



A Fascinating Insight from the Toldos Yaakov Yosef

One Must Be from the Sons of Aharon to Influence Reshaim to Do Teshuvah but One Must Take Precautions Not to Be Perverted by Them

This week's parsha is parshas Emor. In this essay, we will focus on the opening words of the parsha (Vayikra 21, 1): "ויאמר ה' אל משה אמור אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת: 'אליהם לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו'—Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them, 'To a dead person he shall not become impure among his people.'" Rashi notes the redundant language in the passuk. It says "say" and then "and you shall say." His comment is based on the Gemara (Yevamos 114a): **It is instructing the adult kohanim to teach the younger kohanim not to expose themselves to corpse tumah.**

The sacred sefer Toldos Yaakov Yosef explains the practical implications of this mitzvah. As we know, all of the taryag mitzvos are eternal and far-reaching. So, even mitzvos directed specifically to kohanim or leviim are also relevant to each and every Jew. Hence, we will explore how every Jew can observe this mitzvah and follow the example of the kohanim in their service of Hashem.

He explains that indeed this mitzvah as understood simply was given exclusively to the sons of Aharon; however, it alludes here to the fact that every Jew is like a kohen in some respect. This is evident from HKB"H's pronouncement at Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 6): "וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קִדוֹשׁ"—**and you will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.** This is because their Torah-study and performance of mitzvos constitute forms of holy avodah. Therefore, this mitzvah was given by dint of allusion to every Jew.

Not only should the kohanim embrace the Torah and service of Hashem, but they should also heed that all of their Jewish brothers do not deviate from the proper path. It is incumbent on the kohanim to draw those who have strayed back to the Torah and its mitzvos.

He refers to the illuminating words of the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 128b): **A tzaddik must pursue a rasha and entice him by any means possible to rid him of the perversion caused by his sins. This will subdue the forces of evil, and it will be as if he created the being of the rasha anew. This is one of the most praiseworthy acts one can do in the service of HKB"H. Why? Because he has subdued the force of evil and enhanced the honor of HKB"H. Of this, it is written regarding Aharon (Malachi 2, 6): 'And he turned many away from iniquity.' And it is also written (ibid. 5): 'My covenant was with him.'**

Further on, the Zohar hakadosh elaborates on the wonderful praise and reward in store for any person who strives to return reshaim via teshuvah and draw them back to their Father in Heaven: **Come and see. Anyone who grabs the hand of a rasha and helps him abandon his evil ways, ascends in three ways; no one else ascends in this manner. He causes the force of evil to be subjugated to the force of kedushah; he causes the honor of HKB"H to be enhanced; and he causes the perpetuation of the entire world both above and below . . . He will be privileged to see his children have**

children; he will be meritorious in Olam HaZeh and will be deserving of Olam HaBa. He cannot be prosecuted in Olam HaZeh; and in Olam HaBa, he will be permitted to enter the twelve gates, and no one will object. Of him it is written (Tehillim 112, 2): **“Mighty in the land will his offspring be, a generation of the upright who shall be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Even in darkness a light shines for the upright.”**

With this understanding, the Toldos Yaakov Yosef, explains how this mitzvah at the beginning of our parsha applies to every Jew: **“וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֱמֹר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים**—address the people of Yisrael, who serve HKB”H by studying Torah and serving Hashem; **“בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן**—encourage them to emulate the ways of Aharon, who returned many of their brothers from iniquity and evil; **“וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם**—as Rashi explains, this admonishes the adults to not only adhere to the Torah and the service of Hashem themselves but to also heed that the younger people, who have fallen into the yetzer’s trap and gone astray, return to the commendable, pleasant path of Torah and service of Hashem.

