

PARSHAS SHEMINI

תשפ"ד

We spoke earlier about the Chanukas HaMishkon described in Parshas Shemini, and the tremendous joy that it brought to Klal Yisroel. For seven days, Moshe puts up the Mishkon but then takes it down. He functions as the Kohen Godol for those seven days of the Chanukas HaMishkon. On the 8th day, Hashem tells Moshe that it is Aharon's turn to take over as the Kohen Godol.

When Moshe Rabbeinu was away in Midian, growing and developing into the Ish Elokim, Aharon was leading Klal Yisroel in the most difficult period of shibbud Mitzrayim. When Moshe shows up in Egypt after 40 years, saying he is now going to take over the leadership of Klal Yisroel, the Torah itself testifies that Aharon had no jealousy, no resentment toward his brother. He was actually happy in his heart!

Now, Aharon is worried that since he participated in the making of the golden calf, he lost that remaining aspect of leadership in the Kehunoh Gedolah. Moshe Rabbeinu comes over and they try to get that final kapporoh together to allow his brother to become the Kohen Godol. There is total achdus and brotherhood between Moshe and Aharon and this is the last part of the kapporoh needed to bring down the Shechinoh.

The Shechinoh comes down and there is tremendous joy that complete kapporoh from the sin of the golden calf has been achieved.

But at that moment, Nodov and Avihu bring in the aish zoro with ketores into the Kodesh, and they die on the spot. The simchoh is shattered. Moshe comforts Aharon by saying these two sons of yours are incredibly great individuals. I knew that those closest to Hashem will have to be sacrificed in order to establish the kedushas haMishkon. I thought it would be either you or I, and now I see your two sons are greater than us, for they were chosen to be this special sacrifice.

What is really happening here and what is the message we need to take from this incident?

The posuk says clearly that they were killed because they brought a foreign fire with ketores that was not authorized. But the next parsha discusses the issur for a kohen to be drunk while doing the avodoh, implying that the reason Nodov and Avihu died was because they brought in this ketores while intoxicated. But how could this be? If they were such great people – greater than Moshe and Aharon – can you even imagine they would be stumbling into the Kodesh while drunk on the day of this tremendous simchoh?

Why was it necessary for there to be a sacrifice of great people in order for the kedushoh of the Mishkon to be established?

The answer is that Hashem gives us very specific rules for serving Him.

The Netziv asks a very simple question: we know there are 613 mitzvos and it is forbidden to add a mitzvah or subtract a mitzvah. I can appreciate the need for an issur not to add to the Torah. But why do I need a separate issur to subtract from the Torah? If I declare I am not going to observe a mitzvah, and I carry out that intention in practice, that is a bitul of the mitzvah – and it is already forbidden to neglect any mitzvah. Why do we need an extra issur not to subtract from the mitzvos?

The Netziv answers that the 613 mitzvos we are given, are really 613 ways of serving Hashem – each mitzvah comes with its own unique approach and attitude towards avodas Hashem. So the Torah is telling us that you can't make up another approach to avodas Hashem

that isn't already part of the 613 we have, and you can't declare that some mitzvos are interfering with your preferred approach to serving Hashem and therefore you are justified in ignoring it.

In my youth, the Conservative movement was in the process of re-writing the Shulchan Aruch to their liking. It came to a point where they were confronted with the dilemma of driving to shul on Shabbos or not driving to shul on Shabbos. Some learned rabbis came up with the idea that it will be better if they were allowed to drive to shul and connect with their Judaism once a week than to just sit at home the whole day. But this isn't what Hashem wants. It may be the greatest l'shem shomayim motivation you can imagine, but it is not a valid way of serving Hashem.

Similarly, there are very exact and precise rules of how the avodas hakorbonos are to be performed. Just like Shabbos – there are exact and precise rules for how Shabbos must be kept. And especially in the Mishkon, the kohanim are not allowed to deviate from these rules – as we will explain shortly.

But very great people could be tempted to think that they are on such a high level, they shouldn't be limited to the rules and the details that are only necessary for regular kohanim. Certainly one's high level should allow him to do the avodoh in a way he thinks is best to achieve closeness to Hashem!

This is what Moshe told Aharon as to why great people must be sacrificed to establish the kedushoh of the Mishkon. If Nodov and Avihu were ordinary people, there would be no real lesson learned from their death. It is only because they are so much greater than everyone else, did Hashem choose them as an example to show that even the greatest kohen cannot change the rules to suit his understanding of what the best korbon should be. Even the greatest individuals have to stay within the bounds of the halacha made for everyone.

Chazal include the fact that they never got married as a factor. Why is that relevant to Nodov and Avihu's punishment?

This has to do with the contemporary shidduch crisis...

People think they are on such a high level, and it is beneath them to settle for someone with any flaws. The sons of Aharon had an inflated sense of who they were and felt because they are so great, no woman is on the level they require to be their wife. But the Torah says you are obligated to get married and there are no excuses. You can't keep waiting till the perfect person comes along.

