

# PARSHAS SHEMINI: STEPPING FORWARD - AND STEPPING UP

*by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz*

The materials were donated and the artisans had lovingly concluded their work. The Mishkan was built and all the kelim (utensils) were in their proper locations. The kohanim were dressed in their holy garments and were poised to serve Hashem as He would rest His presence among the Bnei Yisroel.

Parshas Shmini begins with the stage completely set for the actual inauguration of the Mishkan and the bringing of the first korbon (sacrifice) on the mizbayach (altar, where the sacrifices took place). At this point, Moshe spoke to his brother Aharon and instructed him to step forward and actually bring his korbon, "K'rav el hamizbayach." (Vayikrah 9:7)

Rashi is puzzled by the fact that Aharon needed prompting from Moshe Rabbeinu at this point. After all, the sacrifices of Aharon were the object of all the preparatory work of the B'nei Yisroel. Why would Aharon not step forward on his own at this crowning moment of the Chanukas HaMishkan (dedication of the Mishkan)?

To address this question, Rashi explains, "She'hoya Aharon bosh (shamed) v'yarei (and fearful) logeshes." Aharon was overcome with shame and fright as he prepared to mount the mizbayach. He therefore needed the encouragement of Moshe to move forward and assume the leadership position of the Kehunah (priesthood). In the words of Rashi, quoting the Midrash, Moshe told him, "Lomo atoh bosh, l'kach nivcharta-?" ("Why are you shamed? Hashem has chosen you [for this position]").)

Upon analysis, the emotion of busha, shame, seems out of place in this incident. We would fully understand the hesitation - perhaps even the fear - of Aharon to approach the Mizbayach and the presence of Hashem. But shame? Why would he feel shamed? Furthermore, how was Aharon comforted by the words of his brother Moshe?

The Ramban sheds light into the dialogue of Moshe and Aharon. Quoting the Midrash, he explains that the ever-humble Aharon had never forgotten the memory of his well-intentioned involvement in the incident of the egel, the golden calf. In fact, he was preoccupied with thoughts of teshuvah (repentance) for his participation in that event.

The Midrash comments that as Aharon looked up at the two protruding corners of the mizbayach, which were visible to him from his vantage point, he was reminded of the horns of the golden calf. He recoiled at that recollection, and was shamed that his misdeed was brought to his memory at this

holy moment. He was therefore fearful of stepping forward to the Mizbayach.

At that point, Moshe, as the leader of the Jewish people, offered words of encouragement to his brother. Why should you feel shame [over the incident of the egel]? Hashem chose you for this holy position after the event of the egel. In fact, as Rashi notes several pesukim earlier (Vayikrah 9:2), Aharon's first korban was a calf, to publicly symbolize Hashem's forgiveness of Aharon's role in the incident of the egel.

The K'sav Sofer adds insight to the timely words of Moshe. He explains that Moshe wisely understood the level of tzidkus (righteousness) in his elder brother's heart and the spiritual turmoil he was undergoing over his âsin' of the egel. He comforted his brother by pointing out that it was precisely because Aharon was agonizing over the egel that made him eminently worthy of serving Hashem on behalf of the B'nei Yisroel.

It is part of the human condition to err. Great tzadikim, however, retain the memory of their misdeeds, learn the lessons from these events, and rise to even greater heights as a result of their teshuvah (repentance). This approach follows the timeless and moving words of Dovid HaMelech, "V'chatai negdi samid" (Tehillim 51:5), "My sins are in my memory at all times." This was not a depressing thought, but was rather a focal point of his devotion to Hashem. In fact, the Gemorah mentions on several occasions that the Torah notes the misdeeds of our great leaders to inform us about the path to teshuvah, and the opportunity for growth from our own mistakes, however painful the lessons learned. (The Mishna in Sukka (5:4) and subsequent Gemorah mention the words that great tzadikim would sing at the Simchas Bais HaShoeva (Festival of the Water Drawing) on Sukkos - "Ashrei mi shelo chata, umi shechata yashuv v'yimchol lo" ("Fortunate is one who has never sinned, [however] those who have sinned, should do teshuvah and they will [surely] be forgiven.")

According to this interpretation, Moshe said, "Lomo atoh bosh?" "Why are you shamed?" "L'kach nivcharta", it is for this reason - your agony over your misdeed - that you were chosen to represent the Bnei Yisroel.

Aharon, the kedosh Hashem, epitomized this approach. He rose to towering spiritual heights after the incident of the egel - as a result of his reaction to it. When Aharon wavered and displayed shame and fear, Moshe encouraged him - and so that encouragement applies to all future generations.

Moshe's enduring encouragement to Aharon should resonate within each of us, especially as we travel down the rocky path of adolescence. K'rav el hamizbayach - step forward and serve Hashem to the best of your ability. Do not let your past misdeeds stand in the path of spiritual growth. And if you are troubled by these misdeeds, that is the greatest sign that your neshama (soul) is alive and well. "Lomo atoh bosh, l'kach nivcharta." Do not be shamed [by these missteps] - as Hashem has chosen you to serve Him.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos.

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Rabbi Horowitz is the founder and dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, NY, as well as the founder and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), which helps at-risk teens and their parents. He is a popular lecturer on teaching and parenting topics in communities around the world, and is the author of several best-selling parenting tape and CD sets. For more information on Rabbi Horowitz's parenting tapes, visit <http://www.rabbihorowitz.com/> or call 845-352-7100 X 133.