



bracha to Hashem. What does “blessing Hashem” mean? The Nefesh Hachayim explains that through our bracha we increase Hashem’s involvement in this world and strengthen the positive spiritual forces in this world. Kloloh means trying to remove Hashem’s presence and sever Hashem’s connection to this world. This is being megadef.

There are many midroshim on this incident. They revolve around one theme. Klal Yisroel take deep pride in all the gedorim we put into place against arayos. The halacha places heavy restrictions on arayos.

Yichud is a very challenging set of halachos. Frum Jews in the business world encounter nisyonos constantly in this area—shaking hands, etc. But as I know from what my talmidim tell me, the moment the person makes a slight compromise in these gedorim, it starts him down a slippery slope which often ends in tragedy. Once you set firm boundaries at the beginning and don’t compromise, the people around you get the message—you are holding yourself to a higher standard. After a while, they don’t even try to get close to you. The prohibition of physical contact with women and yichud can be inyonei deoraisoh which are designed to preserve the kedushoh of Klal Yisroel.

So in the midst of the parsha which talks about kedushoh we read a story about the lone woman who violated those gedorim and was mezaneh. In Bamidbor, the Torah testifies by putting the Shem Koh around the names of the families of the Shevotim—that the offspring of Shevet Yehudah are actually theirs. It was no simple feat to remain pure under the pressure of subjugation in Egypt. It is known that women will get better treatment if they offer themselves to those who have power over them. But for the Jewish women, purity from arayos was paramount and they did not compromise.

Bilaam recognized this trait of tznius in Klal Yisroel. It goes all the way back to Soroh Imeinu and Yosef Hatzaddik. Both of them found themselves in a society of total decadence and arayos. Klal Yisroel kept their core values—even in Egypt—and they didn’t succumb. Chazal say Soroh Imeinu and Yosef Hatzaddik made gedorim in Egypt to preserve their purity.

In today’s world, we live in a society that is full of znus. Without gedorim, there is a slippery slope. Not everyone goes out to the world because it is just too dangerous for their ruchniyus. But even when one stays at home, there is the exposure of the internet. The internet is a tool that can be used for so much good—so much Torah is being learned now in these times because of this tool—shiurim, chavrusos, etc. But it can be such a source of impurity and evil, and it drags people down to the depths very quickly.

The Ramban writes in Iggeres Hakodesh that there is nothing intrinsically evil in Hashem’s world. Everything He created is neutral. Human hands can be used for creating objects of kedushoh such as a Sefer Torah and it can perform acts of unspeakable tumoh, such as murder. It can be used in any direction. Technology is the same thing. We need to set up gedorim on top of gedorim—like Soroh Imeinu when she was taken to Pharaoh’s house.

It doesn’t happen by itself. A person has to be conscious about his situation and be realistic about his own weaknesses and his temptations. Yosef was in Egypt and was still learning Torah—mentally he was connected to his father’s household and constantly had Hashem’s name on his lips. Still, the wife of Potiphar pursued him

to the point where she grabbed his cloak to seduce him. Yosef was honest with himself and realized that he has no strength to stay and resist—he simply has to run away—even if it means leaving behind incriminating evidence. He knew that if he remained in that situation a moment longer, who knows what he is capable of doing?

This is why I am personally very conflicted about conducting the Yeshiva sedorim over the internet.

One cannot afford to rely on his own resolve and say “I can trust myself”. It is a mistake. Parents often tell me: “I can trust my child”. I tell parents, giving their children unrestricted internet access is like giving their child three bottles of vodka and the keys to the car and telling them to have a good time. Saying they trust them to stay safe is foolish. No parent would do something so irresponsible. It is an absolute obligation to set up gedorim upon gedorim for one’s internet access.

We learn it from this week’s parsha. The midroshim say even Soroh Imeinu didn’t trust herself. She made gedorim for herself. Yosef didn’t trust himself. It is not a sign of weakness to admit one needs to set up gedorim to keep themselves from faltering—it shows maturity, responsibility and a striving for kedushoh.

All the women of Klal Yisroel set up gedorim for themselves to remain kodosh—besides one woman who apparently thought these gedorim were excessive—she was shmoozy and didn’t want to stifle her expressive personality. She certainly thought nothing would come out of a little friendliness. But she was wrong and wound up being the only Jew who committed znus in the 210 years of being in Egypt. She was poretz geder and went down the slippery slope.

We have a very peculiar period in human history and in Jewish history. Millions of people are locked up in their homes and are physically isolated from other people. The only connection we have is through electronic devices. The Rambam says a Kiddush Hashem is when we overcome temptations that no-one else knows about—we refrain from aveiros just because it is the will of Hashem.

Why is it that we must have safeguards over our devices and all the protection possible? Because it is a huge nisayon. We have to be afraid of our weaknesses. Yosef had a choice in front of him—either to be with the wife of Potiphar in olom haboh or with his father. He chose to be with his father. He didn’t trust himself to be with her for another three seconds!

Everyone knows my views about internet and smartphones. Especially now, when everyone is stuck in their houses connected to all these devices, we have an unprecedented opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem that the Rambam talks about. We can make sure to separate ourselves from aveiros that no-one will know about. Hashem is always there and He knows. That is why we don’t succumb to temptation. This is the biggest mitzvah.

This parsha is talking to us directly in our situation about maintaining and protecting our higher standard of kedushoh—even in the midst of a decadent environment full of znus and arayos. At the end of the day it is an enormous challenge being at stuck home looking at our computers all day long. Let’s not kid ourselves. It can be used for good and evil, and we need to set up those gedorim to ensure that it remains only for tov.