



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת א מ ו ר

בענין טומאת כהנים:

While every Jew who comes in contact with the dead must undergo the purification process of the eifer parah ha'aduma, kohanim are forbidden to come in contact with the dead in the first place. The kohein gadol is even more restricted in that he cannot defile himself even for the sake of his closest relatives. Even a kohein who is already tamei and has no way to purify himself as he lacks the eifer ha'parah (such as is the case today) may not come in contact with or enter the same room as a corpse. It seems clear that the restrictions of kohanim vis-a-vis tumas meis is more than just a prohibition of defiling himself. What is the nature of this restriction and what lesson can we (non-kohanim as well) glean from these halachos?

The Sheim Mi'Shmuel explains that "death" was brought to the world when Chava ate from the eitz ha'daas. When the nachash first tried to seduce Chava, he told her that by eating from its fruits, one will become like Hakadosh Boruch Hu and this is something that He doesn't want you to do. Chava's error wasn't so much that she believed the false words of the snake, but rather that she should have realized that even if he is one hundred percent right, if Hashem doesn't want her to eat the fruit, then she should not. In short, she comprised on her level of temimus and instead questioned Hashem's directives as if perhaps it wasn't chalilah, the best advice. Hashem wants man to remain tamim, pure



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and close to Hashem. Questioning Him creates distance in the relationship. The kedusha leaves and impurities enter, allowing room for death.

Ultimately, the role of every Jew is to remain “tamim im Hashem” - pure and close to to the Ribono shel Olam. A few people in history have maximized this relationship. For example, the Torah testified that Yaakov Avinu was an “ish tam” and as such, Chazal tell us that “Yaakov Avinu lo meis” - he didn’t die, meaning that he maintained his level of temimus his entire life, leaving no room for tumah to enter. The role of the Kohanim is to serve as our representatives in the Beis HaMikdash. While every Jew must maintain and develop his own relationship with Hashem Yisborach, the kohanim symbolize those who are naturally closer to Him. Since death is a byproduct of the breaking of the ultimate closeness with Hashem, kohanim are instructed to avoid coming in contact with the dead, even though they can purify themselves with the ashes of the parah adumah, and even if they are already tamei. The kohein gadol is further limited by virtue of his unique relationship with Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Only when placed in a situation where there is no one else to tend to burial (i.e. a meis mitzvah) may he associate with death and that which it represents.

The lesson of that which kohanim are to avoid tumas meis is not that everyone should avoid contact with the dead. Indeed, those men and women who are part of the chevra kadisha are involved in a mitzvah of kedusha of the highest caliber. What we should learn from this parsha is that questioning



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Hashem weakens our relationship with Him. Everyone of us has our own challenges in life. Sometimes things appear “unfair” and look dark. Sometimes it is even worse. We need to remember that we there are things beyond our control and all of it is ultimately the ratzon Hashem. With this realization we can strengthen the relationship, instead of breaking it by questioning Him.

אמר אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם וכו':...

The posuk tells us that Hashem instructed Moshe to “address the kohanim and address them saying...”, the redundancy of which is quite obvious. Chazal are quick to tell us that the intention here is “l’hazhir es ha’gedolim al ha’ketanim” - to charge the men to take responsibility for the tumah and tahara of the children. Chazal extend this to include other areas of halacha as well, and generally speaking, all adults are at least partially responsible in preventing the misdeeds of yiddishe kinder. The problem is, that the wording of the posuk doesn’t exactly communicated this. If this is the intent, the posuk should have stated “emor el ha’kohanim... l’eimor” say to them saying. Instead, Hashem merely tells Moshe to instruct Aharon twice.

HaRav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro zt”l explains that from here we can derive a very powerful lesson in chinuch ha’banim v’ha’talmidim: The best way to positively influence others is not that the parent or teacher tell them what to do,



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but to have them observe the parent or teacher actually fulfill that which he wishes to instill in the child. Telling a child to daven with kavana may get him to shukel a lot or recite the first posuk of kri'as shema loudly, but that's all. Only by observing his father or rebbe daven or recite berachos seriously and with true kavana, can the desired effect be achieved; he may not retain the drama of screaming while swaying back and forth, but he will take davening seriously, now and for years to come.

