Hiring and Firing: Thoughts for Parashat Vayikra

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Vayikra
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Mark Zuckerberg, head of Facebook, was asked what he looks for in a prospective employee. He replied: “I will only hire someone to work directly for me if I would work for that person.” I assume he was referring to top echelon employees, people who would have major executive responsibilities. If these people shared the values and work ethic of Mark Zuckerberg, then he would be ready to work for them. If they lacked those qualities, he would not hire them because he would not want to work for them either.

Mark Zuckerberg was offering some very important advice. In our own businesses, organizations, synagogues etc., we should only want to hire top people who we ourselves would want to work for. We should look for people who share our values and work ethic, who have a genuine sense of responsibility and commitment.

We would not want to work for an egotist, a social climber, a shirker of responsibility, or a control freak. We would not want to work for someone who creates dissension, who lacks respect for fellow employees, who takes off work on a regular basis. So we shouldn’t hire such a person! Although this seems so obvious, it often happens that people ignore the “Zuckerberg rule” and hire employees who they themselves would never want to work for.

This week’s Parasha includes descriptions of offerings which were to be brought in the Mishkan. These offerings shed light on what it takes to be a good, responsible person.

The burnt-offering was to be dedicated entirely to God. A lesson: a good person is ready and willing to sacrifice without expectation of personal reward. An idealistic commitment stems from a pious heart.

The peace-offering was brought as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty. A lesson: good people are grateful. They don’t take their blessings for granted. They

say thank you.

The sin-offering was brought to atone for sins that one committed accidentally, without intention to do the wrong thing. A lesson: good people admit their mistakes. They don't pretend to be perfect. They are humble and honest. They don't look for excuses to justify their mistakes and they don't try to pin blame on others. They take responsibility.

The guilt-offering was brought by those who unintentionally caused a loss to the Sanctuary by appropriating sacred property for personal use. A lesson: good people try not to desecrate that which is holy. They have reverence for the Sanctuary. They conduct themselves with respectfulness and gravitas, especially when in the presence of the Sacred.

The guilt-offering for breach of trust was brought by those who have dealt dishonestly with their fellow human beings. Aside from making restitution to those whom one has cheated, the sinner must also atone before the Almighty. A sin against a human being is also a sin against God. A lesson: good people are scrupulously honest. They avoid cheating or hurting others. They do not betray the trust of others. They do not renege on agreements.

A highly successful financier once told me: if you trust people at their word, you can do business with them. You don't need written agreements. Their word is their bond. But if you don't trust people, written contracts will not be a panacea. Untrustworthy people will find lawyers to re-interpret the contract; they will drag you into court; they will waste your time and money.

In short, good and trustworthy people are a blessing. They are reliable, honest and caring. Untrustworthy people are the bane of humanity. They are unreliable, dishonest, and unscrupulous.

Who would you hire? Who should you hire? Who would you work for?

And, most importantly, in which category do we ourselves belong? Would Mark Zuckerberg hire us?

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