

פ' אמור תשפ"ג

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RAV STERNBUCH'S *DIVREI CHIZUK* THIS WEEK

Everybody who finishes a *masechta* should feel that he has acquired a great asset, knowing that for each *masechta* Hashem provides an eternal reward. Especially in our generation when so many of our coreligionists are not observant, those who are in the fortunate minority who have been chosen by Hashem to be raised in a religious family should feel special joy for the privilege of being able to utilize every moment and grab the opportunity to learn more and more Torah.

Some *Gedolei Yisroel* did not dream they would ever become *gedolim*, but by toiling in Torah they eventually became *gedolei hador*. Even someone who thinks he has a weak intellect, if he invests his *kochos* in Torah and *yirah*, even though in the initial stages he may encounter difficulties, his toil will eventually become sweet, and the gates of Torah will be opened for him.

Every *bochur* has the possibility of succeeding in Torah. Everything depends on one's willpower; whoever has a strong will and is determined stubbornly to succeed, will succeed. Sometimes at the beginning one remains strong, only to subsequently slacken. However, if one constantly recalls that it is all in our hands, then those who remain steadfast will climb ever-higher heights, and succeed.

Those who come to learn in *Eretz Yisroel* have to maintain an especially high level, because this country is holier than any other, and the *Shechina* resides here. Therefore, one has to be especially careful not to sin against the King in His Palace. This applies even more so in the holy city of Yerushalayim. More than 70 years ago, when Rav Sternbuch moved to *Eretz Yisroel*, he travelled through France and visited Rav Mordechai Programansky. The latter told him how afraid he was to come and live in *Eretz Yisroel*, since Hashem was more particular about every sin there.

Just like there is more sanctity in *Eretz Yisroel*, so too are the powers of *tumah* more prominent over here. Whereas overseas the Gentiles nowadays generally permit Jews to observe their religion the way they see fit, our misguided coreligionists in this country would like us to emulate them and assimilate into their way of life. With this aim in mind, they devise various ways to attempt to lure us away from our holy way of life. Therefore, those who come to *Eretz Yisroel* must be careful to avoid any contact with these people.

NO LEAPFROGGING

"Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them: Let none of you defile himself for a dead person among his people" (21:1)

Chazal say that *amira* refers to soft speech as opposed to *dibbur*, which refers to harsh speech. Here it says *emor el hakohanim* because a person should not be burdened in a harsh way and expected to elevate himself and become holy instantaneously. Instead, he should be addressed softly, in the hope that he will become elevated gradually.

In a similar vein, the *gemoro* says (*Chulin* 105a) that Mar Ukva called himself "vinegar the son of wine", meaning to say that he considered himself wicked compared to his father, because his father would wait twenty-four hours between meat and cheese, whereas he would only wait between two meals. Why did he in fact not conduct himself the same way as his father so that he could attain his level? Rav Elya Lopian answered in the name of the Alter of Kelm that Mar Ukva knew that he was not on such a high level that he could wait 24 hours between meat and milk, and there was therefore no point in trying to leapfrog to a level of *kedusha* that was realistically beyond his reach at that point in time.

In *avodas Hashem*, it is impossible to leapfrog. The only option is to make step-by-step progress based on one's current situation and level.

NO BRIBES

Rashi [*ibid*] notes that the double expression (“Speak... and say”) comes to admonish the adult *kohanim* to be responsible for the little ones. On the plain level, this means that the adult *kohanim* must be careful not to be *metame* the little ones, but the Noam Elimelech interpreted this statement to mean that great people must be careful about small matters, and not imagine that since they have performed great deeds, Hashem will ignore their little sins, because in reality they will have to account for everything.

Similarly, the Ramban (on *Devorim* 10:17) explains that even if a person has performed many *mitzvos* and good deeds with self-dedication, Hashem will still not ignore other sins he has committed just because he is righteous in other respects, but he will rather be held to account for each thought, speech and action. This is what the *possuk* means there that Hashem does not accept “bribes”. Mortals are in the habit of arranging favors for their associates and friends, but Hashem’s greatness lies in the fact that He punishes everybody for their deeds irrespective of their greatness and righteousness, and even if a person gives Hashem pleasure all his life, he will still be punished even for the smallest sin.