We Can All Aspire to Be “Sons of Aharon”

We can embellish his sacred words regarding the passuk: **“אֱמֹר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן**—by referring to what we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 12): **“הַלֵּל אֹמֵר הוּא**—מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרֵבן לתורה” **Hillel says: Be among the disciples of Aharon—love peace and promote peace, love your fellow creatures and bring them closer to Torah.** The Bartenura comments in the name of Avos D’Rabbi Nasan: **And how did he bring people closer to the Torah? When he was aware that a particular person had committed an aveirah, he would befriend him and greet him with a smile. That person would feel ashamed. For he would say to himself: If this tzaddik was only aware of my evil deeds, he would surely stay far away from me. As a result, he would return to the good (i.e., mend his ways). Thus, the prophet attests to his character (Malachi 2, 6): “He walked with Me in peace and with fairness and turned many away from iniquity.”**

Thus, we see that Hillel HaNasi was explicitly instructing every Jew to emulate the ways of Aharon—to love and promote peace, and to draw every Jew closer to the Torah. Additionally, we have learned in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b): **מעלה, מעלה, ככל המלמד את בן חברו תורה, מעלה, מעלה.”** **Anyone who teaches his friend’s son Torah is considered as if he made him, as it states (Bereishis 12, 5): “And the souls that they made in Charan.”**

We have also learned (Tosefta Horayos 2, 7): **From where do we learn that anyone who teaches his friend one chapter (of Torah), Scripture says of him that it is as if he created him, shaped him, and brought him into the world? For, it says (Yirmiyah 15, 18): “If you bring forth an honorable person from a glutton, then you will be like My own mouth”—like the mouth that threw a neshamah into Adam HaRishon. Similarly, everyone who brings a person under the wings of the Shechinah, it is considered as if he created him, shaped him, and brought him into the world.**

This then is the meaning of the passuk: **“Say to the kohanim”—**those who serve Hashem in each and every generation; **“the sons of Aharon”—**they should strive to emulate the sons of Aharon by fulfilling the words of Hillel HaNasi: **“Be among the disciples of Aharon.”** How is this accomplished? **“Say to them”—**from the redundant language of **“אֱמֹר וְאָמַרְתָּ”** in the passuk, we learn that the **adults are being instructed to guide the younger ones,** to bring them closer to the Torah and service of Hashem. In this manner, they will merit being **“the sons of Aharon”—**as if they were fathered by him, since they learned from him as his disciples to bring others closer to Torah and the service of Hashem.

“To a dead person, he shall not become tamei”— This Is an Additional Warning Not to Be Corrupted by Them

We will now revisit the comments of the Toldos Yaakov Yosef. He explains, accordingly, the continuation of the passuk: **“לִגְבוֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַמִּיּוֹ”**. HKB”H is warning us. While it is indeed incumbent upon those who study Torah and serve Hashem to connect with sinners in order to bring

them closer to the service of Hashem; nevertheless, that is on the condition that they stay vigilant not to be corrupted and contaminated by them. In other words, if someone goes down to lift up someone who has sunk into the depths of tumah, he must first make sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is strong enough not to be perverted, chas v'shalom.

Regarding this matter, we find throughout the books of the Toldos that he cites an interpretation he heard from the great Rabbi Yehudah Leib of Piston, ztz"l, of the passuk (Tehillim 32, 6): **על זאת יתפלל כל חסיד אליך: "על זאת יתפלל כל חסיד אליך—**that for this every devout person ("chassid") should pray to You when misfortune befalls him—that the abundant flood waters do not reach him.**** The "chassid" refers to someone who has descended from his spiritual level to inspire those who have strayed from the proper path to perform teshuvah. Therefore, he must pray to Hashem **"at the time of misfortune,"**—when he must abandon his lofty perch to go down and rescue a fellow Jew who is drowning in the sea of desires and influence him to perform teshuvah—**"that the abundant flood waters do not reach him"**—that he does not drown, chas v'shalom, in those treacherous waters in the process. Rather, he should succeed in his efforts to rescue his companion and return him to good graces.

