

You shall not slaughter for Hashem, your G-d, an ox or a lamb or kid in which there will be a blemish. (17:1)

The animal that is brought up as an offering to Hashem must be without blemish. *Chazal* (*Sifri*) detail a variety of disqualifications which invalidate a sacrifice. The *shores*, root, of this *mitzvah* is quite understandable. A person who brings a *korban*, sacrifice, is to focus his thoughts towards Hashem. A human being is affected by the strength of his actions. Hence, it is only proper that the sacrifice he offers be without blemish. This reflects the idea that the intentions of a man neither rest – nor become focused – upon a lesser sacrifice as they would upon a more important sacrifice. The distinguished and perfect in its species arouse and inspire hearts. In other words, one who offers the *korban* will be inspired to a greater extent by an unblemished animal, because, in his mind, it has greater value. Furthermore, it demonstrates greater reverence for the Temple and its service when the subject of the sacrifice is unblemished.

The concept of *baal mum*, blemished, does not apply exclusively to the animal species. Human beings can also be categorized as blemished. I do not refer to physical impediments, but rather, the character defects brought on by a lack of refinement. *Chazal* (*Megillah* 29a) state: One who is conceited is a “blemished person.” Our sages view conceit in a human being as a failing on par with a blemish. Why is arrogance viewed as a blemish? How does conceit compare to a physical impediment?

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, explains that the most significant shortcoming of one who has a physical impediment is manifest primarily in his ability to move about, to locomote with ease and comfort. One whose limbs do not permit him to go where he pleases and do what he wants is impeded. When we consider the “affliction” of arrogance from a practical point of view, we note that an arrogant person has, due to his conceit, impeded himself from serving Hashem properly. He refuses to ask someone for help in understanding a Torah passage, because this would be an indication that his Torah knowledge is deficient. Likewise, he would rather *daven* in the seclusion of his own home than go to *shul* where he will not be granted the honor that he feels he deserves. The conceited person limits where he goes, functions that he attends, because he has convinced himself that they are below his standard. If it does not match up to his preconceived demands, then he sits in seclusion. Without *kavod*, honor, it is just not worth going out. There is no greater encumbrance than one who suppresses himself. Such a pitiful person is truly blemished.

No more “perfect” person exists than one who adheres to the strictures of humility. Indeed, the less one thinks of himself, the less that can go wrong and the less that can be pointed out concerning him. He has diminished himself to the point that no one focuses on his purported deficiencies. On the other hand, one who positions himself in the centerpiece of another fellow’s scrutiny is asking for trouble. The *anav*, humble person, is out of sight, while the arrogant person is looking for attention which may not always be positive.

Rav Zilberstein relates that *Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl*, represents humility at its apex. He was the premier *maggid shiur*, lecturer in Talmud, not only in Ponovezh, but throughout *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Brisker Rav, zl*, referred to him as the *Rosh Roshei Yeshivos*, the head (premier) of the *Roshei Yeshivah*. When Ponovezh had just opened its doors the *yeshivah* had no operating fund, because it had no money. The student body was small, numbering about fifty students. Due to the lack of funds, it was impossible to secure the services of someone to maintain the sanitary conditions of the *yeshivah*. The *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, traveled throughout the globe fundraising for the *yeshivah*, and *Rav Shmuel* was left to assume the responsibility of providing for the spiritual sustenance of the young men. It is difficult to focus on learning when the environmental conditions are far from appealing. Thus, during this period, *Rav Shmuel* would come to the *bais hamedrash* early in the morning, lock the doors and pull down the shades, take out a broom and dustpan, and sweep the floors. He would take a mop and water and wash the floor. When the students entered the study hall for morning *davening*, the room was spotless. No one had the faintest idea of the identity of the new maintenance crew.

When *Rav Shmuel* lay on his deathbed surrounded by his family, he cried out in pain and said, "With what am I ascending to the Heavenly Throne?" (He was intimating that he was unworthy of any spiritual reward.) This was a question posed by the preeminent *Rosh Yeshivah*, whose lectures served as the lodestar for navigating the difficult subjects of Talmud. Finally he said that perhaps the merit earned by maintaining the cleanliness of the *bais hamedrash* would serve on his behalf.

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, was asked concerning a choice of surgeon for a major procedure. One surgeon was highly-skilled but he had an arrogant bedside manner that left much to be desired. The other surgeon was skilled, but not in the same league as his colleague. His character was impeccable, however, manifesting unparalleled humility and warmth both to the patient and his family. Does skill trump character refinement? *Rav Shteinman* replied that concerning the surgeon who was arrogant, Hashem says, "I and he cannot live together." Hashem does not tolerate arrogance. Why would anyone choose a surgeon who does not have Hashem's support? On the other hand, while the second surgeon may be less skilled, having Hashem at his back will grant him a successful outcome."