

“Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge; whoever touches the mountain shall surely die.” (19:12)

Rabbi Paysach Krohn cites the *Kotzker Rebbe's* homiletic interpretation of this *pasuk*. This was to be the basis of a speech that *Rabbi Moshe Sherer, z.l.*, was to deliver at Agudath Israel's 76th Annual Dinner. Regrettably, Rabbi Sherer, who served as Agudah's president for over thirty years, passed away that morning. The following is the *Rebbe's* exegesis and Rabbi Sherer's supplemental note.

There are instances when one undertakes a project with the desire to make a significant contribution via his work. All too often, as happens with many of us, we do not achieve our planned goals. Yet, this does not faze us. We become complacent and satisfied with what we have done because after all, it is still more than had been previously accomplished. The *Kotzker* says that this is wrong. He applies this idea to this *pasuk*: Beware if you are trying to “climb a mountain” with the stated goals of accomplishing something great. You succeed, however, in reaching only part of your goal. Do not be satisfied, for if you have merely “touched the mountain” and not succeeded in conquering it, that is not life. Rather it constitutes a form of death.

Rabbi Sherer added what probably defined his own essence, as well as the prevalent perspective of so many of *Klal Yisrael's gedolim*, *Torah* giants: “If you have merited to climb the mountain, do not be like those who are satisfied with a little, but instead endeavor to climb higher and higher!” This is the way a Jew should live. It is only through such an outlook on life that one can achieve *gadlus*, greatness, and true success.

Too many of us are “*mistapek b'muat*,” satisfied with a little, accepting whatever we achieve, even if it falls dismally short of our intended goals. *Horav Yissacher Frand, Shlita*, focuses upon our lack of going “all the way,” our sense of complacency with whatever we achieve, our satisfaction with our level of observance. In the *parsha* of *Vidui Maasros*, the confession one recites upon bringing his tithes to Yerushalayim, the individual says, “*I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given to the Levi, to the ger, convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to whatever commandment You have commanded me.*” Concealed in this recitation, say the commentators, is the letter “*chof*” of the word “*k'chol*,” which underscores the confession. We do not say that we have given precisely as we have been commanded, but rather, “*k'chol*,” like, all that we were commanded. We gave, but perhaps not enough, not in accordance with our full ability. We waited to give at the last possible moment, rather than at the appropriate time each year.

When we evaluate our lives and our observances, we will see that everything revolves around the “*k'chol*,” “like.” We do – we observe – but it is lacking in content, lacking in feeling, lacking in attitude. Our *Shabbos* is cold, our *davening* is at best lukewarm, our *minyan* attendance leaves much to be desired. We are, however, *frum*! *Yaakov Avinu* said, “I lived with Lavan, but I did not learn from his actions.” One of the commentators interprets this to mean, “I did not learn from him

to do good as he does evil.” Lavan’s approach to evil was whole- hearted and passionate. We have yet to learn from that.

We must ask ourselves: do we maximize our potential? Adam *Ha’rishon* was judged by Hashem. He was asked one word – “*Ayeca*,” “Where are you?” *Chazal* teach us that this question encompassed much more than it seems to. It critiqued Adam for failing to realize his remarkable potential. “Yesterday you reached up to the Heavens, encompassing the entire world from one end to the other. You were My handiwork, My special creation. And where are you today? Hiding among the trees of the garden.” This was Hashem’s *mussar*, rebuke. Adam *Ha’rishon*’s tragic failure to realize his incredible potential frequently repeats itself in our lives. We must never become complacent, thinking either that we have reached the top of the mountain or that whatever we have done is “good enough.” It is not.

We are all created by the Almighty with a purpose, with goals to achieve, with objectives to realize. Something happens along the way which precludes us from fulfilling our mission in life. We say in the *Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei* of *Rosh Hashanah*, that each person is judged in accordance with “*maaseh ish u’fekudaso*,” everyone’s deed and mission. What is the meaning of deed and mission? A person should be judged according to what he does or does not do. What is the meaning of one’s mission? *Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, z.l.*, explained that a man has a G-d-given purpose in life. We are judged not only by the quality of our deeds, but also by the extent to which we fulfill our personal purpose in life.

Interestingly, when *Reb Shraga Feivel* made this statement, he added, “How does one know whether he has fulfilled his mission in life?” He immediately began to cry. Here was a person who catalyzed much of the *Torah* environment that the post World War II Americans enjoy. Yet, he felt insecure regarding his achievements. Perhaps this is why he was so eminently successful. He never felt that he had made it. This is what Rabbi Sherer was alluding to. The individuals that feel they have made it have only begun to ascend the mountain. We can never become complacent. The process of trying to reach our potential is a never-ending quest for achievement. To paraphrase *Horav Frand*, “Not only is each one of us brought into this world with a unique combination of strengths, but each one of us is brought into the world at a particular time when those powers are needed for the fulfillment of some part of the Divine Plan.” We have a responsibility to ourselves, our People, and the Almighty Who put us here at this specific time and place for a purpose. There are people who go through life doing little more than searching for that purpose. Others search less and do more. They are ascending the mountain.