

PARSHAS EMOR

תשפ"ג

Parshas Emor finishes off the series of parshiyos that began with Parshas Shemini. There is one essential theme of all these parshiyos – והתקדישתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני – the obligation of a Jew to lead a spiritual life and to use the physical aspects of our lives as a means to serve Hashem.

As we mentioned last week, it doesn't mean you aren't allowed to enjoy this world.

The gemara in Chullin quotes Yalta, the wife of Rav Nachman, who said that for every forbidden food there is a different type of food which tastes the same and is kosher. A person has to know there are things that are forbidden and there are things that are permitted.

The midrash asks: Does it really matter to Hashem if we slaughter an animal from the front of the neck or from the back? Rather, the point of the Torah is to be "metzaref" people. What does the word "metzaref" mean? It refers to the process of smelting metal – heating up raw clumps of metal dug up from the ground to burn out its impurities and leave behind just the pure metal. Iron ore is smelted for the purpose of getting rid of all the material you aren't interested in. It can also mean tempering metal – heating it up till it glows and then you plunge it into cold water which strengthens the metal. This is also called tziruf.

The point of the midrash is that the Torah is teaching us how to lead a disciplined life. You can't just do whatever you want. There is a permitted way and a forbidden way to enjoy the physical world. The Torah is interested in the tziruf – the refinement of the human being. A person has to be refined and learn to be in control of his impulses.

There are certain areas of life where the Torah makes excessive demands. Here, it is not just to control impulses but it is to infuse our lives with kedushoh and connect to Hashem. It applies to all Jews, and even more so to a kohen, and even more so to a kohen godol. In the area of kedushas kehunoh, there is a special mitzvah from the Torah to make sure even children who are kohanim need to keep themselves tahor.

What is the mitzvah of chinuch and why is it called a mitzvah derabbonon? In truth, a child is not obligated in keeping mitzvos, and adults aren't necessarily obligated to prevent children from doing aveiros. But parents can't just let their children live a life of total hefkeirus and then expect on his 13th birthday to immediately be able to keep all 613 mitzvos and live a totally different lifestyle! Of course, there is a d'oraisoh obligation to train children to keep the Torah so that when they arrive at adulthood, they are ready to keep all their obligations.

So why does the gemara call chinuch a mitzvah derabbonon?

Mi'derabbonon, there is an extra requirement to train the child to perform the mitzvos in the same way an adult performs them. This is true for positive mitzvos. For negative issurim, it isn't so simple. But for kohanim, there is a din d'oraisoh for the adults to ensure their children guard their kedushas kehunoh. This is also true in two more areas – a father has to make sure his children are not mechallel Shabbos, and that one is not allowed to give a Jewish child non-kosher food to eat.

One might think these are three isolated, unrelated areas of halacha. The Rambam says no – the common theme is training a Jewish child in living a life of kedushoh. He adds that this training is a fulfillment of the verse in Mishlei – חנוך לנער על פי דרכו – The idea is once you train a child in a certain lifestyle of kedushoh while he is young, it will

become a natural part of his behavior pattern and he will continue on this path. Kedushoh is a lifestyle. Once a child is starting to function in the world, he needs to be taught not to be preoccupied with his physical taivos and not to let them dominate him. This is the Torah's approach to chinuch.

The mitzvos of kedushoh have another interesting aspect. These are the areas of halachah where we find s'yogim min HaTorah.

Most s'yogim are derabbonon. Chazal were told to make sure to take all precautions necessary to not come to unwittingly violate any issur d'oraisoh. But there are a number of places where the Torah itself made a s'yog. There are at least four that I know of. The gemara Nozir says a kohen cannot go into an enclosure where there is a gosess – someone about to die. The explanation is clear. The gosess might suddenly die and contaminate the kohen. This is a din d'oraisoh.

There is another s'yog d'oraisoh to prevent arayos which we discussed last week – lo sikrivu. The Rambam in Mishna Torah says it includes physical contact, and in his minyan hakoton, he expands this issur to include any activity which can bring a person to think about arayos. Music, literature, pictures, etc. Arayos are very serious aveiros and they have a tendency to dominate a person's mind. So, the Torah itself says stay away from activities that might lead to arayos – lo sikrivu.

There is the s'yog d'oraisoh of in this week's parsha to ensure children of kohanim protect their kedushas kehunoh. And in Hilchos Niddah, there is a chiyuv d'oraisoh for a married couple to separate near the time when the wife may become a niddah.

Regarding forbidden foods we find an interesting halacha: the Rambam says the issur of chatzi shiur assur min haTorah is limited only to forbidden foods. Chatzi shiur means: don't take step number one which is mutar, since it likely leads to step two and three which will be assur.

In the area of theft, there is an issur d'oraisoh of lo signovu – the Torah says it is forbidden to steal someone's property as part of a practical joke or to be spiteful. Even if you don't want to take it to keep, you are still not allowed to put your hands on other people's property. It is a s'yog d'oraisoh to prevent theft which is very tempting to most people.