One Must Secure a Lifeline with HKB"H before Attempting to Save One's Fellow from Drowning Spiritually

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Beha'aloscha) explains how one can go down to rescue his fellow from drowning in the sea of desires without risking that he will drown along with him. He must begin by establishing a secure connection with HKB"H—a spiritual lifeline, so to speak—like tying a rope to oneself above before descending into a deep pit. He elaborates on this concept at length (Nasso). Let us summarize:

A wise person anticipates the consequences before going down to Mitzrayim—before descending from his previous spiritual level. He does so by first establishing an intimate

connection with Hashem . . . Just like someone descending into a pit begins by tying a rope to himself, so that he can climb back out of the pit; this, too, is the advice for Yisrael, who are described as (Devarim 32, 9): "Yaakov, the portion (literally, 'rope') of His possession." They must hold onto this rope (lifeline) that binds them to the Blessed One, so that they can use it to ascend.

Simply understood, before a Jew goes down to rescue a friend from a negative pursuit that has dragged him down spiritually, a Jew must check to see if he himself is strong enough and secure enough in this respect. He must make sure that he has a strong, dependable connection with HKB"H. Only then should he carefully go down to rescue his fellow from his spiritual turmoil. If, however, he himself is not strong enough and secure in this matter, he definitely should not endeavor to rescue others, since there exists a real danger that he, too, might drown.

It is worth noting that the source for this sacred insight is the Zohar hakadosh (Vayeira 112b). Before Avraham Avinu went down to Mitzrayim, the cesspool of the land, he attached a lifeline to HKB"H, so that he would not sink in the tumah of Mitzrayim. Thus, he made sure that he would be able to leave there unscathed, free of sin. In other words, Avraham established his firm emunah prior to going down both to Mitzrayim and to the land of the Pelishtim.

Aharon Established a Lifeline with HKB"H before Fashioning the Eigel

Now, we have presented the exalted interpretation of the Toldos Yaakov Yosef alluded to by the mitzvah: **"אמור אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו"**. Firstly, all of Yisrael were commanded to emulate the sons of Aharon. Secondly, they were warned not sink and be corrupted by the tumah of the reshaim they are trying to rescue. But where is the advice proffered by the Zohar kadosh hinted to here—to first establish a secure lifeline with HKB"H before attempting any rescue missions?

I would like to suggest a wonderful explanation based on a Midrash (V.R. 10, 3) on the passuk (Vayikra 8, 2). It teaches us that Aharon merited becoming the

Kohen Gadol, because he was willing to sacrifice his life and soul by helping Yisrael make the eigel:

“Take Aharon and his sons with him, etc.” This is the implication of that which is written (Tehillim 45, 8): “You love righteousness and hate wickedness” . . . When Yisrael performed that ignoble deed, they originally approached Chur. They asked him to make them a god. When he refused their request, they attacked him and killed him . . . Afterwards, they approached Aharon, asking him to make them a god. Hearing their request, Aharon immediately became fearful. . . He deliberated as to how to proceed. They had already killed Chur, who was a prophet. If they now killed him, a kohen, they would in effect be fulfilling the passuk (Eichah 2, 20): “Should a kohen and a prophet be slain in the sanctuary of Hashem”; they would be exiled immediately. . . Aharon figured that if they make the eigel, they will be held accountable for the despicable act; it is preferable that I be held accountable and not Yisrael. . . HKB”H said to Aharon: For “loving righteousness,” attempting to vindicate My children, and not wishing to hold them accountable (“hating wickedness”), “therefore, Elokim, your G-d, anointed you.” He said to him: By your life, from the entire tribe of Levi, only you will be chosen to fill the position of Kohen Gadol.

Now, in Toras Moshe (Ki Sisa), the Chasam Sofer is perplexed by Aharon’s decision. After all, the prohibition of avodah-zarah falls into the category of sins that one should allow themselves to be killed for rather than transgress them—“יהרג ואל יעבור” --so why did Aharon acquiesce to their request? Furthermore, why did this merit him becoming the Kohen Gadol afterwards?

