



Who is In Control?

Shushan Purim coincides with this Shabbos, on which we read Parshas Ki Sisa. This presents an opportunity to explore and identify similarities between the Jewish People and Aharon as depicted in this week's Torah portion, alongside the principal figures in the Book of Esther.

The Sin of the Golden Calf

The Torah recounts one of the most significant, if not the most egregious, transgressions perpetrated by the Jewish Nation. Merely 40 days after the momentous event at Mount Sinai, where the divine revelation of G-d was witnessed as He descended to bestow the Torah upon His people, the lamentable and disgraceful incident of the golden calf's creation transpires.

The Jewish people approach Aharon in a state of distress and panic, exclaiming, "Rise and make for us a god who shall go before us, because this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him." They are in a panic. Their anxiety is palpable. Aharon, recognizing the futility of reasoning with a crowd driven by emotion, responds, "Take off the golden rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." He hopes that persuading their families to part with their jewelry will provide sufficient time for Moshe's return.

The Purim Story

In the Book of Esther, a pronounced contrast is evident between the virtuous figures of Mordechai and his cousin Queen Esther, and the antagonists, namely King Achashveirosh, Vashti, and Haman. King Achashveirosh hosts two extravagant feasts lasting 180 days, followed by a week-long celebration, ostensibly to display his opulence and gain the admiration of his subjects. In a state of inebriation, he commands his wife, Queen Vashti, to present herself before his guests to exhibit her beauty. Vashti defiantly rebuffs his request, along with a verbally abusive message to the king. In a fit of drunken rage, and upon Haman's counsel, Achashveirosh orders her execution.

Haman, who ascends to the position of the king's second-in-command and is among the wealthiest and most influential individuals of his era, becomes enraged when one person, the Jew Mordechai, disrespects him. In response to this slight, he devises a plan for the annihilation of the entire Jewish population, driven by his wounded pride and overwhelming animosity.

In contrast, Mordechai and Esther, fully cognizant of the impending threat to their people, choose a path of deliberate and strategic action rather than succumbing to panic. Their approach ultimately leads to the deliverance of the Jewish Nation, illustrating the principle that rational thought must govern emotional responses.

Mind Over Emotion

A hallmark of a psychologically healthy and stable individual is the ability of their cognitive processes to regulate their emotional responses. Within the brain, two critical systems are the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. The limbic system, which is fundamentally responsible for emotional processing, is fully developed and operational from birth, requiring no external input or training for its functionality. In contrast, the prefrontal cortex is the region that governs logical reasoning and decision-making capabilities.



The development of the prefrontal cortex is a lifelong process. Similar to other muscles in the body, the brain strengthens through deliberate practice; thus, the more an individual consciously engages in decision-making that reflects their moral and ethical principles, the more adept they become at making such choices. Conversely, when a person allows their behaviors to be governed by emotions and instincts, primarily influenced by the limbic system, their actions tend to be less rational and considered.

Aharon, Mordechai, Esther vs The People, King Achashveiraosh, Vashti and Haman

The two episodes in the history of the Jewish People illustrate the consequences of individuals either cultivating their prefrontal cortex or succumbing to the influence of the limbic system in their decision-making processes. The decline of the Jewish People can be attributed to their impulsive and emotionally charged response to Moshe's delay. Similarly, the fates of King Achashveirosh, Vashti, and Haman serve as cautionary tales of the perils of allowing emotions to dictate one's actions. Vashti, in her defiance, ultimately meets her demise. Haman, driven by arrogance, hatred, and rage, also faces death. Achashveirosh, consumed by jealousy, intoxication, and anger, not only loses his wife but also issues a death decree against an entire nation and executes his prime minister.

Aharon, in a futile effort to deter the people from transgressing with the Golden Calf, seeks to buy time to alleviate the crisis. His actions are deliberate and considered. When Moshe challenges him about his involvement in this incident, Aharon articulates that each decision was made to prevent sin among the people. Similarly, Mordechai and Esther exemplify a life embodied by patience and careful deliberation. Esther follows Mordechai's directive to keep her heritage concealed. Even in the face of Haman's decree to annihilate the Jewish population, both protagonists proceed with great caution. They engage in fasting and repentance, and Esther strategically invites the king and Haman to a banquet, postponing her request until the subsequent feast. Each step is meticulously planned and thoughtfully executed.

Our Lives, Our Choice

Individuals are faced with choices throughout their lives. In her work, Solution Champs, Dr. Miriam Adahan distinguishes between the "baby brain" (BB) and the "adult brain" (AB), highlighting the contrasting influences of the Limbic system and the prefrontal cortex on behavior. The former, associated with emotional responses typical in children, is contrasted with the latter, which facilitates more rational decision-making. As we reflect on our own behaviors, it is essential to consider which cognitive framework we are utilizing. By examining the exemplary figures in our society, we can aspire to cultivate a life characterized by thoughtful deliberation, one that prioritizes logical reasoning over mere emotional impulses.

Have a wonderful Purim and a Great Shabbos,

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