

In the beginning of G-d's creating. (1:1)

Horav Yehudah Leib/Leibele Eiger, zl, grandson of *Horav Akiva Eiger* and son of *Horav Shlomo Eiger*, was drawn to *chassidus* (in contrast to the way in which he was raised). This was a time in which *chassidim* and *misnagdim*, those in opposition, were, to say the least, not on amicable terms. *Rav Leibele* went to *Horav Menachem Mendel, zl*, of Kotzk, the famous *Kotzker Rebbe*. Kotzk was a *chassidus* devoted to strict adherence to unvarnished truth. The *Rebbe* did not have a large following, because he had no tolerance for anything that was less than the truth. He did not build up his *chassidim*; rather, he pointed out their flaws, so that they could change and better themselves. He lived by the demands of *Din*, Strict Justice, never satisfied until he achieved total perfection. Obviously, his *chassidus* did not cater to – nor was it meant for – the average Jew.

Suffice it to say that no love was lost on the part *Rav Shlomo Eiger* towards *chassidus* in general and Kotzk in particular. The first time *Rav Shlomo* visited Kotzk in an attempt to returning to his son home, he succeeded in convincing *Rav Leibele* to return for a short while. Once he was home, his father asked what he had learned during his stay in Kotzk. Indeed, what could such a brilliant mind, scion of illustrious sages, learn in Kotzk? He replied that he had learned three things in Kotzk.

First, a human is a human, and an angel is an angel. They represent two completely different entities.

Second, if a human being so desires, he can achieve greater distinction than an angel. Being mortal does not preclude his ability to achieve greatness.

Third, the Torah's opening *pasuk*, *Bereishis bara Elokim*, teaches us that Hashem created "the beginning." From that point on, it is in the hands of man.

Veritably, the third teaching dovetails on the two preceding ones. A human being, whose function is to endeavor and to produce in this world, is different from the angel, whose function it is to serve Hashem in the celestial spheres. When a person applies himself – with the *reishis*, beginning point, bestowed upon him by Hashem as his starting point – he can ascend to such heights that supersede even that of an angel.

Let us now proceed to the closing *Parshah* of *Sefer Vayikra*, *Im Bechukosai teileichu v'es mitzvosai tishmeru va'asisem osam*, "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them" (*Vayikra* 26:3). *Chazal* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:6) expound on the words *va'asisem osam*, on which they posit the second word can be read *atem*. (There is no *vav* in *osam*.) Thus, they teach, if one observes Hashem's *mitzvos*, it is considered as if *asisem es atzmechem, asissem atem*, you created yourselves. This supports the notion that one must act upon the *reishis*, beginning. Hashem began the process. We should continue by adding, embellishing and strengthening the original. Man is to rise to serve Hashem to become the loftiest creature in His service.

This, explains, *Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl*, is intimidated by the words, *Naase adam*, “Let us make man” (*Bereishis* 1:26). *Naase* is the plural – “let us.” The simple explanation is that Hashem spoke with His Ministering Angels, a move which demonstrates His humility, to teach us that, regardless of one’s greatness, he should nonetheless consult with subordinates. We can now interpret *Naase* as “let us.” Hashem and man. Hashem looks expectantly at man to see whether he will perfect himself to become the man that Hashem meant him to be.

Man is Hashem's creation; yet, at the same time, he is his own creator. Hashem's plan for creation is put on hold – or even sabotaged by man – when he fails to perfect himself to become the actual man that Hashem wants him to be. It is incumbent upon all to participate in the *naase adam* and continue Hashem's work by perfecting ourselves.

Some are born into *kedushah*, spiritual holiness; others invoke it upon themselves. The *nazir* takes a vow upon himself to live a different lifestyle than his peers. His vow demands that: he not drink wine and other grape derivatives; he must grow his hair; and he may not defile himself to a corpse. Becoming a *nazir* is an extraordinary undertaking, an achievement that is not meant for all men. Maintaining this achievement is difficult. All too often, we obtain a spiritual achievement only to allow it to slip through our fingers, because we lack the fortitude and resolution to hold on in order to keep fighting for what we have accomplished.

In addressing the *nazir*'s lofty spiritual plateau, the *Avnei Nezer* explains why the *nazir*'s level of *kedushah*, in a sense, is even greater than that of a *Kohen Hedyot*, common *Kohen*. A common *Kohen* may defile himself to his seven closest relatives, while a *nazir* may not. A *Kohen* receives his holy status from his ancestors. He did nothing on his own to earn this exalted position – other than being born into a Priestly family. Since he draws his spirituality from his family, it makes sense that the laws prohibiting him from defiling himself to the corpse of another Jew be suspended with regard to close relatives. They are the source of his sanctity; thus, “family” overrides his Priestly status.

The *nazir*, however, is not born into this position. He attains it through his personal initiative, which Hashem sanctions. His holiness has no ties to family. With regard to his holiness, all Jews are the same. The *Kohen Gadol* is different from the *Kohen Hedyot*, as he may not defile himself even to relatives. His position is not bestowed upon him by birth, but, rather, by achievement. Without his self-developed eminence, he would be a *Kohen Hedyot*. His position is not family-connected; it is self-merited. As in all things, however, one must work hard to maintain what he has nurtured. Otherwise, the fleeting moments of success will have little to no effect on the trajectory of his life.

A marked difference exists between success and greatness. A great person is able to overcome challenge time and again, to rise up and continue his quest. The mark of true greatness is the ability to overcome failure and continue on until one achieves his goals. A successful person might reach a certain plateau and then stop, because he has too many obstacles to overcome. He is successful because he has gone higher than anyone else – but he is not great. Accordingly, a man

is constantly involved in his own fulfillment of *naase adam*. Every challenge, every adversity, every failure that one overcomes brings him closer to achieving *naase adam*.

In a letter to a student who had become discouraged by his repeated failure to master the *lomdus*, analytic logic, associated with *Talmud*, *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*, writes: "A failure many of us experience is that we focus on the high achievements of great people... while we tend to ignore the inner struggles that had previously stormed within them. These individuals did not just leap from first endeavor to overwhelming success.

"You have stumbled and will stumble once again. You will win some battles and lose others." Shlomo *Hamelech* (*Mishlei* 24:16) writes: "A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again." Those who do not think believe the intent of the *pasuk* is to teach us that the righteous man falls seven times and – despite this – he rises. Those who think and are knowledgeable understand that the essence of the righteous man's rising is a consequence of his seven falls."

Greatness cannot be achieved without failure. Failure tempers one's resolve and strengthens his footing so that he can climb firmer and higher. *Naase adam* – together with *siyata d'Shmaya* – we can make man.