

# LOOK UP TO GO UP

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

*"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a man (Adam) among you advances an offering to Hashem (G-d), from animals, from cattle, or from sheep shall you bring your offering."*

Rashi points out that the Torah's use of the word "Adam" for "a man" is unusual. Normally the Torah uses the more common "ish". Also noteworthy is the Torah's use of a small Alef on the word Vayikra - And Hashem called (Vayikra) to Moshe.

"Who is wise?" say Chazal, our Sages, "He who learns from every man (~Adam' in Hebrew)." Life is one big learning experience. With each new person we meet, in every new encounter, there is a hidden lesson waiting to be learned.

We are not, however, limited to learning solely from our fellow man. David HaMelech says (Tehilim (8:4)), "When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have established..." David's eyes, say mefarshim (Torah commentators) constantly gazed heavenward. He thought about the malachim (angels), how they served Hashem constantly with fear and trepidation. Though man is not a malach, David would ignite himself with an inner fire burning with love and fear of G-d, as he contemplated the holy service of the angels. When will I be able to serve Hashem with such great awe? he thought to himself.

If we gaze downward, there too we will find there is much to be learned. Even from an ant, we can gain wisdom and insight into our service of Hashem. Chazal say (Eiruvim 100b), "We can learn proper behaviour from the chicken (see there); reservedness from the cat (Rashi - she doesn't defecate before humans, and covers up afterwards); and integrity from the ant (Rashi - as it says (Mishlei 6:8), '~She prepares her [own] bread in the summer,' and does not take from that which her fellow ants have prepared)."

No matter where we look, says the Imrei Noam (R' Meir of Dzikov z"l), we can find suggestions and hints which can be used to enhance our service of Hashem. But where should our concentration lie? Where should we cast our gaze? Certainly to that which is above us! When we think about the animals, we teach ourselves that at the very least, we should not be less than an animal. If even a cat, with her limited faculties, is reserved in her conduct, how much more so should we, humans with discernment and intelligence be reserved and refined! But when we focus our view heavenward, when we attempt to emulate the service of the malachim, then we are setting ourselves goals and looking for growth in our service of Hashem. People flock to watch

professionals perform, knowing full-well that they will never attain their high level of performance. It gives them what to look up to. They observe and are amazed. They go home and practice and dream of one day also being able to perform with such precision and talent. So too, man, of flesh and blood, will never serve Hashem with the same fervour and energy as do the holy malachim. Yet this should not stop him from constantly gazing upward, towards the heavens, and dreaming that one day too his avodah (service of Hashem) will be similar to that of the malachim.

When a man among you advances an offering to Hashem - if one wishes to come closer to Hashem, this can be accomplished by gazing at and contemplating even the lowly beasts of the earth; from animals, from cattle, or from sheep shall you bring your offering. The Alef of Vayikra, however, is small. Alef means "to learn" (see Iyov 38:11). This type of learning, though praiseworthy, should not be our ultimate goal. It is a "small" and constricted way of thinking. A man should not be satisfied by simply ensuring that he is no less than the animals. He must strive to emulate that which is higher than him. To take steps forward and climb the ladder of serving Hashem, rather than just making sure he is well footed on the earth.

Each person knows deep inside how far they are from reaching their full potential. There is so much room for improvement: I could daven (pray) with more kavannah (concentration), learn with more hasmadah (diligence), do more for others... Yet sometimes one takes solace in that which he is not. At least, one will say, I am not like so-and-so. One, for instance, who occasionally speaks (to other people) during davening (prayers) excuses this "minor" misdeed by observing that there are many who speak on a much more regular basis than him. In comparison, after all, what he's doing is really not so terrible at all. And one who occasionally deals dishonestly, pinching a few pens and pencils from the office now-and-again, or embellishing an insurance claim, will often dismiss his transgression by contrasting it with the rampant fraud and deception that are found in today's business environment. Some reason: Many people don't even come to beis ha-midrash (study hall) at all to learn, so if I come for an hour at night, I'm a tzaddik (righteous person), right?

Not necessarily. Hashem demands from each person that they use their full capabilities in their avodas Hashem (service of G-d). To be better than others is meaningless. We must strive to be the best that we can be, regardless of what everyone else may or may not be doing. If we are to look upon others, it should not be to take solace in our lowliness, or to feel smug about the little we do. Rather we should gaze upwards and look at those who are learning more than us, and davening with more kavannah, those with greater integrity and better middos.

That which man is called "Adam" alludes to this concept. "Adameh la'Elyon, I will compare with that which is above (Yeshayahu 14:14)." "Who is wise? He who learns from every Adam." True, we can learn from everyone. From the righteous we can learn how to be. From the wicked we can learn how not to be. But the wise man concentrates on that which is above him, not on that which is below.

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