

"PERIPHERAL EVENTS" MAY BE THE FOCUS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Achrei Mos-Kedoshim

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Achrei Mos: Tape #502 - Kissui haDam Kedoshim: Tape #95 - The Mezonos Roll: Does It Exist? Good Shabbos!

Achrei Mos: "Peripheral Events" May be the Focus of Divine Providence

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the prohibition against consuming blood: "Any man from the house of Israel or from amongst the converts who dwell in their midst who consumes any blood, I will turn My Face (v'nasati es Panai) against the soul that consumes blood and I will cut it off from its nation." [Vayikra 17:10]

The expression "v'nasati es Panai" is peculiar. Rashi comments: "I will turn away from all my (other) affairs and deal with him." This comment is also strange. Rashi's language might be appropriate if we were talking about a busy executive who has many things on his mind and many appointments. If some emergency arises which the executive must deal with right away, the executive might say, "I am going to drop everything else I'm doing, clear my calendar so to speak, and I am going to turn my attention strictly to this matter so I can take care of it."

This may be an appropriate manner of speech for a busy executive, but for the Almighty, who is able to judge the entire world in one glance, in a single millisecond, what does it mean: "I am going to turn my attention away from all other matters and only take care of him?"

Rav Elya Meir Bloch makes an interesting comment. Rav Bloch says that normally when we view things happening in the world, we look at the "major event" and then we look at the peripherals of the event. For example, when there is a war in a certain region, all the people in the region are displaced and become refugees. Because the people became refugees, the price of housing and food rises in another region (owing to the laws of supply and demand that react to the increased

population of refugees), not otherwise affected by the war.

There is a well-known economic principle that one man's disaster is another man's goldmine. But we look at such "secondary effects" of a "major event" as merely being peripheral. In other words, we view Divine Providence as being responsible for the war. The war is the global issue, the cosmic issue. We view the collateral damage or the collateral improvement that "indirectly" affects other people as a "by-the-way" after-effect of the "macro issue."

The Almighty does not always work that way. It could be that the Almighty can "move worlds", engaging entire countries in battle so as to either punish or reward a single individual.

Certainly, the Almighty can multitask with limitation. The meaning of Rashi is -- as Rav Elya Meir explains -- that sometimes the Almighty will "move mountains", make wars, or make diversionary headlines, not necessarily for the item itself but because some person has to be rewarded or some person has to be punished or some other "secondary" goal needs to be accomplished.

Kedoshim: Why Is this Portion Different From All Other Portions?

"And G-d spoke to Moses saying: 'Speak to the entire Community of Israel and tell them You must be Holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am Holy.'" [Vayikra 19:1-2]

The Medrash comments on this pasuk, that the pasuk was said "be'Hakhel," namely, it was said to all the Jewish people together. In contrast, most of the Torah was taught to Moshe, who taught it to Aharon who taught to Aharon's sons, who taught to the Elders, etc., etc. However, Moshe taught this parsha in everyone's presence.

Why is this parsha different? The Medrash answers because most of the fundamentals of Torah are dependent on this portion, called "Kedoshim Teheyu -- You shall be Holy."

The simple interpretation of this Medrash is that since there are so many important laws that are contained in this section, it was said in the presence of everyone.

Perhaps, however, the Medrash means something else. Perhaps it means that the specific command 'You shall be Holy' is so important, and has so many of the fundamentals of Torah dependent upon it, that this Mitzvah itself was given publicly.

According to the Ramba"n, this Mitzvah is the one which tells us how to live and act as Jews. The Ramba"n explains that if not for this command, a person could conceivably be a "naval birshus haTorah," meaning, he could be an observant Jew, and simultaneously a glutton. He could live an obscene life within the parameters of the Torah. He could eat as much as he wants; he could indulge in all the physical pleasures of life; and it might all be 'glatt kosher.'

If not for this mitzvah, such a person could be called a Tzadik [righteous person]. However, the Torah says, "You shall be Holy" -- you must abstain. You must act with restraint, with holiness. Do not

indulge. Do not be a glutton. That is the mitzvah of Kedoshim Teheyu. It is so vital that it had to be said to the entire nation together.

The Shemen HaTov explains that a person cannot be Holy unto himself. Even though the mitzvah is a mitzvah for the individual, the individual needs the help of society. If one lives in a society which is indulgent, it becomes very difficult for that individual to remain a 'Kadosh' [holy person].

In order to achieve "You shall be holy," the cooperation of one's family, of one's city and one's nation is required. The parsha needed to be given to everyone together. When everyone is involved in conspicuous indulgence, it becomes almost impossible for an individual to act with restraint.

We see this very clearly in the society in which we live today. We are surrounded by rampant hedonism, where people instantly gratify their every whim and wish. We live in a society that does not know what kedusha [holiness] is about. The only way we can personally achieve this mitzvah of "You shall be holy," is if we not only work on ourselves, but we elevate and try to live among people who also share the ideal of Kedoshim Teheyu.

It must begin with the individual. As the Chassidic Rebbe, Reb Bunim is quoted as having said, when he was young he thought he could change the world. As he got older, he saw he could not change the entire world, but at least he could change his city. As time went on, he saw that even that was beyond his grasp, but he said "I'll at least change my neighborhood." When he saw that that was not working, he said "I'll at least try to change my family." When he saw that that failed as well, he said, "I'll have to try to only change myself."

But once he succeeded in changing himself, then he saw that his family was different, his neighborhood was different, his city was different, and in a sense the entire world was different.

When working on this mitzvah of "Kedoshim Tiheyu," we cannot go it alone. We have to work on ourselves, and then our families, and then our neighborhoods, and then our societies.

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