

### Appreciation, Priority and Values by Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz

The expression *אחת בשנה* —“once in the year” characterizes the day of Yom Kippur, succinctly and completely. It is a special, unique day, which we all enter into only once a year just as the High Priest entered the *קדש הקדשים* on this Day of Atonement. When the *גורל* did so he wore *בגדי כהן*, white linen garments just as we wear a ‘Kittel’, but it is interesting to note that he only wore these garments once! After the service of Yom Kippur they were put away and stored—*הניחום שם*—not to be used again even on the subsequent Day of Atonement. If the day was unique the garments were singular. But why? The answer may be that the Torah was concerned lest the *גורל* lose his sense of freshness, of reverence and appreciation for the seriousness and sacredness of his mission. Were he to wear the same garments the following year he may say, “I wore these last year, entered in peace, came forth in peace and I’ll do it once again”. The sense of awe and reverence would be compromised. Frequency breeds familiarity and the familiarity may not breed contempt, it does take the edge off admiration and reverence.

This lesson which we learn from the *בגדי כהן* is one that we should take to heart as we sit in Shul on this holy day. Not just atonement is the theme of Yom Kippur but also the need for awareness and appreciation. We take so many things for granted and we fail to recognize our blessings of which the very existence of this Shul is one of our major ones. We must not allow these familiar surroundings to lose their freshness, luster and excitement. Each Yom Kippur the Kittel should feel new, the atmosphere electric and our *sense of appreciation* heightened.

There is a second lesson we should learn from Yom Kippur

which is as overlooked as the first and that is to establish a *sense of priority*. To separate the important from the trivial, to determine what merits our serious attention and concern, and what does not. The service on *שני שעירים* calls for *יום כפור*—two goats, one consecrated to G-d and the other sent to the wilderness, to *עזאזל* carrying away the sins of Israel. The Mishnah (*יומא י"ד*) tells us that there were those who used to push the carrier of this scapegoat, crying out to him *טול רצא* —“make haste and carry it away”. Their concern was to rid themselves of their sins through the *המשחלח*. In *שעיר המשתלח* a previous Perek the Mishnah (*יומא א"ד*) describes how the elders instructed the High Priest in his Yom Kippur duties, and administered an oath to him that he would not deviate from the law of Torah when he performed the service. They worried and were concerned not about the riddance of their sins—but for the preservation of the tradition, the loyalty of the High Priest and the observance of the Torah law! For they, unlike the simple and ignorant *בבלים*, realized that the source of atonement, of cleansing and purification rested *בפניו*—in the *מקדש*. If all is well there, the Jews will be forgiven their sins and be granted a good year—and if not, if the integrity of the *המשחלח* is worthless. And so it is true of the strength or weakness of our communities today. The source of our stability, of our identity and integrity is in the *מקדש* —the miniature sanctuary—the synagogue. If there is sincerity and spiritual well-being in the Shul, the community will be healthy and strong. If not, no scapegoats will expiate our sins or cleanse and purify us. The Shul needs both a sense of appreciation and a sense of priority.

Finally, we need a scale of values. If we sensitize ourselves to appreciate what our Shul means to us and recognize our priorities as responsible congregants then we will know how to value what we possess and be prepared to give of our means to guarantee its future and insure its progress and growth. On Yom Kippur we are certainly prepared to accept our role as stewards

of G-d's bounty and be generous in our giving. There is a story told in (תרי"ג) regarding a Chosid who lost his fortune and was compelled to labor as a hired hand. One day Elijah came to him in the guise of an Arab and told him he would be blessed with six prosperous years. He also had the option to enjoy them at once or at the end of his days. The Chosid consulted with his wife, who was a wise and pious woman, and she chose to accept this heavenly gift at once. Elijah's promise is kept and they find a treasure which enriches them. The woman decides to share her wealth and give money to צדקה each day and asks her son to keep a record. After six years אליהו returns and tells the Chosid that the riches must be returned as agreed. Whereupon the woman takes out the record of her צדקות and says to him, אם אדם more trustworthy than us, then by all means give them this wealth for safekeeping." And G-d agrees that they have been faithful stewards so why take a chance with someone else and He allows them to keep their wealth.

We have been blessed with G-d's bounty. We demonstrate that we are worthy of keeping it by using our means to support institutions of Torah, by sharing our means with a synagogue, by giving generously to צדקה. This must be our scale of values. If we learn these three lessons well—to appreciate fully what we have, to establish wisely our priorities and to balance prudently our scale of values, we will be worthy of G-d's blessings and be granted a year replete with כל טוב.

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