

# THE IMPACT OF HOLINESS

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape # 234, Netilas Yadayim at Breakfast: Is One "Washed Up" for the Day? Good Shabbos!*

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## Holiness Impacts More Than Just the 'Man to G-d' Relationship

While the first reference to Kashrus [Kosher dietary] laws is contained in Parshas Mishpatim [Shemos 22:30], the Torah actually enumerates and identifies the Kosher species of animals, fish and birds here in Parshas Sh'mini.

It is interesting to note the location where the Rambam lists the laws of forbidden foods (within his 14 volume halachic Encyclopedia known as the 'Yad haChazakah'). Serious students of Rambam know that the location where the Rambam categorizes a particular set of laws in and of itself provides insight into the nature of those laws.

The Rambam places the laws of forbidden foods in his Sefer Kedusha [Book of Holiness]. Sefer Kedusha contains the laws of forbidden foods as well as the laws of forbidden sexual relationships. He indicates that observance of the laws of Kashrus and the laws of sexual morality is what makes a person holy.

There is a famous Rash"i on the pasuk [verse] "You shall be holy..." [Vayikra 19:2] which interprets these words as "You shall be removed". The Jewish definition of holiness is one who knows how to abstain, how to exert self-control. A person who is not self-indulgent, is, by our definition, a holy person.

The very pasuk in Parshas Mishpatim [Shemos 22:30], which first introduces the kashrus restrictions, begins with the words "You shall be a holy people to me..." Holiness is what Kashrus is all about.

The Talmud [Yoma 82b] says that a certain pregnant woman smelled the aroma of forbidden food and developed an uncontrollable urge to eat that food on Yom Kippur. They brought her before Rebbe and he whispered in her ear (as if to speak to the embryo) "It is Yom Kippur today". The woman's urge for food then subsided. The Talmud states that this baby turned out to be Rabbi

Yochanan.

The Talmud then relates an identical story except that the whispering did not help and the mother had to eat on Yom Kippur (to save her life). The Gemara mentions that this baby turned out to be a wicked person. The Gemara identifies this wicked person as "Shabsai, the one who would hoard fruits" (he cornered the market on a basic commodity, and then charged poor people exorbitant prices for the food).

[Editor's note: In our times, when a pregnant woman must eat on Yom Kippur, it is not an indication that she is going to have an evil child. Those times were different. People were on a different madreiga (spiritual level). In addition, we don't have the power of Amoraim whispering in our ears.]

Why should self-indulgence be related to a lack of holiness? This does not appear to be a "holiness" problem. This seems to be a problem of one who is not nice to his fellow man. What is the connection between that and the fact that he was already a gluttonous embryo?

I saw the following explanation from Rav Neimen in his work Darchei Mussar:

The answer is because a person who is not holy is self-indulgent. Eventually, self-indulgence affects not only one's relationship with G-d, but one's relationship with his fellow man as well. If a person is self-indulgent, he is focused on "My needs must be gratified". This is the opposite of a holy person. Someone, who must always satisfy his needs and his appetites, will eventually not be a nice person to his fellow man.

Holiness is not only a concept that exists between man and G-d. Holiness also affects how we conduct our daily lives and how we interact with society. Learning to control our urges and desires causes our dealings in the marketplace and business world to be different as well.

### **The Ultimate Act of Faith: And Aharon Was Silent**

Parshas Sh'mini contains one of the greatest exhibitions of faith in the entire Torah. On a communal level, the greatest exhibition of faith was after the splitting of the Red Sea, when the Jewish people "believed in G-d and in Moshe his servant" [Shemos 14:31]. But this week's parsha contains -- on an individual level -- the greatest exhibition of total faith in G-d that appears anywhere in the Torah. That act of total faith was Aharon HaKohen's reaction to the death of his two sons.

Aharon had two sons who were tremendous individuals. They were literally Tzadikim (truly righteous people). These were children who were worthy to eventually be the leaders of the generation. These two children were taken away from Aharon in the midst of what was supposed to be the joyous celebration of the dedication of the Tabernacle.

What is Aharon's reaction? Silence, complete acceptance [Vayikra 10:3]. Aharon accomplished this because of his unshakable faith in G-d. A person who can see the death of two of his children and react with silence and acceptance provides the most eloquent and powerful exhibition of faith

imaginable.

The Ramba"n writes in Parshas Re'eh (on the pasuk "You are children to G-d, do not tear your skin (as a sign of mourning)" [Devorim 14:1]) that the Torah's restriction against self-destructive forms of mourning serves as a testimony to our belief in the eternity of the soul. "Since you believe in the Eternity of the soul and that ultimately what G-d does is never bad, therefore do not mourn too much -- even in the face of tragic youthful death."

[Editor's Note: Mr. and Mrs. Israel Weinstein (who have themselves passed on in the years since this shiur was delivered) lost two children in a terrible car accident, on Erev Pesach, while travelling to Baltimore for the holiday.]

This week, some of us in this community saw an act of Faith reminiscent of Aharon HaKohen's. Mr. Israel Weinstein and his wife suffered a tragedy of terrible proportions with the loss of two children. I was not in the Yeshiva [Ner Yisroel in Baltimore] for Pesach, as Mr. Weinstein was. Those people who were there and saw how he reacted after he heard the terrible news were amazed at the type of Faith he exhibited.

It is mind boggling to think of the specter of a Jew having heard on the night of the Pesach Seder that he just lost two of his children. To come back to the Seder and sit down under those circumstances and make a She- hechiyanu (the blessing thanking G-d for sustaining our lives and bringing us to this occasion) is unimaginable. To come into shul the next morning and to daven and greet people with a "Gut Yom Tov" [traditional holiday greeting] without exhibiting his emotions and dampening the spirit of the holiday requires a special faith. That Pesach morning, a little boy walked into the Yeshiva and walked down the aisle past the place where Mr. Weinstein was sitting. Mr. Weinstein patted the boy on the cheek.

The boy's father visited Mr. Weinstein during Shiva [the one week mourning period, following the burial] and asked Mr. Weinstein how he was able to accomplish that feat. "How, in the moment of your ultimate grief, could you still bend down to a child and pat him on the cheek?" Mr. Weinstein responded that at that exact moment, he realized how precious every Jewish child is. He felt he had to pat that little boy, because he realized how special each and every one of our children are.

Sometimes we take our children for granted. Sometimes we become upset with them too much. We do not realize sometimes how precious they are.

A person who, at the moment of great tragedy, demonstrates such faith and can emulate "And Aharon was silent" can only be a person who recognizes that there is a light on the other side of the world. May the family be comforted amidst the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

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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 (#234). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Netilas Yadayim at Breakfast: Is One "Washed Up" for the Day? The other halachic portions for this parasha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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