

## פ' אחרי מות-קדושים תשפ"ג

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### **PESICHAS HAZMAN AT RAV STERNBUCH'S YESHIVA**

The Rambam says (*Vayikro* 23:36) that the *sefiras haomer* period is like a *chol hamoed* connecting Pesach with *Shavuos*. It is a time designated for *avodas Hashem* and preparing ourselves for *Shavuos*, and we have to be extremely careful to utilize every moment for sanctity and Torah learning. Even during challenging times, such as when we are tired, if we overcome our difficulties we will reap the benefits for *limud Torah* for the entire year. Someone who limits his mundane activities as much as possible, and does not waste a moment during the day or night, will merit coming ever closer to Hashem.

During *sefiras haomer* one has to count the exact day, and one cannot count a day once it has elapsed. This is because our *avoda* during the *sefira* is to prepare ourselves during each day to receive the Torah, and if a day goes by without the necessary preparation, that cannot be rectified. This thought should motivate us to utilize the potential of each day for intensified Torah learning.

We have to realize that a Jew is only exempt from Torah learning if it is Hashem's will that he should be doing something else at that moment in time. Rav Boruch Ber (*Birkas Shmuel Kiddushin* 27-4) notes that people are mistaken when they say that a working person is obligated to learn as much as a *talmid chochom* and a *ben Torah*, only that during the time he is working he is exempt because he is *onus* (compelled by his circumstances), since he is obligated to feed his family. In truth, everybody's obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* depends on his personal situation. Therefore, someone in a position to learn, for example, twelve hours a day will be held accountable for *bittul Torah* if he learns less than that, whereas if a working person can learn, for example, only four hours a day, then that is his sole obligation.

All this pertains to a person's strict obligation, but even a working person with a desire to acquire as much Torah as possible need not limit himself to that. (For an eye-opening example, see Rav Avraham Danzig's testimony about himself in his introduction to *Chochmas Odom*.)

In any case, Hashem knows the times during which a person is obligated to deal with other matters, and when a person is wasting his time. It is not possible to deceive Hashem.

Moreover, Rav Chaim Brisker declared that if someone capable of learning in depth (*be'iyun*) only learns *beki'us* that too constitutes "*bittul Torah*". Hence, the *gemoro* (*Megilla* 3a) states that we must refrain from [*mevatel*] *Talmud Torah* for the sake of reading the *Megilla*. Even though reading the *Megilla* is also a form of *limud Torah*, it comes at the expense of in-depth learning that could be taking place at the same time. That is why stopping one's [in-depth] learning in order to hear the *megilla* is termed an act of "*bittul Torah*" by the *gemoro* (Beis Efraim *O.C.* sec. 68), which we are nevertheless obligated to perform.

### **LIVING FOR OTHERS**

"After the death of two sons of Aharon, who brought an offering before Hashem and they died" (16:1).

Here the *possuk* makes it clear that Nodov and Avihu were punished for having entered the *kodesh hakodoshim*, but in *parashas eikev* it says "And at Aharon Hashem grew very angry to destroy him; I prayed for Aharon, too, at that time". *Chazal* explain that *possuk* as follows: at the time of the *chet hoeigel* it was decreed that Aharon would be punished for his involvement in

the *chet* through the death of all of his four sons, but Moshe *Rabbeinu* managed to mitigate the decree by means of his prayer, so that only two of his sons would die. The question though remains, did Nodov and Avihu die because of their own sin (whatever it was, depending on the different views in *Chazal*) or because of their father's sin?

Sometimes a person may deserve to die, but his wife, children, students, or others who benefit from his activities, would suffer from his death. In a human court of law, if someone deserves to be handed down the death punishment, a judge does not have discretion to consider the ramifications of the death penalty on the killed person's family or friends. By contrast, it says "The commandments of Hashem are true, they are righteous altogether" (*Tehilim*, 19:10). With us, if those who are dependent on a person do not deserve to die, he remains alive for their sake.

