



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

## Parashat Shemini Strength and Humility -Rabbi Tzachi Lehman-

In our parasha Hashem notifies Moshe that the altar (*mizbeach*) will be dedicated on the first day of the month of Nissan. In preparation for the big day, Hashem explains to Moshe how to build and sanctify the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), how to dress and sanctify Aharon and his sons and what sacrifices must be brought on Dedication Day. Upon the arrival of the big day, when Moshe, Aharon and his sons, the elders and the entire nation have already gathered and are waiting for the events to commence, Moshe finally gives Aharon the order to begin with the day's special sacrifices. Aharon, however, hesitates.

The Torah describes the events as follows: "And Moshe said to Aharon, 'Approach the altar and perform your sin offering and your burnt offering, atoning for yourself and for the people, and perform the people's sacrifice, atoning for them, as Hashem has commanded'" (Vayikra 9:7). Our Sages' sensitive ear identified the need felt by Moshe to direct Aharon to "approach the altar," from which they understood that Aharon was somewhat hesitant. What made Aharon freeze just as he was about to open the festivities on the day of his dedication as High Priest? What happened? What gave him pause?

Rashi, based on the words of our Sages in the midrash, explains that "[Moshe had to order Aharon to do so] because Aharon was bashful and afraid to approach [the altar]." Other commentators elaborate and explain that at the moment of his dedication as High Priest Aharon remembered his part in the sin of the Golden Calf and the fear and embarrassment that filled him when remembering his role in that event made him hesitant to fill the position of most senior religious authority over the Jewish people. It is not uncommon for high-pressure situations to release our insecurities. These feelings cause us to question our ability to fulfill the task at hand and undermine the confidence that is necessary for our success. Aharon asked himself whether he was worthy of fulfilling the role of High Priest, whether he was worthy of being the person to channel forgiveness and atonement to the entire nation, whether Hashem would actually dwell in the *Mishkan* and in the Israelite camp if he was the one performing the sacrifices on the altar.

Rashi *ad loc* describes the interaction between Moshe and Aharon, with Moshe saying to Aharon "Why are you ashamed? For this [function] you have been chosen!" Rabbi Ephraim of Sudilkov, grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, cites a tradition in the name of his grandfather that Moshe told Aharon that it was precisely because of the embarrassment that overcame Aharon at that moment that he was chosen to be High Priest.

The fear and embarrassment that a person feels when filling a new position may be interpreted by the person himself or by those around him as acknowledgement that the job is too big for him. Aharon



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

and Moshe teach us that this conclusion is not always accurate. Fear and embarrassment may also be an expression of acknowledgement of the magnitude of the charge and the responsibility that goes along with it. Primarily, however, such feelings indicate that the elevated status that goes along with the position has not blinded the candidate to his own faults and imperfections and it is precisely that knowledge that will aid him in fulfilling his goals later on.

There are, however, times when a person is afraid and ashamed to accept a charge upon himself because he knows that he is truly unworthy. How is one to distinguish between the latter feelings and the former?

The Sefat Emet addresses this question and says that an appropriate level of fear and embarrassment do not reduce a person's levels of positive energy. For this reason, when he is encouraged by those around him to take accept the charge upon himself, a person will do so just as Aharon did when told by Moshe that "it is for this function that you were chosen." However, if the fear and embarrassment shake the person to his core and reduce his confidence levels despite the appeals of those around him to accept the position, it is then apparent that such a person really is unworthy of the charge. Blessed are those whose leaders fill their positions of leadership from a place of true and worthy fear and trepidation.

**Rabbi Tzachi Lehman is the co-director the Tzohar organization**