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"CHUTZPAH"

A Religious Analysis of an Irreligious Quality

Our Tradition paints a very gloomy and ~~horrible~~ picture of the frightening and catastrophic days preceding the coming of the Messiah. And in addition to all the world upheavals and bloodshed and immorality expected in the ^{IKVETA DI-MESHICHA,} ~~IKVSAH D'MESHICHA,~~ in the era preceding ^{Mashiach} ~~MASHIACH~~, our Rabbis predicted ~~as well~~ that CHUTZPAH YASGAI, that CHUTZPAH will abound, that there will be an unnatural increase of brazenness and effrontery and arrogance (Sotah 49). And one ^{may well} ~~begins to~~ wonder if the excessive haughtiness and obnoxious CHUTZPAH we find so common in our world today is not the very thing our Sages were talking about. Perhaps if indeed CHUTZPAH is to herald the coming of the Messiah, then the Golden Age cannot be far off.

What is CHUTZPAH? It is a universal quality, but a uniquely Jewish word. It is essentially untranslatable. You might say: boldness, effrontery, arrogance. It is all these things but more too. CHUTZPAH, a great Sage of the Talmud once said (Sanhedrin 105), is MALCHUTA BLI-BE'LI TAGA, kingship without a crown; it is authoritativeness without authority, dominion without dignity, ruling without right, arrogance without warrant, positive and dogmatic opinionation without basis-- in short, a man acting the part of a ^{KING} ~~king~~ when he has never been entitled to the crown: MALCHUTA BLI TAGA.

CHUTZPAH is, of course, an unpleasant characteristic. When we speak of a man as a "CHUTZPANICK" we pass an unfavorable judgment upon him. And yet CHUTZPAH has a positive side too. Our Rabbis meant to praise Israel when they attributed to it the greatest amount of CHUTZPAH from amongst all nations. There are times that CHUTZPAH makes for survival, times that it expresses a profound loyalty to values which transcend ordinary

politeness and courtesy, and even life itself. The CHUTZPAH of the Jew in refusing to settle down and assimilate, his insistence that Torah must survive at all costs and in all environments, his persistence in the face of great odds that he is a member of G-d's Chosen People - that is a constructive and desirable CHUTZPAH.

How then are we to understand CHUTZPAH, and discriminate between its legitimate and illegitimate uses, between its positively offensive aspect and that quality which is not necessarily objectionable?

The answer is that in Hebrew we have two terms that correspond to the two component parts of effrontery or CHUTZPAH, and each one must be treated differently for they mean different things. These two are called AZUS METZACH and AZUS PANIM, being head-strong and being bold-faced.

AZUS METZACH literally means "strength of the forehead" or headstrongness. This is an intellectual or ideological CHUTZPAH, an effrontery of the mind. It means that I am totally convinced of the rightness of my opinion and that I will therefore not yield one inch to your argument no matter what you do or say. It is a most irritating quality - but it is restricted to the realm of ideas, and involves no sneering or mocking or scoffing. It can be good or bad. When a young man is headstrong and refuses to yield to the pressure of his friends who see nothing wrong with immorality and looseness as long as everyone else is doing it - that is A.M.; an annoying and frustrating headstrongness, but a wonderful and admirable kind of CHUTZPAH. But when a man sees G-d's miracles and goodness before his very eyes and refuses, unreasonably, to be convinced that HA'SHEM HU HA'ELOKIM - that is the wrong kind of A.M., a respectful but annoying and sinful headstrongness.

AZUS PANIM, however, is always and forever a detestable and obnoxious feature. Literally it means "strength of face" - bold-facedness or brazen-facedness. This is more than ideological stubbornness. It involves more than METZACH, the head or mind. It is AZUS PANIM, the boldness of the whole face, the effrontery of the whole personality - the supercilious glance

of the eye, the haughty sniff of the nose, the sneer of the lips, the vulgarity of the mouth, the closing of one ear to all reason and the opening of the other to all malicious talebearing. That is A.P. - the boldness of the face, the vulgarity and detestable arrogance of the ^{warped} ~~whole~~ personality. This A.P. is what makes CHUTZPAH so "Chutzpahdik".