Similarly, the Brisker Rov asked what it means that Hashem is "full of lovingkindness and truth" (in the Thirteen Divine Attributes). What sort of praise is it to state that Hashem does not lie? He answered that it means that His truth is just and fair towards all parties involved, something which a mortal system of justice is incapable of achieving.

If Aharon would not have had a sin of his own to be held out against him, his sons would not have died despite their own sin, because their father would not have deserved to endure the anguish of losing his sons.

On a related note, Rav Eliyohu Lopian told Rav Sternbuch several times that a person should engage in as many possible activities that benefit the public, such as teaching or being *osek bezorchei tzibbur*, so that even if he deserves to be punished, that punishment might be deferred because those who benefit from his activities do not deserve to be punished.

## PARABLES

*"After the death of two sons of Aharon" (ibid). Rashi: What does this teach us? Rabi Elozor ben Azariah illustrated this with a parable of a patient, whom a physician came to visit. The physician said to him, "Do not eat cold foods, and do not lie down in a cold, damp place." Then, another physician visited him, and advised him, "Do not eat cold foods or lie down in a cold, damp place, so that you will not die the way so-and-so died." This one warned that patient more effectively than the former"*.

This parable cited by Rashi illustrates the power of real-life precedents even on Aharon *Hakohen*. Sometimes hearing stories about great Torah personalities has a greater effect on a person than merely being told about a prohibition or *halocho*. Rav Schneider too would bring incidents from *gedolim* to bring alive certain points to do with *yiras shomayim* etc.

## HUMAN SANCTITY

*For I Hashem Your G-d am holy (ibid)*

*Medrash Raba: "You shall be holy", I would have thought like Myself therefore it says, "for I am holy", My sanctity is greater than your sanctity.*

On one level, Hashem is telling us that we should not make the mistake of abstaining altogether from material matters in an attempt to emulate Hashem who is completely spiritual, because we have been commanded to attain sanctity as human beings who must eat and drink and satisfy our genuine material requirements. Our physical essence must be elevated, not negated.

As a corollary, unlike "spiritual" recluses such as monks, who consider a withdrawal from society and self-denial to be prerequisites for a spiritual existence, the Jewish nation is told to "be holy" (in the plural) by living together in society, and not like Me, Who is alone, and, lest

you think that everyone should lead their own individual existence it says “for I am a holy”, although I possess absolute unity and am alone, you, the Jews, become sanctified collectively, in one unified society, in which each individual, doing the will of the Creator, makes his own unique contribution.

Each individual is capable of, and expected to, attain sanctity, not only exceptional individuals. Even working people, who deal honestly in their business, minimize the time spent on making a living, focusing primarily on Torah and *avodas Hashem*, performing *mitzvos* for the sake of giving joy to the Creator, and putting Hashem’s wishes before theirs, can attain great sanctity.

Furthermore, we are being warned against the theory that by drawing closer to or cooperating with transgressors we are emulating Hashem, who is close to all his creations. It therefore says “for I am a holy”, My sanctity remains unaffected by My proximity to even the worst sinner, but the sanctity of both individuals and the nation as a whole is likely to be gravely prejudiced by contacts with transgressors. Hence, such contacts must only take place following consultation with the *gedolim*.

The main aspect of *kedusha* consists in erecting fences to ensure observance of both interpersonal commandments and *mitzvos bein odom lamomok*.

## **FIGHTING ROUTINE**

*Speak to your brother Aharon that he not come at all times into the Holy . . . so that he not die, for in a cloud I shall appear on the Ark-cover. (16:2)*

*Because the revelation of My Shechinah is there, he should be careful not to accustom himself to enter. (Rashi, ibid.)*

The force of habit and routine weakens our ability to maintain a sense of excitement and awe, so that even Aharon was forbidden to enter the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* at any time lest he become too accustomed to the intense holiness that pervaded it. Before entering, he had to make sure that he felt an appropriate awareness of Hashem’s Presence there.

