



In Honor of the Upcoming Lag BaOmer

The Joy of Rashbi's Holy Entourage on Parshas Kedoshim Kedushah Provides a Surrounding Light that Wards Off the External Forces of Evil

This coming, auspicious Shabbas Kodesh, we will read the parshiyos of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim. It is the Shabbas preceding Lag BaOmer, the day on which we celebrate the passing of the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. As such, it is fitting that we examine a pertinent passage in the Zohar hakadosh (Kedoshim 81a) related to parshas Kedoshim and the holy entourage who learned the mystical, hidden parts of the Torah from Rashbi: **Rabbi Abba taught: This parsha (Kedoshim) encompasses the general principles of the entire Torah and the seal of truth—"emet." Exalted secrets are revealed in this parsha related to the ten utterances, decrees and punishments, and heavenly mitzvos. When the colleagues reached this parsha, they were elated.**

Now, the parsha begins as follows (Vayikra 19, 1): **"וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם, איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתותי."** Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: **Speak to the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and say to them: You shall be kadosh, because I, Hashem, your G-d, am kadosh. Every man shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall observe My Shabbasos; I am Hashem, your G-d.** Three mitzvos are juxtaposed in these opening pesukim: **"You shall be kadosh," "every man shall revere his mother and his father," and "you shall observe My Shabbasos."** The first mitzvah is: **"You shall be holy."** The second is: **"Every man shall revere**

his mother and his father." The third is: **"and you shall observe My Shabbasos."** Apparently, these three mitzvos are intimately related. In this essay, we will endeavor to explain this relationship.

Every Jew Must Adorn Himself with an Internal and External Light

Let us begin by examining the first of these mitzvos: **"קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם."** The Ramban explains: In the previous parsha, HKB"H admonished us to avoid illicit relationships and immorality. So, now, HKB"H instructs us to also sanctify ourselves in matters that are optional and permissible: **"קדושים תהיו"**. In the words of the Gemara (Yevamos 20a): **"קדש עצמך במותר לך"**—in other words, do not be a glutton pursuing anything allowed by the Torah to one's heart's content. The Ramban defines such a person as **"נבל ברשות התורה"**—a sordid (morally reprehensible) person within the permissible realm of the Torah.

With great pleasure, we will expand on the practical implications of sanctifying oneself even in matters that are optional and permitted by the Torah. The Bnei Yissaschar (Tishrei 10, 7) writes that it behooves us to consider the benefit and merit of performing mitzvos to a degree above and beyond the basic command. He refers to a fundamental principle taught in the writings of the Arizal (Eitz Chaim 2, 3) that every person must strive to adorn himself with an illumination from Hashem to purify

his corporeal body. Now, there are two forms of this divine illumination. The first is referred to as "אור פנימי"—an internal illumination from Hashem inside a person's body; the second is referred to as "אור מקיף"—an external illumination from Hashem that surrounds the human body from outside. Together, these two divine forms of illumination purify the physical, material human body—from the inside and the outside. Thus, the entire human body, the vessel housing the neshamah, is purified.

**In the Merit of Performing Mitzvos Properly We Are Endowed with an Ohr Penimi
in the Merit of Adding Stringencies We Are Endowed with an Ohr Meikif**

In his own sacred, inimitable way, the Bnei Yissaschar teaches us what acquiring these two divine lights entails. By performing mitzvos punctiliously—as prescribed by HKB"H in Torah she'b'chsav and explained in Torah she'b'al peh—we merit being endowed with the "**ohr penimi**"—the internal light. It is limited to the space available within the human body. Then, by performing mitzvos with stringencies and details beyond the basic requirements, we merit the external adornment of the "**ohr meikif**," which illuminates us externally and is limitless, since it exists outside the physical limitations of the body.

We find corroboration for this fascinating chiddush of the Bnei Yissaschar in the writings of the divine kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Pano, zy"a, in Kanfei Yonah (Part 1, Chapter 1). Here is a loose translation: **The same applies to a person's neshamah; it possesses internal and surrounding (illumination) . . . The internal is limited to the observance of the Torah and its mitzvos; the external is for the purpose of a person voluntarily accepting stringencies upon himself for enhanced kedushah . . . Thus, the "ohr meikif" is above all else and is unrestricted. Therefore, it is far greater than the "ohr penimi."**

