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AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



PARSHAS
SHEMINI

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RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

BAD GOOD DEEDS

In the beginning of our *parsha*, Moshe tells Aharon to 'come close' to the altar, and bring various offerings.¹ The Ramban² (R' Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–1270) explains that Moshe used the term 'come close,' as Aharon had shied away from doing the service, for he was embarrassed regarding his role in the *Eigel HaZahav*. Thus, Moshe was reassuring Aharon that Hashem had indeed wanted Aharon to perform the service.

Though Aharon's contrition seems to be understandable, it becomes puzzling once we understand what Aharon accomplished during the event of the Golden Calf. The *Medrash*³ states that Aharon's involvement in the Golden Calf was specifically calculated to prevent harm to *Klal Yisrael*. Aharon saw the passion of *Klal Yisrael*, and his limited options. If he were to allow them to continue unabated, there would be a terrible eruption of idolatry. However, if he stood opposed, they would kill him to get their way. Either way, it seemed the Jewish people were doomed. What could he do?

He decided to pretend to join them, but only to slow them down. By taking the helm, not only was he able to obstruct their efforts, but if they served idols, as the leader, he would take the blame instead of them. Because he was willing to undertake such a distasteful act to save *Klal Yisrael*, the *Medrash* reveals that he was rewarded with the position of *Kohein Gadol*.

Thus, we come to our confusion — if Aharon did an amazing act of heroism, why was he so remorseful? We must conclude that although Aharon's actions were righteous, there was still an aspect of fault mixed in. Yes, his subterfuge in defence of Hashem was exactly what was needed at that moment. Yet, there was still *something* improper about his conduct. Thus, despite the reward he received, he felt unworthy.

We may lean towards black and white thinking, but we find that our actions can be shaded, with tinges of good and wicked mixed together. It is easier to be forgiving of others and ourselves when we realize that no one is wholly evil, and it is easier to find areas for growth when we realize that no one is wholly perfect.

When we appreciate this subtlety, we will have an easier time in our relationships, with ourselves, with others, and with Hashem.

1 *Vayikra* 9:7

2 *ibid.* s.v. קרב אל

3 *Yalkut Shimoni, Remez* 391

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

It might be an interesting point to note that we can have dual purposes when doing *mitzvos* or *aveiros*. But how does this knowledge help us in our *avodas Hashem*?

Knowing that there are often multiple sides to our actions can help us judge ourselves and others favorably, as well as push ourselves to greater heights in our doing of *mitzvos*.¹

If we see something doing something wrong, even if it is inexcusable, we can still acknowledge that we do not know their inner thoughts, the potential remorse or divided feelings they may have. We, ourselves, may do something wrong, but have tinges of regret, or other proper feelings.

On the other hand, we may sometimes become complacent with our actions, satisfied with our level of *mitzvos*. By recognizing that there is still potential in our *mitzvos*, and we can purify them further, we are opening up a new vista of *avodas Hashem*.

1 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 16

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The soul needs Mussar like the earth needs dew. - Shevet Mussar, Chap.

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IT'S ALL OR SOMETHING

"Thank you for calling me back, *Rebbi*, this has really been weighing on my mind."

It was the summer and Hirsch* had not been in *yeshiva* in a couple of weeks. Nevertheless, he liked to keep in touch with his *rebbeim*, and recently reached out with something that was bothering him.

"Over the summer, I feel like I'm not really a *yeshiva bochur*. When I'm in *yeshiva*, I pretty much follow the rules, I come to *seder*, and so on. But when I'm on vacation, I feel like the 'real me' is coming out, and I'm just not sure *yeshiva* is for me."

"That could be, I suppose," responded Rabbi Genack, surprising Hirsch. "But tell me more about what's going on."

"Well, you know... it's vacation so I let things slip a little. Or maybe a lot. Either way, I'm certainly not keeping up with what I used to in *yeshiva*, and perhaps worse."

"Sounds to me like you're judging your future based on these couple of months."

"Yes, I guess that might be silly, but it's not just that. Even when I am in *yeshiva*, even when I'm learning, my mind wanders, I waste time instead of learning, I come late to *minyan*, and so on. And, to be honest, learning is hard! I like it, sometimes, but other times I'm just not in the mood. Frankly, like I said, I'm not sure *yeshiva* is for me."

There was silence on the other end. Then Rabbi Genack spoke, and Hirsch could hear a smile in his voice. "Hirsch, I have to say, you haven't convinced me. Look, I understand you feel torn about *yeshiva*, and I can understand what led you to that. But I think it's important to recognize an important facet of our nature.

"You know that people are complicated. That complication is not simply the fact that our moods change, or that we sometimes do the right thing, and then go ahead and do the wrong thing. It is deeper — we sometimes do the right thing, but for the wrong reasons, or even for the right reasons, but our heart isn't really into it. It is not common to have an instance where everything is running together, with no alternative motives, no disruptions, and smooth sailing.

"I have to say, Hirsch, the fact that your summers are weaker than your months in *yeshiva*, or even the fact that your time in *yeshiva* has its ups and downs, doesn't make you unfit for *yeshiva*. It makes you human, and that makes you a perfect candidate to stay."

Now it was Hirsch's turn to be silent. Finally, he spoke, "I guess, perhaps, I was thinking that it's all or nothing. Kind of perfectionist thinking, really."

"Exactly right. We always strive to do better, but we must first understand who we are."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Moshe was afraid of the merit Og received for doing a favor for Avraham, despite the fact that Og did it with nefarious intent.¹
- Hashem gave *Klal Yisrael* so many *mitzvos* in order to ensure that every member of *Klal Yisrael* will do at least one *mitzvah* perfectly, without any improper intent mixed in.²

¹ *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 21:34 s.v. אל תירא and *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 14:13, s.v. ויבא הפליט

² *Rambam* on *Makkos* 3:16, s.v. רבי חנניא

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