Similarly, before praying, we should endeavor to internalize the fact that we are about to pray before the King. “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to those who call upon Him in truth” (*Tehillim* 145:18). Rav Elyah Lopian would note that since Hashem can read our thoughts, they are equivalent to speech as far as Hashem is concerned, so if when we pray we are thinking of matters not connected to our prayer, it is as if we are communicating in a garbled language with the Almighty. Hashem is close to those who call upon Him *in truth* — who seek closeness to Him and exclude extraneous thoughts as much as possible when they pray, thereby “speaking” in a language that He “understands.”

In general, our only hope of avoiding the tendency to perform *mitzvos* in a perfunctory manner is to treat each day as if we were born anew on that day and approach our *avodas Hashem* as if for the first time.

## **KOSEL**

If we have to be in an appropriate state of mind before entering a holy location such as a *shul*, this applies with even greater force to the holiest place which we still have, the *Kosel Hama’arovi*, through which every Jew’s prayer passes. Unfortunately, the sanctity of the *Kosel* becomes desecrated when people behave there with levity, or dance. It is meant to be a place set aside for tearful prayer concerning the destruction of Hashem’s Palace.

In recent times the *Kosel* Plaza has become expanded and renovated. People imagine that it is a great mitzvah to beautify this area, but the *halocho* states that a *shul* which has become destroyed and its location is full of weeds, those weeds should not be uprooted, in order to make people dejected by this desolate state, thereby motivating them to reconstruct the *shul*. Clearly then, the location of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdosh* should not be beautified because that diminishes the *churbon* (destruction) that one should be feeling. [Although the *Kosel* Plaza is strictly speaking not situated in a location where the *Beis Hamikdosh* used to stand, and is therefore not a place of “destruction”, it is considered subsidiary to the *Kosel* itself, and serves as a place of prayer in a place of *churbon*].

## **TORAH NEEDS NO COVER**

“*In front of the כפרת that is upon the ark*” (*ibid*).

It says in *Toras Kohanim* that the purpose of the *kapores* was not to act as a cover for the *oron*.

Some *bnei Torah*, or their wives, are embarrassed that after twenty years of marriage the head of the family is "only" an *avreich* with no profession or even a Torah position to show for it, and they feel that they have to cover up for this “deficiency”. The *oron* symbolizes Torah and Chazal are telling us that the Torah does not need to be "covered up", and *bnei Torah* and their families should instead be proud and realize that it is in the merit of people like them that Hashem has guarded us throughout history.

Our erring brethren cannot understand why someone in his thirties or forties should remain an eternal "student", who is merely an unproductive burden on the state. On the other hand, they argue that our right to repossess this country is based, to a great extent, on our almost continuous presence here over the past 2000 years. What they ignore is the fact that until recent generations the only people living here were "idle" people who did nothing other than learn Torah and lived off charity from overseas. In reality, those who dedicate their lives to Torah learning make up the Army of Hashem and are closest to Him.

## **YESHIVA WITHOUT SEDORIM**

*With this shall Aharon enter the Holy* (16:3)

The *Medrash (Vayikro Rabba 21:6)* says that “with this” refers to the merit of the Torah. This shows that the merit of the *kehuna*, of Yom Kippur and of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* was not enough. Without the power and merit of Torah the *Kohen Godol* could not achieve atonement for the nation.

Torah is supreme, and that is why a *mamzer* who is a *talmid chochom* takes precedence over a *Kohen Godol* who is an *am ho'oretz* (ignorant) (*Horayos 13a*).

