RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS SHEMINI

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemini

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #896, omen & Havdalah – Second Thoughts. Good Shabbos!

"It Is For This Reason You Were Chosen"

Near the beginning of Parshas Shmini, the pasuk says: "Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded." [Vayikra 9:7].

Rashi here quotes the Medrash that Moshe sensed his brother Aharon was reluctant to take on the duties of the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. For the previous "7 days of Consecration" Moshe acted as the Kohen Gadol. The "Eighth Day" was the first time Aharon was charged with taking over this role. When Moshe saw that Aharon was hesitant, he told Aharon – according to the Medrash cited by Rashi – "Why are you embarrassed? – It was for this that you were chosen."

These same words (Why are you embarrassed?) can allude to another phenomenon that was taking place here. Aharon felt that he was not worthy of the task. Aharon manifested the character trait of humility. Moshe sensed that Aharon felt about himself that he was not up to this task. Moshe told him "Why are you embarrassed? It is for this reason you were chosen." Meaning: By virtue of the fact that you feel unworthy for the job – that itself is the biggest proof you are worthy of the job! The sense of humbleness and unworthiness that you possess is in fact the key criteria that makes you worthy for this position.

The Chasam Sefer actually records this thought earlier, in the book of Shemos. When the Almighty was urging Moshe to become the leader of the Jewish people and to go to Egypt in order to lead the people out of bondage, Moshe asked, "Who am I that I should go before Pharaoh?" Moshe Rabbeinu hesitated. The ensuing discussion continued for 7 days. G-d responded and said, "I will be with you. And this is the sign that I sent you." The Chasam Sofer interprets homiletically that this is the sign (the proof) why I have sent you – because you are so modest and think yourself unworthy of the position!

The feeling of unworthiness, of "who am I?" is the defining characteristic of the type of person who the Almighty wants for Jewish leadership. He wants leaders who feel "I cannot do it on my own!" who feel the only reason they will be able to do it is because "I (the Almighty) will be with you!"

Rav Tzvi Pessach Frank was a leading Rabbinic personality in the pre-State period in Eretz Yisrael. When the position of Ashkenazik Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem became available in the mid-1930s, a rabbinic delegation approached him to discuss the requirements of the position. They discussed all the problems of the community as well as the duties of the Chief Rabbi. Rav Tzvi Pessach listened to their presentation and then told them "I know all the problems of the community already. Why are you telling me all this? Why are you coming to me? What do you expect me to do about solving all these problems?"

They told him, "We want you to become the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem." The prerequisite of the job, they told him, was to have someone who asks, "Why are you coming to me?" When you possess the attitude of "Who am I to go before Pharaoh" – that is the proof that you are worthy of Jewish leadership.

This concept is in stark contrast to the world around us. Have you ever heard anyone announce their candidacy for the presidency of the United States by saying "Ladies and Gentlemen, my fellow Americans, I am not worthy for this job. There is no reason on earth that you should elect me and I do not feel up to the task. Who am I?"

It is an amazing thing. Everybody running for president says, "I can do this job and I can do it well. I am the most worthy person out of 300 million people in the United States of America. I am the person for this job!"

Contrast this with the attitude of Aharon, who was embarrassed to accept the assignment. That indeed is why Hashem picked him! G-d came to Moshe and told him "You are the man." Moshe replied, "I am not the man." This says something about the difference between a secular leader and a manhig b'Yisrael (a Jewish leader).

The Giver of Chamisha Chumshei Torah Does Not Take "The Fifth"

The second thought I would like to share is another one of the criterion for leadership. Aharon's eldest two sons offered an "alien fire" on the Altar on the first day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. Fire came down from Heaven and consumed them.

At this point, Aharon and his remaining sons had the status of Onenim. An Onen is a person who has just lost a relative for whom he must sit Shiva – prior to the burial. There are all sorts of mourning laws that apply to an Onen, one of which is that an Onen may not eat sacrificial meats (Kodshim).

On this day (1 Nissan), they brought 3 ritual sacrifices. It was Rosh Chodesh so they brought the "He-Goat of the New Month". They brought the first in the series of 12 daily offerings of the tribal princes – that of Nachshon ben Aminadav from the Tribe of Yehudah. Finally, they brought a special sin offering unique to the inauguration of the Mishkan – Chatas haMiluim.

Moshe told Aharon and his two remaining sons that despite the fact that they were Oneninim and an Onen is not allowed to eat from a ritual sacrifice, under the present circumstance, there was a special dispensation which made it incumbent to eat from the sacrifices, as they would normally have done were they not Onenim.

