



The Gadlut of Aharon HaKohen

By Yonatan Halstuch (25)

After the Torah finishes discussing the specifics of all the difficult services of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, the passuk states: "ויעש כאשר צוה ה' את משה", "And [Aharon] did just as Hashem commanded Moshe (Vayikra 16:34). Rashi points out that the Torah says this to praise Aharon "שלא היה לזבשן לגדלתו אלא כמקום גזירת המלך", because Aharon did not wear the special כהונה בגדי on Yom Kippur for his own greatness, but rather, as one who fulfills the decree of the king. Rashi points out that Aharon did not wear these garments with any type of pride or גאווה, and he did not let the honor of being chosen to represent all of כלל ישראל get to his head, rather he did everything מצוה לשם.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody asks a very interesting question. The gemara describes an incident with Rebbe Chanina Ben Dosa where he was davening and a serpent came and painfully bit his foot, but nonetheless, he continued davening because he had such intense כונה. The point of this gemara is to demonstrate that Rebbe Chanina Ben Dosa was so focused that he could be bitten by a snake and it wouldn't make a difference- he was fully involved in תפילה. Rav Simcha Zissel asks: as great as Rebbe Chanina Ben Dosa was, he wasn't on the level of Aharon HaKohen, and if Rebbe Chanina Ben Dosa can be fully focused on his davening, shouldn't Aharon be solely focused on the עבודת יום הכיפורים?

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that it's much easier to overcome physical pain than the Middah of arrogance.

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Sometimes, one can get caught up in their own greatness. Therefore, it is a great חידוש to say that although Aharon was the most special man in the world at that moment, he remained humble and did everything לשם שמים. Every one of us has these moments when we feel haughty or superior to others and we must try to do our best to remain modest at all times. That was the גדלות of Aharon HaKohen.

He then quotes a fascinating Midrash that when Yitzchak was on the Mizbei'ach and about to be slaughtered during עקידת יצחק, the Satan tried to prevent Yitzchak from agreeing to die for Hashem. Surprisingly, the Midrash says that the Satan told Yitzchak that all of the clothing which his mother Sarah made for him would go to Yishmael if Yitzchak died: "The one who has been your enemy for your whole life will inherit everything you own". Even though Yizchak Avinu still didn't stop the Akeidah, the Midrash continues that the reason Yitzchak calls out "אבי" twice was because he sought rachamim from his father so perhaps Avraham wouldn't go through with it.

The Zohar explains that Yitzchak was ready to be sacrificed, but part of Yitzchak's hesitation stemmed from his jealousy that, of all people, Yishmael would take everything that belonged to him- even if it was just something as insignificant as his clothing.

These poor middot are so powerful that even some of the greatest גדולים struggled to completely overcome them, but Aharon completely rid of these feelings on Yom Kippur. Perhaps the final idea is that the Mishnah in Yoma famously states that Yom Kippur is only מכפר for sins between man and God, but עבירות בין אדם לבין אדם such as improper Middots towards someone else, is between you and that person, and Yom Kippur cannot help someone for that. Therefore, we must try our best to always act kindly towards others and certainly remain humble just like Aharon HaKohen in the Mishkan.

Sfeikah DeYoma of Sefirat Ha'Omer

By Kivi Davis ('23)

We are currently in the time period known as Sefirat Ha'Omer. During this time, we are commanded to count the days and weeks from the second day of Pesach, when the Korban Omer was brought in the Beit HaMikdash, all the way until Shavu'ot seven weeks later. Shavu'ot is not given a date in the Torah, rather it is the day after the 49th day of the Omer.

In Chutz La'Aretz, we have a Minhag to keep two days of every Yom Tov because we used to not be sure which day Yom Tov actually was. The second day of Yom Tov is a carbon copy of the first day in everything we do and say (for the most part). If that's the case, why don't we count two days of the Omer everyday? We are commanded to start counting on the second day of Pesach, but we don't know when the second day is!! Maybe it's the second day that we keep as Yom Tov like we count now, but maybe it's the day we keep as the first day of Chol HaMo'eid! Why don't we count day two and day one on the third day of Pesach? We aren't sure whether it is really the second day of the Omer, or if it's the first! Furthermore, if Shavu'ot isn't given a calendar date in the Torah just the day after the Omer, then why do we have two days in Chutz La'Aretz. Either we should be counting two days of the Omer everyday, and then the first day of Shavu'ot is either Shavu'ot or the 49th day of the Omer, or we only count one day of the Omer everyday, and the 50th day should be the only day of Shavu'ot.