In the 1950s, when it was proposed that religious girls be exempted from being drafted into the army or for national service, and the general population would be drafted, most *gedolim* agreed to this proposal, since it was a way of achieving an exemption for chareidi women. However, the Brisker Rov said that since the Torah forbade women from serving in the army, it was forbidden for us to assist in non-religious girls being forcibly recruited, even if as a result we would gain an exemption for religious girls. Citing the above Ramban that Hashem does not accept “bribes”, he said that Hashem will not accept the bribe of our efforts to obtain an exemption for religious girls and thereby forgive our sin of agreeing to the recruitment of non-religious girls.

RISKS AND PRIVILEGE OF OUTREACH WORK

“Let none of you defile himself for a dead person among his people” (ibid)

This *possuk* may be taken as a warning to those who deal in outreach work, which increases the purity of the nation, not to defile themselves in the process. Yeshiva *bochurim* should not engage in activities requiring them to enter irreligious homes, thereby being exposed to forbidden sights and heretical statements. That would constitute a *mitzvah* stemming from a sin, and a person is not permitted to defile himself in order to purify others. Such work should be left to married men who feel capable of meeting such challenges, and following consultation with outstanding *gedolei* Torah (see *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* Vol. 5 Resp. 278). (As an aside, Rav Sternbuch spoke a *Lev Leachim* convention in Bnei Brak several years ago highly praising and blessing the activities of the activists in this outreach organization. Amongst other things, he noted the sorrow the *Shechina* feels since the majority of the nation is still completely detached from religion, and he encouraged activists to feel joy at the privilege of engaging in activities that bring Jews closer to Torah and *mitzvos*).

BEST INVESTMENT

And Hashem said to Moshe, “Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them (21:1)

This *parashah* deals mainly with matters of *kedushah*, and the Torah warns us that specifically in that area, adults must educate children in the path of Torah.

When parents used to come to him for a *brochah* prior to their sons’ Bar Mitzvahs, Rav Yehudah Zev Segal from Manchester would ask to say a few words to the child first. He would take the child’s hand and explain to him his obligations with regard to *kedushah* (in thought, speech, and action).

Afterwards he would explain to the boys’ parents that even though in previous generations people did not talk about these matters so much, nowadays that *tumoh* has become so prevalent everywhere it has become appropriate to speak to boys about them, even before they reach the age of Bar Mitzvah.

Rav Segal told Rav Sternbuch that many boys told him later how he had saved them, because had he not spoken to them, they would not have had any idea what *kedushah* was about.

Furthermore, it says “speak,” and only then “say to them.” Only if a person first tells *himself* how to behave will he succeed in encouraging his children to follow the path of the Torah. A personal example set by a parent has a greater effect on a child than all the admonishments and rebukes he hears from his parent.

Investing in our children’s education is the best possible investment, since in return for our financial and emotional efforts, they will *b’ezras Hashem* grow up to be *talmidei chachomim* and *yerei Shomayim*, and we will reap the benefit of those results for all eternity.

We say in *Krias Shema*: “And all these words that I command you this day shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them to your children.” The Chofetz Chaim says: In order to see whether a person has Hashem’s *mitzvos* engraved on his heart, we have to check whether he fulfills the commandment of “To teach them to your children.” If he invests in his children’s education, not making do with merely sending them to good educational institutions, but always checking how they are doing and who their friends are, that is a sign that the *mitzvos* of Hashem are engraved on his heart and he is truly connected to Hashem, since due to his love of Torah he wants to make sure that his beloved sons learn and observe it.

RAV YISROEL SALANTER’S PSAK TO THE CHOFETZ CHAIM

If a kohen's daughter becomes desecrated through adultery she desecrates her father; she shall be burned in fire (21:9)

Rav Aharon Kotler derived from this *possuk* that the punishment of *bnei Torah* for any sin is greater than the punishment meted out to others, because if the punishment of someone who desecrates the Crown of *Kehuno*, such as this daughter of a kohen, is so great, how much more so the punishment of someone who desecrates the Crown of Torah, which is superior to the Crown of *Kehuno*.