And that is why our Rabbis said, on the one hand, that IM RAISSA KOHEN B'AZUS METZACH; AL TEHARHER ACHARAV (Kiddushin 70), A.M. in a Kohen should not shock you. For a religious leader, be he Kohen or Rabbi or scholar, must be a source of ideological strength and firmness which may at times be irritating to others. But this is the A.M. aspect of CHUTZPAH, and is therefore above suspicion. On the other hand, A.P. deserves no such consideration. A.P. NIKRA RASHA (Bmdibar Rabba ch.18). It is a sign of wickedness. Headstrongness is not always to be condemned, while boldfacedness is always an evil.

(Example of A.M.: Mayor Wagner's snub to King Saud.

Example of A.P.: Saud to U.N. about "freedom" and "human equality")

(Example A.M. Rabbi in Toronto challenges Canadian Council Churches that Judaism "inferior" religion.

Example A.P.: Reform Eisendrath that we accept Nazarene, Christians rejected him).

That is why on Yom Kippur we include in the list of sins for confession, AL CHEIT....B'AZUS METZACH. To be headstrong against G-d and Torah is a sin, for which we apologize and hope to be excused. But in the preface to that very VIDUY, we say EIN ANU AZEI PANIM...we may be gossips and thieves and liars and A.M.; but G-d, A.P. - that we never are, for we know that that is unforgivable. Hold us guilty for anything, G-d, but not for A.P.

Until now, friends, we have defined the two types of Chutzpah, and attempted to illustrate them and clarify the differences. Now let us proceed to a further analysis of this objectionable aspect of Chutzpah called "Azus Panim". Why should Judaism place so much weight upon it? Why, in the very confession of the greatest sins do we deny that we are guilty of this one fault? Why does our great tradition react so violently to this one specific character fault?

The deeper understanding of this quality of A.P. may be found not in the great ethical works of our sacred literature, but in the Halacha. The Talmud (Ketubot 18) discusses the prosaic and mundane problem of "Modeh B'Miktzas": Reuben appears before a court and demands that Simon pay him back the \$100 he lent him. Simon concedes in part, he is "modeh b'miktzas", he says: yes, I owe him money, but only \$60. What is the decision of the Halacha? The \$60 to which Simon admitted must, of course, be returned to Reuben. But the other \$40, while they cannot be collected without witnesses, nevertheless require Simon to take a solemn oath before Beth Din. Simon must go through the extremely serious procedure of denying the loan of the extra \$40 under oath - and you know of the great hesitation of Jews to swear. Why so? Here the great Rabba explains: Why do we not say that if Simon were a liar that he would deny the entire \$100, and that therefore if he admitted to \$60, to "miktzas", that he must be telling the truth? *↪* because EIN ADAM MEYIZ PANA V BIFNEI BAAL CHOVO, no man will ordinarily be that bold-faced, that much of an A.P., that he will deny the entire amount to the face of his ^{creditor} ~~debtor~~. That is why he feels forced to admit to the \$60.

Whatever the legal ramifications of that statement, and whether or not we are able to follow the short explanation I have just given, this fact emerges clearly: no ordinary human being will ^{ordinarily act with} express A.P. against

one to whom he is indebted. If I feel that someone has done me a great favor, if I feel beholden to him, then I will never exercise A.P. towards him. This is the Halacha's psychological principle with regard to A.P. One who feels beholden and indebted will hold his peace and ~~asked~~ act respectfully. Otherwise ~~it is the~~ he is guilty of the most brazen, arrogant, inhuman and detestable kind of A.P.-Chutzpah. There can be no worse.

