse poses a problem. "They shall be holy to their G-d" implies that if one chooses not to there will be merely an absence of sanctity. But the conclusion, "and they shall not desecrate the name of their G-d," suggests that failure to fulfill the ideal of sanctity leads not only to a vacuum of holiness, but the actual desecration of the Divine Name.

Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Niman (2) explains that mediocrity is not a characteristic appropriate for the service of G-d. G-d gave us the ability and propensity to excel in His service. Thus, the Torah is teaching us that when one does not attempt to operate at his best, he is desecrating the Divine. If an individual is not striving to elevate and improve himself, then he will be automatically descending into complacency and malevolent behavior.

King Solomon describes in concrete terms the cycle of complacency. "I passed the field of a lazy man....Behold it was overgrown with thorns, its surface had been covered with bramble, and its stone wall was broken down....A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to recline, then our poverty will come like a traveler." (Mishlei/Proverbs 24:30-34) Viewed through this prism, it is clear that the loss of one who does not tend to his field is not limited to lack of produce. An unattended field eventually becomes overgrown to the point that it becomes a wasteland; it is less desirable and demands more restorative effort the end of the year than it did at the beginning.

Each of us operates at a different level in Divine service. Moreover, each has different talents and natures that require cultivation. The Torah's lesson is that in life there is no such thing as inertia. If one does not grow, he becomes "overgrown with thorns". But there is great significance to small,

simple advances. Any positive growth, whether it be Torah study to better understand Judaism, forging a connection with G-d through prayer or performing acts of kindness motivated by the desire to emulate His ceaseless kindness, all contribute to the improvement of one's Divine connection. Everyone at his own level can strive for greater sanctity and excellence in his relationship with G-d.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Tabernacle; see Shemos/Exodus 32:26

(2) previous Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Ohr Yisroel in Petach Tikva

Text Copyright © 2005 by [Rabbi Elly Broch](#) 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