



# GROWTH

## At The SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT SHEMINI

#### From Setback to Strength

"Moshe said to Aharon: come near to the Altar and perform the service..." (Leviticus 9:7). Rashi explains why Moshe felt it imperative to request his brother to "come near the Altar": *Because Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach. Moshe therefore said to him, 'Why are you embarrassed? This is what you were selected for!'*

This Rashi appears riddling. First of all, what exactly was transpiring? What was causing Aharon's hesitation? Secondly, Rashi had prefaced that Aharon felt both embarrassed and afraid; why did Moshe only address his shame?

The *Chatam Sofer* provides a beautiful explanation. Aharon felt uncomfortable serving as the *kohen gadol* due to a mix of emotions. His embarrassment stemmed from the *chet ha'egel*; he felt mortified to serve as the *kohen gadol* after having led the nation in the sin of the golden calf. In addition, there was also a sense of fear within himself that such an honorable position might get to his head and arouse haughtiness. Hearing out his brother's concerns, Moshe nevertheless reassured both of his worries. "It is precisely because of this – i.e. your mistake, your imperfection – that you were chosen!" The reason why he was ashamed was also the solution to his fears.

Royalty could only last in an individual who is *imperfect*. Shaul, who, as the *navi* relates, had a sterling and perfect reputation, didn't merit keeping the crown. It was only his successor, David – who didn't grow up with a good reputation and had made mistakes in his life – that merited building an everlasting dynasty.

This is the message that Moshe was conveying. Not just that Aharon's imperfect background was okay, but that it was the very reason he was chosen to lead! The bump in the road in Aharon's rearview mirror – that 'ugly' part of his past – would always be there to help keep his head in place and allow him to become the great and humble leader he was destined to be.

*How often do we second-guess ourselves and hold back from greatness just because we tell ourselves we're unworthy? "Who am I to be the most amazing parent/spouse/child/student/employee/friend/mentor whenever I've made such mistakes in my life? Who am I even fooling?"*

*The answer is that you'd only be fooling yourself if you listened to that. Your past – the ups and downs, the successes and the failures – is all part of a Divine journey with the objective of building you to become the absolute best version of yourself, and very often it is precisely one's downfalls that inculcate the sensitivity, wisdom, and strength one needs in order to soar beyond the shadows of past defeats into the light of new beginnings.*

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' Avraham Mirsky)

#### Distorted Mirror

You ever have that feeling where, after you've made a few mistakes, you feel completely worthless? How about being flooded with heavy, overwhelming waves of guilt, shame, self-disgust, and inadequacy after a negative thought or experience?

Towards the end of this week's Torah portion, where it discusses some of the laws of ritual purity, the verse (Leviticus 11:32) describes: "And if any of those [sources of impurity, listed in preceding verses] falls into an earthen vessel, everything inside it shall be impure and [the vessel] itself you shall break."

While on the surface, this discusses technical details, I believe a homiletical reading of the verse carries a powerful truth in human psychology. Sometimes, one's yetzer hara confronts an individual with just one thought of negativity or toxicity, knowing full well that such minimal "ammunition" may actually cause significant damage. How often in the human brain is a small seed of negativity watered by our own doubts and insecurities to sprout into a big tree with branches of loathing, shame, anxiety, depression, and despair? How often do we allow our minds to exaggerate our flaws and come to irrational conclusions about ourselves? Perhaps, our verse is alluding to this phenomenon: "*If any impurity falls into an earthen vessel*" – whenever any negativity enters human consciousness, our 'vessel' of thought, "*everything inside it becomes impure and the vessel itself is broken.*" So often, we blow things out of proportion and allow something small and likely insignificant to fill our minds, cloud our self-image, and take over.

Internalizing this tactic of the Satan helps one see through the façade. Let us maintain the clarity we need to harbor a healthy mindset, utilizing the darkness for nearing oneself towards the light and not allowing it to destroy us.

*In loving memory of Cindy Spielman, Chana Chaya bat Malka*

**Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:**

Ariel Ben Frida Miriam Bat Bakol Yitzhak Ben Naama Rachamim Ben Shifra

*"The strongest people are not those who show strength in front of us but those who win battles we know nothing about."*