Here is his enlightening answer: **In the “mussar” sefarim, it is presented in the name of a particular chassid that if it was decreed from above that for a mitzvah we would be punished and for an aveirah we would be rewarded, I would still perform the mitzvah and not the aveirah out of love for Hashem—knowing that it is the will of my Maker to perform the mitzvah . . .**

He explains there that this is the true meaning of “mesiras nefesh.” If we merely sacrifice our lives for the honor of Hashem, we have not sacrificed our souls but only our bodies . . . but if we perform an act that causes the forfeiture of the soul, knowing that one’s soul will descend to hell to be lost forever, and nevertheless one does not desist, because Hashem will be sanctified by this act, this is a true act of “mesiras nefesh.”

Having witnessed the murder of Chur, who sacrificed his life by refusing to make the eigel, Aharon HaTzaddik understood that if he allowed himself to be killed, as well, there would be no salvation for the people of Yisrael. He reckoned that it was preferable that Yisrael survive, even if it meant sacrificing his own soul. He was willing to incur the consequences of “midas hadin,” so that they would be saved. However, He Who discerns what is in a man’s heart knew that Aharon’s intent was for the sake of the love of the blessed Creator—that an entire, prestigious nation not be lost for having committed an aveirah l’shma. Therefore, he and his offspring after him were chosen to fill the role of Kohen Gadol.

Aharon Learned This Lesson from HKB”H

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to reconcile the difficulty posed by the Chasam Sofer. Why was Aharon willing to sacrifice his life by making the eigel with the rationale: **“מוטב שיתלה”**—הסרחון ביולא בישראל—it is preferable that the stench be associated with me and not with Yisrael? Because prior to deciding to save Yisrael from extermination by fashioning the eigel, he used his kedushah to establish a secure connection with HKB”H to ascertain how to navigate those troubled waters. As a result, HKB”H illuminated the way for him. He followed the Almighty’s example depicted in parshas Yisro (Shemos 19, 4): **אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם אלי”**—you have seen what I did to Mitzrayim, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me.

Rashi comments: **The eagle is different from the other birds for it is only afraid of man—that perhaps man will shoot an arrow at it. For no bird soars higher than the eagle, and therefore he places his young on top of him when he flies and says, “Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children.” I too did so** (said Hashem when the Egyptians attacked Bnei Yisrael, as it says in Shemos 14, 19): **“And the malach of G-d travelled, etc., and came between the camp of Mitzrayim, etc.” And the Egyptians would shoot arrows and catapult stones, and the cloud would intercept them.**

In Avodas Yisrael, the holy Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy”a, ponders: Does anyone have the power to shoot arrows against the will of the Almighty prompting Him to proclaim, as it were: **“Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children”?** He provides the following insight:

“אלא הענין הוא כך, כי בשעת יציאת מצרים וקריעת ים סוף, וכן בכל זמן כשמגדיל הבורא ברוך הוא חסדיו על עמו ישראל רוצה המקטרג לקלקל, כמו שאיתא שאמר השר הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה, ומדוע אתה ברוך הוא נושא פנים להם. וזה הקטרוג נקרא חיצים שמורה [גם על קטרוג] בלשון, כמו שכתוב (ירמיה ט-ז) חץ שחוט לשונם וכיוצא בהם.

ואף על פי כן הקב”ה מגדיל חסדו, ודן את דיננו ומוציא משפטינו לאורה ומסיר כל המקטרגים וסותם פיהם. וזה שכינה הכתוב, ואשא אתכם על כנפי שרים, ואומר מוטב יכנס החץ בי, שהקב”ה מסיר הקטרוג מעל עמו ישראל ולא יכנס בהם החץ, ומקבל על עצמו כביכול להשיבם תשובה ניצחת ולהסיר כל תלונה.”

Whenever Hashem is compassionate towards Yisrael displaying His immense chesed—like at the time of “yetzias Mitzrayim” and “Krias Yam Suf”—the prosecuting angels try to intervene by finding fault with their actions. Their allegations resemble arrows. Notwithstanding, Hashem subdues and silences them; He carries us and protects us by absorbing all of the arrows our prosecutors aim at us. He accepts upon Himself, as it were, the responsibility of convincingly refuting their allegations.