Rav Yisroel Salanter noted that this occasion presented a confluence between the holiest person, the *Kohen Godol*, the holiest time, Yom Kippur, and the holiest place, the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. The sanctity of this unique combination of factors is difficult to fathom, and yet the Torah of *talmidei chachomim* studied with sanctity is dearer in Hashem’s eyes even than the *avoda* of the *Kohen Godol* on Yom Kippur in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

When the Netziv was asked about the learning schedule of Volozhin Yeshiva, he replied that “Torah has no schedules, the only scheduled times in the Yeshiva are for eating and resting”. In

other words, Torah is not limited to time, one must learn as much as one can at any time, and only eating and resting should be limited to specific allotted times.

## **SECLUSION**

*“No man shall be present in the Tent of Meeting when he comes in to atone” (16:17).*

The *kohen Godol* in the *kodesh hakodoshim* on Yom Kippur had to keep his mind exclusively focused on his *avoda* and on Hashem, and the presence of any other person would have been likely to disturb his concentration.

Sometimes great people feel the need to emulate such a situation for a limited period. Rav Kalmanovich, the Rakover *rov* told Rav Sternbuch that he once went to see Rav Chaim Brisker with an urgent question. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer. Only when he shouted that he had come to ask about a matter involving *pikuach nefesh* did Rav Chaim come to open the door. When Rav Kalmanovich asked him why did not open earlier, Rav Chaim replied that sometimes he closes himself up in his room and learns undisturbed as if there is no one else except for him and Hashem, but when he heard that the Rakover *rov* had a question on a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, he felt that he had no choice but to come and open the door.

## **IDLE BOCHURIM**

*And Aharon shall enter the Ohel Moed (16:23). Rashi: to take out the spoon and the pan, with which he had caused the ketores to go up in smoke in the inner kodesh*

The *kohen godol* has to change clothes, *toivel*, and wash his hand and feet before and after this *avoda* of removing the vessels. Why is such a fuss made about this seemingly insignificant act? Why does the Torah not simply require the *kohen godol* to remove these *keilim* the next time he enters the *kodesh hakodoshim* on the following Yom Kippur?

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky answers that there can be no such reality as an object remaining in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* without a purpose, because that would be a disgrace for Hashem's Abode.

The Yeshivos too, added Rav Abramsky, are *Kodesh HaKodashim* and therefore cannot house anyone who wastes his time. Even if this person does not harm others, it is a disgrace for the holy Yeshiva to house someone who sits around idly without engaging in Torah. Such a *bochur* must understand on his own that he should not be in a holy place without a purpose.

On the other hand, the Yeshiva management has no right to throw him to the street and abandon him simply because he is not learning. Rav Schneider used to say that as soon as a boy enters the Yeshiva he becomes like a son and has to be treated accordingly. Just like one would not throw one's own son to the street and abandon him, but would rather find him an alternative Yeshiva appropriate for him, so too must any *bochur* receive the same treatment. As long as no alternative exists, the boy may not be thrown out, although the other *bochurim* must be warned not to learn from his ways or associate with him.

Of course, each case has to be assessed based on its specific circumstances.

## **SINNING IN ERETZ YISROEL**

*And the land became defiled, and I visited its sin upon it, and the land vomited out its inhabitants (18:25)*

The Ramban talks at length about how *Eretz Yisroel* is Hashem's heritage, which is subject to His direct providence, and has not been delivered to *mazolos* or angels. That is why this country spews out those who defile it with sins. He adds that even before *matan Torah* the forefathers kept *mitzvos* only in *Eretz Yisroel*, the Palace of the King, in which His Will has to be fulfilled completely.

The *Sefer Chareidim* (Ch. 59) decries those who come to live in the Palace of the King only to feast and drink, and commit sins therein (see also *Shlo*, end of *P. Bechukosai*).

The residents of *Eretz Yisroel* are not only obligated to be especially careful to refrain from sinning themselves, but are also duty-bound to act as "guardians" to make sure that others do not defile the Holy Land, and warn them about the great blemish caused by sins in *Eretz Yisroel*.

