

CLEAN UP YOUR MESS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Parshas Tzav: Rule Number One: Clean Up Your Mess

In this week's parsha we have the mitzvah of the offering of the Korban Olah. Aharon and his children are given the tremendous responsibility of the Temple Service. But the first thing Aharon is instructed to do is, "And the priest shall put on his linen garment and his linen pants shall he wear on his flesh, and take up the ashes to which the fire had consumed the elevating-offering on the altar, and lay them down at the side of the altar" [Vayikra 6:3].

There is a biblical command known as "Terumas HaDeshen." One of the first things that had to be done every morning as part of the service was to remove the ashes of the wood and offerings that had burnt the previous night.

The Chovos HaLevovos, one of the classic works on Ethics and Jewish philosophy, says that the rational behind this is that the Torah is particularly careful that people should not let things go to their head, lest they become ba'alei gayvah and haughty.

Here, the Kohen thinks he is something special -- and in fact he is something special. He is among the select few who were chosen to do the Avodas HaMikdash. The Torah, nevertheless instructs him, "Take out the ashes!" The Torah is very sensitive to human emotions. Lest Aharon come to think too much of himself, the Torah tells him to begin his day by the lowly task of taking out the ashes.

A number of years ago, it hit me that the last thing I do on Erev Yom Kippur is take out the garbage. Erev Yom Kippur is a very special moment. We have the Seuda Mafsekes. We bless our children. Yet, last thing I always do before I go to shul on Erev Yom Kippur is take out the garbage.

I was struck with two thoughts: That this really is what we all try to do on Erev Yom Kippur -- take out the garbage in our lives. Secondly, when one walks into Shul on Yom Kippur wearing his Kittel, he may be tempted to think of the loftiness of his station - entering into Yom Kippur, enveloped in

Kedusha. One should always remember however, he still has to deal with such things as the garbage bags; he still is a very human type of being, and he should never forget that he has to take out the garbage -- he remain a very real human being. He must eat, and yes he must still take out the garbage. If one thinks in those terms, he will not let other things go to his head.

One's Honor Is Worth Something

On the other hand, we see how the Torah was very particular about the honor of the less fortunate. On the one hand the Kohen Gadol should not become a ba'al gayvah; but on the other hand the poor person should not become depressed and broken.

There is an interesting gemara in Bava Kama [92a]. The wealthy people used to bring their Bikurim in golden and silver baskets. The poor people couldn't afford golden baskets, so they had baskets made out of reeds. That is what they used to carry their fruits when they presented them to the Kohen.

The Gemara says that the gold and silver baskets were returned to the wealthy. The Kohanim had no right to keep these precious utensils as a fringe benefit that came with the first fruits. But the reed baskets from the poor people they kept. The poor person "lost" the basket in the deal as well. Rava applies to this the old rule "basar anyah azla aniyusa," which loosely translated means "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

It is ironic. The rich fellow gives his basket and gets it back while the poor person who can ill afford it, doesn't get his basket back. This always bothered me. Why do we keep the poor fellow's basket?

I once read that the reason the Torah takes the basket, is to bolster the ego of the poor person. Keeping the fruit in the basket makes it look like a more substantial gift. The Torah says, let the Kohen keep the basket and let the poor person suffer the financial loss, but let him at least keep his pride in tact. Better the poor person should lose the basket, in order to give the Bikurim the appearance of looking plentiful, rather than return the basket and make him swallow his pride. The Torah goes to great lengths to protect a person's honor.

I remember a person asking me about raising money for another Jew for Hachnosas Kallah. A person was marrying off his daughter and he was not a very wealthy person. The fellow who approached me wanted to raise money on the other person's behalf so that he could make the wedding.

His question was that if he told people who he was raising the money for, there was no question that he could raise a lot of money. (The person was well-known and well-respected in the community.) On the other hand, if he made it anonymous he would not be able to expect that much, for these type of requests come in a half dozen times a week.

