

IT IS EASIER TO OVERCOME PHYSICAL PAIN THAN TO SUPPRESS THE HUMAN PSYCHE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshios Acharei Mos & Kedoshim

It Is Easier To Overcome Physical Pain Than To Suppress The Human Psyche

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 766 - Making Shiduchim Among Non-Observant. Good Shabbos!

The Torah section in Achrei Mos dealing with the laws of the Yom Kippur Service in the Bais Hamikdash concludes with the words "This shall be to you an eternal decree to bring atonement upon Children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And (Aharon) did as Hashem commanded Moshe." [Vayikra 16:34]

(As an aside, it is interesting to note that even though each of the Jewish holidays comes out only once during the year, Yom Kippur is the only holiday which the Torah explicitly categorizes as being "Achas B'Shanah" [once a year]. Chazal explain that the death of a righteous person (Tzadik) serves as atonement as does Yom Kippur. Therefore, when the Torah says that Yom Kippur will serve as atonement for us once during the year, it may be interpreted as a blessing. The Torah is in effect saying that there should only be one "day of atonement" this year, not a second equivalent day of atonement that year, i.e. -- a day marking the death of a Tzadik in the community.

On that note, I saw a story whereby one year, Rav Eliyahu Lopian got up before Neilah, repeated the above thought, and began crying bitterly. He said loudly before the congregation "Halevai (let it only be so) that we just have one Yom Kippur this year, that we not need to experience any additional "Yom Kippur -like" days of atonement. Unbeknownst to him, when he made this moving declaration, the Brisker Rav [Rav Yitzchak Zeev Soloveitchik] had just passed away.)

However, I would like to focus on the last part of the above quoted pasuk: "And (Aharon) did all that Hashem had spoken to Moshe". Rashi, quoting the Toras Kohanim, states: This indicates the praise of Aharon. When Aharon wore the special garments of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, he did it strictly

for the sake of Heaven. There was not an iota of personal pride or haughtiness.

Consider that once a year, one man out of the entire nation was privileged to wear these special garments. That could potentially go to a person's head and have an effect upon him. But the pasuk testifies that this was not the case with Aharon. He was not thinking of personal pride but did it strictly to fulfill the decree of the King.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody asks the following question: The Talmud in Brochos speaks of Rabbi Channina ben Dosa, whose intent in prayer was so focused that he did not even notice when an Arod (a serpent like animal with a very painful bite) bit him while he was davening -- so intense was his kavana. Rav Simcha Zissel asks: Why would it enter our mind to think that Aharon the High Priest would have less kavana than Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa? Why then is the Toras Kohanim afraid his mind might wander and have thoughts of personal pride that he is wearing the "White Garments" designated only for the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur? Of course, his laser like concentration would not allow him to deviate for one moment from his kavanah!

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody answers that it is easier not to be affected by physical pain than it is to be not affected by such things as pride and haughtiness! One can overcome the physical. It is difficult but it is doable. However, for people not to be affected by matters such as honor, jealousy, pride, and all of these very human character traits is not as easy a matter.

Therefore, Chazal need to tell us -- it goes without saying that Aaron would not have been affected by a bee bite or a snake bite or the bite of any other animal -- but even when it came to honor -- which could have affected him -- he also was not affected in the slightest and did the entire service strictly for the sake of Heaven.

Rav Simcha Zissel relates this comment to another amazing Medrash which he cites. The Medrash in Bereishis Rabbah states that during the Akeida the Satan came to Yitzchak and told him that all of his most prized gifts and possessions that his mother Sarah had lovingly given him throughout the years would now fall to his half-brother and nemesis, Yishmael. "Does that not bother you?" Satan teasingly asked. "How can you go through with this, Yitzchak? You are going to lose all those presents your mother gave you!"

The Medrash goes on to record Yitzchak's response to this taunt. Why, the Medrash asks, does Yitzchak say "My father, my father" two times? It is in order that at least on some minuscule level, so that his father would have mercy on him and not go through with the Akeida. In other words, the Medrash implies that Satan's teasing of Yitzchak DID have at least a partial impact on him!

Should Yitzchak not be above such matters? The answer is that as great as Yitzchak was, he was human and human beings are affected by these things. They are affected by honor, by lust, by pride, by jealousy, by all types of human emotions that are impossible to totally suppress. We can overcome physical things, but when we start talking about a person's psyche then even the greatest of people have to deal with human frailties.

Pirkei Avos: Chapter 3 Mishneh 10

"Everyone who the spirit of mankind is pleased with, we know for sure the Spirit Above is pleased with him."

As a proof for this Mishna, the Tosfos Yom Tov sites the pasuk in Proverbs: "And you will find favor and goodly wisdom in the eyes of G-d and man" [Mishlei 3:4]

This proof is difficult. It seems backwards. Our Mishna says that the proof that a man has found favor in Heaven is that mankind is pleased with him. The pasuk in Mishlei states the reverse: First man finds favor in G-d's Eyes and only then does he find favor in man's eyes.

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky resolves this question. The Mishna is telling us the advice Rav Abramsky used to tell every disciple who was going out into the world of "Avodas HaKodesh" [religious communal service]: Do what is right in the eyes of the Master of the Universe and that is how you will take care of the people. He would tell his students "If you try to please the people at the cost of doing what's right by the Ribono shel Olam, it is not going to work. You will not be successful with people and you will not be successful with G-d either."

If a person's guide will be "I have to do what the Almighty wants", says Rav Chatzkel Abramsky, there is a guarantee that the communal servant will be popular in the eyes of mankind as well.

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky was himself loved and admired by all. He writes that he never did things to please people. His goal was strictly to do that which was right and -- as the pasuk says -- to find favor and good understanding in the Eyes of G-d. He also quotes this advice in the name of the Chovos haLevovos -- One should do what the Ribono shel Olam wants and as part of the Divine Reward, he will be made pleasing and acceptable to mankind.

This indeed is what the Mishna is saying: If people are pleased with you, that is the proof that in Heaven too they are pleased with you as well. However, the method is certainly not to compromise just to make the people happy so that then Heaven will be happy as well. The method is just the reverse -- make Heaven happy and as a reward He will see to it that they are happy with you down below as well. When people are happy with someone down below, it is proof that He must be happy with him up above as well.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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