

HOLINESS - SERVED FRESH

by Shlomo Katz

Parashat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim

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Today's Learning:
Taharot 10:3-4
O.C. 202:10-12
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chullin 99
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 14

Much of this week's parashah is devoted to describing the sacrificial service that the Kohen Gadol was required to perform whenever he entered the Kodesh Ha'kodashim / The Holy of Holies. The Torah says (Vayikra 16:2), "He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary . . ." Why not?

Rashi explains: "Because My Shechinah is revealed there, Aharon should be careful not to enter regularly." R' Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l (1902-1979; Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva in Shanghai and Yerushalayim) elaborates, saying: "Habit is the greatest enemy of one who wishes to feel holy and uplifted. When one stands opposite that which is sublime and exalted, and in his soul burn sparks of a holy fire, habit sneaks in and douses the embers one by one until the entire fire is extinguished."

R' Shmuelevitz continues: The prophet Yechezkel writes (46:9), "When the populace comes before Hashem on the appointed days, whoever comes in by way of the northern gate [of the Temple] to prostrate himself shall go out by way of the southern gate, and whoever comes in by way of the southern gate shall go out by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he came in; rather, he shall go out opposite it." R' Yosef Yaavetz z"l (died 1507) explains that Hashem does not want a person to see one of the gates twice, lest he equate it in his mind with the gate of his own house. Likewise, one should not see the same wall of the Bet Hamikdash twice lest he equate it with the walls of his own house. In fact, writes R' Yaavetz, this is what caused the sin of the Golden Calf, for they took the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting for granted and began to despise it. Therefore, after the sin, we read (Shemot 33:7) that Moshe dismantled the Tent and rebuilt it outside of the camp. (Sichot Mussar 5731, No. 16)

"Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled . . ." (18:3)

The Midrash on this verse comments: "Thus it is written (Shir Ha'shirim 2:2), 'Like the rose [maintaining its beauty] among the thorns, so is My faithful beloved among the nations.' This [says the Midrash] refers to Rivka who lived with her deceitful brother Lavan and among other deceitful people, but she maintained her righteousness."

R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; died 1922) writes that this verse is warning us not to feel as if we have settled comfortably in our place of exile and must act like the other nations in an attempt to gain equal rights. That is what the Jewish people did in Egypt, and only one-fiftieth (2%) of the nation survived spiritually and took part in the Exodus, according to one opinion among the Sages. Says the verse: "Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt." What was that practice? "In which you dwelled . . ." That you settled comfortably there. Rather, see yourself like a rose among the thorns, standing out in your uniqueness and beauty, just as our Matriarch Rivka was among her own family members.

(Torat Yechiel)

"You shall rebuke your fellow . . ." (19:17)

Knowing when and how to deliver rebuke is always a difficult task. The following story relates to this dilemma.

R' Moshe Yosef Teitelbaum z"l was Rabbi of Zabarov. Once, during his derashah (sermon), he said, "You might wonder, 'Who is this rabbi that he should rebuke us?' Let me explain with a parable:

"There was a town which had a fire chief, whose job it was to sound the alarm whenever a fire broke out. Once, a visitor to the town saw a fire breaking out, and instead of notifying the fire chief, he sounded the alarm.

"The fire chief was very upset that his job had been usurped, but any right-minded person would laugh at this fire chief. When the fire is raging, every able-bodied person must rush to fight the blaze.

"So it is with me," concluded Rav Teitelbaum. "When I see that the city is on fire, so-to-speak, I must do what I can to quell the flames."

(quoted in Tamar Yifrach)

"When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree . . ." (19:23)

R' Avraham Saba z"l (Spain and Turkey; died 1510) observes that G-d has implanted in man an inborn desire to preserve the world, as Kohelet states (3:11), "He has also put ha'olam / the world into their minds." Were this not the case, every person would say, "Why should I bother planting when someone else might end up eating my produce?"

