

PARSHAS SHEMINI

תשפ"ב

This week's parsha begins with the avodoh necessary for the Shechinoh to finally come down to the mishkon after all the effort that Klal Yisroel put into it. This happened on the eighth day.

There is a minhag in Klal Yisroel not to say tachanun on the first 12 days of Nissan when the Nesi'im brought their korbonos for the chanukas hamizbeach. Some have the minhag to not say tachanun the last seven days of Adar. During those seven days, Moshe put up the mishkon and dismantled the mishkon. Why are these events still commemorated 3,500 years later and what does it have to do with us today?

For seven days, Aharon saw Moshe Rabbeinu doing the avodoh and no Shechinoh came down. Only on the eighth day, when Aharon did the avodoh, the Shechinoh finally came down.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Aharon Hakohen always had the feeling that he never received complete forgiveness for his participation in the sin of the golden calf. He saw Moshe doing the avodoh for seven days and thought perhaps Moshe would become the Kohen Godol instead of him. Moshe was doing the avodoh for these seven days and he was wondering the same thing. Is he going to be the Kohen Godol instead of Aharon?

But on the eighth day, Moshe stepped aside to let his brother do the avodoh and become the Kohen Godol. That is the day when the Shechinoh came down. This is one important idea. Shechinoh only dwells within Klal Yisroel when there is peace and harmony among us. Also, that you can have the most important person in Klal Yisroel – Moshe Rabbeinu himself – doing the avodoh, but if there is no hashroas haShechinoh as a result, it doesn't mean anything.

This process of building the mishkon and dismantling the mishkon, and Moshe Rabbeinu doing the avodoh, was all in preparation for the eventual hashroas haShechinoh that would result when Aharon Hakohen would start doing the avodoh. This is why these days are remembered 3,500 years later. It is because this was the first time in Klal Yisroel's history that the Shechinoh set up a permanent residence among us and became a part of our lives. It was a tremendous simchoh. There is no commemoration of when the second Beis Hamikdosh was completed 2,400 years ago. No-one knows which day on the calendar that was.

At that moment, Nodov and Avihu brought their ketores and were killed on the spot. What was their aveiroh? Bringing ketores? Why was it so severe? Some say they were drunk at the time and this is why the next section discusses the prohibition of doing the avodoh while drunk. But we learn that Nodov and Avihu were even greater than Moshe and Aharon! Is it possible that these two gedolei hador were drunk while doing the avodoh? Another opinion says they never got married. Another shita says they paskened a sheiloh in front of their rebbe.

The Netziv poses a problem with having a separate aveiroh in the Torah not to add or subtract from the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. The Netziv understands why there is an aveiroh not to add to the Torah. But not to subtract a mitzvah? Which kind of person would subtract from the Torah? Does he believe this mitzvah was given by Hashem but he wants to disobey it? Then it is not a separate aveiroh. If he doesn't believe it was given by Hashem, then he also won't believe that there is an aveiroh to subtract from the Torah either! So who are we talking about?

He answers that it is a person who decides that his personal avodas Hashem would be so much better without this mitzvah or this aveiroh getting in his way. But the Torah says no – we have to fit our avodas Hashem into these 613 mitzvos. They are binding on every kind of Jew. We can't decide that our derech avodoh will be better than what the Torah set down for us.

This was the aveiroh of Nodov and Avihu. They thought the Torah was given for the average Jew – only the average Jew needs the limitations of 613 mitzvos. But they were above it and didn't need these restrictions. So they thought they could bring their own ketores that Hashem didn't command, and didn't feel it was necessary to consult with anyone else. They weren't married because they didn't think any woman was an appropriate match for their high spiritual level. This was their basic mistake – thinking their greatness allowed them to operate above the restrictions and the obligations of the Shulchan Aruch.

The issue of being drunk is a separate one. On the one hand, wine and alcohol can enhance and increase a genuine simchoh. But it can't be the basis for it. There are many religions which promote using drugs and alcohol to expand one's consciousness and stimulate their spiritual experiences.

The Torah says this is not a valid derech avodoh. We serve Hashem by working to get inside our own neshamos. Anything that distracts you and is artificial is not really who you are – it interferes with genuine avodoh.

In addition, we learn two halachos from this. You can't daven while intoxicated and you can't pasken sheilos in that state. Confronting Hashem requires one confronting Him with all of one's own focus and self. It is not because alcohol clouds our focus. The Rambam quotes the halachoh of not paskening while intoxicated in Hilchos Bi'as Mikdosh. It means when you think about a sheiloh, you are connecting your daas with Hashem's daas to arrive at the correct psak. With alcohol, your mind is not connecting to Hashem in a genuine way.

