

GUARDING AGAINST FEELING TOO GOOD ABOUT ONESELF

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 93, Melacha Before Havdala. Good Shabbos!

Guarding Against Feeling Too Good About Oneself

In this week's Parsha we have the culmination of the Seven Days of Consecration, used to dedicate the Mishkan. On the eighth day, Moshe called Aharon and told him which offerings to bring to finish off the process of consecration. After they did everything, Moshe said "This is the matter you shall do so that the Glory of G-d will appear upon you." [Vayikra 9:6]

The Yalkut on this pasuk [verse] interprets these words to mean "That Evil Inclination you should remove from your hearts." What specific Evil Inclination (Yetzer Hara) is Moshe referring to over here?

(Several years ago we offered an interpretation from the Netziv on this question. This year we will be giving different insight, found in the Drash V'Iyun, by the Reisher Rav.)

The pasuk in Koheles says, "There is no righteous person in the world who does (only) good, and does no evil" [Koheles 7:20]. The Reisher Rav says that perhaps the pasuk means that even when a person does a mitzvah, there is always the chance that in the mitzvah itself, he will come to do some kind of a sin.

A person can give Tzedakah and feel good about himself, but the Evil Inclination can creep in and he'll feel too good about himself and become haughty. So, the pasuk means that even when a person does a great act, it can be tainted by the wrong emotions or by feelings of gayvah or the like.

It was at this time, says the Drash V'Iyun, that Klal Yisroel were susceptible to such an Evil Inclination. Imagine the feeling. Here they were, a people who just came out of slavery, and now they built this beautiful edifice, with beautiful vessels. There was a very real worry that they would feel too good about themselves. There was the chance that they would succumb to the emotions of "my strength and the power of my hand made all this might" [Devorim 8:17] -- it was our power, it was our money,

it was our dedication, etc., etc.

It was at this juncture that Moshe tells them "That famous Yetzer Hara" -- the Evil Inclination of feeling too good about doing a Mitzvah, too smug and too satisfied about oneself -- is what you have to watch out for at this moment of erecting the Mishkan.

The Requirement of Jewish Leadership: A Feeling of Unworthiness

The pasuk continues "And Moshe said to Aharon, Draw near to the Altar and offer your Sin Offering and your Burnt Offering and Atonement for yourself and for the nation..." [9:7]

Rash"i cites an interesting Toras Kohanim. Aharon was embarrassed at this point about going over and doing the Temple Service. Moshe asked, "Why are you hesitant? This is what you were chosen for!"

Another Toras Kohanim says that Aharon saw the Altar appear to him in the form of an Ox and was afraid to approach. Moshe told him to get up the courage and approach the Altar.

What do Chazal mean when they say that the Altar appeared like an Ox? One does not have to be a great Darshan, to suggest that the purpose was to remind Aharon of the Sin of the (Golden) Calf. If that was the case, however, shouldn't the Medrash have said that the Altar appeared to him like a Calf, rather than like an Ox?

I saw a beautiful pshat from Rav Shlomo Breuer. The pasuk in Tehillim [106:19-20] says, "They made a calf in Chorev... and they switched their Allegiance to the form of an Ox." We see that the sin started out as a calf, and somehow developed into an Ox. Rav Shlomo Breuer says in the name of his father-in-law, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, that Klal Yisroel never wanted a real Avodah Zarah. They did not want to switch G-ds. What they wanted was an intermediary. They were afraid that Moshe had died and they wanted someone in his stead.

Aharon went ahead and made something that, in retrospect, we have to say was a mistake. Aharon made a concession and said, "They want an intermediary? I will pick something for them that there is no way they will ever be able to transform it and give it any power. I will pick a weak little calf. How can anybody think that a little calf can become a G-d?"

What happened? The concession snow-balled and grew from being merely a calf and turned into the form of an ox -- something having its own power. This was Aharon's role in the Sin of the Calf -- making the concession of the calf that grew into an ox. That is why the Altar appeared to him now in the form of an ox.

Now we can understand what Chazal mean. Aharon was afraid to assume the High Priesthood. He said, "I once had my try at leadership. I once tried to be a leader and I failed. I gave into the people. I

made a concession when I should have said a firm 'No.'" As a result of that concession, the calf became an ox. That is why Aharon was hesitant. He felt he wasn't cut out for the job.

Moshe told him, "Why are you hesitant? This is the very reason you were chosen!" One of the requirements of a Jewish Leader is to have this sense of hesitancy, to feel unworthy. A leader who campaigns for the position and says "I am the best man for the job" is not a Jewish leader!

There was once a Jew who had such feelings. He thought that he was the right man for the job. That man's name was Korach. We all know what happened to Korach. Such a person is not worthy to be the leader.

Hesitancy, embarrassment, intimidation, and humility are the very essence of what is needed to be worthy of assuming Jewish leadership.

Glossary

Mishkan -- Tabernacle

p'shat -- interpretation

tzedakah -- charity

gayvah --haughtiness)

Personalities & Sources:

Yalkut (Shimoni) --Midrashic anthology of Tanach attributed to Rav Shimon HaDarshan of Frankfurt (13th century).

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105); Torah commentator par excellence; France.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch --(1808-1888) Frankfurt-am-main; leader of modern German-Jewish Orthodoxy.

Rav Shlomo Breuer --(1850-1936); Papa, Hungary; Frankfurt-am-main.

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