

אִתָּא בְּפָרָק שְׁנֵי מַסֶּכֶת יוֹמָא: בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה כָּל

The Ashes of the Altar and Running After Honor

THE TEACHING

Rebbe Nachman reads the Mishnah in Yoma about clearing the ashes of the altar (תְּרוּמַת הַדֶּשֶׁן) as a teaching on leadership. The דֶּשֶׁן is prominence (הַתְנַשְּׂאוֹת), as in “דִּשְׁנַנְתָּ בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי” (תהלים כג:ה), “You anointed my head with oil.”

In the early, righteous generations, “כָּל מִי שֶׁרָצָה לְתַרְם תְּרוּמַת הַדֶּשֶׁן תוֹרָם”: whoever wished could step forward and lead the generation (מְנַהִיג הַדּוֹר). Now that prominence is sought for one's own honor, flee from it.

MAIN POINTS

- When many wanted it, “רָצִין וְעוֹלִין בְּכָכָשׁ”, they ran up the ramp: the one who knew more of the Torah's secrets (סודות התורה), ahead in the four cubits of halacha (אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת שֶׁל הֶלְכָּה), was made leader. For through the Torah one rises: “בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלְכוּ” (משלי ח:טו), “through me kings reign.”
- When two were equal, the officer (הַמְּמַנֶּה), here the evil inclination (הַצָּר הָרַע), says “הִצְבִּיעוּ”: show a little false piety (צְבִיעוּת) before the crowd, just once or twice; once they accept you as a tzaddik, go back to being sincere.
- The true tzaddikim refuse, for they know “מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדִי” (ישעיהו ג:), “the whole earth is full of His glory”, and are ashamed to pretend before Him. “אֵין מוֹצִיאִין אֶגּוֹדֵל בְּמִקְדָּשׁ”: the מִקְדָּשׁ is their mind, their דָּעָה.
- One pushed his equal, who fell, “וַיִּנְשַׁכְּרָה רִגְלוֹ”: a break in faith (אַמוּנָה), for “וַיִּצְדִּיק בְּאַמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיָה” (חבקוק ב:ד). Jealousy (קִנְיָאָה) of a peer who rose can make a person deny everything; Yeravam too said “מִי בְּרָאשׁ”. And pushing ahead is brazenness (עֲזוּת), “מְלִכּוּתָא בְּלֹא תְּגָא”, a kingdom without a crown.
- So the court decreed a lottery, פִּיּוֹס, and the Rebbe hears פִּיּוֹס, appeasement: accept leadership only when all the people come and plead with you.
- Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Nasan sought to undo honors Rabban Gamliel had set up, surely only for the honor of Hashem.

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Watch for the voice that says: just a little show, just once. Let honor come to you if it must; never chase it, and don't let another's success shake your faith.

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