The Torah then changes and discusses kashrus and the halachos which deal with dead animals. At the end of the parsha there is a summary – this is the Torah of animals. Then we have tumas yoledes, metzorah with all the types of tzoraas, zovim, and finally, niddoh and taharas hamishpocho. We have long forgotten about the beginning of Shemini and the death of Nodov and Avihu.

But then we have Parshas Acharei Mos which suddenly reminds us about the death of Aharon's sons! It is an introduction to the Kohen Godol's avodoh in the kodesh hakodoshim. But this is strange. If the avodoh of the Kohen Godol is related to the death of Nodov and Avihu, why is there a two and a half parsha interruption between Shemini and Acharei Mos with all kinds of halachos about kashrus and tumoh? The midrash is bothered by this question.

The answer is that before anyone goes into the kodesh hakodoshim, we need a long introduction. We first need the Torah of animals – regarding their kashrus and their tumoh. Then you need the Torah of the metzorah, the Torah of zov and niddah. It is all one continuum to build up to the highest level of kedushoh.

If you want to go into the kodesh hakodoshim, it isn't so simple. You can't just have an uplifting spiritual experience on demand. There are all these levels of kedushoh that you first have to go through. You have to know what you are allowed to eat, and be in control of your taivos. If

you don't know how to deal with animals in the Torah way, you cannot be kodosh.

The verse says that Klal Yisroel must be kodosh because Hashem is kodosh. The Rambam says there is a mitzvah to imitate Hashem's middos of rachamim – ve'holachtoh b'drochov. Interestingly, the Rambam includes kedushoh in this mitzvah. But we cannot be as kodosh as Hashem! He is completely beyond the physical. However, we can rise above the physical to some degree when we limit and control our basic physical needs and appetites. That is kedushoh.

Parshas Tazria and Metzorah is all about how to deal with human beings. It starts with halachos about one's wife after childbirth. And it finishes with halachos about one's wife as a niddoh. In between, we learn about how to deal with tzoraas which comes as a result of loshon hora. Only then can one go into the kodesh hakodoshim.

Going into the kodesh hakodoshim isn't just a matter of putting on some special clothes and barging in. It requires a whole process of self-development and a lifestyle of kedushoh and taharoh. The Rambam put the halachos of kashrus and taharas hamishpocho in the sefer of kedushoh. Being in control of our physicality is what gives our lives kedushoh and allows us to connect to Hashem.

But then there is another important step – loshon hora.

Dovid Hamelech composed the chapter of Al haShminis in Tehillim. Chazal says the heading came from bris miloh. Dovid was in the bathhouse and thought there are no mitzvos with him, and then he realized he has a bris which is part of who he is and is with him at all times. But if you look at the entire chapter, you will see that there are no references to bris miloh at all! It is mostly about loshon hora. What is the connection?

Dovid Hamelech is telling us that people have a misconception about what it means to be a religious Jew. It isn't just about doing mitzvos with physical objects that are external to you. It is about controlling and shaping who you are as a person. Bris miloh is a sign that we are

Hashem's people – imprinted on our very bodies. How you use your mouth is part of your avodas Hashem. You have to control what goes into it and what comes out of it. The parsha of kashrus in the Torah is put before the parsha of tzoraas. If you can't control what goes in your mouth, you won't be able to control what comes out.

The first relationship and the last relationship is taharas hamishpocho. In some ways, one's relationship with one's wife is the easiest relationship, and in other ways the most difficult relationship to control. Only when you are in absolute control of your body and how you deal with people, then you can come to the kodesh hakodoshim.

What happened with Nodov and Avihu? They tried to jump straight into the kodesh hakodoshim because they thought they were so great. They thought they could do an avodoh that no-one else can do. They thought they weren't bound by the 613 mitzvos that everyone is bound by. They thought they couldn't get married because no-one was on their level. They thought they didn't have to consult with Moshe and Aharon because they were even greater.

Everything which follows this incident is coming to teach us why they were wrong. You have to go inside yourself for genuine spirituality and not use any artificial stimulation. You have to know how to have a proper relationship with a wife. Only a married Kohen Godol can do the avodoh of Yom Kippur. You have to know what kedushoh means and be in total control of your ego, all aspects of your personality, and all your physical urges and needs.

The parsha teaches us many vital lessons. There is only hashroas Shechinoh when there is sholom between people. It discusses the sin of Nodov and Avihu and everything that is required to rectify it. We are told a halacha that one cannot render a psak halacha while drunk. It is included in the halachos of bi'as mikdosh – not because one's thinking gets distorted. But because you can't get the sugya clear in your mind without realizing that you are before Hashem. People learning Torah need to realize that getting a sugya clear is an encounter of confronting Hashem.