

TEACHING FEAR OF HEAVEN BY EXAMPLE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Teaching Fear of Heaven by Example

The verse at the beginning of Emor states "And Hashem said to Moshe 'Say to the Kohanim [Priests], the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people'" [Vayikra 21:1]. The construction of this command is very strange. It contains an obvious redundancy in the repetition of the terms 'say to the Kohanim... ..say to them'.

The Talmud [Yevamos 114a] infers from here a special obligation for Kohanim to ensure that even their young children (who in general are not obligated in Mitzvah performance) do not become tameh meis [ritually impure (by virtue of contact with the dead)]. The first 'Say to Kohanim' refers to Kohanim over Bar Mitzvah [adults] and the second 'say to them' refers to the Kohanim who are minors.

The problem with this is that the drash [homiletic interpretation] is apparently contradicting the pshuto shel mikrah [simple reading of the verse]. There is no indication in the verse that we are speaking about minors. The simple reading is that 'say to them' is referring back to the original subject -- the (adult) kohanim.

Rav Elyakim Schlesinger, in his sefer [book] Bais Av offers a new insight into the mechanics of this drasha. In fact, he explains, the entire verse is referring to the adult Kohanim, but the implication of the repetition to the adults is for the benefit of the ketanim [young children].

What does this mean? All of us have thought about the issue of how to teach our children Yir'as Shomayim (Fear of Heaven). We all know how to teach children to do mitzvos. When a boy is young we buy him a pair of Tzitzis. When he gets a little older, we learn Torah with him and we recite Kiddush with him. This is all relatively simple. We teach our children to do the acts and they get into the habit of making brochos [blessings], of davening [praying], and so forth. But how do we instill

Yir'as Shomayim? How do we instill in a child a real Fear of Heaven, such that, as appropriate for the child's age, the child should know the severity of doing a sin and should appreciate what it is to do a mitzvah?

I think that the only way this can be taught is by allowing the child to see Yir'as Shomayim in the parents. The child will then get the message that there is something to be afraid of. If the child sees his father or mother recoil at the mere thought of eating something non-Kosher; if he sees the trouble his parents go through to fulfill a mitzvah; and if he sees the joy of fulfilling a mitzvah -- that is how a child learns Fear of Heaven.

If one is a Yoreh Shomayim himself and he exhibits that fear in actuality -- that is how it gets passed to the next generation.

Who is my own paradigm for Yir'as Shomayim? Those of us who learned in Yeshivas Ner Yisrael of Baltimore from the early 1950s until the early 1970s will think of Rav Dovid Kronglass z"tl, the Mashgiach Ruchni ["Spiritual Supervisor"] of Ner Yisrael during those years.

Rav Dovid was a man who had a true Fear of Heaven. On the Yomim Noraim [High Holidays] he looked and talked differently. Rav Dovid's joy in life was to sit in the Succah -- to just sit there! He **exhibited** Yir'as Shomayim. He had a true Fear of Heaven. Those of us, who were fortunate enough to have known Rav Dovid Kronglass, at least know what it means to be a Yoreh Shomayim.

Unfortunately, today, these types of Jews are few and far between. But this is the basic principle -- if doing a sin is a 'big deal' to a person, it will be a 'big deal' to his child.

There is a famous story about the 'Kehilas Yaakov', the Steipler Gaon, z"tl. The Steipler once went on a date to meet a girl and fell asleep on the date. Why did he fall asleep?

The Steipler knew on the day before, that he would need to travel the entire following day to meet the girl. Therefore, he stayed up and learned the entire night -- to make up for the future lost learning time. The Steipler figured that he would sleep on the train. However, when he boarded the train and looked at the seats, he was concerned that they might be shaatnez [a mixture of wool and linen material which we are proscribed from wearing]. As a result of that remote possibility, the Steipler did not sit on the seat. He traveled the entire day standing up, after not sleeping the entire night before. Therefore, when they finished the 'small talk' on the date, he fell asleep. That is Yir'as Shomayim.

One can preach Fear of Heaven all day long, but a person who **observes** such meticulousness in observance of mitzvos is one who will be truly impressed! [P.S. The girl in question, who desired this type of Yir'as Shomayim, married him.]