(Tzror Ha'mor)

The Midrash on our verse cites the same verse from Kohelet that R' Saba cites, and it notes that the word "ha'olam" is spelled without the letter "vav." As a result, the verse from Kohelet can be read: "He has also put he'ellem / enigma into their minds." Says the Midrash, Hashem has hidden man's day of death from him, for if man knew when he would die, he would not plant and he would not build. That would be wrong. Just as each generation finds the world planted and built-up, so it must plant and build for the generations that follow. Regarding this, Hashem says, "Take your example from Me, for I have no use for what I plant, yet it is written (Bereishit 2:8), 'Hashem Elokim planted a garden in

Eden'."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

Pirkei Avot

"Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says, 'If one's fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. If one's wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure'."

(Chapter 3)

At first glance, says R' Yoel Teitelbaum z"l (the Satmar Rav), this teaching seems to contradict Hillel's teaching in the prior chapter: "An empty person cannot fear sin." Really, though, the two statements are consistent, as follows:

A person is not either a talmid chacham / Torah scholar or an am ha'aretz / ignoramus. There are intermediate steps. Hillel is teaching that a person who is completely empty of Torah cannot fear sin. One must have acquired at least some Torah knowledge to begin to fear sin. However, one cannot be a talmid chacham until he has first attained a significant measure of fear of sin. This is what Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa is teaching.

Alternatively, Hillel and Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa are speaking of different levels of fear of sin. The Zohar teaches (Introduction, p. 11b) that there are three different reasons why people fear sin. Two categories of people are merely afraid of being punished - one group fears punishment in This World, for example, harm to their families or livelihoods, while the other fears punishment in the World-to-Come. Both of these are lower forms of fear / Yirah because the focus of the Yirah is actually one's self, not G-d. The higher level of Yirah is the fear of severing one's relationship with G-d. This is called "Yirat Ha'romemut," loosely translated, "Awe." Our Mishnah is teaching that fear of sin - i.e., fear of punishment - must precede the acquisition of Torah wisdom. Hillel, on the other hand, is teaching that wisdom must precede Yirat Ha'romemut.

(Kuntres Chiddushei Torah)

R' Menachem Mendel z"l of Shklov

R' Menachem Mendel ben R' Baruch Bendet was one of the leading students of the Vilna Gaon and

the publisher of many of the Gaon's works. R' M.M. was born in approximately 5510 / 1750 and he died on Rosh Chodesh Adar 5587 / 1827. He wrote of himself in the introduction to his work Sha'ar Ha'tzimtzum:

I am an ignoramus among men; what is man that You should acknowledge him? However, Elokim saw my lowliness and my suffering, and He brought me to the house of "Admor" / our master, our teacher and our rabbi, the Gaon / genius and Chassid / pious one, the rabbi of all the sons of the diaspora, in Vilna. Hashem gave me favor in his eyes and I served him with all my strength. For all of the two years minus one third that I was with him, I did not move from him, I held him and did not let go, and I did not leave his tent day or night. Where he went, I went; where he slept, I slept; and my hand did not leave his at all. He opened for me the door to wisdom [apparently referring to Kabbalah], and he told me several things which serve as valuable doorways; also what he said to others, I heard and understood . . . His merit and the merit of my righteous ancestors stood by me to bring me to the Holy Land to make my home in the holy city of Tzefat, may she be built and established speedily in our days, and there, with G-d's help, I established study halls full of books for Torah study and prayer. However, this was a small matter in His eyes, and He brought me to Yerushalayim, the city of our holy Elokim, and there, too, the Holy One Blessed Is He and those who fear Him aided me, and with G-d's help, I established a study hall and a shul for Torah study and prayer.

R' M.M. continues, explaining that he has the opportunity to rebuild one of the old Ashkenazi shuls of Yerushalayim and that he is publishing a sefer to raise money for that effort.

In the above excerpt from R' M.M.'s writings, he alludes to his settling in Eretz Yisrael in 1807 at the head of a sizeable contingent of the Vilna Gaon's students and their families. A non-Jewish traveler who visited Eretz Yisrael in 1824 refers to R' M.M. as the Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazic Jews and writes, "We must praise his great love for G-d, even though he does not share our beliefs." This traveler also describes how, during his stay, Arabs jailed and tortured R' M.M. and other Jews until the Jewish community paid a ransom of 4-1/2 bags of silver. (Gedolei Hadorot p. 494)

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