

DO AS I DO

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Emor. In last week's parsha the entire Bnei Yisroel [Children of Israel] were commanded to be holy. In this week's parsha, the kohanim [priests] who were all chosen to be the 'm'sharsay Hashem' [the servers of Hashem] are commanded to observe an additional level of purity.

"Hashem said to Moshe: Emor el hakohanim [Say to the kohanim] the sons of Aharon, v'amarta aleihem [and say to them]: To a dead person do not defile yourself. [21:1]" All kohanim, regardless of any service being performed in the Mishkan [Tabernacle], are commanded to not come in contact with a dead person.

There is a redundancy in the passuk as Moshe seems to be told to "emor v'amarta"--say and then say again. Rashi quotes the Talmud [Yevamos 114A] which explains that this teaches us "l'hazhir gedolim ol k'tanim"--that the older people must warn (and educate) the younger people.

We know that this is the case in regard to the entire Torah--those who know more have an obligation to teach those who know less. If so, why is this concept stressed specifically over here by the special purity laws which pertain to the kohanim?

The Ozneyim LeTorah offers a beautiful explanation which has very practical implications. We know that a child is influenced both by his parents/teachers and by his friends/environment. It is often unfortunate that the latter pair have a much stronger effect than the first pair do. Trying to educate a child to act in a specific way or to consider certain things to be important when others around him are not acting in such a way and are treating those things with disregard is exceedingly difficult.

That is the predicament that the kohanim find themselves in. They have to teach their children to stay away from the things which cause ritual impurity. Their children's friends have no such concerns. They can play with reckless abandon, not worrying what they might come in contact with. The young kohanim however, have a different set of rules and standards that must be maintained. What is the solution? What can the parents do? "Emor v'amarta"--say and then say again! Put more and more effort into explaining and thereby educating your children. "Emor v'amarta"--say and then say again.

In Shoftim [13], Manoach, the father of Shimshon [Samson], when faced with an even more difficult situation, was instructed to deal with it in a fascinating manner. An angel of Hashem appeared to the wife of Manoach and informed her that she would become pregnant and give birth to a son. She was

told to abstain from any wine, any intoxicating beverages and from any food that a Nazzir is not allowed to eat. When he would be born, no (hair-cutting) blade would be allowed to go upon his head. He would be a Nazzir [Nazirite] from the womb.

She came and related to her husband, Manoach, all that had happened. He then prayed to Hashem, asking Him to send the angel again to instruct them as to what they should do. Hashem sent the angel who once again approached the woman when Manoach wasn't there. She quickly ran and summoned her husband, Manoach, who asked the angel what would be with the child. The angel answered: "All that I told the woman you shall adhere to." He then went on to repeat all of the specific instructions and then again commanded: "All that I commanded her you shall adhere to."

On the surface, this whole conversation seems very strange. Why did Manoach feel the need for the angel to return and repeat all of the instructions that had already been told to his wife?

I heard the following explanation in the name of Rav Shimon Shwab. Manoach was correctly troubled by what he had heard. How will it be possible to bring up this child to abstain from things from which I partake?! How can I teach him to do as I say and not as I do? He thus asked the angel what will be with the child.

What was the response he received? "All that I told the woman YOU shall adhere to." YOU have to keep it! You have to personally assume all of those restrictions for yourself. By doing that and setting a proper example, you'll be able to educate him to act in a way that none of his peers are acting.

I once heard an amusing but sad story. A teacher called a parent to inform him that his son in the first grade kept on stealing things. The father was shocked and asked the teacher what sort of things his son was taking. The teacher explained that he kept taking other children's pencils. At this point the father was totally bewildered. "Why would he take pencils of all things?! We have plenty of pencils in the house! I bring home pencils from the office every day!" Like I said, amusing but sad.

The example and the sincerity of the parents have an incredibly profound effect on a child.

The Maggid Speaks tells of the Ridvaz (one of the leaders of his generation who published two classic commentaries on the Jerusalem Talmud) who began to cry as he waited for the prayers to begin in the shul [synagogue] on the day of his father's yahrtzeit [anniversary of his death]. A close friend approached him and asked why he was so upset considering the fact that his father had lived until the age of eighty and had died more than fifty years ago.

The Ridvaz explained: When I was a young boy, my father had hired the best mela'med [teacher] for me. He charged one ruble a month which was a large sum of money in those days, especially for my father who was very poor.

My father made a living building furnaces. One winter there was a shortage of cement and lime and my father couldn't meet the payments for my mela'med. Three months went by and he hadn't paid him. One day, I brought home a note from my teacher which said that if he didn't receive money by

the next morning, he'd be unable to continue teaching me.

My parents were devastated. To them my Torah study meant everything and they felt that nothing should stand in its way. That evening at shul, my father overheard a wealthy man complain that the contractors who were building a house for his son couldn't get a furnace because of the shortages. He offered six ruble to anyone who would get him a furnace. In Russia, a furnace was vital as it was used for both cooking and heating.

When my father came home from shul he discussed the matter with my mother. They agreed that my father would take apart our furnace, brick by brick and rebuild it for the rich man. They would then have money for my mela'med.

My father did just that and received the promised six rubles. These he immediately gave me to pay my mela'med. "Tell the mela'med," he said proudly, "that three are back pay and the other three are for the next three months."

That winter was bitterly cold and we all froze and shivered in order that I could have the best mela'med and grow in Torah.

The Ridvaz took a breath and then continued. "This afternoon it was very cold and I was considering having a minyan [quorum for prayer] in my home. Then I decided that in honor of my father I should make the extra effort, brave the cold and go to shul. I was crying thinking about the self-sacrifice that my family had for my learning."

"Emor v'amarta"--say and then say again. Do as I do. The effects can last for generations.

Good Shabbos,

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