

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS, KEDOSHIM & EMOR

תשע"ט

Towards the end of bein hazmanim, the Yeshiva suffered a tremendous loss. Rav Heshy Pincus passed away. He was with us for the past few years—some knew him well and many did not.

The gemara asks who is a ben olam habboh? We might think it's the people who are the most well-known tzaddikim and rabbonim—the people splashed on the front pages of various publications. But the gemara in Eiruvim says that a ben olam habboh is someone who enters quietly and leaves quietly—totally unassuming, totally unnoticed by the public.

In addition, it is a person who is learning constantly and does not take credit for it. Why not take credit? The Mishnah in Pirkei Ovos tells us that when you learn a lot of Torah, don't feel you are doing something special—this is what you were created for. It's not a big deal, it's not extra. It's really all those who aren't learning who should feel that they have a problem and aren't doing what they are supposed to be doing. If an employee is here in the office from nine-to-five and doesn't goof off, he has nothing to be proud of. That's why he's being employed and being paid a salary.

Some people understand that this is their purpose in this world. This was Rav Pincus.

There is a story in Bava Basra of someone who passed out, briefly left this world, and then was revived. They asked him what he saw while he was in the olam ho'emes. He told them he saw an upside-down world where those who held high positions in this world held low positions in the next, and vice-versa. Why is this so? He explained: "Fortunate is the one who goes there with his learning in hand." The only thing that counts up there is your learning. Those who knew him well knew he was a great talmid chochom, a tremendous masmid and medakdek in halacha, but he invested much of his strength and energy in giving over Torah to talmidim. He was an extremely devoted rebbe and tutor.

The Rambam went through many difficulties and persecutions in his life, but he consoled himself with two things: the time he had to learn Torah and block out the world around him, and the son he had in his later years. He praised his son for the following three attributes: he is humble, he is a baal middos tovos, and he has a subtle understanding of the Torah—in that order.

The Rambam's opinion was that middos are a prerequisite to proper understanding of Torah and reaching olom habboh. And the one middah which one needs to go to the extreme is humility.

Rav Pincus was a tremendous onov and this is why few knew how big a talmid chochom he was. But people who know a fraction of what he knew try to make sure everyone knows about it. Not Rav Pincus.

The gemara, explaining the posuk in Nach, says there is a tzaddik and a rosho, and then there is a whole different level—an oveid Elokim and not an oveid Elokim. The gemara asks, both are tzaddikim—what is the difference? The difference is reviewing your learning 101 times or just learning it 100 times. What is the meaning of this?

The Baal HaTanya and others write that in the times of Chazal, when it was forbidden to write down Torah Shebaal Peh, the only way to ensure the mesorah would be passed down accurately was through enormous investment in review. If you didn't remember it in your head, it was lost forever. So the standard amount of times a talmid had to review his rebbe's teaching was a hundred times. This was the basic requirement and most people stopped there. But some people

weren't satisfied with the basic minimum. They saw Hashem in front of them and didn't settle for just getting by. They cared about the emes and they pursued the emes till the whole thing was absolutely clear. This was Rav Pincus—he was an oveid Elokim. He had an unbelievable pursuit of emes and built himself up to be a massive talmid chochom. But he didn't stop there. He built others up and had an influence on people. His passing is a very big loss specifically for those who came into contact with him and drew inspiration from his humble but powerful love for Torah and avodas Hashem. Those who were only exposed to him in his last year while he was receiving treatments didn't appreciate his full qualities which are very rare in today's world.

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At the end of Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah warns us not to become contaminated with all the arayos. This is what contaminated the nations here before you and led them to be cast out of the land. At the beginning of this section of arayos, the Torah points out that you should stay away from all the abominable practices which the Egyptians and Canaanim—from where you came and where you are going—immersed themselves in. The Ohr HaChaim asks, why does the Torah bother telling us that Egypt is where they came from and Canaan is where they are going? We know this from the whole narrative of the Torah!

Egypt was a fully corrupt society, full of abominations, and Canaan was similar. Yet Klal Yisroel, in the midst of everything, still kept themselves guarded from arayos. The nations scoffed at the assertion that Klal Yisroel kept pure in Egypt. How could their women stay untouched while under the rule of their znus-crazy masters? But Hashem Himself testified that they remained pure throughout the golus.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that Jews throughout the ages might be tempted by the surrounding culture and make excuses to assimilate. They'll rationalize and say: "How can we be expected to keep the Torah which goes against all the values and standards of behavior that we see all around us? The Torah wasn't designed to be kept in our day and age!" To this the Torah responds that even when surrounded by the decadent culture of Egypt and Canaan which Klal Yisroel found themselves, Hashem still demanded of them to keep a higher standard. We are always able to maintain our level of kedushoh.