There are three answers to this question. The first answer is the Ran based on Shemini Atzeret. On Yom Tov Sheini Shel Gali'ot, we make a Berachah on all the Mitzvot HaYom so that people will treat the day with the same respect as real Yom Tov, even though usually when it comes to Berachot we do everything we can to not make a Berachah LeVatalah. Yet, on Shemini Atzeret, the Gemara tells us that we have to eat in the Sukkah because maybe it is still the seventh day of Sukkot, namely Hoshanah Rabbah, but we don't make a Berachah of Leisheiv BaSukkah because maybe it really is Shemini Atzeret. Why is this so? The Ran answers that to make the Kiddush of Shemini Atzeret, and to Daven and act like the Yom Tov of Shemini Atzeret, it would be a Tarti DeSatri, conflicting, to then make a Leisheiv, a Berachah on being commanded to eat in the Sukkah on Sukkot (and not

Shemini Atzeret). So too, by Shavu'ot, it would be a Tarti DeSatri to act and speak like Shavu'ot, but then also to count the 49th day of the Omer, which by definition is Erev Shavu'ot. Similarly, every day of the Omer, you can't count one day as both the 3rd day and the 4th day. It's not possible!

The second answer is offered by the Devar Avraham. The Devar Avraham says that the commandment to count (like by Ma'aser Beheimah, Shivah Neki'im, or Sefirat Ha'Omer) by definition has to be certain. If we are not sure which day of the Omer it is and we count two days, by definition we are not counting.

The third answer is presented by the Rav. The Rav explains that Sfeikah DeYoma only applies to things we do because of Kedushat HaYom, for example, making Kiddush or not doing Melacha. Counting the days of the Omer has nothing to do with the Kedushat HaYom, even though it happens to coincide with the holiday of Pesach. It is based on the Korban Omer that was brought on the 16th day of Nissan.

Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai's Risk Management

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Risk Management

Managing risk is a central aspect of planning in all areas of life. Knowing when it is appropriate to take a risk and when it is not is crucial to achieving success.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai deemed it too risky to request from Vespasian that he spare the Beit HaMikdash (Gittin 56b). Some have criticized Rabban Yochanan for failing to take this bold step. However, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai deemed it far too risky. He sought "Hatzalah Purta," small gains that would keep Judaism alive, instead of what he deemed to be overly ambitious, to leave the Beit HaMikdash intact.

Inconsistency?

However, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai took enormous risks before he met the Roman emperor. The manner in which he cleverly slipped out of Yerushalayim easily could have led to his death both from the Biryonim who refused to let anyone leave Yerushalayim and the Roman guards on the other end. In addition, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai very narrowly avoided death with his bold gambit to greet the conquering head Roman general Vespasian "greetings to the king". Why was Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai willing to take great risks to leave

Yerushalayim and greet Vespasian but not to save the Beit HaMikdash?

Leaving Yerushalayim

In order to answer our question we must try to understand why he took these enormous risks. While Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai could not control the Biryonim, he could reframe the Roman attitude to the besieged Jews in Yerushalayim. Rabban Yochanan's role is reminiscent of the episode in Shmuel II Perek 20 where the wise woman of Avel Beit Ma'achah reached out to Yo'av Ben Tzeruyah clarifying that only Sheva Ben Bichri and his group of rebels threatened Yo'av. The rest of the town opposes Sheva Ben Bichri and should be spared from Yo'av.

Similarly, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai informs the besieging Romans that the consensus of Jewish Yerushalayim opposes the Biryonim and are noncombatants who should be spared.

Greeting Vespasian as King

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai's greeting Vespasian as the king was a ploy to empower the otherwise powerless Jewish rabbinic leader. If granted some power, Rabban Yochanan could use the power to the benefit of Am Yisrael.

