

HIGH POTENTIAL VS. HIGH RISK

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Emor

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 237, Sterilization: Is It Permitted? Good Shabbos!

Kohen Gadol In the Holy of Holies: High Potential versus High Risk

A regular Kohen [Priest] may not marry a divorcee. However, unlike a regular Kohen, a Kohen Gadol [High Priest] may not even marry a widow. A Kohen Gadol must marry a woman who has never before been married.

The Moshav Zekeinim al haTorah (a Biblical commentary from the authors of the Talmudic Tosfos commentary) suggests a reason for this restriction on the Kohen Gadol. Had the Kohen Gadol been allowed to marry a widow, we would have been afraid of the following scenario: Perhaps the Kohen would have his eyes on a married woman, who he really wanted to marry. When he went into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur to utter the explicit Name of G-d (Shem haMeforash -- which has supernatural powers capable even of killing people [Rashi Shemos 2:14]), he might have in mind the husband of the woman who he wants to marry -- and thereby cause his death. To avoid this potentially life-threatening situation, the Torah commands the Kohen Gadol to only marry a woman who was never previously married.

This reason is literally mind-boggling. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. The location is the holiest spot on earth. The Kohen Gadol is going to utter from his mouth the holiest of syllables. And what are we afraid of? We are afraid that he might be thinking "I wish so-and-so would drop dead, so I can marry his wife!"

To make the matter even more astonishing, this interpretation is quoted in the Moshav Zekeinim al

HaTorah in the name of "HaChossid" -- the pious one. (Rav Bergman says this probably refers to the Rokeach.) This interpretation came from a person who was famous for his piety and holiness!

Rav Bergman writes that we learn from this Tosfos that there is no limit to the depths to which people can sink. This very person, who is ostensibly the holiest man in the Jewish nation, on the holiest day of the year, at the holiest place in the world, might have such evil and perverted thoughts. Such is the nature of the human being.

If this message is thoroughly depressing in terms of the wickedness of man's spirit, we need to contrast it with that of a different teaching of Chazal [our Sages].

The Medrash in Parshas Acharei Mos asks a question about the pasuk [verse] that describes the Kohen Gadol's entrance into the Holy of Holies. The pasuk says, "And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting" [Vayikra 16:17]. The Midrash asks: "Was not the Kohen Gadol, himself, a man?" The Midrash quotes the opinion of Rabbi Avahu in the name of Rabbi Pinchas that when the Kohen Gadol entered the Holy of Holies he was not human, he was like a Heavenly Angel.

If the Kohen Gadol does everything properly, he transcends the level of humanity and rises to that of a Heavenly creature.

The first Medrash says that the Kohen Gadol can be thinking the most malevolent of thoughts when he enters the Holy of Holies. According to the second Medrash, the Torah testifies that a Kohen Gadol is capable of escaping all human limitations when he enters the Holy of Holies. How do we reconcile these two Medrashim?

The answer, Rav Bergman suggests, is the power of Torah and Mitzvos. As human beings, we are capable of the worst. There is no limit to the depths to which people can sink. Never think, "but we are speaking of civilized people". One only needs to read the Holocaust literature to understand that this is no argument. Human beings, without Torah and without Mitzvos and without Kedusha [Holiness] can think the worst of thoughts... IN the Holy of Holies, ON Yom Kippur. But by virtue of Torah and Mitzvos, a person can become elevated and transcend humanity. The Kohen Gadol can achieve such heights as well. This is a very, very, sobering thought.

With this idea, Rav Bergman relates a beautiful interpretation to a Talmudic passage. The Talmud [Shabbos 88b] says that when Moshe went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, the Angels tried to talk G-d out of giving it to him. They argued that the Torah was an inappropriate gift for humans. G-d instructed Moshe to answer the argument of the Angels. Moshe countered that the Torah could only be meant for human beings and not for the Angels because the Torah says "I am the L-rd who took you out of Egypt..." The angels were never in Egypt!

What, indeed, were the Angels thinking? They were aware of what is written in the Torah. They knew they had never been in Egypt.

Rav Bergman explains that the issue was not the historical fact that the Jews were taken out of

Egypt, while the Angels were never taken out of Egypt. The issue was that the Jews needed the Torah because they had been in Egypt -- and while there, had sunk to the 49th level of depravity. They needed the Torah to raise themselves. They needed the Torah to keep themselves straight. The Angels, who were never in Egypt and had never experienced that spiritual depravity, do not need a Torah. They were created at a certain spiritual level and they maintain that level throughout their existence.

This was the basis of Moshe's argument: You do not need the Torah. We -- who despite being in the holiest of places can still have the least holy of thoughts -- need the Torah! The Angels agreed that Moshe was right. People need the Torah, so that they can potentially achieve the level of Angels.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Emor are provided below:

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