

The Real YOU

Dear Parents,

We discussed last week how a key to Teshuva is giving value to your inner self and not allowing your mistakes to define you. That sounds easier said than done and with all eyes focused on making the most of the Aseres Yemei Teshuva and Yom Kippur, we need to find a tangible means to achieve this.

There is a powerful insight that can be gleaned from a statement of Hillel recorded in Pirkei Avos: Be from the disciples of Aharon (HaKohein); Love peace and pursue peace, love people and bring them close to Torah. (Avos 1:12). Rabbeinu Yonah explains as follows: When Aharon sensed that a certain person was doing Aveiros in private, he would befriend that person. This person would reflect and think "if **Aharon only knew what is really going on inside my heart** he would distance himself from such a bad person." But in fact, Aharon did befriend him. And this association helped bring the person to regret his behavior and inspire him to do Teshuva, to come closer to Torah.

A further insight is shared in the Sefer Yesod HaBayis. He suggests that Rabbeinu Yonah is of the opinion that Aharon would not have made these efforts for a person whose aveiros were committed publicly. Aharon invested in those people who cared about their public image, which showed a deep-rooted desire to be upright and good people. Aharon's strategy was to befriend and build their self-image (since the great Aharon Kohein Gadol thought so highly of them) so when they were faced with temptation in private, they would feel an obligation to themselves to improve and be bigger and better.

The root of many people's failure to live up to appropriate levels of behavior comes from viewing their failings as their true identity and they convince themselves they are fakers for putting up a pious front on the outside. Frequently, others label them as phonies and hypocrites causing them to accept their shortcomings as their true identity. In turn, they eventually give up, succumb to more temptation, stop trying to maintain their public image and eventually fall completely from a life of Torah and Mitzvos, R'L.

Hillel, through Rabbeinu Yonah, is teaching us that Aharon's approach was predicated on the fact that **how a person acts on the outside, how he wants to be seen by others, is his real identity!** It shows what he truly aspires to. Being in the presence of a great Talmid Chacham and reveling in his goodness and Torah, while being super careful to conduct himself in accordance with all the expectations of halacha and midos tovos when in the Gadol's presence, is the real person.

The age-old question of how does doing Teshuva on Yom Kippur really help when it's practically inevitable that you will slide back to your previous patterns of behavior can be answered in a similar vein. The way one acts, feels and thinks on Yom Kippur is the real you, not clouded by the temptations of the physical world or influenced by the behavior of less than desirable compatriots. Yom Kippur reflects who you want to be and the direction you are choosing.

When it comes to children who are establishing independence from their parents and discovering who they really are, this insight can be extremely helpful. Children need to know they can go far. When they identify with great people and want to dress, speak and act in a way that will earn them respect from Rabbis or Rebbitzens, Rebbis or Morahs, they should be applauded and encouraged. Identifying with upstanding and outstanding people is a wonderful step with great benefits.

Children should never be made to feel like hypocrites or fakers for aiming high yet not always living up to the standards that their words, actions or dress may call for. **The child should be respected for what he desires to be.** This will enable the child to identify with his yearnings and not his current shortcomings and that ultimately will be the catalyst to propel him to align all of his behavior with what he really wants, deep inside himself.

We may not be on the madreiga (level) of Aharon HaKohein, but we need to internalize his message - when you see a child or anyone expressing an interest in growing spiritually, show respect and give value to those yearnings, and you will enable the small spark to burst into a roaring, beautiful flame of spiritual growth.

I want to take this opportunity on behalf of myself and our entire administration, faculty and staff to wish all our parents, families, supporters and friends a Gmar Chasima Tova and ask for forgiveness for any word or deed that was hurtful and not helpful this past year.

Best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a meaningful and easy fast,



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