PURE WORDS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Emor

Pure Words

Volume 24, No. 28 17 Iyar 5770 May 1, 2010

Sponsored by the Rutstein family in memory of mother Bessie Rutstein (Pesha Batya bat R' Zemach a"h)

Today's Learning: Nach: Tehilim 27-28 Machshirin 4:10-5:1 O.C. 466:5-467:1 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 78 Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 4

The Midrash Rabbah on this week's parashah opens by citing the verse, "Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, [and say to them, `Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a dead person among his people,']" and comments: Rabbi Tanchum ben Chanilai opened his discourse with the verse (Tehilim 12:7), "The words of Hashem are pure words; [like purified silver, clear to the world, refined sevenfold]." The words of G-d are pure words, but the words of a human being are not pure words. The way of the world is that a king visits a province and everyone praises him. Pleased with this praise, the king promises that the next day he will build buildings, bathhouses and aqueducts. If he goes to sleep and does not wake up the next day, what will become of his words? Hashem is not like that, for He is truth. Why is He truth? Rabbi Eliezer says: He is the G-d Who is Life and He is King of the world. [Until here from the midrash]

R' Shmuel Yafeh Ashkenazi z"l (Turkey; 1525-1595) explains: The opening verse of our parashah contains a seeming redundancy, for it says, "Emor / Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, v'amarta / and say to them." Later, in a passage not quoted here, the midrash will explain that the double "saying" alludes to two mitzvot given to kohanim that relate to purity--not to come in contact with corpses and to prepare the parah adumah. However, the style of the midrash is to comment on tangentially related verses, such as the quoted verse from Tehilim which also repeats the term "imrot" / "words." ["Emor" and "imrot" share the same root.]

What is the midrash teaching? That Hashem is the only being whose word is entirely true, for He is the only one capable of keeping all of His promises, as He alone exists forever. (Yefeh Toar)

****

"Command Bnei Yisrael that they take to you clear olive oil, pressed for lighting, to kindle a continual lamp. Outside the Curtain of the Testimony, in the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting, Aharon shall arrange it . . ." (24:2-3)

The Mishkan (and later the Bet Hamikdash) was comprised of three parts. The innermost section was the Kodesh Ha'kodashim / Holy of Holies, where the aron with the luchot was stored. The outer part was where the altar was located and where most of the day-to-day service occurred. The middle part, the Ohel Mo'ed (separated from the Holy of Holies by a curtain), was where the menorah was located.

Commentaries note that, in our verse, the menorah is described as being, first, "Outside the Curtain of the Testimony," and second, "In the Ohel Mo'ed." In contrast, in Shmot (27:20-21), we read, "Now you shall command Bnei Yisrael that they shall take to you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually; in the Ohel Mo'ed, outside the Partition that is near the Testimonial-tablets, Aaron and his sons shall arrange it"--first, "In the Ohel Mo'ed," and second, "Outside the Partition."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: The menorah is the symbol of the flow of sechel / intellect and understanding to the Jewish People. Thus, the placement of the menorah teaches us about the role of sechel in our service of Hashem.

One part of our service involves deeds. This does not primarily involve sechel, for the key is to do the mitzvot whether we understand them or not. The other part of our service, however, is the chovot ha'levavot / the intellectual duties. This service primarily uses the sechel. At their extreme, the chovot ha'levavot include understanding the reasons for the mitzvot; however, these are very deep secrets which are not for every person.

In Sefer Shmot, the command regarding the menorah is addressed to Moshe Rabbeinu personally--"Now you shall command Bnei Yisrael." As far as Moshe was concerned, his intellect could take him even inside the Holy of Holies, for he understood the deepest secrets of the Torah. Thus he was told to put the menorah "in the Ohel Mo'ed," not in the section where the day-to-day physical service occurred. Nevertheless, for the benefit of Bnei Yisrael, it could only be near, not in, the Holy of Holies-- "outside the Partition."

In our parashah, in contrast, there is not the same emphasis on Moshe Rabbeinu. From Bnei Yisrael's perspective, the focus of serving Hashem is on deeds, not deep thoughts. Thus, the menorah's location is described first as being, "Outside the Curtain of the Testimony," i.e., not in the Holy of Holies. Even so, the chovot ha'levavot are not entirely discounted; thus the menorah is described as being "in the Ohel Mo'ed." (Me'orot Ha'Rayah: Chanukah p.64)

****

Pirkei Avot

Ben Zoma says, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion."

