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Azus D’Kedushah – The Holy Chutzpah of Chanukah

The Brazen Enemy: The Greek Leopard

In the seventh *perek* of *Sefer Daniel*, the *navi* describes a prophecy in which he was shown images of four animals, representing the four kingdoms who would exile Am Yisrael in the future. The third kingdom, Yavan, was portrayed as a leopard.

The *sefer Shem MiShmuel* (Chanukah 5683) explains that the leopard was chosen because the predominant aspect of Yavan was the *middah* of *azus* (boldness, brazenness, chutzpah). This trait of the leopard is highlighted in *Pirkei Avos* (5:23): “Yehudah ben Teima says, ‘הוי עז כנמר, – *be bold as a leopard* . . . to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven.’”

To understand the trait of *azus*, we should examine its antithesis – *בושת* – bashfulness. The same *mishnah* in *Avos* presents the two contrasting *middos*: עז פנים לגיהנום ובושת פנים לגן עדן – *The brazen-faced goes to Gehinnom, and the bashful-faced goes to Gan Eden.*

When does a person experience *bushah*? When someone else is present and observing him. **A Jew with *yiras Shamayim* is therefore in a constant state of *bushah*** because he knows that Hashem is always watching him.

Additionally, the more the person recognizes his own insignificance vis-à-vis the greatness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the more his sense of *bushah* increases. If you say a *drashah* to four small children, you won’t feel especially bashful or embarrassed, whereas if you say a *drashah* before four great *talmidei chachamim*, you will experience a much greater degree of *bushah*. It all depends on the stature of those observing you.

The sense of *bushah* actually correlates with your level of *chachmah*. If you are wise enough to know your place, and recognize the greatness of those observing you, you will feel *bushah* in their presence. This is the positive form of *bushah* that is rooted in *kedushah*.

The negative form of *bushah*, on the other hand, causes a person to feel embarrassed when others mock and ridicule his *avodas Hashem*. In those scenarios, a person should ask himself: "Why am I letting myself feel embarrassed by these fools?"

The Essence of Azus and Bushah

The behavior of a person with *bushah* will be determined by the people observing him and by the situation he finds himself in. If he is in the presence of a person who, because of his stature, wisdom, or age, should be "center stage," he will take his appropriate place in a distant corner.

In the above scenario, a person with *azus* is the exact opposite. He feels no obligation to modify his behavior. He feels free to interrupt, scream at, contradict and disparage the older, wiser, greater person. **A person with the *middah* of *azus* invades the space of others.** He feels empowered to breach all boundaries of honor and respect, and feels no need to restrain himself in the presence of an important person.

When a teacher tells a student, "You are being *azus'dig* (or *chutzpah'dig*)!" he means: "You don't know your place. You are a young boy, and I am your teacher. I understand you want to say something, but you need to restrain yourself and sit quietly in your seat."

Rashi describes Lavan as a *rasha* because of the fact that Lavan spoke before his father. He didn't scream at or embarrass anyone. He is considered a *rasha* **because he didn't know his place.** It's a two-part process. He didn't have the wisdom to understand his place, and therefore he acted with *azus*.

Azus Based on Kedushah

Azus can be utilized for positive purposes. That type of *azus* is referred to as "*azus d'kedushah*."

For example, if a respected individual is talking in the middle of davening, it takes *azus d'kedushah* to protest his behavior. "Why should I stand by passively and refrain from saying anything?" thinks the person who possesses holy *azus*. "Because he's rich and people admire him? I'm not going to let that stop me."

Or, if someone mocks his Jewish *levush*, his thought process will be: "Why is he laughing? Because he is enmeshed in *gashmiyus* and is caught up in false values. On the contrary, he should be ashamed to walk around without demonstrating his Jewishness!" He may answer the person mocking him: "I stick to my ways and I do what I have to. You can keep laughing for all I care." He understands that the brazen scoffer doesn't know his place; he is lacking awareness that the world belongs to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and not to him or anyone else.

This *oveid Hashem* utilizes positive *azus* to defeat those who try to embarrass him. He feels no shame in his *levush*, and feels no need to change his behavior based on the scoffer's worldview.

In our *avodas Hashem*, we need the positive forms of both *bushah* and *azus*. **The two middos actually complement each other**, as long as we know when and how to use each *middah* appropriately.