What we learn from the Halacha, therefore, is that a man who acts brazenly, with A.P., towards his fellow-men, he ~~was~~ who is not only head-strong but vulgar and unreasonable and arrogant and mocking towards all they are and stand for - such a man acts that way because he does not recognize a power to whom he is indebted; such A.P. can be explained only as a feeling of complete independence, of being a self-made man. When a man recognizes the fact that there is no such thing as complete independence, that his clothing comes to him by grace of G-d, that his food and his health and his money and his family are all temporary gifts granted to him by G-d, and that he is therefore indebted to G-d for his very existence, that G-d is his BAAL CHOV, then that person will never develop A.P. of any kind in any situation. It is only when a man has deluded himself as to his own powers and greatness and self-sufficiency and forgotten his essential weakness and inadequacy and helplessness, when he has forgotten that he owes many a debt to G-d, that he becomes an AZ PANIM. That is why Judaism is so concerned over the quality of A.P. It is because the AZ PANIM rejects G-d offhandedly. Boldfacedness is rebellion against the Lord. Brazenness against anyone is automatically a denial of all religion. "Haughtiness against men," wrote the great Ramban to his son, "is rebellion against G-d." Certainly, for EIN ADAM MEYIZ PANAV BIFNEI BAAL CHOVO - to accept G-d is to be indebted to Him; and to be indebted and to know it is to make A.P. impossible.

Certainly, therefore, when we meet up with people who speak with such a great semblance of authority on all matters and try to subvert the whole nature of the synagogue, who try to make of Judaism what it is not, who would paganize all that is holy in our tradition and remake the synagogue in their own images, this is the greatest A.P. of all, the vilest kind of Chutzpah. Those who know least and who at the drop of a yarmulke will deliver long lectures on what they believe religion is or ought to do, who speak with authoritativeness but without authority on matters where angels fear to tread, who sneer at and ridicule the voice of wisdom and scholarship and Torah - they are the A.P., not the AZEI METZACH, for they act as if G-d had no place in Religion. If ours is an age of IKVSAH D'MESHICAH, when effrontery and arrogance and brazenfacedness reign supreme, it is because it is an age where man has begun to think of himself as a god and has attempted to dethrone the G-d of all Creation. A.P. and Religion are two diametrically opposed poles. The A.P. is the most atheistic of atheists. For he lives as if G-d did not exist. That is why, incidentally, our Rabbis defined the APIKORES, the heretic, as he who is MEVAZEH TALMID CHACHAM, who insults or exercises A.P. against the scholar; for in his effrontery to the Talmid Chacham, the Apikoress rebukes what the Talmid Chacham stands for - Torah. The A.P. is a heretic, an APIKORESS. He refuses to acknowledge his reliance upon and indebtedness to G-d.

Where can we find the cure for A.P.? Surely in the synagogue, if no place else. The MIKDASH ME'AT, the miniature sanctuary, not only should be a place where A.P. is never practiced, but the place where people learn to rid themselves of this scourge. In today's Sidra we read of the construction of the very first Synagogue - the MISHKAN or Tabernacle. And if you read carefully the measurements the Torah prescribes for the

Ark, the holiest part of the Mishkan, you will notice that in all three dimensions the measurements are not full units, they are not integers or complete numbers. Instead they are all partial numbers: the length is two and a half cubits; the width one and a half cubits; and the height is one and a half again. Why so? Because, answers the saintly Rabbi Nathan Adler, the teacher of the famed Chassam Sofer, the Torah wanted to teach the people of the ARON, the people of the Synagogue, that they must never consider themselves complete - they are always to believe themselves only half-done. Their pride must be broken in half. They are never to imagine themselves complete and sufficient and independent. And people who remember that they are only CHEITZI, only half of what they should be, people who recognize their great indebtedness to the Lord of all creation, such people will never be guilty of A.P., for such vile Chutzpah comes about only when thinks he is complete in and of and to himself.

We who are close to the ARON HA'KODESH, to whom the synagogue is meaningful not only as another organization, but as the place of Torah and the sponsors of the study of Torah, we must ever remember that debt we owe G-d Almighty, and thus forever remain free of the ineradicable taint of A.P. If we are to use CHUTZPAH, then let us make the proper use of A.M., for the greater glory of G-d and Torah. But let us never be guilty of A.P., of the sin of spiritual vulgarity for which our tradition ~~did~~ not even provide an AL CHEIT on Yom Kippur. Let us always say EIN ANU AZEI PANIM, say what you will, G-d, you cannot accuse us of that crime.

May our association with our beloved Synagogue bring to us that moral sensitivity and nobility of character which, based on our indebtedness to G-d for our very lives, will cause us to become the ambassadors of G-d to an unreconstructed world, bringing the light of Torah to all Israel and all the world, so that ~~we-s~~, in a manner of speaking, G-d will say to us: My children, I am indebted to you.