Furthermore, people observe how *bnei Torah* behave, and if they do not behave in a way befitting their status, that desecrates the Divine Name.

It is said that in his youth the Chofetz Chaim was very sick for a short period and unable to learn. He was worried about the *chilul Hashem* that might result if people saw him seemingly idling his time away. He sent a letter to Rav Yisroel Salanter to ask if it was permitted for him to leave an open book in front of him so as to avoid a *chilul Hashem*, or whether this was forbidden as *geneivas da’as* (giving a deceitful impression). Rav Yisroel responded that it was permitted because of *chilul Hashem*, and the Chofetz Chaim acted accordingly.

GREAT PEOPLE’S YETZER HORO

Only a besula of his people may he take as a wife (21:14)

On the plain level the *kohen godol* has to marry a *besula* because in his capacity as the most elevated person, the Torah wants the *kohen godol*’s wife to be someone who will be most likely to form the closest possible bond with her husband (see *Sefer Hachinuch mitzvah 272* and *Sefer Habatim* positive commandment 36).

But the Moshav Zekeinim (by the *Ba’alei Hatsofos*) bring in the name of Rav Yehuda Hachosid that if a *kohen godol* has thoughts about wanting to marry another person’s wife he might pray for her husband to die when he pronounces the Divine Name in the *kodesh hakodoshim* on Yom Kippur

so that he can marry her. In order to deter him from doing that the Torah rules that (unlike an ordinary *kohen*) he is not permitted to marry a widow.

This explanation seems astonishing. On one level, we may suggest that the Torah foresaw a situation where the *kohen godol* is far from righteous, as was the case during the Second *Beis Hamikdash* when the *kehuna gedolo* was bought by wealthy Sadducees, and the Torah therefore prohibited all *kohanim gedolim* from marrying a widow. However, we may also understand it on the basis of the *gemoro* in *Yoma* 21a that one of the ten miracles that took place in the *Beis Hamikdash* was that a *kohen godol* never saw *keri* on Yom Kippur. This implies that were it not for a miracle it would have been natural and expected for that to happen. Rav Dessler told Rav Sternbuch that the forces of *tumah* intensify in the case of a great person, a holy point in time or a holy place, and when these factors merge they are especially intense and likely to create a stumbling block. Hence, on the holiest day and in the holiest place it required a miracle for the holiest person, the *kohen godol*, to be spared from the forces of *tumah*. Similarly, the Torah has to be concerned about the *kohen godol* defiling himself with such a terrible deed as described by the *Moshav Zekeinim*.

When Rav Shimon Shkop was sick in hospital during his later years an elderly nurse came to sleep in the same room. There was no one else in the room and he jumped up and left the room. His students asked him why he did that, after all he was old and sick, and she was old. Rav Shimon replied; “The *yetzer horo* will make me young and her young so that I can sin, so I fled immediately to avoid sinning”.

The power of the *yetzer horo* is immense. It never relents, and specifically when a person is at the peak of a holy experience it will endeavor to bring about his downfall, especially in the case of *tzaddikim* or *baa'lei teshuva* at times that they feel closeness to Hashem. For example, it confuses them with extraneous thoughts when they are praying in order prevent the efficacy of their prayers.

Rav Eliyohu Lopian noted that not only base people have base desires, and it is not a contradiction for elevated people to have base desires too. In fact, if the *yetzer horo* attempts to ensnare great people in such a way it should be taken as a sign that they are indeed great and following the right path, and that they have to run to the *Beis Hamedrash* and immerse themselves in Torah, the only antidote to the *yetzer horo*. In the case of women, Rav Sternbuch heard from the Chazon Ish that *zenius* protects them from the *yetzer horo*, and acts as its antidote.