The Darkness of Yavan

The *Shem MiShmuel* goes on to explain that in the beginning of Creation, Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the four *klipos* (husks) of *tumah* that manifest themselves in the four kingdoms. The Midrash says that the *pasuk* תְּהוֹמוֹת הָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְּהוֹמוֹת וְנִבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹמוֹת alludes to the four kingdoms. חוֹשֶׁךְ, **the third term, represents Yavan, whose essence was azus**. The *klipah* of Yavan didn't know its place. It had no right to enter the space of Am Yisrael and demand that they deny the basic principles of Yiddishkeit.

We can understand this more clearly by focusing on the image of an actual physical *klipah*, the peel or shell of a fruit. It can't be discounted. It serves an important purpose, protecting the fruit. Nonetheless, the peel is a peel, and the fruit is a fruit! The *klipah* has to know its place.

The *klipah* of Yavan clearly didn't understand that. Instead, it attacked the fruit.

It is often said that the difference between Purim and Chanukah is that Haman wanted to destroy the physical bodies of the Jewish people, while the Greeks wanted to destroy the *neshamos*. **We suffer from the azus of Yavan to this very day.** Modern proponents of the Greek outlook tell G-d-fearing Jews, "I have no problem with you being Jewish. However, I want to tell you *how* to be Jewish. I will tell you what to do and what not to do. Don't keep Shabbos or *bris milah*. Then you can feel free to be as Jewish as you like." What chutzpah! How dare these people interfere with our Judaism? They want to educate us? They want to tell us how to be Jews? This Greek *azus* is rooted in the small-minded perspective of those who don't know their place and think they can invade our space.

Rebound!

But the Chashmonaim fought back! And in every war, explains the *Shem MiShmuel*, when you defeat the enemy, you conquer their territory and take possession of their weapons. **Am Yisrael's victory helped them attain the middah of azus d'kedushah to its fullest extent;** their *mesirus nefesh* actualized the potential of their latent *middah* of *azus*.

The entire battle waged by the Chashmonaim was an expression of *azus d'kedushah*. They paid no attention to the obvious advantage of the large, well-trained Greek army. They said: "We see that you greatly outnumber us. We hear the noise of your vast army. Nonetheless, we will fight for our right to serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash with *kedushah* and *taharah*. Who are you to tell us what to do? How dare you prevent us from keeping Torah and mitzvos? Leave our land! We are neither impressed by you, nor do we fear you."

That is an expression of *azus*: **"I see how big you are, but I'm not intimidated by you.** I don't view myself and my place the way you would want me to. I see myself as strong and great!"

The Power of Shevet Levi

Part of Moshe Rabbeinu's *brachah* to Shevet Levi in *Parshas V'zos Habrachah* (33:11) was *בָּרַךְ ה' חֵילוֹ וּפְעָל יָדָיו תִּרְצֶה* — *Hashem will bless his strength, and accept his actions*. The simple explanation of this blessing is brought in the *Targum Onkelos* – it refers to the *korbanos* Shevet Levi would bring in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Rashi brings another interpretation.

“He foresaw that Chashmonai and his sons were destined to wage war with the Yevanim, so he davened for them, as they were so few— the twelve sons of Chashmonai and Elazar against tens of thousands.

From Rashi's *peirush* we see that Shevet Levi received the *middah* of *azus* as part of their innate character, albeit in a latent form. They expressed this *azus* at different times in history. After *Cheit Ha'eigel*, when Moshe Rabbeinu called out *מִי לֵה אֶלִי*, it was Shevet Levi who answered his call. **It was their attribute of *azus* that enabled them to resist getting swept up in the nation's rush to worship the Eigel.** Moshe Rabbeinu recognized this power of *azus* and bestowed his *brachah*, asking Hashem to bless their *azus d'kedushah* so that they would succeed in their future battle against the Yevanim. (As the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains, Moshe Rabbeinu blessed each *shevet* according to their nature so that they would be able to utilize their particular attributes in *avodas Hashem*.)

The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Parshas Vayeichi*) also points out the unique role of Shevet Levi in the war against Yavan.

“Levi, the third *shevet*, opposes Yavan, the third *malchus*. Just as the name of one has three letters, the name of the other has three letters... These are many and these are few, and the many fell in the hands of the few. In what merit? That of Moshe's *brachah*. . . In whose hands does Yavan fall? In the hands of *Bnei Chashmonai* who descend from Levi.”

