

IT IS CERTAINLY NOT MY FAULT!

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Sh'mini

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It Is Certainly Not MY Fault!

This week's parsha begins with the "Eighth Day." During the previous week the Jewish people had occupied themselves with what is known as the "Seven Days of Consecration" leading up to the inauguration of the Mishkan. All that was left to happen on the eighth day was for the Divine Presence of G-d to descend and become noticeable in the Mishkan.

Rashi, at the beginning of the Parsha, cites the following Medrash: "When Aharon saw that all the sacrifices were offered and all the rituals were performed, yet the Shechinah [Divine Presence] did not descend upon Israel, he was distressed. He said, 'I know that G-d is angry with me and because of me, the Shechinah did not descend upon Israel.'" Moshe tried to tell Aharon this was not the case, but Aharon remained distressed.

Let us imagine how Aharon must have felt. Here he was, serving as the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. He was representing the entire Jewish nation. Only recently, the entire nation had sullied themselves through the sin of the Golden Calf. The active participants were killed shortly after the incident. However, it was not only the active participants who perpetrated that sin. Virtually the entire nation was sullied by the Golden Calf. When Moshe, having descended from the mountain, discovered what had transpired, he raised the banner and called "Who is for G-d, let him join with me." Only the tribe of Levi gathered around Moshe to defend G-d's honor. The rest of the people were tolerant enough of what had transpired that they did not rally around that banner.

If we were Aharon, we could have very easily shifted the blame, for the failure of the Shechinah to descend, to the nation. "We acted for the Sake of Heaven. We, the tribe of Levi and the Kohanim are not to blame. It is the people's fault that the Divine Presence failed to descend! It is certainly not our

fault!"

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz says that this Medrash demonstrates the tremendous strength of character of Aharon. When something goes wrong, most of humanity says, "it is HIS fault!" When there are gatherings for repentance and introspection as a result of tragedies in a community, Heaven forbid, our reaction is invariably "I wonder what OTHER people are doing wrong!"

Aharon demonstrated the exact opposite reaction. His a priori assumption was "it must be MY fault!" If more of us had this attitude, rather than looking around and saying "who could it be?" or "what are THEY doing wrong?" then we would be a better people and the community would be a better community.

I once heard a very powerful insight from the Brisker Rov, zt"l. When Yonah was on the boat and the boat was about to break up, all the sailors prayed to their gods. Again, if we were in a similar situation, what would our reaction be? What if we were on an airplane and things became very turbulent, or Heaven forbid there was engine trouble? Everyone would become panicky and would start praying to the 'gods' of their religion. Wouldn't our reaction be "You guys keep quiet -- I'll daven!?" Would we not think "How will we ever survive if these guys are worshipping foreign gods - they are making matters worse, not better"?

Yonah was in a similar situation. He was on the boat and everyone was carrying on. This sailor invoked this Avodah Zarah and that sailor invoked that Avodah Zarah. The boat was on the verge of shattering. Yet, Yonah - in the presence of all the idolaters - was convinced that it was his own fault. The boat was not on the verge of destruction because of the idolaters. Yonah was convinced that the boat was on the verge of destruction because of him, the righteous prophet.

Yonah was in fact correct. It was the very fact of his righteousness and lineage and stature that convinced him - correctly - that it was HIS fault! He should know better. More is expected of him. The greater the person is, the greater the responsibility for success or failure.

This too was the reaction of Aharon. The blame was not placed on the people who just worshiped the Golden Calf. He accepted the blame on his own shoulders, because responsibility comes with greatness.

This must be our attitude as well. Our "holy community" ought not look elsewhere to find blame when "bad things happen." Yes, there is intermarriage and yes, there is abandonment of Torah and the basics of Judaism elsewhere. Yet despite many failings of so much of the Jewish People who are not observant, it is not necessarily THEIR fault. "For I know that it is because of me that this great tempest is upon you" [Yonah 1:12].

When a community 'knows better' - when they know what is right and what is wrong, the responsibility lies with them. This must be our attitude, the attitude of Aharon the Kohen Gadol and of Yonah the prophet. If we would have that attitude and use it to improve our lives then we would

merit the descent of the Shechinah, speedily may it come in our days.

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