

OH, IS THAT THE REASON WHY?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 191, The Bracha for Kiddush Hashem. Good Shabbos!

Emor - "Oh, Is That The Reason Why?"

In the beginning of Parshas Emor, HaShem [G-d] told Moshe to "Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon" [Vayikra 21:1]. The Medrash comments on that pasuk [verse] that this teaches that HaShem showed to Moshe "each generation and its judges, each generation and its kings, each generation and its wise men, each generation and its robbers, and he showed him King Saul and his sons falling by the sword in battle" against the Plishtim. The Medrash then quotes Moshe's query to G-d: "The very first king who took charge of your children should be stabbed by the sword?" G-d responded, "Why are you complaining to me? -- Instead, you should speak to the Kohanim who he (Saul) killed (in the priestly city of Nov), for they are prosecuting him." "That", the Medrash concludes, "is why it says 'Speak to the Kohanim.'"

This is an amazing Medrash that, on the surface, appears to be merely playing with words. Among other difficulties, the prime sin of King Saul was not killing the Kohanim in the city of Nov. The pasukim [verses] tell us [Shmuel I, Chapter 15] that King Saul was given an explicit command to kill out the entire nation of Amalek -- men, women, and children. King Saul had mercy on Amalek and spared their king, thereby violating this command. Samuel came to Saul and told him that as a result of this sin, Saul was unworthy of the monarchy and HaShem would tear the Kingdom of Israel from him. We continue to suffer until this very day, as a result of this unfortunate incident. Haman, and most likely many of the oppressors of the Jewish people, are descendents of this Amalekite.

So why does this Medrash say that the reason why King Saul was killed in such a horrible fashion was because of the incident with the Kohanim in Nov? How do we reconcile this Medrash with the explicit words of the pasukim?

The Reische Rav gives a beautiful interpretation of this Medrash in his sefer HaDerash V'halyun. King Saul's primary sin was, in fact, his refusal to kill all of Amalek. But, had it been for that sin alone, Saul

would not have been killed in such a fashion. Why? Because he could have excused himself by saying, "I am a compassionate person. I could not bring myself to kill innocent men, women, and children." That would have been a human emotion, which is understandable. Sometimes a person may have trouble controlling his emotions.

However, the refutation of such an argument was the incident with Nov, the city of priests, where Saul was not compassionate. He wiped out an entire city of Jewish priests. Where was the compassionate person then? Had it only been for the crime of not killing all of Amalek, there could have perhaps been an excuse. However, Saul's action in Nov slammed the door in the face of any such excuse. Nov remained as a prosecutor pointing to the evidence. "No, Saul, you are not a compassionate individual."

As the Beis HaLevi and other commentaries in Chumash say, that same phenomenon will be the source of our own judgement at the hands of Heaven. When we "go upstairs", after 120 years, and try to give excuses for what we did or did not do, G-d will look at our lives and ask, "Oh, is that the reason why?"

"You didn't have any money? But for X, Y, and Z you had money!"

"You didn't have any time? But for A, B, and C you had time!"

"You were not smart enough? But you were smart enough for that other thing that you wanted to do."

Our own deeds and our own lives will be the biggest indictment against us. When we will try to say that we were too "this" or too "that", HaShem, who has all the events of our lives written in a Book, will be able to call our bluff. "What about this, and what about that, and what about here". That is what the Medrash is saying, "Speak to the Kohanim." -- try giving that argument to the Kohanim in the city of Nov, whom you mercilessly eradicated.

For The System To Work We Need Not Just One Kind of Law

The end of the parsha contains the incident of the Blasphemer - the person who cursed HaShem. This was the first time that such a thing ever occurred. The people did not know what to do with this person. Immediately after the incident, the Torah explicitly tells us what to do with such a person: He is put to death.

The Torah then mentions several laws [Vayikra 24: 17-21] that appear to be totally unrelated to the law of the Blasphemer:

- 1) One who kills another person deserves the death penalty.
- 2) One who kills someone's animal must pay a monetary fine.
- 3) If one injures another person receives a monetary punishment.
- 4) One who injures an animal must pay a monetary fine.
- 5) One who strikes his father or mother deserves the death penalty.

Only then does the Torah return to the story of the Blasphemer and relate that the people actually put the Blasphemer to death.

This does not seem to be a smooth flow of narration. Why does the Torah digress from the discussion of the Blasphemer by inserting these seemingly unrelated laws?

The Sefer Darchei Mussar suggests that this sequence of the pasukim contains a tremendous lesson. Some people feel that a dichotomy exists among Jewish laws. There are laws that relate to the relationship between man and G-d, and there are laws that relate to the relationship between man and his fellow man. And never the twain need meet. "I can be the perfect gentlemen and citizen, and yet deny the existence of HaShem. I can be the most ethical and upright of individuals without a G-d."

The Torah is telling us that this is not true. If the whole system of laws is legislated by man, then just as man can create laws, man can change laws. Man can legislate one thing today and can legislate the complete opposite tomorrow. [That which is considered a crime today (even murder!), can be considered a righteous act tomorrow.] Without a higher authority, there are no laws that can not be changed. If man is the creator of the system of laws, then there really are not any laws between man and man either.

Therefore, after the Torah tells us the laws of the Blasphemer, the Torah begins to establish laws relating to man's relationship with his fellow man. Without that first category of law (relating to man - G-d interaction), there can be no true laws of the second category (man -- man interactions). That is the only way that the system can work.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#191). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: The Bracha for Kiddush Hashem. The other halachic portions for Parshas Emor from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

- Tape # 010 - Can Kohanim visit Graves of Tzadikim
- Tape # 053 - Are Our Kohanim Really Kohanim?
- Tape # 096 - "Kovod Habrios": The Concept of Human Dignity
- Tape # 144 - Kohanim in Hospitals: A Real Problem
- Tape # 237 - Sterilization: Is It Permitted?
- Tape # 281 - Kiddush Hashem: Is "Giluy Arayus" Ever Permitted?

- Tape # 327 - The Cohain and the Divorcee

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

Yad Yechiel Institute

PO Box 511

Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511

Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through your local Hebrew book store or from Project Genesis, 1-410-654-1799.