The Torah is telling us to tell the adult Kohanim the severity of the prohibition of Tumah -- and to repeat it to **them**! Put the Fear of G-d in **them** so that they will become so careful about this prohibition, that it will make an impression even on their children!

"It Makes No Sense"

At the end of the parsha we study the famous incident of the blasphemer. The sin of 'giduf' (blasphemy) is euphemistically called 'one who blesses G-d'. It really refers to the opposite action, but we don't even want to say those words.

The Toras Kohanim is bothered by the language "And there went out the son of a Jewish woman, and he was the son of an Egyptian man..." [24:10]. The Toras Kohanim asks, "From where did he go out?" and cites the opinion of Rabbi Berachya "he went out from the immediately preceding portion of the Torah".

The blasphemer was disturbed by the previous parsha (that of the Lechem HaPanim [the "Showbreads"]). The Lechem HaPanim was put on the Table in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, every Shabbos and was removed the subsequent Shabbos (when new loaves replaced the old ones) and was eaten by the Kohanim. The blasphemer had a 'problem' with this. He argued that a King should be served with warm, fresh, bread -- not week-old stale bread. "What kind of stupid law is this?", he argued. "This doesn't make any sense!"

"This doesn't make any sense!" was the beginning of the end. The end was he cursed G-d. Obviously the Medrash is trying to instruct us, to teach us something. What does it mean "he had difficulty dealing with the parsha of Lechem HaPanim, until he came to curse G-d"?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, zt"l, points out an interesting fact. What would have happened if this fellow would have waited a week? He would have seen a miracle. The bread was not hard and stale, but retained its freshness for an entire week. He would have had no questions; he would not have -- Heaven forbid -- cursed G-d; and he would not have been put to death. His problem was a question on G-d's Actions and Behavior, something that with the passage of time he would eventually have understood. But he had no patience to wait. He had to know **now**, and if it did not make sense to him **now**, then the whole religion was not worthwhile -- and he cursed G-d.

There are a lot of times in life when we don't understand G-d's conduct. We don't understand sickness; we don't understand why the righteous suffer; we don't understand things like Jewish history; we don't understand the Holocaust. We don't understand! It makes no sense to us. But the main thing to remember is 'to us'. G-d, we believe, has His Master Plan. Unfortunately, time and space limit us. In the grand scheme of things, with the passage of time, sometimes, things begin to make sense.

This is the lesson of the blasphemer and the Lechem HaPanim. His inability to accept and his lack of understanding led him to a terrible death. Had he had the faith to accept and to wait -- to question but to conclude "I don't know why, but G-d must have His ways" -- had he even waited one week's time, his entire life would have been different.

Sometimes only with the passage of time do things 'make sense'. Sometimes it is a week, sometimes years, sometimes centuries -- but in the final analysis we believe that G-d is True and Righteous and "All of the Rock's Actions are Pure, for all His Paths are Just" [Devorim 32:4].

Glossary

Kohain (Kohanim) -- Priest(s)

tameh (meis) -- ritually impure (by virtue of contact with the dead)

ketanim -- under Bar Mitzvah (singular, katan)

drash -- homiletic interpretation

peshuto shel mikra -- simple reading of the verse

Tzitzis -- fringes placed on a four-cornered garment

shatnez -- mixture of wool and linen material which we are proscribed from wearing

Lechem HaPanim -- Bread of Surfaces, specially shaped loaves placed weekly on the Table in the Tabernacle and Temple, represented the Bread of the Almighty

Sources and Personalities

Rav Elyakim Schlesinger -- Author of Sefer Bais Av, Rosh Yeshiva in London.

Rav Dovid Kronglas -- (1910-1973), Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ner Israel in Baltimore; disciple of Rav Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936), Mashgiach of Mir Yeshiva in Europe, spent the war years with the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai, China.

Steipler Gaon -- Rav Yaakov Yisroel Kaniefsky (1899-1985); author of Chidushei Torah called Kehillas Yaakov on numerous tractates; Bnei Brak.

Toras Kohanim -- Tanaitic halachic midrash to Vayikra, also known as Sifra.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin -- (1881-1966) "Lutzker Rav" (Lithuania), subsequently emigrated to Israel. Authored Oznam L'Torah Chumash commentary (published in English as Insights in the Torah).

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