This Midrash teaches us an amazing lesson. If the Greeks hadn't been so many, and if the Chashmonaim hadn't been so few, the Chashmonaim would not have been able to achieve victory. Had the odds been more even, they wouldn't have had to draw on their *middah* of *azus*. Since they were fighting Yavan, the *klipah* of *azus*, the only way to defeat them wasn't with an army but with the *middah* of *azus*. **They were victorious because they felt no *bushah* in standing up for their identity in the face of the Greek empire.** They weren't intimidated by the size and power of the army facing them.

Bold as a Leopard

The *Shem MiShmuel* explains that **with the victory of the Chashmonaim, all of Am Yisrael acquired the *middah* of *azus d'kedushah*.** Until Chanukah, that *middah* lay dormant in us. It only became an integral part of our identity in the *zechus* of Shevet Levi's battle.

The *Shem MiShmuel* then teaches us how to acquire and strengthen this *middah*. Some people are naturally bashful. How are they to attain *azus*?

He explains that *azus d'kedushah* is really a supernatural power. **When you know Hashem is with you, you realize that you possess strength that is *l'maalah min hateva* and there is no reason to feel *bushah* before anything or anyone in this world.** Without this understanding, it would simply have been foolhardy on the part of the Chashmonaim to challenge an army that numbered tens of thousands more than theirs.

True, people sometimes succeed through their *azus*, but that doesn't mean it's a wise approach. People who lack *bushah* and aren't fazed or intimidated by anyone simply don't know their place and have a distorted view of the world around them.

A person who possesses *azus d'kedushah*, on the other hand, understands that by natural means he doesn't stand a chance, but because Hashem is with him, he can draw on a source of power far

beyond the limitations of this world. This kind of *azus* enables him to face challenge without fear.

Don't Fear Them

In a similar vein, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains the *pasuk* in *Parshas Shoftim* (20:1),

כִּי תֵצֵא לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם כִּי ה' אִלֶּיךָ
עִמָּךְ הַמַּעֲלֶה מִמִּצְרַיִם מִצְרַיִם - *When you go to war against your enemy and you see horses and chariots, people who outnumber you, do not fear them, for Hashem your G-d is with you, He Who brought you up from the land of Egypt.*"

This also refers to the war one needs to wage on the *yetzer hara*. Even if you feel the *yetzer hara* is stronger than you and you know you have a long history of *aveiros* and that logically you have no chance of winning, the Torah tells you, לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם, don't fear them, because Hashem is with you. Without His help, it would indeed be foolish to even think of waging war on the *yetzer hara*. However, **since you understand that your strength is *l'maalah min hateva*, you are prepared to go to war even though you are aware of the facts on the ground.** It is our readiness to be *moser nefesh* that enables us to access those supernatural powers.

It was with this boldness that we merited the light of Chanukah, which lasted eight days, a number representing that which is beyond *teva* (symbolized by the seven days of the week).

Past and Present

The *Shem MiShmuel* goes on to say that this wasn't just a historical phenomenon; it applies today as well.

Even in our times, on Chanukah, a person must don the robes of *gev*, might, and heightened pride in the ways of Hashem. **To be bold as a leopard, and to view any obstacles or impediments as insignificant.**

When it's clear to us that we must do something as part of our *avodas Hashem*, but face opposition and obstacles, we must not be frightened

by them. A person may feel, “There’s no way I can succeed. It’s just a dream. I have to be realistic, and when I take a realistic look at the impediments I’m facing, there is no chance I will succeed. I’m just going to have to accept the situation as it is and abandon my plans.” That is the opposite of *azus*!

A person with *azus* will say: “Realistically, I don’t stand a chance of succeeding. Too many obstacles stand in the way of success. But I won’t let that intimidate me.” **He will continue in his path because he knows it is correct.** Once he does that, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will help him in supernatural ways.

The *Shem MiShmuel* concludes that just as it was back then, **the days most suited for acquiring this trait are the days of Chanukah.**

This lesson should encourage a person who wants to break an old habit but feels that it’s just not possible; it’s always been an uphill battle, and it seems that every day, new obstacles crop up and prevent him from overcoming it. This person should tell himself, “I have an attribute that was granted to me in the merit of the *mesirus nefesh* of the Chashmonaim: I have the *middah* of *azus*, and if I utilize it, I can succeed”.

