Jewish Tribune – Shemini

**Learning From Our Mistakes**

Max Goldberg went to a talk by the famous life coach. He was intrigued by the topic – “Learning from Our Mistakes” and indeed found the talk illuminating. Buoyed by what he had heard, he happily came home and told his wife that she should embrace her mistakes. She duly gave him a big hug.

We all make mistakes. The question is do we have the strength of spirit to acknowledge when we make a mistake. And if we do, how do we respond and learn from our them.

Our parsha begins on the eighth day, which followed the seven days of the inauguration of the Mishkan. Aharon and his sons begin to officiate as kohanim and fire descends from Hashem and consumes the korbonos and the Divine Presence finally dwells in the new sanctuary.

And then tragedy strikes. Nadav and Avihu, Aharon’s two older sons, offer a “strange fire” which they were not commanded to do and are punished with death. Aharon remains silent.

Moshe and Aharon subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the korbonos that follow this incident. After Aharon explains his position, Moshe Rabbeinu concedes and acknowledges that Aharon is correct.

As the possuk (Vayikra 10,20) tells us:

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁ֔ה וַיִּיטַב בְּעֵינָיו

And Moshe heard this and it pleased him

Rashi adds:

הודה ולא בוש לומר לא שמעתי

Moshe admitted that Aharon was correct and was not ashamed to admit his mistake.

Moshe could have covered up by saying that he had not heard of this halacha. Rather, Moshe was totally honest and said to Aharon, “You are right! I did hear that an onen must not eat from the sacrifices that will be offered in future generations, but I forgot!”

The Pele Yo’etz (אות ט - טעות), writes:

**אין אדם בעולם שלא יטעה ... אבל להיות מחזיק בטעותו ולומר שלא טעה זהו בושה וכלימה**

There is no man in the world that does not make a mistake … but to cling to your error and say that he did not err, that is a shame and disgrace.

There are many stories of gedolim who were happy to admit errors. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the renowned Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin and later Rov in Brisk was once giving a shiur in his home. An out-of-town visitor attending the shiur suddenly realised that the Rov’s reasoning could be refuted with a particular gemoro he had learned that very morning. The visitor was hesitant to mention anything, so he stated his point quietly, almost to himself. Several people in the room showed their disbelief that someone had dared to challenge the ideas of the great Rav. Rav Chaim, however, silently pondered the visitor’s position. He then responded firmly, “What I have said is definitely refuted from the passage you have recited.” With those words, he closed his Gemara and brought the shiur to an abrupt end! Despite the fact that his Torah knowledge surpassed that of everyone in the room, he did not hesitate to admit that his first opinion was wrong.

I recently read another classic from Rabbi Yisroel Besser. The book is called “B’ahavah, Benny” and tells the fascinating life story of Reb Benny Fishoff. A story of a young man, sole survivor of his family after the Holocaust, who took the richness of his youth as a Gerrer chossid in Lodz, through to Shanghai and eventually to the executive suites of the New York City skyscrapers.

Reb Benny was a “kligeh yid”, he embodied the cleverness and perception of the old-time Poilishe Yidden. And he used his warmth and wisdom to help countless Jews with money, advice and overflowing love.

A young friend of Mr Fishoff was upset about a negative business experience and shared his hurt feelings with Mr Fishoff.

“But he signed a contract, how could he just break it?”

Mr Fishoff nodded empathetically and shared one of his wise aphorisms. “Contracts are for honest people,” he said, “and they are there to remind you of the terms of the agreement, but nothing more. A difficult person can always find a way around a contract, so the only solution it to learn from the mistake and avoid doing business with him again.”

It was important to Mr Fishoff that his younger friends understand that some deals are bad, and it is best to move on from the people and methods that led to failure.

“The filing cabinets in this office,” he would tell grandchildren, “are filled with records of bad deals. We hold on to them too, because it is important to remember.”

Making mistakes is human. We all do it. Our parsha shows us that greatness is acknowledge when we make a mistake. And having the strength of character to admit to our errors and respond and learn from them.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**