We will now return to the illuminating remarks of the Bnei Yissaschar. He goes on to explain the tremendous

benefit that accrues to us from the "ohr meikif" that is earned by embellishing and performing mitzvos more stringently: **The illumination of the "ohr meikif" causes the "chitzonim" (the external, evil forces) to flee.** His source is the teachings of the Arizal (Sha'ar HaKavanas, Birchot HaShachar): **Nothing is more effective at warding off the klipos than the "ohr meikif," since the klipos are incapable of drawing nourishment or latching onto the "ohr meikif." Therefore, it stands outside and has no fear of the klipos.**

From the words of the Arizal, we can appreciate the difference between the "**ohr penimi**" within the body and the "**ohr meikif**" that surrounds the body externally. Due to its limited size, there is concern that the "chitzonim" will receive nourishment from the former. Hence, by being concealed within its bodily vessel, its light is concealed from the external forces of evil; thus, they cannot derive nourishment from it. In contrast, the latter—the "ohr meikif"—is so enormous and extensive that the body cannot contain it. As such, it illuminates and surrounds the human body externally. There is no fear that the "chitzonim" will derive nourishment from it; on the contrary, they flee from it as they would from fire, since it blinds them.

We can now comprehend why the parsha opens with the directive to be holy— "**קדושים תהיו**" – by doing even things that are permissible and optional with greater stringency and enhancement. By initially performing the mitzvos according to the strict letter of the law, we merit being endowed with an "**ohr penimi**" that illuminates and purifies the internal body. Then, by going a step further and sanctifying ourselves by accepting stringencies and embellishing the mitzvos, we earn the protection of an "**ohr meikif**" that wards off the "chitzonim," the first and foremost of which is the yetzer hara. Once it cannot affect us, we can sanctify ourselves to an even greater degree.

Revering One's Mother and Father

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will now address the relationship between "**being kadosh**" and "**revering**

one's mother and father." We will begin by introducing what our holy Rabbis of Belz, zy"a, used to say in the name of the fiery, angelic Rabbi Uri of Strelisk, zy"a. He interpreted the juxtaposition of these two mitzvos at the beginning of our parsha based on a teaching in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **"תנו רבנן, שלשה שותפין הן באדם, הקב"ה אביו—ואמו"****—the Rabbis taught: There are three partners in the creation of a human being—HKB"H, his father and his mother.** Rashi explains that a person's parents contribute the child's physical body, and HKB"H breathes the neshamah into it.

Now, the neshamah is surely perfect. Since HKB"H is holy, therefore the neshamah, which is a godly portion from above, is also holy. For this reason, every morning in Birchot HaShachar, we say: **"אלקי נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא, ואתה משמרה בקרבי"****—my G-d, the neshamah You placed within me is pure; You created it; You fashioned it; You breathed it into me; and You safeguard it within me.** The same is not true of the physical body, which comes from one's parents. There is concern that if the parents are lacking or flawed, then the body they produce might also be imperfect. This may cause their progeny to sin, chas v'shalom.

This then is the interpretation of the opening pesukim: **"קדושים תהיו"**—with respect to the neshamah, which comes from HKB"H, you can rest assured that you will be holy; **"כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם"**—because Hashem, your G-d, is holy. Notwithstanding: **"איש אמו ואביו תיראו"**—the Torah warns us that we must be concerned with respect to the body produced by our parents, which might be flawed.

The "Ohr Penimi" Comes from the Mother the "Ohr Meikif" Comes from the Father

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to embellish their sacred insight regarding the concern related to the parents' contribution: **"איש אמו ואביו תיראו"**—literally, have fear concerning one's mother and father. We will refer to a precious, edifying teaching from our master, the Arizal, in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 10). He asserts that **the "ohr meikif" comes**

to a child from the father, whereas the "ohr penimi" comes from the mother. If both parents had pure intentions, the child will be a consummate tzaddik with a matching "ohr meikif" and "ohr penimi." Conversely, if both parents had impure intentions, the child will be a consummate rasha with a matching "ohr meikif" and "ohr penimi." If the intentions of the father were good but the mother's were bad, the "ohr meikif" of the child will be pure and righteous, whereas the "ohr penimi" will be evil. As time goes on, the "meikif" will prevail over the "penimi," and the child will become a consummate tzaddik, since the "meikif" contains the "penimi" within it and transforms it into a positive force.

