



Speak Harshly To Your Darkside

ספר ויקרא
וַיְדַבֵּר יי אֵל מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן
בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי יי וַיָּמָתוּ... בְּזוֹאת יָבֵא אֶהֱרֹן
אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ

The LORD spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before the LORD, and they died...With this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary.
Leviticus 16:1,3

One common technique rabbis use to draw meaning from the Torah is to question why events happen side by side or in close proximity to each other. We find an opportunity for this from the verse above: Why does the Torah juxtapose the death of the sons of Aharon (Aaron) with the description of the service of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)?

Rashi, a 12th century commentator of the Torah and Talmud, explains that the death of Nadav and Avihu are mentioned in order to draw Aharon's attention to the severity of improper entry in the Tabernacle. It is like a sick person who has been told not to eat certain foods. The first doctor only gives his patient the instructions about what not to eat, while the second doctor tells him, "You must avoid these types of food or you will die, as did So-and-so." The second set of instructions is a clearer, more effective warning than the first.

R' Yehudah Leib Chasman discovers an important lesson from this juxtaposition. Remember, we are talking about Aharon, the High Priest of Israel, the brother of Moshe the great prophet. Was it really necessary for God to use such harsh imagery to get His warning across to Aaron? Wouldn't he have listened just the same had God's instructions not contained the example of his sons' death? What if, in the above scenario, it was a doctor who became sick and needed to abstain from certain foods. Would he also need to be given a strong version of the warning to refrain in order for him to obey it?

We learn from this a lesson probably best said by the Dark Lord himself, Darth Vader: "Do not underestimate the power of the Dark Side of the Force." The flesh of man is always in tension with his spirit. No matter what level a person reaches in his life, he must realize the he is still attached to the body which only desires physical pleasures and seeks to hide from truth and live in fantasy and indulgence. No matter who you are, the flesh can always be the cause of one's fall.

Once upon a Vort, we discussed the two sides of serving God: through our fear of Him and our love for Him. It is true that the service of God based on fear is only the first step in the total progression of our service to Him. After this, one should progress to serving God from an appreciation of His greatness and power. This becomes a catapult that can propel a person to the highest levels of service, motivated by pure love of God. Nevertheless, even after a person has reached these sublime heights, he must always remember the original fear of God with which he started. Why? Because a person is made up of both flesh and spirit, and the flesh portion of man only understands the stick and the rod. Therefore, even one on the high level as Aharon the High Priest should not disregard the warnings that are directed to the body: If you disobey, you will die as did your sons.

This method of exhorting a person to stay on the righteous path, through the use of bold, even harsh imagery, teaches a person that this life is not the goal. We have been promised an entire world that is more important than this one. We are to store up treasures there through our deeds rather than pursue things of the flesh in this world.

If even Aaron the High Priest needed to be warned in such a stark manner, how much more so do we need to recognize our great need for it and never think that we are above it.