

If an individual person from among the people of the land shall sin unintentionally. (4:27)

The sin-offering of a *yachid*, individual, which is brought for an inadvertent sin (for a *mitzvah* whose intentional prohibition carries the punishment of Heavenly excision, *kares*), is always a beast (female goat or sheep) and does not vary up and down (*oleh v'yoreid*) according to the wealth or poverty of the one who sinned. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains the *shoresh ha'mitzvah*, root of the commandment, as in all *korbanos*, to abase and bring the sinner to humility over the sin which he committed. As Shlomo *HaMelech* says in *Mishlei* (16:18), "Pride precedes destruction, and arrogance comes before failure." Humility is the greatest safeguard from downfall. After all, when one holds himself to be low, he cannot fall very far.

Sin brings one to humility. When Aharon *HaKohen* approached the *Mizbayach*, Altar, and the opportunity to represent *Klal Yisrael* in performing the service of the Golden Calf (from the corners of the *Mizbayach*, *keren* – corner, *keren* – horn), the image frightened and subdued him, because he had played a role in creating the Golden Calf. It was certainly inadvertent and meant to save the people, but, nonetheless, he felt responsible, and, as a result, inadequate to represent the nation.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* took note of Aharon's reluctance. He understood the reason he was demurring. He heartened and emboldened him, when he said, "Approach the Altar. Hashem designated you (specifically), due to your reluctance, born of humility." One who is truly humble is best suited to serve Hashem, to ascend the ladder of distinction. It was precisely because of Aharon's unpretentiousness that he was chosen to serve. Hashem does not want a leader who is arrogant. A leader who is full of himself has no room for his people.

Genuine spirituality can only flourish in a setting of humility. The *Baal Shem Tov* teaches that when one is meek, deferential, submissive – when he is not obsessed with himself - he will more easily recognize and acknowledge that his existence is fragile and that, without Hashem, he has absolutely no chance of survival. Whatever success he might ever enjoy will always be attributed to Hashem, because he knows that he alone is nothing. Humility leads one to prayer, because without Hashem, he cannot make it. Humility is authentic, or it is not humility. It is an approach to living as a Jew, with the constant awareness that one submits himself to a Higher Authority. Aharon *HaKohen* felt himself imperfect. Thus, he was the perfect person to become *Klal Yisrael*'s representative in the *Mishkan*.

Being aware of one's fragility – both physical and spiritual - sparks one to serve Hashem with greater sincerity and trust. Everything that he does is genuine and meaningful. The *Rav HaKollel*, Chief Rabbi of New York, *Horav Yaakov Yosef, zl*, was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose brilliance and erudition catapulted him above all other candidates for the position of Chief Rabbi. At the time, he was the de-facto *Rav* of Vilna. Sadly, his tenure was marred by much strife, since

not all of the fifteen most prominent *shuls* to have originally supported him could maintain harmony with regard to their selection. Indeed, Rav Yosef was accorded great honor only twice during his tenure: When he arrived, to the outstanding welcome of 100,000 people, and fourteen years later at his funeral, which was attended by an estimated 120,000 people.

During his last year, the Chief Rabbi spent most of his time in seclusion, suffering from depression, as a result of the merciless diatribe fomented by his antagonists and the early onset of Alzheimer's disease. He was only fifty-nine years old. On *Shabbos Shuvah* of that year (1902), he asked to deliver the traditional *drasha*, lecture, which focused on repentance, character refinement and *mitzvah* observance as a prerequisite for the *yemei ha'din*, days of judgment. Having been out of the public eye for some time, the announcement of his first public *drasha* brought out a huge crowd to the *Bais Medrash HaGadol* of the Lower East Side. He donned his *tallis* (a tradition before delivering the *drasha*), ascended to the *bimah*, lectern, and began with the opening words: "The Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah*..." He stopped, as the greatest fear (of any speaker) was realized: he forgot what he wanted to say. Here stood before them one of the most brilliant minds of the generation, a man who once had the entire *Talmud* and Codes at his fingertips, who was well-versed in all areas of Torah scholarship, and he could not remember what he wanted to say.

The Chief Rabbi waited a few (long) moments, composed himself and began to speak. "*Morai v'Rabbosai*, the *drasha* which I had planned to deliver has sadly slipped my mind. However, there is one thought I would like to share with you. The *Mishnah* says, "*When Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi died, anavah, humility, passed (with him. There was no one who was so humble as Rebbe)*. Rav Yosef said, '*This is not true, for I am still alive!*' (In other words, Rav Yosef said, concerning himself, '*I am still alive, and I will wear the mantle of humility.*'").

"Is this humility, for Rav Yosef to declare concerning himself that he is humble? We must keep in mind the fact that Rav Yosef, who was the leader of the generation, and the *Rebbe* of *Rava* and *Abaya*, became blind during his old age and forgot his learning. His students, *Rava* and *Abaya*, were constantly reminding him of his teachings. Thus, Rav Yosef was intimating that, as long as he was alive, he was a living example of why a person should never be arrogant about his self-worth. For what is man? A frail, sad, helpless mortal, who, at any moment can lose everything, when his physical and/or mental faculties cease to function.

"How can a human being think that he is 'something'? Humility has passed? Take one look at me. I forgot my *drasha*! Is there any more compelling and poignant *drasha* than this? When one looks at me, he sees the frailty and fragility of a human being!"

Need we say more?