## MORAL FREEDOM

*You shall be holy . . . You shall fear your mother and father. (19:2–3)*

The commandment to fear our parents is written immediately following the commandment to be holy, because in order to attain holiness, a person must rein in his desires. If a parent wants to give his child the gift of the ability to acquire holiness in his adulthood, he must train him from infancy to practice self-control, and not to give in to his urges. If a parent accustoms his child to subject his own will to that of his parents, the child will be trained to subject his will and desires to the Will of Hashem, thereby gaining moral freedom.

## PARENTS AND CHILDREN

*Every man shall fear his mother and his father, and you shall observe My Shabosos (19:3)*

Irreligious forces argue that the younger generation is wiser than its parents. Such propaganda can have terrible effects. When Rav Sternbuch first came to *Eretz Yisroel* about 70 years ago, accompanied by his late mother, a child came up to them and exclaimed "*aba sheli chamor*" ("my father is a donkey"). Needless to say, they were deeply shocked. The Zionists severed the link between the generations so that it would be easier for them to indoctrinate youngsters with their theories.

The Torah is warning us that it is not enough to honor our parents, but we have to fear them, always remembering that the Torah compared the honor we must accord to our parents with that which we accord to Hashem.

Parents who feel uncomfortable about their children getting up for them when they enter the room, as used to be the standard practice amongst *erliche yidden* in previous generations, are doing themselves and their children a disservice. Obviously parents do not require such displays of honor to satisfy their vanity, but only in order to instill that element of respect, which is conducive to an appropriate domestic atmosphere, and which results in a lifetime of *kedusha*.

The Brisker Rov would make a point of his sons serving him so that they would have the benefit of performing *mitzvas kibbud av*. Similarly, Rav Sternbuch's father would ask his daughters to help him rather than the domestic helper because he wanted to give them the great merit of *mitzvas kibbud av*.

Another vital principle in childrens' education is to create a close relationship with the child, because in the absence of such a relationship the child will be exposed to the danger of departing completely from his parents' path *rachmono litzlon*.

Just like one must fear Hashem and His judgment ("You shall fear Hashem your God") so too a person must always fear that he is not performing this fundamental *mitzvah* adequately.

The Ksav Sofer says that a “man” (i.e. adult), who has left his parents’ house might imagine that he must now dedicate himself totally to his own family. The Torah therefore warns him that his obligations to his parents remain unchanged.

## **CONCEALED IDOLS**

*Do not turn to the idols, nor make for yourselves molten gods (literally: “gods with masks”)* (19:4)

Even if someone does not actually serve an idol, but only begins to turn towards one, he violates a negative prohibition, and the *gemoro* in *Shabbos* (149a) derives from this *possuk* that even looking at idols is forbidden *mide’oraiso*. Reading heretical books on topics such as philosophy and physics is even worse than looking at idols, and anyone doing so surely transgresses this prohibition, and damages the sanctity of his mind and thoughts.

Even books or newspapers, which at first sight appear not to clash with a Torah outlook must be shunned, since more often than not they will turn out to be “gods with masks”, i.e. seemingly harmless material concealing heretical views.

## **BUSINESS**

*You shall not steal, nor shall you deal falsely, or lie to each other* (19:11)

The Torah expects us to be especially careful in monetary matters, where there are many potential pitfalls. Failing to disclose any deficiency in a sold object, even to a non-Jew, constitutes *geneivas da’as*, not to mention overstating the supposed market value of the object. The *halochos* of *gezel*, *ono’oh* and *ribbis* are manifold and complex, and *rabbonim* must ensure that their congregants are well versed in them.

A *rov* once came to Rav Yisroel Salanter and told him that he wanted to abandon the rabbinate due to the great responsibilities weighing on his shoulders, and he had chosen to become a businessman instead. Rav Yisroel responded that the responsibilities of a businessman were even greater, since he was likely to *chas vesholom* transgress many prohibitions. Moreover, achieving atonement for interpersonal sins is more difficult than for sins *bein odom lamokom*.

