

RE-JEW-VENATION

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Emor. Emor begins with the laws which apply only to Kohanim. "Emor el haKohanim bnei Aharon v'amarta aleihem l'nefesh lo yitama b'amav (say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them: do not defile yourselves by coming in contact with a corpse) [21:1]."

There are two terms that are used throughout Tanach (acronym of Torah, Prophets and Writings) for speaking: 'va'yedabare' - usually defined as 'speak' - and 'vayomer' (a slightly different grammatical form of the root word 'emor') - usually defined as 'say'. Throughout the Torah, the term 'va'yedabare' is usually used. Throughout the Prophets, the term 'vayomer' is used.

When Hashem commanded Yehoshua to set aside cities of refuge for those who killed inadvertently, the term 'va'yedabare' is used. The Talmud [Makkos 11A] explains why this harsh term of 'va'yedabare' was used in the Prophets. Hashem was commanding Yehoshua to fulfill a law of the Torah - He therefore used the harsher Torah term.

If so, why, in the Torah, does Hashem command Moshe regarding the special laws of the Kohanim using the 'softer' term 'emor'? Furthermore, why is there a seeming redundancy, with that term being used twice (say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them)?

Rav Moshe Feinstein z"l explains in the following manner. The Kohanim were designated to be the spiritual leaders of our nation. They, being sanctified through their additional laws of purity, were to lead us by example. We were commanded to bring sacrifices at different times of the year to Yerushalayim and to eat certain tithes in Yerushalayim. These frequent visits to Yerushalayim and the ensuing contact with the Kohanim would provide the necessary rejuvenation (re-Jew-venation?) that we needed.

That is from the perspective of the non-Kohanim who come and learn from these Kohanim. The Kohanim themselves have the difficult responsibility of accepting upon themselves all of these added obligations and prohibitions. The Torah, therefore, uses the 'soft' term of 'emor' when introducing these laws to the Kohanim. The Kohanim have to realize that in order to effectively teach and serve as an example to the nation, these laws can't be a burden to them. They must be 'soft', light, a pleasure to carry. They must accept it with happiness and pride. Otherwise, they are not worthy to serve as Kohanim.

Rav Moshe explains that the same applies to those who are involved in chinuch (Jewish education). There are often many difficulties involved, be they difficult students, difficult material to teach, difficulties with the parents or financial hardships. Nevertheless, all of the above must be accepted with happiness and a sense of overriding pride in the crucial work that is being accomplished. If it is a burden, then the person and certainly the students, would be better off if a different occupation would be chosen.

Rashi explains that the repetition of the term `emor' teaches "l'haz'hir gedolim ol ha'k'tanim" - that the gedolim (adults) are warned to educate the k'tanim (youth). Rav Moshe explains that the same understanding of `emor' applies in this situation. Children don't necessarily listen to what they are told to do - they are best at following examples. If they see that the parents love what they are doing, then they will follow suit. Even if they hear that the parents overcame very difficult tests in observing mitzvos, they won't necessarily do the same. 'My parents are very strong... I'm not.' However, when they see that the mitzvos aren't difficult at all, that they are actually pleasures that the parents wouldn't dream of missing, that will soundly educate the children toward mitzva observance.

With this, we have a deeper understanding in the words "l'haz'hir gedolim ol ha'k'tanim". L'hazhir, in addition to meaning `warn' also contains the root word `glow'. The adults need to `glow' with pleasure when performing Hashem's commandments - that will provide the best example.

It is fascinating to see how Hashem has made things so much easier for us as the years have gone by and our strength of commitment has waned. A common Yiddish expression was: es shvair tzu zein a Yid - it's difficult to be a Jew. Whereas for earlier generations that had served as a rallying cry, later generations agreed that it was difficult and simply said: "No thanks!".

The truth is that it's now becoming easier and easier to be a Jew. Oreo cookies are now kosher. Here in Israel we can have a kosher `finger-lickin-good-time' at Kentucky Fried Chicken and enjoy `America's favorite hot-dog' at kosher Nathan's. One of my Rabbeim once joked that when we want to tell our children how hard it was when we were kids, the only thing that we'll be able to come up with is that we had to actually get out of our chairs when we wanted to change the TV channel!

It is also becoming easier to be observant in the secular world. I would hear stories about my grandfather losing his job each week because he refused to come to work on Saturday. Now, Shabbos observance is almost a given in all professions. Two close talmidim (students) of mine who are excellent musicians were signed by a major record company. They set a legal precedent with a Shabbos clause included in their contract. They can never be asked to do anything on Shabbos. Any time deadline that is set, automatically excludes Shabbos and any Jewish holidays. Those days are beyond time...

The parsha then moves on to the laws of Shabbos and the different holidays. Perhaps it is teaching us that the perfect time to `glow' and show our happiness is during Shabbos and the holidays. If we

look forward to Shabbos and holidays as times to move closer to Hashem, then that will provide incredible chinuch. If we are constantly thinking and worrying about our mundane dealings, these days will seem like a burden.

The story is told of a merchant from Danzig who came to Lublin to spend Shabbos with the Seer of Lublin. The Rebbe saw him on Friday afternoon and gave him a warm shalom aleichem (greetings). Friday night after prayers, each person came to wish the Rebbe a 'gut Shabbos'. When this person came before the Rebbe, the Rebbe again extended a very warm shalom aleichem as if he had just arrived. The surprised visitor reminded the Rebbe that he had already greeted him. The Rebbe smiled and explained: "I saw during prayers that you were very preoccupied. I realized that you were 'traveling' back to Danzig to check on your business. Now that I see that you have returned I am again wishing you a shalom aleichem!"

Dovid HaMelech (King David) says in T'hilim (Psalms): "Aleh barechev v'aleh ba'susim va'a'nachnu b'shem Hashem Elokainu nazkir (They [the non-Jews fight their battles] with their chariots and they with their horses but we [fight our battles] by mentioning the name of Hashem)[20:8]". In light of the previous story a different explanation is given. The non-Jews, in order to travel, need to use either chariots or horses. We Jews need neither. We just mention the name of Hashem, start to daven, and our minds are wandering all over the world. We're gone!

Wishing you a 'glowing' Shabbos (and hoping we'll stay close to home...),

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