The pasuk records: "Moshe insistently inquired about the he-goat of the sin offering, for behold, it had been burned (rather than eaten) – and he was angry with Elazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons saying: 'Why did you not eat the sin-offering in the holy place, for it is that which is holy of the highest degree; and He gave it to you to gain forgiveness for the sin of the assembly and to atone for them before Hashem.'" [Vayikra 10:16]

According to the interpretation of the Gemara in Zevachim, Aaron responded to his brother by asking, "Is it not the Halacha that the special dispensation allowing Oneninim to eat the ritual sacrifices only applied to the special offering of the Princes (that of Nachshon) and to the special offering associated with the Inauguration (Chatas haMilium); but it did not apply to the standard He-goat of Rosh Chodesh, which also happened to be brought that day?"

The Torah records: "Moshe listened to Aaron's argument and he approved." [Vayikra 10:20] Moshe told Aaron, "You are right and I was wrong." The Talmud indicates that Moshe was not just saying, "I never heard this Halacha from the Almighty." Moshe was saying, "I heard this Halacha from the Almighty but I forgot it. You reminded me and you are correct!" Moshe sent out a proclamation throughout the entire camp letting everyone know "Aharon was right and I was wrong."

If we were in Moshe Rabbeinu's position, (and remember that he had the awesome responsibility of being the Giver of Torah to the Jewish people) we would be worried about our reputation. If Moshe Rabbeinu can hear something from the Ribono shel Olam and then forget it, that is the last thing in the world that he would want to make public knowledge. If he could forget this Halacha, who is to say that he couldn't forget 612 other halachos?

Moshe could have rationalized to himself, "Okay, I know I am wrong. But for the sake of the 'greater good', in order to protect the 'integrity of the Torah' I have to finesse this explanation." It is like someone who needs to testify before a Senate Committee. Let him say at least "I can't recall" or some other equivalent evasive response. Let him "plead the fifth". However, not only does Moshe not say I never heard this, he confesses that he heard it and forgot! In addition, he publicizes the incident throughout the entire camp.

The explanation of this behavior is that Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching us another lesson about Jewish leadership. The example of leadership is that it is necessary to be able to say "I'm wrong. I made a mistake." This is also something that is very lacking today amongst our secular leaders. To have the courage to get up and admit such a thing requires a very big person. That is the type of person that is needed for Jewish leadership.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, also had to fight his enemies. There were people who had great resistance to the Mussar movement. There were people who had the attitude "Mussar is very nice, but it is not learning!" Compared to traditional Torah study, they felt it was a waste of time.

As the patriarch of the Mussar movement, Rav Yisrael Salanter wanted to establish his bona fides that he was a Talmid Chochom and a "lamdan" (advanced scholar of the Oral Law). He once got up in a Beis Medrash with many distinguished people there and gave a Talmud shiur. He was in the middle of delivering the lecture and someone asked him a question. The questioned decimated the premise of the entire Torah thought he was developing. Rav Yisrael thought for a few minutes. He looked at the student who asked the question and told him, "You are right. I have no answer to that question." He then closed the Gemara and ended the shiur.

After the shiur he came to his disciples and told them, "You should know that while I was thinking about the question, I had five different answers that I could have given. However, they were not "true". "You know what I was thinking about?" he told his students. "I was thinking that the whole purpose of my delivering the shiur this evening was to gain prestige for the Mussar movement. In order to establish the Mussar movement, I need to come across as a bona fide Talmid Chochom. Therefore, for the greater good, it might be worth it to make up one of these 'answers' so that I can get through my shiur. Even though it would not have been 'true', it would have been worth it! But to do something which was not mussar-dik (i.e. – unethical) in order to promote Mussar would not be mussar-dik!"

The whole raison d'etra of Mussar is that a person should improve his character and be honest and honest with himself. Resorting to non-Mussar tactics to promote Mussar values would be the height of hypocrisy. We cannot promote Mussar through non-Mussar tactics.

Finally, here is a story that is a little closer to our own time frame: When Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, was asked to become the Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Kol Torah (in those days one did

not become a Rosh Yeshiva without undergoing some type of examination) he had to "speak in learning" with the great men of Jerusalem including someone named Rav Yenna Martzbach. During the course of the discussion, Rav Yenna Martzbach asked Rav Auerbaach a question and he responded, "I don't know." He came home and told his wife, "I don't think I got the job because I didn't come across very well in the interview. When you ask a Rosh Yeshiva candidate a question in a job interview and he does not know the answer, it does not bode well for him."

Lo and behold, before long Rav Yenna Martzbach knocked on the door. He told Rav Shlomo Zalman, "We decided to give you the job. You are going to become the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah." He explained, "You know why you are going to become the Rosh Yeshiva? It is because we are interested in a person who admits the truth. We are looking for someone who has the capacity to say 'I don't know.' We want to teach our students to be honest and ethical. If the Rosh Yeshiva on his 'proba' [interview] can get up and say 'I don't know' that shows he is an honest person. That is why we want you for the job."

These two requirements – the feeling of unworthiness for the job and the ability to admit the truth – these are two crucial criteria that make a Jewish leader.

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