We can now appreciate the vital connection between **"קדושים תהיו"** and **"איש אמו ואביו תיראו"**. We are commanded to be holy by accepting upon ourselves added stringencies and preventive measures to abstain from the temptations and cravings of Olam HaZeh, even those that are technically permissible. **"כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם"**—for, just as HKB"H is totally detached from worldly matters, we can emulate Him and also detach ourselves from them. This behavior will endow us with an **"ohr meikif"** that will ward off the **"chitzonim"** and negate their control over us. This is especially important, since we have to be wary of the contributions a child inherits from its parents. If the **"ohr meikif"** and **"ohr penimi"** it inherits are not positive, constructive forces, the person they have created is liable to be a sinner, chas v'shalom.

Nevertheless, by fulfilling the mitzvah of **"קדושים תהיו"**—becoming holy by establishing boundaries and preventive measures even regarding things that are permissible—a person will be fortified with a holy **"ohr meikif,"** as explained by the Bnei Yissaschar. As a result, one can easily overcome and modify any negative influences inherited from one's parents. For, as we learned from the Arizal, a good **"ohr meikif"** is able to transform a bad **"ohr penimi"** into a positive, good force.

The Three Plied Cord: “Be Holy” “Revere Your Father and Mother” and “Observe Shabbas”

We can now address the third mitzvah mentioned at the beginning of the parsha: **“ואת שבתותי תשמורו”—and you shall observe My Shabbasos.** Now, regarding the mitzvah of Shabbas, it is written (Yeshayah 58, 13): **“ויקראת: לשבת עונג לקדוש ה' מכובד וכבודו מעשות דרכיך ממצוא חפצך ודבר”—and if you proclaim Shabbas a delight, and the holy (day) of Hashem honored, and you honor it by not engaging in your own affairs, from seeking your own needs or discussing the forbidden.**

This passuk mentions both the **“oneg”—delight—**of Shabbas and the **“kavod”—honor—**of Shabbas. The Gemara (Shabbas 118a) interprets **“oneg Shabbas”** as eating special, delightful foods on Shabbas. On the other hand, **“kvod Shabbas,”** according to the Gemara (ibid. 113a), means honoring the Shabbas by wearing special clothes—not the same as your weekday attire.

It appears that we can connect this to our current discussion as follows: **“Oneg Shabbas”** is a form of **“ohr penimi,”** since the special food and drink consumed on Shabbas enter into the body; it is internalized. **“Kvod Shabbas,”** on the other hand, is a form of **“ohr meikif,”** since the special clothes worn on Shabbas adorn and surround the body externally. In fact, the Arizal asserts in Sha’ar HaKavanos that the special clothes worn on Shabbas are an **“ohr meikif”** unique to Shabbas.

This explains beautifully the passage of the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 135b) that some recite prior to tefilas Arvis on Friday night: **“בד עייל שבתא איהי אתיחדת: ואתפרשת מסטרא אחרא, וכל דינין מתעברין מינה... וכל שולטני רוגזין ומארי דדינא כלהו ערקין.”** When the Shabbas enters, the holy Shechinah isolates herself and separates from the external (impure, evil) forces; all the forces of “din” leave her; she remains isolated with the holy light . . . and all the powers of anger and prosecutors flee and abandon her. Based on what we have discussed, it is the “ohr meikif” of Shabbas that wards off the “chitzonim.”

Thus, we can comprehend the amazing relationship between the three mitzvos of **“קדושים תהיו,” “איש אמו ואביו,”** and **“ואת שבתותי תשמורו.”** By exhibiting holiness even when performing optional, permissible acts, we merit being endowed with an **“ohr penimi”** related to the performance of the mitzvos and an **“ohr meikif”** related to the enhancement and glorification of the mitzvos. This helps protect us from the possibility of an impure, negative **“ohr penimi”** and **“ohr meikif,”** we may have inherited from our parents. They are rectified by the holiness associated with the stringencies and enhancements we fulfilled the mitzvos with. The Torah then provides us with an additional option; the **“ohr penimi”** and **“ohr meikif”** of the mother and father respectively can be rectified by **“observance of My Shabbasos.”** By delighting in the Shabbas with special foods, we rectify the **“ohr penimi”** emanating from one’s mother, and by wearing special clothes to honor the Shabbas, we rectify the **“ohr meikif”** emanating from one’s father.