ABSORBING A TALMID CHOCHOM'S SANCTITY

“And if a *kohen* acquires a person, an acquisition through his money, he may eat of it” (22:11)

Rav Sternbuch heard in the name of a *godol* that the fact that an *eved* is entitled to partake of his master's *terumo* must mean that the *eved* has nullified himself to his master to such an extent that he is no longer considered like a stranger (*zar*) forbidden to eat *teruma*, but rather an integral part of his master. This teaches us that even someone who is not a *talmid chochom* and holy, if he nullifies himself to a *talmid chochom* and *tzaddik* and cleaves to him, seeing to his needs and fulfilling his wishes, this will certainly help him to absorb that *talmid chochom*'s sanctity.

GRATITUDE FOR DAILY MERCIES

“And when you slaughter a thanksgiving offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it so that it should be acceptable [*lirzonchem*: literally: out of your free will] (22:29)

The *Baal Hahafl'o'oh* reads this *possuk* as follows: do not wait to bring a thanksgiving offering until you are forced to bring one after having experienced misfortune and being saved from it, rather bring it *lirzonchem*, out of your own free will, out of a desire to thank Hashem for his blessings on a daily basis every moment of the day, and not just when you were saved from misfortune.

In a similar vein, when thanking Hashem in the *birkas hagomel* for “having rendered *all good* unto me”, we are thanking Him for all the “mundane” favors He bestows upon us on a daily basis, and not just for the “exceptional” favor for which we are giving thanks on the occasion of this *brocho*. By having this in mind when making this *brocho* we make sure not to be tainted with the heretical view that “miracles” come from Hashem, but everything else is merely “nature”, and recognize that the purpose of miracles that Hashem performs for us is to induce us to recognize that Hashem runs our private life every moment, and that everything stems from Him. As the Ramban says, “the purpose of all the commandments is that we should believe in our G-d, and acknowledge that He is our Creator. That is the purpose of creation... and the eternal God’s sole desire is that a person should recognize and thank his G-d who created him”.

FOCUSING ON NEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS

“*You shall keep [Ushemartem] My commandments and perform them [Va'asisem]... (22:31)*

Ushemartem may be translated as “waiting with expectation”. Accordingly, this *possuk* is enjoining us to yearn to perform *mitzvos* with joy and anticipation. Rav Sternbuch witnessed how Rav Moshe Schneider would wait in his *Sukka* in the early morning waiting for *netz* to finally arrive so that he could make a blessing on the *arba minim*. Rav Schneider would perform all *mitzvos* with enthusiasm and joy, waiting eagerly for the opportunity to serve his Creator.

Alternatively, *Ushemartem* may be interpreted as a reference to negative commandments and *Va'asisem* to positive commandments, to teach us that a person’s initial duty is to avoid any sins. Only then does a person enjoy divine assistance to perform positive commandments. If he does not avoid sin, he is surrounded by *tumah* and lacks the *siyata dishmayo* to succeed in performing *mitzvos* properly.

The Chasam Sofer said that the reason why most people’s repentance during the *aseres yemei teshuva* and on Yom Kippur does not last throughout the year is because the main component of *teshuva* and the resolutions one makes in practice during that period pertain to positive commandments, because a person is more reluctant to abandon his negative deeds, such as *loshon hora*, or the desecration of the Divine Name that occurs when people imitate his sins. Since he does not focus on rectifying negative commandments his resolutions regarding positive commandments which he has resolved to remedy are not maintained, because as long as he continues to sin in the area of negative commandments he remains enmeshed in *tumah* and consequently lacks the *siyata dishmayo* necessary to succeed in performing all *mitzvos*.

NO DESPAIR

“... *I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a G-d to you. I am Hashem*” (22:32-33)

A person should not say, “Who am I that Hashem should desire my *avodo*, why should I bother so much to keep *mitzvos* and yearn to perform them”. Instead, he should remember that “*I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt*”. Even when the Jews were immersed in the 49 gates of *tumah*, Hashem still desired them and did not despair of them. Therefore, since Hashem desires us, we should keep *mitzvos* with alacrity in order to give pleasure to Him.