## **PUBLIC FUNDS**

“You shall not steal” [*lo signovu*] is in the plural to teach us that activists in charge of public funds are able to steal from thousands of people instantaneously through one act of misappropriation, and they must therefore be especially careful about the way they treat money with which they have been entrusted.

## **WORKER'S WAGE**

*The hired worker's wage shall not remain with you overnight until morning* (19:13)

The Zohar says that someone who infringes this commandment will have his days curtailed.

If the worker tells the person who hired him that he is not particular about being paid on time, and the hirer does in fact not pay on time, he does not infringe the negative prohibition of the worker's wage not remaining with him overnight, although he misses out on performing the positive *mitzvah* of paying on the day the work is completed. However, this is only the case if the laborer genuinely agrees to forego his rights to be paid late, and not merely because he has no

choice, or because he does not dare to claim payment on the same day. In such circumstances, the hirer would be breaching the above negative prohibition.

The best option is for the hirer to tell the worker, “You’re entitled to be paid today, and I’d be willing to do so, but if you are willing to forego this right I’d be grateful”. If the worker then willingly agrees to be paid late, the hirer does not infringe the negative prohibition.

The late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon Rokeach, was also particular about paying non-Jewish laborers on time, and he cited sources for this opinion. (On this whole topic, see also *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* 3:470).

### **RAV CHAIM BRISKER’S YIRAS SHOMAYIM**

*And you shall fear your G-d. I am Hashem. (19:14)*

Rav Zvi Hirsh Farber told Rav Sternbuch that he was once travelling on a train together with Rav Chaim Brisker (who would travel in a regular compartment like everyone else), when one elderly man joined them. Rav Chaim asked him where he had come from, and he replied that he had been at Kotzk to see the Rebbe (presumably a grandson of the first Rebbe). Rav Chaim asked him to repeat a *dvar Torah*, which he had heard from him.

The man replied that the Rebbe had talked about the *possuk* (in *Devorim* 6:13), “You shall fear Hashem your God” – which Chazal expound “to include *talmidei chachomim*”. The plain meaning is that this is an injunction to fear *talmidei chachomim*, but the Rebbe added that *talmidei chachomim* also have to fear Hashem. There are some *talmidei chachomim* who imagine that they do not have to be careful about this area, but the truth is that they too must be careful to fill their hearts with fear of Hashem.

Rav Chaim was very pleased with this *vort*, and did not stop praising it. He said: “You hear what the Kotzker said, *talmidei chachomim* also need *yiras shomayim*! Oy, how right he is, *talmidei chachomim* also need to work very hard to attain fear of heaven”. Rav Farber added that he was very moved to witness the extent to which Rav Chaim was concerned about his own level of *yiras shomayim* and fear of sin.

### **HILCHOS LOSHON HORO**

*You shall not go around as a gossipmonger among your people; you shall not stand by your fellow’s blood; I am Hashem. (19:16)*

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained the connection between these two commandments as follows: Even though we are forbidden from acting as gossipmongers, when *halocho* requires negative information to be conveyed, for example, when we are asked about a certain *shidduch* proposal and we know about defects of the person concerned that are considered significant in the eyes of *halocho*, if we refrain from passing on what we know to the questioner and remain silent, this is the equivalent of standing by his blood, because we could be saving him from damage.

Of course, information should only be disclosed in accordance with the rules set down in *Sefer Chofetz Chaim*. Sometimes information must be divulged, sometimes it must be withheld, and sometimes one should avoid saying anything. These rules are rather detailed, and someone not familiar with them must consult with a *rov*. Rav Moshe Schneider felt that candidates for *rabbonus* should be tested not only on *Orach Chaim* and *Yoreh Deioh*, but also on *hilchos loshon horo*. Since these *halochos* deal with one of the severest prohibitions and are very prevalent, every *rov* must be conversant in them. Rav Sternbuch notes with satisfaction that nowadays there are *talmidei chachomim* conversant in these *halochos* who are available to answer questions.