The Workday Holiday

We can now understand, says the *Shem MiShmuel*, why the Chachamim didn’t prohibit *melachah* on Chanukah.

“They intentionally decided not to forbid *melachah* so that even when people are burdened by work and are traveling, the physical and material won’t hinder them, and they will remain connected to Hashem.”

On Chanukah a person is told, “I am not providing you with a light that will ensure a smooth journey with no impediments. No! In your travels, you will encounter pits and thorns, burdens and complications. **The light I give you on Chanukah will enable you to successfully overcome those obstacles and reach your destination.**”

Sometimes, a person is sitting in his car, stuck in traffic, and he sees motorcycles weaving in and out between the cars as if the traffic jam has no effect on them. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells a Jew, “I want you to stay in *Olam Hazeh* with all of its complications. I am not going to give you a Chanukah on which *melachah* is forbidden. If I did that, you wouldn’t understand the message of Chanukah. **I want you to use your power of *azus* just as the Chashmonaim did**, causing the many to be vanquished by the few. I want you to know that if you believe in that which is *l’maalah min hateva*, if you believe in the foundational principle of אנוני ה' אלוקים, you will succeed and go very far.

Netzach and Hod

The power of *azus* has its roots in the *middah* of *netzach*.

We each have within us all the *middos* with which Hakadosh Baruch Hu interacts with the world—*chesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus*. We are meant to utilize all of those *middos* for purposes of *kedushah*. For example, when a person performs acts of *chesed*, especially when it’s difficult for him, he becomes a vessel for the corresponding light of Hashem’s *chesed* that is aroused as a result of his *chesed*. That process brings him close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Chazal treat the *middos* of *netzach* and *hod* as a pair of *middos* that complement each other. We see that Moshe Rabbeinu, who embodied the *middah* of *netzach*, and Aharon Hakohen, who embodied the *middah* of *hod*, led Klal Yisrael together (as opposed to the Avos, Yosef and Dovid Hamelech, who each represented another *middah* and were leaders at different times). ***Netzach* and *hod* always work in tandem. They are similar to the two legs in a human body.** While our two hands can work individually, both legs need to work in tandem for us to be able to walk.

We will define *netzach* and *hod* as individual *middos*, and we will then understand how they work together.

Defining and Applying Netzach

Netzach is the root word of נצחון, defeating an enemy and achieving victory.

The *Tanya* (Igeres Hakodesh 15), teaches us how to utilize *netzach* in our *avodas Hashem*:

To stand victoriously against anything that may prevent us from serving Hashem and achieving *dveikus* in Hashem, and against anything that prevents the *kavod* of Hashem from filling the world.

The impediments we encounter are agents of the *yetzer hara*, whose mission is to prevent a person from living a life of *kedushah*. **When a person refuses to be intimidated, and continues in his *avodah*, he is utilizing *netzach d'kedushah*.**

As with all *middos*, there is a *klipah*, or negative form of *netzach*. Let's take the example of someone who is arguing about the correctness of his actions. If his approach represents truth, he won't be intimidated by the other person's opposition or scorn. However, what if he is actually wrong? The negative form of *netzach* will prevent him from ever admitting his error and changing his mind.

This is why a person may fight with his *chavrusa* for hours, even though he knows there are a number of fallacies with the opinion he holds. He hasn't been able to answer his *chavrusa's* questions, so why is he now shouting? Why is he insulting and embarrassing his *chavrusa*? It's because he doesn't know how to answer those questions. He doesn't want to hear or deal with the questions. Why? **Because he is arrogant. As a result, he feels he must win!** This is an example of negative *netzach* that is based on falsehood.

We also see the influence of negative *netzach* when a person has decided that he wants to serve Hashem in a particular way; he refuses to submit to Hashem and hear if this is the path of *avodas Hashem* that is most appropriate for him. He may have decided that he must be a *maggid shiur* to *talmidim* of a particular age and level of learning. **Even though Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends him numerous signs that this isn't the path he should take, he ignores them.** He refuses to change his mind, or even question his assumptions. He has absolutely no desire to ask for advice or entertain the possibility that he may be mistaken.

The negative *middah* of *netzach* convinces him that he must be right, and he wants his reality to reflect his viewpoint at all costs.

Positive and Negative Netzach

There is a very fine line between the positive and negative forms of *netzach*. Nonetheless, it isn't that difficult to determine which form of *netzach* is guiding you in a particular situation.

