

The blessings of your father surpassed the blessings of my parents... Let them be upon Yosef's head. (49:26)

When Yaakov *Avinu* blessed his sons, he gave an extra blessing to Yosef. *Rashi* translates *Gavru al Bircas horai*, "The blessing of your father *gavru*, surpassed, the blessings of my father." This means that the blessings that Yaakov received from Hashem surpassed the blessings he received from his father. These should rest upon Yosef. *Targum Onkelos* translate *gavru* as "in addition." This means that all the blessings – Yaakov's father and those of Hashem, should all come to fruition in Yosef. This was the Patriarch's way of saying that all the blessings will rest upon the head of he who lives an observant life, dedicated to Torah and *mitzvos*. Such a person will not need to go anywhere else to find gratification. Sadly, many of us talk the talk and agree with this, but, when it comes to walking the walk, to living our lives not by the validation of others, but rather, by what they themselves think and know is right, they fail dismally. Everyone wants to impress and be accepted. If the life of an observant Jew does not pivot him to the upper echelons of society, he feels he must innovate in order to get accepted. He needs and thrives on the accolades he receives from others. Their reviews of his lifestyle and work and endeavors, i.e., what he does, how he lives, where he *davens*, the trips he takes and the schools/camps his children attend, form the barometer of his personal success or failure.

How very sad. Such a person will do anything to be accepted, to be one of the *chevra*. As a result, he does not focus on his G-d-given qualities, which would build up his self-confidence and esteem. Without this, he will never achieve true fulfillment. Our work should be defined independently, and the choices we make in life aligned with our values and passions. Worrying about what *yenem* will say exchanges a lack of authenticity for public acclaim. We are then left with shallow fulfillment, because we are not pursuing what really matters to us. While public opinion is helpful, and, in some instances, necessary to truly succeed, one must strike a balance and not ignore personal values, goals and aspirations.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, gleans this basic lesson from the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh's* commentary to *Bereishis* 4:7. Following Hashem's acceptance of Hevel's *korban*, offering, over that of his, Kayin became seriously despondent. Hashem said to Kayin, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your face fallen? If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven, but if you do not forgive yourself, then sin rests at the door." What did Hashem mean when He asked Kayin the reason that he is annoyed? He seems to have a good reason, bearing in mind that Hashem accepted his younger brother's *korban*, while He rejected Kayin's. I think that would ruin one's day. Furthermore, Hashem's suggestion that Kayin improve is wonderful advice for the future, but it does not alter the way things were at that time.

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that Kayin's problem was focus: he focused inward, rather than outward. When Hashem accepted Hevel's *korban*, Kayin took it personally, thinking that Hashem cared only for Hevel and not for him. The Almighty explained the reason for the rejection of

Kayin's *korban*: a deficiency in his performance of the *mitzvah*. If Kayin would have been good, exhibiting proper behavior, not subject to anger and jealousy, he would have needed no outside approval. Pure actions emanating from a pure heart are – in and of themselves – uplifting, thus elevating the person. Had Kayin used some *seichel*, common sense, he would have realized that his *korban* was not lacking, but rather, his attitude was. His desire to connect with Hashem was flawed. When one's actions are good, spurred on by noble and proper intention, these actions and the person's spirit will be uplifted. If, however, the actions lack virtue and devotion, the possibility of spiritual elevation will be negated. Hashem was not addressing the future, but rather explaining the past, which set the tone for the future.

How often, due to societal pressure and public opinion, do we fear taking a chance and living our dream, executing our passion? A dear friend undertook a project which he had dreamed of doing for years. The consensus of opinion was that he would fall flat on his face. It was a difficult undertaking, fraught with challenge and undermined by a doubting public. Nonetheless, he went for it, and, while he did not realize his aspirations, he did achieve personal fulfillment. He stayed true to himself and found meaning beyond the approval of others.