

NOTHING TO FEAR

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"G-d spoke to Moshe saying, 'Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel saying, "You shall be holy, for I, G-d your L-rd, am Holy."' (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:1-2) The achievement of a level of piety, of devout G-dliness, which most would associate with the acquisition of holiness, is no small chore. Yet we are promised that G-d does not give us any mitzvos (Divine commands) that we cannot fulfill. How do we fulfill this one?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1) explains that the essence of this command is one of awareness. We are mandated to recognize that each of us has inherent holiness owing to our acceptance of the mitzvos of the Torah at Sinai. Thus, we understand the core of the blessing recited before the fulfillment of many mitzvos, "...asher kideshanu bemitzvosav..." - who has sanctified us with His mitzvos - the mitzvos infuse us with holiness. Indeed, notes Rabbi Feinstein, the wording of the blessing teaches us that the converse is true as well: if not for the holiness instilled within us, we would not have permission to fulfill the mitzvos even on a voluntary basis. This holiness is our very license to utilize the mitzvos to build our relationship with G-d. But now that we possess this holiness, we must not let it be in vain; it is incumbent upon us to capitalize upon it.

How do we motivate ourselves to realize the full glory of our latent holiness? King Solomon taught, "Fortunate is the person who always fears." (Mishlei/Proverbs 28:14) The Talmud (Brachos 60a) explains that this statement applies to the realm of Torah. Mesilas Yesharim (2) expounds that we are given manifold opportunities throughout our lives to build our relationship with the Divine. The strength of the relationship is defined by the frequency of our utilization of these means and the degree to which we maximize the potential of each opportunity. Therefore, King Solomon extolled the "fear" of losing or not fully utilizing a chance to forge this relationship. But one who successfully maintains a consciousness of his inherent holiness and the power of a mitzvah has nothing to fear.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century (2) "Path of the Just", one of the most popular Mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) works in Jewish literature; a moving, inspiring work describing how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness; authored by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, 1707-1746 of Padua, Italy, and Amsterdam

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