This applies to all areas of chinuch. Proper midos are acquired by children observing their parents' proper conduct and not by merely being told what they should do. This is not to diminish the importance of speaking about the importance of tefillah with kavanah or midos tovos. Education does not happen by itself. This alone however, is not enough. The key to success in chinuch is to become a living example of that which we wish to teach.

We are all teachers. If it is not to our children or students, it is to other people's children, or even adults who in some way look up to us. You never know who you may inspire, even in a small way.

לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך:

Our parsha ends with the horrific story of the son of Shlomis bas Divri who publicly spoke blasphemously. Not sure as how to punish him, Moshe had him



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jailed until Hakadosh Boruch Hu told him how to proceed. Immediately thereafter, the Torah records Hashem's clear directive to stone the perpetrator to death. However, before proceeding, the Torah reiterates some of the laws of damages and the consequences for murder, bodily injury and damage of property. Only then, does Moshe instruct the Jews to stone him to death. Not only do these pesukim seem out of place – after all what do they have to do with blasphemy? – but why didn't Moshe run to relay Hashem's directive? After all, they were waiting to hear them.

HaRav Moshe Feinstein zt"l explains that this break was a very deliberate attempt to make the executioners appreciate the great value of human life. In no uncertain terms, the Torah informs them that not only is human life to be valued, but there is great merit to the value of the physicality of a human being. If one injures another, he must pay for it. More than this, even a person's property is to be viewed as somewhat sacred and one must suffer the consequences of damaging another's property as well. Only after this introduction were the executioners permitted to punish the blasphemer for his transgression. In Reb Moshe's words, they must first reinforce their love for their fellow Jew. What they are about to do is not to chalilah get rid of a Jew who is "problematic", but an act of love and mercy. Very much like the ben sorer u'moreh who is executed because (the Torah testifies) he will end up doing much worse, people are executed for other capital crimes in order to save



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them from falling much further. One who deliberately transgresses Shabbos after being forewarned that he will be liable for his life shows such high disregard for everything, that he will ultimately hurt or kill others as well. The same is true of the blasphemer.

There are many lessons to be learned from this: In chinuch, as parents and teachers we must punish out of concern for the child's welfare and not, chalilah as a means of taking revenge. In the world of kiruv, our fellow Jews are not "problematic" and because they do not understand or are otherwise misguided, it is our job to reach out to them by being compassionate. Since they are not motivated by disregard but are simply ignorant, we must not "rid ourselves of them" but rather develop our sense of ahavas Yisroel and show it to them. As Jews, we must realize that disregard for someone else's property is the beginnings of weakening regard for human life. We must constantly remind ourselves of R' Akiva's mantra: "love your friend as yourself – this is a great Torah principle".

ולקחתם לכם וכו' ושמחתם לפני ה' וכו'

We are quite familiar that the mitzvah of simchas yom tov applies mostly to Succos, and indeed we refer to it as "z'man simchaseinu" in our tefillos. However, we are wont to think that it is like any other mitzvah in which we are



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פֶּרֶשׁת אִמּוֹר

obligated. Just like we must hear shofar on Rosh Hashana and eat matzah on Pesach, so too must we rejoice on Succos. The Sefer HaChinuch understands otherwise and his insight provides us with a lesson that we can integrate into our daily lives.

He explains that since Succos is the time of harvest, people would naturally rejoice. Their homes were filled with whatever produce the year's crop had yielded, which in today's terms means wealth. As a result, people's spirits were lifted and they naturally rejoiced. However, instead of simply rejoicing over their own material gain, Hakadosh Baruch Hu provided k'lal Yisroel with the opportunity to channel their emotions and turn them into avodas Hashem. In other words, Hashem wanted to give us the opportunity to take our feelings about the mundane, and make them more meaningful.

This is a powerful lesson. While most of us are not the level where we enjoy food etc simply in order to bentch, we can nevertheless turn our enjoyment into a vehicle for avodas Hashem. Next time your meal tastes especially good, don't just enjoy it and then thank Hashem, because you have to. Instead, allow the physical satisfaction to inspire you into putting a little more kavana into bentching or even borei nefashos. Instead of walking away from the table weighed down by the food you have consumed, you will feel uplifted!