

PARSHAS EMOR

תש"פ

If one had to identify the basic theme of Parshas Emor it would be kedushoh.

Emor begins with kedushas kehunoh and eventually then moves on to kiddush Hashem and chillul Hashem. After that, it discusses kedushas hazman. Then at the very end we have an incident of the ben Ish Mitzri who is mekalel, and the parsha concludes with dinim of chiyuvei misoh.

First we will discuss the concept of kiddush Hashem and chillul Hashem, an idea that is used quite loosely nowadays.

Right before this, the Chumash says there is sh'miroh before assiyah one must learn before one performs mitzvos. One cannot become a medakdek bemitzvos unless he understands them and learns them thoroughly. The Mishnah Berurah says in his introduction to hilchos Shabbos that one cannot effectively avoid chillul Shabbos unless one is very familiar with hilchos Shabbos. This is the message of Rashi to this posuk.

Then we have the issur not to be mechalel Hashem's Name and the mitzvah to be mekadesh Hashem. What does this mean?

Rashi explains the issur of chillul Hashem means to be a total meizid. The mitzvah of kiddush Hashem is to be willing to be moser nefesh not to do aveiros.

The simple pshat is that a Jew has to be ready to die rather than succumb to certain temptations. If you fail the nisayon and do the aveiroh, you are mechallel Shem Hashem.

But there is a whole different dimension to kiddush Hashem.

The Rambam begins the fifth perek of Yesodei HaTorah with this definition. Then in halacha 10 proceeds with a second definition. If you violate an aveiroh with no personal gain and simply out of a complete disregard for the gravity of the aveiroh, that is a chillul Hashem. If you did this in public, it is a chillul Hashem berabim.

Conversely, if you refrain from violating an aveiroh or perform a mitzvah for no other motive other than it is the will of Hashem, this is a kiddush Hashem. If you do this in public, it is a kiddush Hashem berabim. We are talking about a person who has a tremendous nisayon and has everything to gain from doing the aveiroh—but refrained from it only because Hashem forbade it. The prime example of this is when Yosef Hatzaddik refrained from immorality with the wife of Potiphar. No-one else was present when it happened. He had everything to gain from the averioh and everything to lose by refraining. He only refrained out of yiras shomayim.

The Rambam continues to say another example of chillul Hashem is when someone who the public looks up to as a role model of a Torah personality betrays his position. If he does something which people look down upon as low and undignified behavior, it is a chillul Hashem—even if it is not technically an aveiroh. It is a chillul Hashem because someone who represents the Torah in the eyes of the public has to live his life on a higher standard. He cannot feast and get drunk and be like "one of the boys". He cannot insult people and get into petty fights with people. The Torah is supposed to make someone into a superior human being. If someone who learns Torah doesn't live up to that higher standard, it is a chillul Hashem.

These halachos apply to everyone who represents the Torah to the wider public. It applies to yeshiva bochurim because they are supposed to be bnei Torah—they are supposed to have been elevated and refined by their Torah learning.

If people see how a yeshiva bochur behaves, and come away with a bad impression, it reduces the stature of the Torah in their eyes. It is a chillul Hashem. A bigger talmid chochom has to go out of his way to get along with everyone and help people with their troubles and do chessed. It doesn't mean associating with everyone as his equals. A talmid chochom still has to maintain certain boundaries and act in a superior way. But his manner always has to be pleasant and gracious. This creates a kiddush Hashem.

In the midst of all these pesukim of kedushas kehunoh and kedushas hazman, the Torah throws kiddush Hashem and chillul Hashem into the mix. It is telling us something important. Being a kodosh doesn't mean to isolate one's self from humanity and remain aloof from society. No! It means to interact with people and extend one's self to people. But people see me as leading a superior life and I show people that the Torah transforms a human being. I represent a higher level. This is a separate mitzvah in the Torah, and to betray this stature is a separate aveiroh of chillul Hashem.

I now want to bring something to people's attention that often gets overlooked.

There is the story of the ben Ish Mitzri. He was the product of Shelomis bas Divri and an Egyptian slave driver. A Jew was in charge of 10 Jews and one Egyptian was in charge of ten groups of ten Jews. One day, a certain Egyptian slave driver went into a Jewish home to get a Jew out of bed to work. His wife was very talkative and was flirting with him. Once the Egyptian noticed this, he decided to get the husband off to work for the entire day and then made it his business to go back to the house and be mezaneh with this woman, Shelomis bas Divri. She became pregnant from the encounter and the Jewish husband started to suspect something happened. So the slave driver got anxious and tried to beat the husband to death to avoid being discovered. This is when Moshe Rabbeinu noticed what was happening and killed this Egyptian to save the Jewish victim.

The child of this union grew up with his mother and left Egypt with Klal Yisroel. The Torah testifies in Parshas Bamidbor that none of the women in Klal Yisroel were mezaneh with any Egyptian. This is astounding if you think about how unlikely this was. The only single exception was this woman. Amazing! All other Jewish women made strict gedorim to prevent any znus despite the very compromising situations they were in for all the long years they were in golus, and one woman was poretz geder. The result was that this child went out and was mekalel. This is a powerful limud.

He got involved in a dispute with Shevet Dan. He claimed he had a rightful place in the camp of Dan because of his Jewish mother. They rejected him because of his Egyptian father. They argued correctly that encampments go according to the father—in order to emphasize the great level of fidelity the Jewish couples had to each other. So it is unfortunate that this person had no natural place to put his tent down because of his mother's failing.

At least he should have taken pride in the fact that he is still a member of this holy nation! But no. Since things didn't work out for him personally, he rejected the entire system. He blamed Hashem for his troubles and is megadef.