I went at that time and asked the Rosh Yeshiva [Rav Yaakov Ruderman], zt"l, the question: Should he mention the name and get more money or keep it anonymous and get less money? Without batting an eyelash or thinking a minute, the Rosh Yeshiva said it should be anonymous -- "A mensch's kavod is vert a sach" (a person's pride is worth a whole lot as well).

That is what we see over here from the baskets. A person's respect and honor is worth a lot. It is even worth that he should lose money over it. Money can always be replaced, but kavod habriyos and pride is much harder to replace.

Modim: The Two-Phase Bracha

One of the Offerings mentioned in this week's parsha is the Korban Todah -- the sacrifice that people brought when they wanted to give Thanksgiving. The Medrash tells us that in the future all the other Korbanos will become nullified, there will be no need to bring them. But there will always be a Thanksgiving Offering -- for "Todah" will never be nullified: There's always need to give thanks.

Rav Hutner, zt"l, makes a very interesting point. "Todah" comes from the noun "hoda-ah" meaning to give thanks. But the word "hoda-ah" also means something else in Hebrew. It means to admit. (As in "hoda-as ba'al din k'meah eidim dami" -- the admission of the party in question is like 100 witnesses).

Rav Hutner said that it is no coincidence that the word for "thanks" and the word for "admitting" are one and the same word. In order for a person to give thanks, he has to be able to admit that he needs help. The first step in being able to be grateful to someone for doing something for me, is that I have to admit that I needed someone else. I am not perfect; I am not all-powerful; I need others as well.

How do we know, asks Rav Hutner, when "Hoda-ah" means admission and when it means thanks? We have to look at the preposition that comes after the word. In using the word "hoda-ah" to mean admit, it is always followed by the pronoun 'she' (shin with a segol underneath). In using the word "hoda-ah" to mean thanks, it is always followed by the word 'al' (ayin lamed).

Rav Hutner points out that in our Davening we have the Blessing of Thanksgiving called "Modim." That Bracha, however, reads "Modim anachnu lach SHE..." -- the translation thus is not, "We Thank you G-d...;" but "We admit to you G-d..." We admit to G-d that we are dependant on Him. Once we come to that understanding, then we can come to the end of the Bracha: "Nodeh lecha u'nesaper Tehilasecha AL..." -- "We Thank You and will tell Your Praises for..."

No Messenger Can Say "Thank You"

I saw recently in name the Avudraham a beautiful comment. When the Chazzan says "Modim" during

the repetition of the Shmoneh Esrei, we say "Modim d'Rabbanan" (the "Rabbi's" Modim). Why is that?

The Avudraham says for all blessings in the Shmoneh Esrei we can have a shaliach (designated representative). For 'Heal Us' (Refaeinu) we can have a shalichah; for 'Grant us Sustenance' (Barech Aleinu) we can have a messenger -- the Shaliach Tzibur can say it for us. But there is one thing that no one can say for anyone else. Everyone has to say it for himself. That is 'Thank You.'

Glossary

ba'alei gayvah -- literally 'masters of pride'; arrogant

Seuda Mafsekes -- last meal (before the fast)

mesnch -- human being

Bikurim -- first fruit offerings

Hachnosas Kallah -- Expenses necessary to marry off a bride

kavod habriyos -- honor of creatures (human dignity)

Korban Todah -- Offering of Thanksgiving

Shliach Tzibur -- Designated representative of the Congregation (Chazzan).

Personalities & Sources:

Chovos HaLevovos -- "Duties of the Heart" written by Bachye ben Yosef Ibn Paqda in Arabic in 1080 and translated in Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon in 1160.

Rav Ruderman -- (1900-1987) Rosh Yesiva of Ner Israel; Baltimore.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner -- (1907-1980) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Rav Chaim Berlin; New York.

Rav Dovid ben Yosef Avudraham -- (1420-1494) Laws and commentary on prayers for the entire year; student of Rav Yakov ben Asher (Ba'al HaTurim).

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