Rabban Yochanan also sought to raise the prestige of the Jewish people in the eyes of both the Romans and ourselves during our low point of the Churban by saying that the Churban will occur only by the hands of an extremely powerful leader. Even at our worst moment, we realize we fall only to major figures and powers. Nothing less is fitting for the "Mamlechet Kohanim," our priestly nation who are spared the indignity of falling to a "nobody".

In his gambit, Rabban Yochanan gains the respect of Vespasian not only for himself, but also respect for the entire Jewish people.

Interestingly, during the episode related by our Gemara regarding Vespasian's shoes becoming too big for him, Rabban Yochanan advised him to look at someone he disliked to balance his emotions. Most interestingly, Vespasian did not look at Rabban Yochanan, indicating that on a certain level he liked Rabban Yochanan. This positive attitude likely is the reason Vespasian agreed to carry out Rabban Yochanan's requests.

Rabi Akiva vs. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai

Rabi Akiva and other critics of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai could argue that the fact that Rabban Yochanan leaving Yerushalayim and greeting the general gambits worked so well despite the enormous odds against them, as is an indication that Hashem is tilting the events in favor of Rabban Yochanan. If so, then Rabban Yochanan should have also asked for the Beit HaMikdash to be saved because he was on a proverbial "roll" (i.e. he had a Chazakah of successful requests) and Hashem would have brought this request to a successful conclusion as well.

Distinguishing between the Cases

Rabban Yochanan, however, did not arrive at this conclusion, and instead distinguished between the situations. Rav Zion Vaanunu notes the difference between Rabban Yochanan risking his own life as opposed to risking the survival of the Jewish people.

The Jewish people could not survive without a Torah center and Torah leadership – therefore it was worth it for Rabban Yochanan to risk his own life to ensure that we would be able to transfer the Sanhedrin to Yavneh. However, had Rabban Yochanan asked for the Beit HaMikdash, Vespasian would have likely declined any request, endangering the very survival of our people, which was too great of risk for Rabban Yochanan to take.

Another suggestion, at least to explain the greeting, is that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai felt supremely confident in the Torah and that it teaches that the Beit HaMikdash would fall only to a great leader. Thus, no risk was involved by greeting Vespasian as king.

Maccabim vs. Biryonim

I believe that we can reconcile Rabban Yochanan's choices by drawing a crucial distinction between the Maccabim and Biryonim. The Biryonim likely supported their quixotic resistance to the Romans based on the Maccabees' most unlikely victory against the Syrian-Greeks. However, there is a major difference between the two rebellions.

The Torah makes very few guarantees. One of them is that the Jewish people, as a whole, will survive. We are referred to by the Tanach (Shmuel I 15:29) as Netzach Yisrael, eternal Israel. The Torah also guarantees (Devarim 31:21 with Rashi) that "Lo Tishkach MiPi Zaro," the Torah will never be completely forgotten by our people. The eternal Torah and the eternal people are

inextricably linked and the Torah guarantees that they will both survive together forever.

In stark contrast, not only does the Torah not guarantee the survival of the Beit HaMikdash, it even warns of its destruction if we sin (VaYikra 26:31). Thus, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai deems it reasonable to take great risks to save Am Yisrael and its connection to Torah. Since the Torah guarantees both the Torah and Am Yisrael's survival, Rabban Yochanan is confident his efforts to save both us and the Torah will succeed. He feels assured that Hashem will help him overcome all odds.

However, no such promise exists for the Beit HaMikdash, and there is every indication that Hashem is following his warning to bring about its destruction. Thus Rabban Yochanan decides that it is imprudent to make an extraordinary risk to save the Beit HaMikdash.

Conclusion- The Perspective of Time

The passage of years shows that Rabban Yochanan made the correct choices. In retrospect, it is clear that he, with Hashem's help, facilitated the survival of our people. We all must take risks to accomplish anything in life.

However, we must know when we are crossing the line from prudent risk taking to reckless behavior. May we merit divine assistance similar to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai when determining the limits of our risk taking when making critical personal and communal decisions.

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