When it comes to *avodas Hashem*, one should use the *middah* of *netzach* that is telling him not to be intimidated by obstacles or opposition. For example, you may find it very difficult to be *kovea ittim l'Torah* or to daven with a minyan. Every day, something new seems to interfere with your schedule. **If you remain consistent despite all the impediments, you have activated your positive *netzach*.**

The battle to do *chesed* can be just as intense, but with different obstacles. You know that there is a certain *chesed* that depends on you, because for whatever reason you are the only one who can help. **You may have to overcome your shyness, or your discouragement due to previous unsuccessful attempts.** Your *middah* of *netzach* enables you to surmount the obstacles and keep going.

When it comes to matters that are clearly part of your obligation to serve Hashem, positive *netzach* enables you to remain true to yourself and fulfill your destiny without allowing obstacles to get in your way.

On the other hand, there are many situations where it isn't clear if you should be going in a certain direction or doing certain things. But you very much want to do those things. In those cases, **you must look out for the negative form of *netzach***, which may prod you to achieve your goal without caring how many people you hurt or trample in the process.

A Beautiful Synthesis

We can now understand why *netzach* and *hod* need each other. *Hod d'kedushah* opposes the negative form of *netzach*. The root word *hod* is related to מודה, admitting or thanking. In its positive sense, it means that one person listens to the other.

Aharon Hakohen, the embodiment of *hod*, was אוהב את הבריות ומקרבתן - *he loved people and brought them closer to Torah*. He listened to people's troubles, humbled himself, and adapted his teachings to accommodate the listener's ability to understand. He never screamed; he never told anyone, "You must learn!"

Moshe Rabbeinu embodied the *middah* of *netzach*. He led Bnei Yisrael with statements like, מִמֵּיּוֹם הַיְּיָתָם עִם ה' דַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם (Devarim 9:24) - *You have rebelled against Hashem from the day that I know you*, or מָה ה' אֵל לִירְאָה - *What does Hashem your G-d ask from you other than to fear him*. He didn't minimize or tailor his message to the limitations of the community.

When Am Yisrael learned from both Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen, they were able to absorb Torah and *kedushah* in a healthy, balanced way.

Each person needs to chart a balanced middle course that incorporates both *netzach* and *hod*. (*Sefarim* explain that the *middah* of *yesod* serves as a regulator, balancing *netzach* and *hod*.) A person who acts only with *netzach* will inevitably come to use it in the wrong way and in the wrong situations. He goes through life without noticing or caring about how his decisions impact others. **If he commits to a certain learning schedule, he couldn't care less if the world turns upside down.** If it's time to learn, he doesn't care about his wife or children. He doesn't care about anything; he's learning!

He may approach *chesed* with the same rigid approach: "I have to win no matter what." That approach may even lead him to transgress the laws of the Torah in his insistence to help people in the way that he wants.

A Supernatural Nation

Let's return to the positive form of *netzach*.

A Jew must know that he has tremendous powers that enable him to escape the confines of natural limitations. Everyone has to deal with

their limitations. A person may look at his daily schedule and say, "That's it. I can't fit anything else in my day. What am I supposed to do? What should I drop? Should I stop going to work? Hakadosh Baruch Hu blessed me with a large family. Should I "speed-daven"? That's not an option! So what am I supposed to do? I see no way to add any more learning into my schedule."

Here he needs to utilize his *middah* of *netzach*, remembering that if Hashem is with him, he can overcome all obstacles. **With that knowledge, he can start to move forward, even though he doesn't see how he will achieve his goal**, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will open new gates that will enable him to progress. Of course, he needs to carefully determine the path Hashem wants of him, as well as make sure he is fulfilling his obligations to family, work, and so on. At the same time, he has to remember that Hashem certainly wants him to set aside time for learning and to progress from *madreigah* to *madreigah*.

When it comes to *sur mei'ra*, it is clear that we must distance ourselves as far as possible from anything forbidden or negative. Since it is obvious that this is Hashem's will, a person should know that **no impediment to *sur mei'ra* is an excuse for surrender.**

When your obligation is clear, but you are afraid to fight, the *Shem MiShmuel* wants you to know that you can draw on the same power of *azus d'kedushah* that the Chashmonaim utilized to overcome the Yevanim. Don't let obstacles and opposition paralyze you with fear. Those who utilize *azus d'kedushah* will see great *yeshuos*!



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