What does it mean to curse Hashem? Look at the opposite-giving a

bracha to Hashem. What does "blessing Hashem" mean? The Nefesh Hachayim explains that through our bracha we increase Hashem's involvement in this world and strengthen the positive spiritual forces in this world. Kloloh means trying to remove Hashem's presence and sever Hashem's connection to this world. This is being megadef.

There are many midroshim on this incident. They revolve around one theme. Klal Yisroel take deep pride in all the gedorim we put into place against arayos. The halacha places heavy restrictions on arayos.

Yichud is a very challenging set of halachos. Frum Jews in the business world encounter nisyonos constantly in this area—shaking hands, etc. But as I know from what my talmidim tell me, the moment the person makes a slight compromise in these gedorim, it starts him down a slippery slope which often ends in tragedy. Once you set firm boundaries at the beginning and don't compromise, the people around you get the message—you are holding yourself to a higher standard. After a while, they don't even try to get close to you. The prohibition of physical contact with women and yichud can be inyonei deoraisoh which are designed to preserve the kedushoh of Klal Yisroel.

So in the midst of the parsha which talks about kedushoh we read a story about the lone woman who violated those gedorim and was mezaneh. In Bamidbor, the Torah testifies by putting the Shem Koh around the names of the families of the Shevotim—that the offspring of Shevet Yehudah are actually theirs. It was no simple feat to remain pure under the pressure of subjugation in Egypt. It is known that women will get better treatment if they offer themselves to those who have power over them. But for the Jewish women, purity from arayos was paramount and they did not compromise.

Bilaam recognized this trait of tznius in Klal Yisroel. It goes all the way back to Soroh Imeinu and Yosef Hatzaddik. Both of them found themselves in a society of total decadence and arayos, Klal Yisroel kept their core values—even in Egypt—and they didn't succumb. Chazal say Soroh Imeinu and Yosef Hatzaddik made gedorim in Egypt to preserve their purity.

In today's world, we live in a society that is full of znus. Without gedorim, there is a slippery slope. Not everyone goes out to the world because it is just too dangerous for their ruchniyus. But even when one stays at home, there is the exposure of the internet. The internet is a tool that can be used for so much good—so much Torah is being learned now in these times because of this tool—shiurim, chavrusos, etc. But it can be such a source of impurity and evil, and it drags people down to the depths very quickly.

The Ramban writes in Iggeres Hakodesh that there is nothing intrinsically evil in Hashem's world. Everything He created is neutral. Human hands can be used for creating objects of kedushoh such as a Sefer Torah and it can perform acts of unspeakable tumoh, such as murder. It can be used in any direction. Technology is the same thing. We need to set up gedorim on top of gedorim—like Soroh Imeinu when she was taken to Pharaoh's house.

It doesn't happen by itself. A person has to be conscious about his situation and be realistic about his own weaknesses and his temptations. Yosef was in Egypt and was still learning Torah—mentally he was connected to his father's household and constantly had Hashem's name on his lips. Still, the wife of Potiphar pursued him to the point where she grabbed his cloak to seduce him. Yosef was honest with himself and realized that he has no strength to stay and resist—he simply has to run away—even if it means leaving behind incriminating evidence. He knew that if he remained in that situation a moment longer, who knows what he is capable of doing?

This is why I am personally very conflicted about conducting the Yeshiva sedorim over the internet.

One cannot afford to rely on his own resolve and say "I can trust myself". It is a mistake. Parents often tell me: "I can trust my child". I tell parents, giving their children unrestricted internet access is like giving their child three bottles of vodka and the keys to the car and telling them to have a good time. Saying they trust them to stay safe is foolish. No parent would do something so irresponsible. It is an absolute obligation to set up gedorim upon gedorim for one's internet access.

We learn it from this week's parsha. The midroshim say even Soroh Imeinu didn't trust herself. She made gedorim for herself. Yosef didn't trust himself. It is not a sign of weakness to admit one needs to set up gedorim to keep themselves from faltering—it shows maturity, responsibility and a striving for kedushoh.

All the women of Klal Yisroel set up gedorim for themselves to remain kodosh—besides one woman who apparently thought these gedorim were excessive—she was shmoozy and didn't want to stifle her expressive personality. She certainly thought nothing would come out of a little friendliness. But she was wrong and wound up being the only Jew who committed znus in the 210 years of being in Egypt. She was poretz geder and went down the slippery slope.

We have a very peculiar period in human history and in Jewish history. Millions of people are locked up in their homes and are physically isolated from other people. The only connection we have is through electronic devices. The Rambam says a Kiddush Hashem is when we overcome temptations that no-one else knows about—we refrain from aveiros just because it is the will of Hashem.

Why is it that we must have safeguards over our devices and all the protection possible? Because it is a huge nisayon. We have to be afraid of our weaknesses. Yosef had a choice in front of him—either to be with the wife of Potiphar in olom haboh or with his father. He chose to be with his father. He didn't trust himself to be with her for another three seconds!

Everyone knows my views about internet and smartphones. Especially now, when everyone is stuck in their houses connected to all these devices, we have an unprecedented opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem that the Rambam talks about. We can make sure to separate ourselves from aveiros that no-one will know about. Hashem is always there and He knows. That is why we don't succumb to temptation. This is the biggest mitzvah.

This parsha is talking to us directly in our situation about maintaining and protecting our higher standard of kedushoh—even in the midst of a decadent environment full of znus and arayos. At the end of the day it is an enormous challenge being at stuck home looking at our computers all day long. Let's not kid ourselves. It can be used for good and evil, and we need to set up those gedorim to ensure that it remains only for tov.