R' Yoel Sirkes z"l (the Bach; 1561-1640) explains: Every person's earnings are made up of two parts - the portion that a person is obligated to gives as terumah, ma'aser, and charity, and the portion that is his to enjoy. Some people are not happy unless they keep both shares for themselves, but a truly wealthy person is the one who is content with keeping his own portion and giving the other portion to its rightful recipients. (Meishiv Nefesh: Introduction)

****

R' Yose says, "Whoever honors the Torah will himself be honored by people."

Rashi z"l explains: This refers to a person who does not put a sefer [e.g., a chumash or siddur] on a bench on which someone is sitting.

****

Rabbi Elazar Hakappar says, "Kinah (usually translated `jealousy'), lust and honor remove a man from the world."

Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain; died 1263) writes: The term "kinah" covers a number of different attitudes. The worst kinah is that of a person who hates those who love Hashem and do His will. This is the kinah that "removes a man from the world." The second type of kinah is that of a person who does not hate the ways of Hashem, per se. However, he is uncomfortable around those who are more religious than he because they are different than he is, so he wants them to be like him. After all, if his way is good enough for him, it should be good enough for everyone else. Such a person, writes R' Yonah, also deserves the title, "One who hates Hashem."

There is also a good form of kinah, i.e., the feeling of one who sees holy people and wise men and is moved by jealousy to be like them. About this attitude, our Sages say (Bava Batra 21a), "Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom." (Even so, writes R' Yonah, this is not the ideal motivation for serving Hashem. Rather, one should learn Torah and perform mitzvot because that is G-d's will. Indeed, one who goes in the right path voluntarily will serve Hashem more perfectly than one who does so because of peer pressure.)

R' Yonah continues: There also are different levels among those whose kinah focuses on wealth. The worst is a person who cannot stand to see the success of others. Not as bad, is one who does not resent others' wealth, but who compares himself to them and feels that he deserves at least as much or more. The least bad is one who does not look at what others have, but who is not happy with what he has. (Commentary to Avot)

****

Shabbat Leftovers

The Gemara (Sukkah 45b, as explained by Rashi z"l) states: "If one observes the day after yom tov with food and drink, the Torah views it as if he built an altar and offered a sacrifice."

Why is it praiseworthy to make a feast on the day after yom tov? And, why is this likened to bringing a sacrifice?

R' Avigdor Nebenzahl shlita (rabbi of the Old City of Yerushalayim) explains: One of the mitzvot that was fulfilled in the Bet Hamikdash was bringing a korban chagigah / a festival offering. Because a chagigah is a korban shelamim, the law is that it may be eaten for two days. But, one might be reluctant to bring such a sacrifice when there is only one day remaining in the holiday (for example, on the last day of Pesach). In order to encourage the bringing of sacrifices even on the last day of yom tov, our Sages taught that it is meritorious to eat a festive meal on the day after yom tov. Such a meal honors the holiday by giving people a reason to bring sacrifices.

Today, too, in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, a person will cook more in honor of yom tov knowing that he will have a use for the leftovers. Thus, eating a meal after yom tov honors the holiday even today.

R' Nebenzahl continues: This may also be a reason for the obligation to eat a melaveh malkah meal after Shabbat. If one knows that he will have a use for any leftovers after Shabbat, he will cook more in honor of Shabbat.

This also may explain an enigmatic passage in Tanach, writes R' Nebenzahl. In Shmuel I (20:5-just prior to the haftarah for Shabbat which is Erev Rosh Chodesh), David and Yehonatan plan to meet on the second day of the Rosh Chodesh feast. But how did they know in advance that there would be a second day of Rosh Chodesh, when there was not yet a fixed calendar and Rosh Chodesh would be only one day if the new moon was spotted when it first appeared? R' Nebenzahl explains that the two days referred to are not two days of Rosh Chodesh but rather two days of a Rosh Chodesh feast, i.e., two days of eating the korban shelamim brought in honor of Rosh Chodesh. (Yerushalayim B'moadehah: Shabbat p.65)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is $36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.