Why was intoxication a factor?

Other religions incorporate wine, drugs, or various artificial stimuli to enhance their spiritual experience. But the Torah tells us this is not the way to intensify your devotion. You have to look inside yourself and develop internal motivation to intensify your connection to Hashem. Don't rely on outside sources to stimulate your religious feelings. This is connected with the idea of not adding or subtracting from the 613 mitzvos. Hashem gave us a Torah with all the ways that are necessary to connect properly to Him. If you want a deeper connection to Hashem, work within the 613 and look deeper within yourself.

After this entire incident, we come to the laws of kashrus, and apparently, we have left the story of Bnei Aharon behind us. We move on to tumoh of sheratzim, taharas hamishpocho, and the laws of metzorah. We totally forgot about Nodov and Avihu, but two and a

half parshiyos later, we suddenly come back right where we left off with "אחרי מות שני בני אהרן"! Chazal are very bothered by this long interruption of the narrative with the dinim of tumoh and taharoh.

The answer is found in the very last pesukim of Parshas Shemini:

זאת תורת הבהמה והעוף וכל נפש החיה הרקשות במים ולכל נפש השרץ על הארץ: להבדיל בין הטמא ובין הטהור ובין החיה הנאכלת ובין החיה אשר לא תאכל:

If the Bnei Aharon want to go into the Kodesh, or the Kohen Godol wants to go into the Kodesh haKodoshim, they need to first move up the ladder of kedushoh and taharoh that is being set up in all the parshiyos before. You have to first understand the laws of kashrus – how to treat animals you eat with kedushoh. There are very detailed halachos to teach you how to control what you put into your mouth and what you don't put into your mouth. You can't go into the Kodesh without first dealing with animals with kedushoh.

Then you move on to dealing with tumoh and taharoh regarding human beings. Once you learn how to control what goes in your mouth, then you learn to control what goes out of your mouth. You can't go into the Kodesh haKodoshim until you have learned how to maintain positive social relationships with other people and not destroy them through loshon horo.

Then there is tahraras hamishpocho – dealing with your wife. Marriage between a man and woman is on the one hand the easiest relationship and on the other hand, the most difficult. After you learn how to deal with animals, human beings and loshon horo and with your wife, and you have it all under control, the Torah says the following:

והזרתם את בני ישראל מטמאתם ולא יקרתו בטמאתם בטמאם את משכני אשר בתוכם:

Not only is the Torah giving you halachos, the Torah obligates you to make fences around the issurim of arayos. This is one of the most difficult areas of human relationships to limit, and unless you make fences, it is one of the easiest places to slip.

So if the Kohen Godol wants to enter the Kodesh haKodoshim, he can't just walk in there because he thinks he is on the highest level. Once a year, on the day of the greatest kedushoh, by the man of the greatest kedushoh, in the place of greatest kedushoh, you have to go through this whole avodoh before walking in. Everything is clearly defined.

Everyone has to serve Hashem within the 613 mitzvos. There is enough variety and room for creativity among these 613 mitzvos for everyone to find a way to express their unique spirituality. Torah and mitzvos are suitable for every Jew in every time in history and in every society. They give us discipline in every area of life because I have to have Hashem present in every area of life. But there is plenty of room to grow and expand your levels of spiritual expression.

The message is that Torah is for everyone and it is for all time – it applies equally in every generation.

One of the main messages of the Ramban about yetzias Mitzrayim is that all the yesodos of emunoh are learned from the various aspects of yetzias Mitzrayim.

There is a halacha that an idol worshipper and a public mechallel Shabbos have the status of a non-Jew in many respects. We understand idol worship – but why chillul Shabbos? The Rambam explains that it is because Hashem made a bris uniquely with Klal Yisroel through Shabbos. Our keeping Shabbos is a testimony to Hashem's creation of the world out of absolutely nothing. And this world was created from the blueprint of the Torah – which means Hashem designed a world that lasts forever from a Torah that will last forever. It never becomes obsolete just like the world never becomes obsolete. We all have the same 613 mitzvos going all the way back from our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers etc. to Har Sinai. And we have the same 613 to give to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren going all the way into the future.

This is why Pesach is central to Yiddishkeit. It is when Hashem showed everyone that He created the world out of nothing, He controls it and supervises everything that happens, and gives reward and punishment for whatever we do. And He told us to keep Shabbos in order to testify this to all the world every week. A Jew who says he'd rather go shopping or go to the soccer the game in public, he is saying he isn't willing to fulfill his end of this bris which makes him unique and distinct from the non-Jewish nations. He is violating the bris between himself and Hashem.

Each person has his own way of serving Hashem with various mitzvos in the Torah. He can connect to different ones in very deep ways that are unique to him. But it is still the same Torah for everyone, and it is the same Torah for all times.