“And I shall pass through the land of Mitzrayim”—a Sort of Aveirah L’Shma

We can elaborate on this subject based on a passage in the Midrash (S.R. 15, 5): **Rabbi Shimon said,**

“Great is the love for Yisrael, such that HKB”H revealed Himself in a place of idolatry, a place of filth, and a place of tumah for the purpose of redeeming them.” The commentaries are puzzled by this statement, since, according to the Gemara (Sanhedrin 39a), HKB”H has the status of a kohen. That being the case, how did He enter a place of tumah? A kohen is prohibited to do so.

We find an answer provided by the Bnei Yissaschar (Nissan 4, 7). He refers to the passuk (Shemos 12, 12): **“ועברתי בארץ מצרים כליליה הזו, והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים, ובכל אלהי”** **“and I shall pass through the land of Mitzrayim on this night, and I shall smite every firstborn in the land of Mitzrayim, from man to animal; and I will perform feats against all the gods of Mitzrayim. I am Hashem.”** We find an interesting exposition in the Zohar hakadosh (Bo 36b): Whenever the language **“ועברתי”** **“ועברתי”** **“ועברתי”** is used, it implies that HKB”H disregarded the dictates of **“din,”** so to speak, to act with compassion or **“rachamim.”** They arrived at this exposition based on the passuk (ibid. 23): **“ועברתי ה’ לנגוף את מצרים, מאי ועברתי, שעבר על שורת הדין”** **“Hashem will pass through to smite Egypt.”** **What is meant by “He will pass through”?** **He transgressed (overrode) the dictates of “din.”**

The Bnei Yissaschar explains what this means. On account of His great affection for Yisrael, HKB”H committed an aveirah l’shma, so to speak. This is the implication of His pronouncement: **“ועברתי בארץ מצרים כליליה הזו.”** The term **“ועברתי”** indicates that HKB”H overrode the **“din”** and committed an aveirah l’shma, so to speak, by entering a place of tumah. This explains magnificently, HKB”H’s declaration: **“Better that the arrow will go into Me and not into My children.”** So, even though a kohen is not permitted to expose himself to tumah, in order to save Yisrael, the children of HKB”H, He transgressed the rules of the Torah, the **“din.”**

This enlightens us as to where Aharon learned that it was permissible to sacrifice his life and soul both in Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa. As explained, before making the eigel, he attached himself securely with a lifeline to HKB”H. In the process, he learned from HKB”H that it

is permissible to commit an aveirah l'shma in a time of need. In a sense, that is what HKB"H did during "yetzias Mitzrayim." He entered a place of tumah in order to save His children and explained: **"Better that the arrow go into Me and not into My children."** Therefore, Aharon invoked the directive (Devarim 28, 9): "זהלכת בדרכיו—a Jew should emulate the ways of the Almighty. He adopted the attitude of HKB"H Who said: **"It is preferable that the stench (shame and disgrace) be associated with Me and not with Yisrael."** Hence, he agreed to sacrifice his soul by making the eigel in order to save Yisrael from extermination.

This then is the lesson being taught by the Toldos Yaakov Yosef regarding the eternal mitzvah: **"Say to the kohanim."** This mitzvah is addressed to all those who serve Hashem and study Torah in every generation. **"The sons of Aharon"** encourages us

to emulate the behavior and attitude of Aharon, who descended from his lofty perch to save Yisrael from extermination because of the "cheit ha'eigel." As explained, he bound himself securely to HKB"H with a spiritual lifeline and acted as HKB"H did when He said: **"Better that the arrow go into Me and not My children."** In the merit of his close connection with HKB"H, Aharon was assured: "לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו"—that he would be able to rescue sinners while maintaining his own level of kedushah and purity. This is the message conveyed by Chazal (Avos 5, 18): "כל המזכה את הרבים אין חטא בא על ידו"—**whoever influences the masses to become virtuous, no sin shall come through him.** For, whoever influences the masses and causes them to perform teshuvah, will not transgress or cause others to transgress, since he is afforded divine protection enabling him to maintain his level of kedushah and continue to climb higher spiritually.



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