

# TAKE CHARGE

*by Rabbi Raymond Beyda*

*"Moshe and Aharon came to the Tent of Meeting, and they went out and blessed the people--" [Shemot 9:24]*

The Parasha opens with a grand ceremony of offerings to G-d on the first day of Nissan almost 1 year after the Exodus from Egypt. It is the day of the Grand Opening of the Mishkan -- the Tabernacle. Aharon, at the bidding of Moshe, serves his first day as the Kohen Gadol and offers all the required sacrifices and concludes with the priestly blessings --given to the people for the first time in history. Then Moshe and Aharon go to the Tent of Meeting. The question is --Why?

Rashi gives two interpretations. First, Moshe instructed Aharon to offer the Ketoret -- the incense -- on the Alter of Gold that was located inside the Tabernacle.

The second reason, however, is less historical and more applicable to our daily lives. Rashi records the following sequence of events.

Once Aharon saw that all the offerings had been brought, and all the acts of the Mishkan service had been performed, BUT the Shekhinah had not descended to Israel, he was distressed and said, "I know that G-d has become angry with me (because of my involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf), and because of me he did not descend to Israel." He then said to Moshe, My brother, thus you have done to me, I entered because you asked me to and I was embarrassed because I failed to bring the Shekhinah down." Immediately, Moshe entered the tent with him and they prayed for mercy and the Shekhinah did descend to Israel.

Rav Yeruham Levovitz zt'l, the Mashgiah of Yeshivat Mir Yerushalayim pointed out, "Human nature dictates that one who has done wrong or failed will blame the failure on others." This is true when one has a personal failure but applies even more so when a group of people are involved in a faux pas. Each feels that he or she is not the one responsible --it must be one of the others who participated in the unsuccessful action. The Gemara teaches, "When a time of trouble befalls a community the leaders should declare a communal fast with prayers and supplications of repentance." What good would the fasting and praying do if each individual felt that the blame for the troubled times was his friend's fault but certainly not his or her wrongdoing. Who would repent and turn the eyes of G-d towards blessing rather than curse? The decree of the Sages would only be beneficial for all if each took personal responsibility for the community's problems and repented from his or her misdeeds. The lesson to each oof us is clear. As we watch in horror, all the events

around the globe, each should feel that perhaps "I" contributed to G-d's decision to bring this upon our people and it is MY RESPONSIBILITY to do MY best to pray and to repent and to turn the situation around. It is so easy to look at others and place blame and so difficult to imitate the honest approach of Aharon. He said, "I know it is ME!"

Taking responsibility not only applies in the realm of staying away from evil it also applies in the realm of doing good. Once there was a synagogue whose membership were very poor. One year on Simhat Torah they became envious of the rich community across the street because the well-off members shared in delicious wines as they danced with the Torah in the courtyard of their synagogue. One of the poverty stricken congregants approached his community's leader with a suggestion. "We should place a barrel in the courtyard of the shul. Every one of us has at least enough wine for our weekly Kiddush and Habdallah. Rather than waste the small amounts left in our cups everyone should be told to bring the leftovers and pour them into this barrel. Next year at Simhat Torah we too will be able to drink and be merry while we perform our Hakafot." All the members enthusiastically approved the suggestion and the collection became a weekly habit. The following year the holiday was awaited with great anticipation. The joy, however, was short lived. Upon dipping their cups into the barrel the members were disappointed by the drink of water that was gleaned from the community chest. The barrel was full of water -- not wine! Each person felt "If every one brings wine what difference would it make if I am the only one who pours water into the barrel?"

Many people approach community efforts with this attitude. There are so many "others" who will do it. So many "others" to give of the time, money and talent that it takes to get a good project accomplished. If everyone takes the "other guy will do it" approach it will not get done.

When an opportunity for good presents it self "Take Charge" Accept the responsibility as if you are the only one available and capable to get it done and it will get done with the help of many.

## **LESSONS FROM PIRKE ABOT**

The custom of Jews is to study a chapter of Pirke Abot -- The Ethics of Our Fathers -- in the six weeks between Pesah and Shabuot. This portion of Mishnah is a treasure chest of epithets taught by our Sages to their students as instructions for living.

One of the three lessons taught by the Men of the Great Assembly was, "be deliberate in judgment." This instruction to the judges of Israel also can be applied to the lives of all people even though they may never sit on the bench. Rambam says, "One who acts irreverently in deciding the law and is quick to hand down a ruling before thoroughly investigating the issue until it is clear as day is considered a fool, a wicked person and an arrogant one. This is what the sages commanded, "Be deliberate in judgment." [Hilkhhot Sanhedrin 20:]

Every day all of us judge. Perhaps we don't serve in an official capacity but we do tend to judge the behavior of our friends, neighbors, co-workers and relatives all day long. The advice of our Sages is

to take our time, get all the facts and weigh them judiciously to avoid "jumping" to an incorrect conclusion.

One also must judge one's own behavior and correct oneself. Here the same rule applies. Don't be quick to justify. Consider your behavior from a distance or involve another as you consider the correctness of what you have done. "Be deliberate" in your judgment of your self. [Abot Chapter 1, Mishnah 1]

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