

FOR THIS YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Shemini. "Va'y'hee ba'yome ha'shmini [And it was on the eighth day], Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons and the elders of Israel. [9:1]" Rashi explains that this was the eighth day of the consecration and the day that the Mishkan [Tabernacle] was erected.

"And he said to Aharon, take a calf as a sin offering... because on this day Hashem will appear to you. [9:2,4] And Moshe said to Aharon: 'Draw close to the altar and offer your sin offering... and atone for yourself and for the nation.' [9:7]"

Moshe needed to urge Aharon to draw close to the altar. Aharon was both embarrassed and afraid to draw close-he saw a vision of the Golden Calf blocking any atonement that he would offer. Rashi explains that Moshe assuaged his fears by asking, "Why are you embarrassed-for this you have been chosen."

There are many different explanations on what Moshe meant when he told him "for this you have been chosen." There are those who explain that it was specifically this sensitivity and humility, manifested by his embarrassment and fear of the sin he had committed, which made him worthy of being chosen as the Kohen Gadol [High Priest].

We can perform an act which should cause us to feel embarrassment before Hashem and then immediately afterwards perform a mitzvah [commandment] or make a bracha [blessing]. Now, of course, having done something wrong is no reason not to do something right. However, at the same time, one should feel at least a little bit sheepish coming to stand before Hashem and serve Him after just having done something clearly contrary to His will.

The vision of the Calf was embedded in his mind-he felt that he couldn't draw close to Hashem. Moshe explained to him that it was that attitude which made him worthy of being the Kohen Gadol. "For this you have been chosen."

The Imray Emes, quoting Rav Chaim Vital, offers a different explanation. Every person has a specific life-mission to obtain or correct a certain attribute or tendency. Since this is the reason why his neshama [soul] was sent to this world, he will encounter resistance, challenges and difficulties in regard to that specific area. As opposed to these difficulties being seen as an indication that this area 'just isn't for me,' one must have the insight to realize that those difficulties are the highway markers on the long road of life, revealing the area which contains the potential for optimal growth and greatness. The greater the challenges that one is confronted with, the more Hashem wants and

expects from the person.

Aharon had stumbled and had sinned with the Golden Calf. As he was now going to induct the service to Hashem in the Mishkan, he encountered tremendous obstacles. It appeared as if Hashem didn't want his service. He was embarrassed and afraid to draw close. Perhaps he was in the wrong line of business...

Moshe tells him: "Draw close to the altar-for this you have been chosen." The difficulties and obstacles that you are encountering are the strongest and clearest indications that this is your line of business, "for this you have been chosen."

The Vilna Gaon takes this even a step further. At times a soul must return to this world in order to take care of some unfinished business. This is known as 'gilgul' or reincarnation. The Kabbalists teach that in our 'last-minute-before-the-Moshiach-generations' we are all in such a state-we're back trying to make good on where we fell short in the past.

But how does a person know, besides general mitzvah observance, what specific aspect or area he has returned to correct? The Vilna Gaon says that there are two ways of knowing. Firstly, the area where a person has stumbled and 'given in' many times and secondly, the area for which he feels a strong pull of desire. Those are the areas where he can shine and that is why he is walking this earth.

Rav Hutner zt"l, in a famous letter to a student who was getting discouraged by his stumbles in life, wrote that the stories we tell of the greatness of our Gedolim [great Jewish scholars and leaders] can sometimes serve a disservice. We tell of the final end product, skipping the struggles and stumbles, which, only through them, was that greatness achieved.

The classic example amongst Klal Yisroel [the Jewish people] of a person who guarded his tongue and attained the highest level of taharas halashon [purity of speech] is the Chofetz Chaim. Ask any child and he'll tell you that the Chofetz Chaim never spoke or listened to lashon harah [derogatory statements]. That of course is incorrect. It was only as a result of his battles, his struggles, his stumbles and his setbacks that he ultimately attained the purity that he did. But that is not discussed! The result is that a person who slips and sometimes speaks lashon harah can feel discouraged and disgusted with himself. "I'm not cut out for this," he'll say to himself.

I recall a conversation I had with a parent of a student of mine who had progressed beautifully during the year but had regressed a bit while home for the Pesach vacation. The parent was so upset and frustrated that she was questioning if the time spent in Yeshiva in Israel had been worthwhile. My response was that, as compared to the state that he was in before coming to Yeshiva where he had basically thrown in the towel, if now he was struggling, albeit stumbling, then the gains that had been made were immeasurable.

"Why are you embarrassed-for this you have been chosen." Important words to keep in mind as we bump along the road of life...

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

Warmest wishes of mazel tov to Mr. Joseph Sokol and Miss Suzy Kamali on their upcoming wedding. We are honored to be attending. May you seek and reach the understanding of what the two of you were "chosen" to accomplish and may you have much success and joy in fulfilling it.

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