

KEDUSHA OUT — TUMAH IN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1038 - Flowers At The Cemetery? Good Shabbos!

Kedusha Out — Tumah In

The beginning of Parshas Chukas deals with the *parah adumah* [Red Heifer]. The presence of a dead body in a room generates a form of spiritual contamination known as *tumas ohel* [tent impurity], which will, in turn, contaminate anyone in the room (even if they do not come into physical contact with the corpse) and render them *tamei meis* [impure by virtue of "contact" with the dead].

The *pasuk* at the beginning of the parsha says, "This is the Torah (i.e., the law): 'Adam' [a man] who will die in a tent, whoever will come into the tent will be *tamei* (i.e., impure) for seven days" [Bamidbar 19:14]. The Talmud expounds, "You are called 'Adam', but idol worshippers are not called 'Adam' [Yevamos 60a]. Namely, this *halacha* of tent impurity only applies to the dead body of a Jew. The corpse of an idol worshipper will convey death impurity only through touch or transport, but will not make *tamei* a Jew who merely is in the same room.

What is the logic of this distinction? Underlying the answer to this question is really a fundamental understanding of the whole concept of *tumah*. As many commentaries say, *tumah* devolves on a person or an animal when there is a diminishment of sanctity (*hisroknus shel haKedusha*). While a person is alive, he has a *neshamah* [spiritual component; 'soul'], and possesses a certain amount of holiness. When the person dies and the *neshamah* departs, the source of his sanctity (*kedusha*) departs. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, spiritual laws do not tolerate vacuums either. With the absence of *kedusha*, *tumah* takes its place. That is why when a person dies, the *kedusha* he possessed, which has now departed, is replaced with spiritual impurity (i.e., *tumah*.)

The more holy a person is, or the more holy an object is, the greater is the form of *tumah* that emerges when the source of the holiness of that person or object has departed or has been defiled. This explains why a deceased Jew contaminates in a tent, but not an idol worshipper. Even though an idol worshipper has a soul, and indeed during his lifetime he has the potential for *kedusha* within himself -- and consequently he is subject to other forms of *tumah* -- it is not on the same level -- and consequently is not subject to *tumas ohel*.

This rule -- that the holier a person or object is, the greater form of *tumah* is created -- helps us understand many of the principles we come across in studying the laws of *tumah* and *tahara*.

The Shem m'Shmuel cites a teaching of the Kotzker Rebbe which seems anomalous: When a woman has a child, for a certain period of time after having given birth, she is in a state of having '*tumas leida*' (childbirth impurity). This is independent of '*tumas nidah*,' which comes from normal uterine bleeding. '*Tumas leida*' is a status that automatically comes upon every woman who has a baby. How do we explain this impurity? Here she is doing something that is a *mitzvah* -- bringing additional life into the world. What could be a nobler act than that? And yet she is declared impure by virtue of this great spiritual accomplishment. How is this to be understood?

The Kotzker Rebbe explains by citing the *gemara* [Ta'anis 20a] which says that the "key to life" (the ability to conceive and have babies) is the domain of the *Ribono shel Olam* Himself. He does not give over that "key" to anyone else. Thus, when a woman becomes pregnant, she is G-d-like. She has a partnership with the Master of the Universe as long as she is in the process of having that baby. She resides in a higher spiritual dimension throughout her pregnancy. Once she has the baby, *mazal tov*, but that suspends her special nine-month partnership with the *Ribono shel Olam*. When there is a "*Hisroknus shel kedusha*", where there once was kedusha, and it has now departed (even for the best of reasons), *tumah* takes its place.

We have discussed *tumas mes* and *tumas leida*. Here is a third example of this phenomenon of impurity resulting from the departure of *kedusha*: (I recently saw this thought cited in the name of Rav Ruderman, even though I never personally heard it from the Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l.)