Rashbi Revealed the Mysteries of the Torah in the Merit of the Ohr Meikif

Following this sublime path, we will now explain the elation of Rashbi’s entourage associated with parshas Kedoshim. We are familiar with the widespread Jewish minhag to light candles and bonfires on Lag BaOmer, especially at the sacred, consecrated gravesite of the divine Tanna Rashbi in Meiron, to celebrate the day of his passing. The Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3, 3) suggests a wonderful rationale for this minhag; here is a translation of the passage:

It is an accepted (time-honored) Jewish minhag to light candles and bonfires on this day to signify the light—described as “tov”—that begins to shine on this special day. For, Lag BaOmer is 17 (ט"ז) days prior to Matan Torah. Thus, we honor the neshamah of the Torah-luminary, the holy light, that was revealed on this day. On this day, he also ascended to the heights of heaven, and it is the day on which we celebrate him. We will be guided by his light and

will honor his sacred book—the Zohar—that shines from one side of the world to the other, illuminating for us the path through our galus until the arrival of our righteous Mashiach.

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation for this hallowed minhag based on what our master, the Arizal, teaches us in Sha'ar Ma'amarei Rashbi (Zohar, parshas Mishpatim, 100b). Why was Rashbi afforded the privilege of revealing the mystical secrets of the Torah to the world in the Zohar hakadosh? After all, there were those among his teachers and Tannaim who preceded him whose knowledge of Toras hanistar exceeded his. It is because only tzaddikim like Rashbi, who resemble an “ohr meikif,” are capable of presenting the mysteries of the Torah in such a way that they will be understood by those who are worthy.

Satiating Oneself with the Study of Talmud— Ohr Penimi Strolling through the Orchard of the Mystical Torah—Ohr Meikif

With immense pleasure, we will elaborate further. In Likutei Amarim (Chapter 48), the author of the Tanya explains the concept of the “ohr penimi” and the “ohr meikif.” Hashem’s original light was constricted step after step until man was capable of containing it and comprehending it; this diminished light was called “ohr penimi.” The original light of Hashem, which was beyond man’s capabilities, physically and intellectually, was called “ohr meikif.” It illuminated man from the outside, since he could not internalize it. Thus, it seems that the revealed aspects of the Torah, which can be understood by anyone who studies it, is related to the **“ohr penimi”** that penetrates a person’s intellect. In contrast, Toras hanistar, which is beyond human comprehension, is related to the **“ohr meikif”**; it is limitless and illuminates a person from the outside.

I believe that we can corroborate this assertion from what the Rambam writes (Yesodei HaTorah 4, 13) and the ruling of the Rama (Y.D. 246, 4): **I maintain that it is not**

proper for a person to stroll in the “pardes” unless he has filled his belly with bread and meat. “Bread and meat” refer to the knowledge of what is permitted and what is forbidden, and similar matters concerning the other mitzvos. In a similar vein, in his introduction to Eitz HaChaim, Rabeinu Chaim Vital warns that **a person should not contemplate studying the wisdom of kabbalah before studying Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud. For, our Rabbis of blessed memory have already taught that a person should not stroll in the “pardes” unless he has filled his belly with meat and wine; that is akin to a neshamah without a body.**

This teaches us that one should first study the revealed Torah associated with the “ohr penimi,” and only after becoming proficient in Shas and poskim should one begin to study the Toras hanistar associated with the “ohr meikif.” This explains fabulously the specific language employed by the Rambam—comparing the study of the revealed Torah to “filling one’s belly with bread and meat.” After all, food enters the body like the “ohr penimi.” In contrast, studying Toras hanistar is compared to a stroll in the “pardes”—the mystical orchard; there a person enjoys the trees surrounding him externally. This resembles the “ohr meikif” that illuminates a person externally. Through the illumination of both the “penimi” and the “meikif”—the revealed Torah and Toras hanistar—the body is refined from the inside and from the outside.

We can now comprehend the widespread, time-honored, Jewish minhag of lighting many bonfires on Lag BaOmer in honor of the celebration of Rashbi. On this hallowed day, he granted Rabbi Abba permission to commit the Zohar hakadosh to writing. It has become the cornerstone of Toras hanistar throughout the generations. As mentioned above, Rashbi qualified to reveal Toras hanistar, because he was a form of “ohr meikif.” Thus, by lighting bonfires we perform a symbolic gesture to draw the “ohr meikif” from his kedushah—to ward off the “chitzonim” and prevent them from roaming and wreaking havoc wherever kedushah exists.

This enlightens us with regards to the elation experienced by Rashbi's holy entourage on parshas Kedoshim. For, as explained, the mitzvah of "קדושים תהיו" involves sanctifying even permissible, optional acts with added stringencies in order to merit the "ohr meikif."

This command is directed specifically to those who study Toras hanistar, who must sanctify themselves with many layers of kedushah to merit the "ohr meikif" that wards off the "chitzonim" and incinerates them with its intense, magnificent fire.



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