

# TO ERR IS HUMAN - TO ADMIT IS FINE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

## Ashes - To Err is Human - To Admit is Fine

*Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah, did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe. (38:22)*

It does not say, "that which Moshe commanded," but rather, "everything that Hashem commanded Moshe." [This implies] that even with regard to matters which his master, Moshe, did not teach him, Betzalel's thoughts were in accord with that which had been said to Moshe at Sinai.

Moshe had commanded Betzalel to make the furnishings first, and then build the Mishkan [Tabernacle]. Betzalel said to him: "Normally, one first builds a house, and then furnishes it! [Perhaps Hashem commanded the opposite order?]" Moshe said to him: "Indeed, as you say, so I heard from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He. [Your name is Betzalel] because you have been in Hashem's shadow (Be-tzel Ke'l)! Indeed, this is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded me." [Rashi quoting Gemara, Berachos 55a]

Moshe, commentators point out, admitted his error immediately. He had reversed Hashem's instructions, and made no attempts to escape blame. How often are we prone, when faced with error, to attempt to defend our actions, instead of just saying, "I was wrong." As a teacher, I am often put in the sticky situation of pointing a blaming finger at a student. More often than not, their reaction will be to immediately take up the defensive, trying to justify what they've done. And more often than not, my reaction will be to tell them: "I wasn't asking for excuses. 'I'm sorry' would do just fine." When they get the message, a shy smile appears on their faces. "I'm sorry," they say. "It's alright," I tell them. "Now sit back down."

Sometimes it is so much more difficult to say the simple words, "I'm sorry," than to create the most intricate and elaborate excuses. How many friendships and marriages have fallen apart over this simple yet powerful concept. If Moshe, the greatest prophet ever to grace the earth, can err, can't we all?

Interestingly, I was bothered by a different aspect of this Gemara. It is all very well that Moshe made no attempts to cover-up his error before Betzalel; yet why wasn't Moshe personally disturbed by his lapse? After all, if Moshe could err with his prophecy, doesn't this call into question everything that Moshe had taught? Who's to say that this is the only place in which he erred? One would imagine

that Moshe would have been highly distressed by his mistake, yet no distress is apparent. Why not?

A poor man once came to the renowned tzaddik, the Strikover Rebbe, who had a reputation for performing the most wondrous and amazing miracles. The man's daughter had already been engaged twice, but when her father had been unable to provide the agreed-upon nadon (dowry), the engagements had been broken. Now she had become engaged once again, and her father desperately wanted this marriage to go through.

The Rebbe told him to go home, and buy a lottery ticket - the Ribbono Shel Olam would surely help him. The poor man optimistically returned home, and bought a ticket, but the ticket did not win. Although the father somehow managed to keep the shidduch (engagement) afloat and marry his daughter off, the Strikover Rebbe was so shaken by his "failure" that he refused to accept any more petitioners for his blessings. A Rebbe's power, he argued, is derived from the dictum of Chazal, our Sages (see Ta'anis 23a) that Hashem fulfills the will of a tzaddik. Obviously, he was not a tzaddik!

Soon afterwards, R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa came to Strikov to visit the Rebbe. He was disturbed that the Rebbe had ceased accepting the hundreds of petitioners who desperately sought his blessings over the apparent failure of one blessing.

"Strikover Rebbe," said R' Simcha Bunim, "tell me: How does one reconcile that which we are taught, 'Hashem fulfills the will of a tzaddik' with the pasuk in Iyov (Job 9:12), 'Who can tell Him what to do!?' The explanation, however, is as follows: Hashem will fulfill the tzaddik's will. But even the tzaddik has no right to dictate **how** Hashem will do it. Your beracha (blessing) was fulfilled. The marriage went off as planned - just not the way you thought it would happen!" The Rebbe saw the wisdom in his words, and resumed accepting Chassidim.

Moshe Rabbeinu was not the least bit disturbed by his error. He knew that ultimately, Hashem's will would prevail, if not through himself, then through others like the likes of Betzael. If Hashem saw fit in this case to have the Mishkan built through Betzael's wisdom and not his own, then that was fine too. He had no need for things to turn out exactly the way he had planned. He did not demand exclusive rights to prophecy and leadership.

When performing the will of Hashem, it is imperative to remember that we are ultimately just a cog in the machinery of Klal Yisrael. Our desire should be that Hashem's Name be sanctified in the world, through ourselves or through others. Ideally, it should make no difference whether we were able to do the right thing ourselves, or whether others "got there before us," as long as Hashem's will prevailed.

