

CONGRATULATIONS, BUT...

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Emor

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 415 - The Ba'alas Teshuva and the Kohain. Good Shabbos!

Why Is The High Priest Not Allowed to Marry a Widow?

We learn in the parsha that a Kohen [Priest] is not allowed to marry a divorcee, and the Kohen Gadol [High Priest] is not even allowed to marry a widow. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos provides an astounding interpretation of the law that the Kohen Gadol cannot marry a widow, that highlights how suspicious the Torah is when it comes to human nature and man's baser instincts.

On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol mentions the (normally) unmentionable Holy Name of G-d while standing in the Kodosh HaKodoshim [Holy of Holies]. If, during one of the ten times that the Kohen Gadol mentions the explicit Name of G-d on Yom Kippur, he has in mind a certain individual that he does not like, then that person will die during the coming year.

The Daas Zekeinim is suggesting that at this spiritually charged time, when the Kohen Gadol mentions the Holy Name of G-d on behalf of the entire Jewish nation, he might have in mind that he wants to marry a certain (already) married woman. Implicitly, he would be hoping that her (current) husband will die so that he might marry her.

To preclude such a possibility, the Torah insists that he marry a virgin rather than a widow, so that such wicked thoughts will never enter his mind.

This is an amazing statement. The message is that, unfortunately, people can be so corrupt that in the holiest moment of the year, in the holiest place in the world, when the Kohen Gadol is involved with the responsibility of carrying the prayers of all of Israel, at that very moment he could, possibly, deviously abuse the Holy Name of G-d.

The Daas Zekeinim emphasize this point further by mentioning a passage from the Talmud Yerushalmi [Jerusalem Talmud]. The Talmud Yerushalmi states that originally the Kohen Gadol would pronounce the Explicit Name of G-d out loud 10 times during the Yom Kippur Service. This powerful Name was normally not spoken, and most people did not even know how to pronounce it correctly.

This practice was stopped, because there were people who would listen to the Kohen Gadol's pronunciation of the Explicit Name of G-d on Yom Kippur and would write down the transliteration of that Name, so that they would have it available during the course of the year if they wanted to curse someone. The practice of audible pronunciation of the Explicit Name was stopped so that people would not be able to use this weapon.

Incredible, but true.

Congratulations on Doing the Mitzvah, But...

The pasuk [verse] states, "They shall guard my safekeeping and they shall not bear sin over it and die because of it, for they will have defiled it, I am Hashem who sanctifies them." [Vayikra 22:9]. The context of this verse is the consumption of the Terumah by Kohanim. Rashi says that the sin referred to is the capital offense of consuming Terumah while in a state of impurity (Tumas haGuf).

Rav Yeruchum makes the following observation in his work on Chumash: Eating Terumah is a mitzvah. The Torah is warning that in the course of doing a mitzvah, one should make sure not to commit any aveirahs [sins].

We are lulled into thinking that while we are in the midst of performing a mitzvah, we are 'exempt' and have immunity from any sins that we might be doing simultaneously. "I'm doing a mitzvah now, so I have nothing else to worry about." This is not true.

Sometimes a person can be doing a mitzvah, but in the course of doing a mitzvah he commits an aveirah. The admonition of this pasuk is not only referring to Terumah. Anytime one performs a mitzvah he needs to make sure that the mitzvah is complete and is not tainted by any simultaneous aveirahs.

The classic example of this is the person who comes in to daven Ma'ariv [pray evening prayers] and parks his car in the middle of the parking lot (blocking other parked cars from driving away). He thinks "Well this other fellow is probably davening Ma'ariv as well. I'll leave right after Ma'ariv and won't be causing anyone any problem."

Of course, the other fellow did not come to daven Ma'ariv. He is now ready to go back home. He comes outside and finds another car sitting horizontally opposite his fender. Of course, the person who came in "just to daven ma'ariv" is caught in a conversation with a third person after ma'ariv. The poor fellow in the parking lot is stuck there because he can't get his car out.

Beautiful. Someone wants to daven ma'ariv. He wants to do it with a minyan [quorum of ten].
Wonderful. But "They shall guard my safekeeping and they shall not bear sin over it..."
Congratulations on doing the mitzvah. But be careful not to simultaneous sin in other matters.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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