After Acharei Mos we have Parshas Kedoshim and the mitzvah of Kedoshim Tihyu.

Rashi explains that to be kodosh in the area of arayos you need to do more than just not violate the prohibitions. You have to create an environment of prishus and make boundaries. This need for boundaries in arayos is needed today more than ever. Our society is so steeped in the thrills of breaking down boundaries in arayos.

The Ramban goes further and explains that one has to make his life kodosh in all areas and not be dominated by the pursuit of pleasures of the body. It is a mitzvah of the Torah—like the Rambam's mitzvah of lo sosuru—to have a lifestyle of kedushoh—to be focused on spirituality and not be preoccupied by taivoh.

There are two aspects to the created world—the spiritual realm and the physical realm. Human beings are unique in the sense that they have an ability to straddle both realms simultaneously. But one usually takes dominance over the other, and our obligation is to make the spiritual dimension dominate the physical dimension. This is kedushoh.

Klal Yisroel are not like other nations of the world whose life goals are physical prosperity and increasing one's power and pleasure. These goals are antithetical to the Torah's values and we have to struggle to not adopt them as our own.

Pesach is a Yom Tov to connect to Hashem and elevate our neshomoh. But unfortunately, you see the advertisements in the media about all the Pesach hotels and vacations which boast all the food and alcohol and entertainment you could possibly want. Complete physical indulgence and luxury for the 8 days of Pesach. This is what we were given Yom Tov for?

Now there is nothing wrong with having physical enjoyment. There are four cups of wine that we drink on the Seder night and they can be a quality wine that is enjoyable to drink. But to spend a thousand or two thousand dollars on wine and alcohol for Yom Tov? That is simply over the top—an over-emphasis on the physical side of our existence. It is a violation of kedushim tihyu or lo sosuru. The goal of a Jew's life is avodas Hashem. We are a mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh.

The first mitzvah in Parshas Emor states that kohanim may not usually become tomei meis. Rashi quotes Chazal who comment that there is a special mitzvah for the adult kohanim to train their children to avoid tumoh.

We see that there are different aspects to the mitzvah of chinuch.

The basic aspect of chinuch is for parents to teach and inspire their children to keep Torah and mitzvos generally. The goal is that they will continue to keep Torah and mitzvos on their own when they become bar mitzvah. But there is no specific mitzvah of chinuch to make sure children keep the minutiae of halacha. That is only miderabbonon.

But there are three exceptions: Parents of kohanim have to see to it that their children do not become tomei meis; parents have to see to it that their children keep Shabbos and not do melacha; and that parents have to see to it that children don't eat non-Kosher food.

The Rambam identified the theme that runs through these three mitzvos in particular: Living a life of kedushoh. Kedushoh is a way of life and we have to train for this way of life from the very beginning.

When you train a child to only eat kosher you are sending a message:

you can't just satisfy your physical drives at a whim—eating whatever is around whenever you are hungry. You have to stop and think and sometimes exercise self-restraint and delay your gratification. The physical isn't dominant—this is kedushoh.

When you train a child to keep Shabbos and refrain from melacha, you are sending a message—physical manipulation of the world and development of the world has to stop for 25 hours. You show with your rest from work that developing the world is not the goal of life—it is a means to a higher spiritual end of devoting time to connect to Hashem.

A Kohen has to maintain a separate level of kedushoh in order to enable him to do the avodoh.

Kedushoh is an absolute obligation, as the Ohr HaChaim states. It is not a mere suggestion or a higher level for tzaddikim. It is a way of life that needs training and discipline. It is no excuse that we are engulfed in a society of arayos and chasing physical pleasure. We maintained our distance from arayos in Egypt and we can do it anywhere.

We are Hashem's representatives in the world and our neshomos are primary and our body is secondary. We live in a world where spirituality is completely absent from people's minds. But, a life of kedushoh is a major theme of the Torah and it is what unifies all three parshyos.

Rav Pincus taught us how a real Jew lives—pursuing the truth in total simplicity, devoting his entire life to coming closer to Hashem, and helping others do the same. It only happens by shutting out everything that takes us away from the values of the Torah. The only way Klal Yisroel survives the nisayon of arayos is by being totally removed from it and setting up boundaries.

Our world has gone absolutely crazy in its worship of the body. The P.R. slogan for Tel Aviv to attract tourists is that it is "a temple of the body." There can be no greater desecration of kedushas Eretz Yisroel than this. And the Torah warns us that when we defile the land with arayos, the land itself will spit us out! Eretz Yisroel cannot tolerate such tumoh.

Wherever you are, in every society, we need to live a life of kedushoh and teach and train our children in a life of kedushoh.