So, we find two areas of s'yogim d'oraisoh – maintaining kedushoh and theft. This means the Torah identified two areas which set a person in the proper pattern of behavior that is basic for being a Torah Jew. The mitzvah of chinuch requires that every child has to develop these patterns from the very beginning of his life.

It is interesting that when the Rambam talks about bechiroh chofshis, he doesn't expect that a person can immediately take total control over his behavior at the snap of his fingers. If someone is caught in some kind of addictive behavior, alcohol, drugs, whatever, bechiroh chofshis doesn't mean we can demand that he drop this ingrained habit right away. It is not so simple.

The Rambam says every person has an ability to begin a process that will arrive at an end goal that you will be in control. You don't discover who you really are – you decide who you want to be – you form yourself. You shape yourself.

Until now we have been talking about the kedushoh of the physical guf – not letting your taivos and your physical urges control you. Another kind of kedushoh is kedushas hamokom – the place we bring

korbonos, the mikdash. We are obligated to treat the mikdash with awe because it is a place which is designated to be used to connect to Hashem. The beis hamikdash was also designed to be the place of tefillah as well as korbonos – as we see from what Shlomo Hamelech said when he inaugurated the beis hamikdash – it is a place of tefillah for all people, wherever you live. This is why we face the mizbeiach hamikdash when we daven. Nowadays we have a mikdash me'at – the beis knesses – which also obligates us to treat it with kedushah.

Kedushas haguf is a very interesting thing. When a Jew dies, the body has to be buried. It is forbidden to have benefit from a deceased Jewish body. Why is that? Because the body of a Jew is kadosh since it was used to serve Hashem by keeping 613 mitzvos throughout his lifetime. A body's kedushah requires that it be covered, which is the core of the concept of tzniyus. Since it is used as a means to serve Hashem, it has been elevated and imbued with kedushah as a result. So, it requires burial and is forbidden to derive benefit from it.

This is why Jews must be buried in a cemetery for Jews exclusively. We learn this from the fact that Avrohom Ovinu refused the offer of Bnei Ches to bury Soroh in one of their burial places. He insisted that Soroh be buried in a separate place – in Me'oras Hamachpeilah.

The parsha ends off with kedushas hazman – all the mikro'ei kodesh of the Yomim Tovim, etc. What does mikro'ei kodesh mean? The Rambam defines it as a time of public limud Torah and tefillah b'tzibbur. The Rambam in Hilchos Shabbos and Hilchos Yom Tov says that 50% of your waking moments during Shabbos and Yom Tov have to be utilized for davening and learning. Certain days were imbued with kedushah and these days enable us to connect to Hashem on a higher level.

There is a difference between Shabbos and Yom Tov. Shabbos has a mitzvah of oneg and Yom Tov has a mitzvah of simchah.

Shabbos is a day of kedushah and doing things related to kedushah. The Rambam says people might be tempted to use all the free time on their hands to rearrange things and move things around the house. The concept of muktzah makes this forbidden and forces us to focus on activities of ruchniyus.

The Rambam believed in davening vasikin, but didn't sit down to eat

his Shabbos day seudah until after chatzos – this means half his day on Shabbos was spent davening and learning.

What is the extra simchah of Yom Tov that Shabbos doesn't have? The Rosh explains that Shabbos is a day where you are forbidden to carry things outside. You are essentially stuck in your house and you can't bring food to other people's houses to share a meal. It means you stay at home to relax and to learn. It is a day of avodas Hashem. On Yom Tov, one is allowed to carry and bring things to people and one can be more social.

At the very end of the parsha we have a story of the son of Shlomis bas Divri whose father was an Egyptian. Chazal explain that an Egyptian taskmaster came to their house to drag the husband to work, and Shlomis his wife started a friendly conversation with him. This motivated the Egyptian to go back to the house afterwards to be mezanah with her. Chazal say this was the only case of znius out of all the Jewish women throughout the entire time Klal Yisroel were in Egypt. The Jewish women knew they had to keep up strict fences to separate themselves from the Egyptian men. When Shlomis broke that fence, it resulted in znius.

We are a spiritual nation whose defining essence is our connection to Hashem and we use the physical world to serve Hashem. We uplift our guf and imbue it with kedushah by using it to serve Hashem. We have places in the world which are used for serving Hashem, and that is what makes them kadosh. They are botei midrash and botei knesses. Not all the places of so-called "mekomos hakedoshim" which keep up the tourism industry. We have times and places that are designated for a higher level of avodas Hashem.

We are part of the world but we don't get pulled into the world. We sanctify the world – our guf, certain places, certain times of the calendar – we use them all to serve Hashem.

There are a number of s'yogim d'oraisah and aspects of chinuch d'oraisah surrounding the areas of kedushah – in the food that our bodies enjoy, in time like on Shabbos, and in kehunoh for those who serve in the beis hamikdash. All of this is to remind us that kedushah is the core of our Jewish identity.