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# בְּתוֹכֵנוּ

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

## Beneath our Dignity

When identifying Zimri ben Salu, the Torah specifically points out that he was the *Nasi* of the *Shevet* of Shimon<sup>1</sup>. *Rashi*<sup>2</sup> explains that describing him in this way actually disgraces him. The *Gur Aryeh*<sup>3</sup> points out that this is certainly a strange disgrace! One would think that being the *Nasi* of a *Shevet* is an honor and deserving of respect; why is Zimri's status a source of infamy?

The *Gur Aryeh* answers that the very fact that he was so respected makes his downfall that much worse. Shoplifting doesn't make the paper, but if the shoplifter were the President, it would be front page news. It is more embarrassing for a distinguished person to sin than it is for a common citizen. One reason for this is that the respect for the position itself should be reason to prevent one from sinning.

This idea does not only apply to those who hold office or are known and respected members of the community. Every single one of us is representative of something special. "*Banim Atem L'Makom*" - "You are children of Hashem" is not simple hyperbole. It is a privilege, and a responsibility.

Hashem has given us a precious and holy *Neshama* that yearns to be close to Him<sup>4</sup>. We have the opportunity to connect to Hashem with Torah, with *Tefillah*, and with *Mitzvos*. And we come from a long line of illustrious personages – prophets and scholars, *Tzadikim* and *Gedolim*.

Like Zimri, the leader of *Shevet* Shimon, we can and should recognize our own personal worth, that we were made *B'Tzelem Elokim*, given powers that no other creature has been given<sup>5</sup>. On top of that, we are part of a special nation that has a unique relationship with the Creator of the universe. By doing so, we can remember that *Aveiros* are not just a bad idea, they are beneath our dignity.

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## Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Connecting to our forefathers, recognizing we are children of Hashem, and knowing that we have a holy *Neshama* sound like good ideas, but don't seem to be practical. How can I truly feel this way, and make it a part of my daily life?

There are a couple of techniques that can be used to help us become attuned to our special value. One way is to learn *Sefarim* that discuss our unique value, and what we can accomplish. *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses the value of a person, our *Tefillah*, and our Torah. *Toras Avraham* and *Ohr HaTzafun* have many chapters on the pricelessness of a person, on how people can be greater than angels. And there are many more *Sefarim* that discuss these ideas.

*Tefillah* can be an especially powerful way to connect to Hashem. Taking a few minutes before davening to recognize that the Creator of all things is giving me an audience can augment our relationship with Hashem.

Lastly, we sometimes think that we are nothing special, since so many others are treated similarly. We think that 'special' must mean different. But that is not the case – our status does not change whether there are more or less people like us – Hashem loves and cherishes every single one of us, and the fact that He also cherishes the people around us does not diminish our relationship.

1 *Bamidbar* 25:14

2 *Rashi ibid.* s.v. ושם איש

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Mesillas Yesarim* Chapter 1

5 *Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar* 1 Perek 2

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# A Prisoner of the Mind

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Rav Yaakov Galinsky, zt"l (1921-2014) relates the following story. He had been captured by the Russians when fleeing the Germans in 1939 and exiled to Siberia. The treatment was terrible, provisions were scarce, and the climate was harsh. The prisoners were treated no better than animals, with little regard to their health and safety. Their workday started before dawn, and ended late into the night – their last strength of the day was spent collapsing into bed. A cellmate of R' Galinsky's was a Polish general captured in the Polish-Russian war. After some time, R' Galinsky observed this man waking up very early every morning, and pulling out a small box tucked away under his bed. The man would meticulously open the box, and carefully remove the contents – his old Polish army uniform with his medals attached.

Quietly, so as to not wake the other prisoners, the general would don the uniform, smartly salute, get back into his regular clothing, and return to bed. Night after night this irrational behavior continued, until one night, R' Galinsky confronted the man.

"Sir," said the man, "let me explain. Before I was captured, I was a well-known and skilled general, with many troops under my command. Because of one mistake, I am now a prisoner of war, incarcerated in Siberia. The Russians treat us poorly, reinforcing our status as captives. However, by wearing my old uniform, I remind myself of who I truly am. I am no prisoner, I am a general!"

Indeed, the world tries to tell us that we are nothing special. But we are not prisoners, we are generals!

## DID YOU KNOW?

- *Midah Kneged Midah* - As a result of making Shalom between Hashem and *Bnei Yisrael*, Hashem gave Pinchas internal *Shalom* and he therefore lived for over 300 years<sup>6</sup>
- Some say that Pinchas is Eliyahu Hanavi in which case he went up to *Shamayim* with his body and is still living in physical form<sup>7</sup>
- Even the most wicked *Rasha* still so unbelievably important that he alone would be significant enough for Hashem to renew the entire creation on a daily basis<sup>8</sup>.
- We, at times, could reach similar heights to that of the *Avos* as their "*Ruchnius genes*" have been passed down and are part of our DNA.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Seforno* 25:12, *Radak Shoftim* 20:28

<sup>7</sup> *Pirkei D'Rabi Elazar*, Perek 47

<sup>8</sup> *Ohr HaTzfun Chelek* 1, page 16

<sup>9</sup> *Chidushei HaLev, Shemos* 35:30