The law is that a *neveilah* [a dead animal that was not properly slaughtered] also conveys *tumah*. If someone eats the *neveilah*, he transgresses a negative prohibition for which the punishment is lashes. On the other hand, someone who eats *piggul* [caused by a person having the "wrong" intent when slaughtering a sacrifice] or *nosar* ["left over sacrificial meat," i.e., not consumed during the appropriate halachic time frame allotted to that particular sacrifice], receives the severe (Heavenly) punishment of *kares* (becoming "cut off"). The Rosh Yeshiva asked: Why is the punishment is so much more severe for eating a *korban* that has been defiled one way or another, than for eating a regular piece of meat improperly slaughtered? He answered with this same concept. Something which was a *korban* had *kedusha* [sanctity]. Now that it became *piggul* or *nosar*, that *kedusha* departed. The prohibition that is attached to a piece of meat from which holiness has departed is more severe than that attached to a regular piece of meat.

Another example: We are in the middle of Tamuz already, on the threshold of the Three Weeks. The Yearos Devash cites a beautiful idea. In the *Haftarah* of Shabbos Chazon (prior to Tisha B'Av), when the prophet *Yeshaya* talks about *Yerushalayim*, he says "Righteousness dwelt therein, where now there are murderers" [Isaiah 1:21]. During the period prior to the Destruction of the First Bais haMikdash, Chazal say that murder was rampant in *Yerushalayim*. The Yearos Devash explains the phenomenon: When the righteousness/holiness left *Yerushalayim*, it fell all the way to the other extreme. Where there once was *kedusha*, and that *kedusha* left because the people strayed, the area becomes filled with *tumah*. Thus, the same *Yerushalayim* that was previously so holy is now

filled with murderers.

Based on all of the above, the Avnei Nezer says a very interesting thought. Why is a Kohen prohibited from marrying a divorcee? He suggests that Chazal say, "When a man and woman are living in peace, the *Shechina* [Divine Presence] resides between them." When, unfortunately, a couple must divorce, the *Ribono shel Olam* departs. When the *Ribono shel Olam* departs, the void left by that departure of holiness is replaced by *tumah*. The Avnei Nezer explains that is why a Kohen cannot marry a divorcee -- because the *Shechinah* that was once there (in her first marriage) has departed, and the void has been replaced with a certain metaphysical impurity that would have a deleterious effect on the sanctity of the Kohen.

I saw an interesting question in the sefer Bei Chiya: If that is the case, why can a Kohen marry a widow? The *halacha* is that a *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest] cannot marry a widow or a divorcee, but a regular Kohen **can** marry a widow. Bei Chiya asks, "Why should that be?" Why do we not say that as long as her first husband was alive, "The *Shechinah* resided between them" and now that the first husband is dead, the *Shechinah* has departed from her life and she has a certain metaphysical impurity that prevents her from marrying a Kohen?

The Bei Chiya offers an interesting explanation: By a widow, the *Ribono shel Olam* is still there in her life. Chazal say that the *Ribono shel Olam* is the Friend and Protector of orphans and widows [Mishlei 15:25]. Therefore, despite the fact that there was a departure of sorts when her husband died, the *Ribono shel Olam* reappears as the Protector of widows.

Of course, we must explain that sometimes a woman is divorced through no fault of her own, and the *Ribono shel Olam* will stick up for her and protect her as well. In fact, Rashi says in Chumash that Divine Protection is certainly not limited to widows and orphans, but these are just examples of unfortunate persons, and the Almighty is on the side of any unfortunate person. But we do not have the latitude to tamper with Halacha based on such reasoning. (This is known as the principle of "*Ayn Dorshin Ta'ama dikra*" – we do not analyze the reasons behind scriptural statements in order to modify application of the law.) Regarding divorcees it depends on the situation: Sometimes Hashem will see that she is an unfortunate victim and be on "her side," and sometimes not. However, by widows, Hashem is always "on their side" and is not seen as having left them.

A Propitious Moment in Time Was Lost Forever

One of the most difficult sections in the Torah is that of *mei merivah*. What did they do wrong? There are a dozen or more different opinions as to what the sin of *mei merivah* was, for which Moshe was punished. Rashi, as we all know, takes the approach that Moshe Rabbeinu hit the rock rather than speaking to it, and as a result of that, he was chastised, "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them" [Bamidbar 20:12].

Rashi's interpretation is based on a Medrash. The *Ribono shel Olam* wanted Moshe Rabbeinu to talk

to the Rock. Rashi makes the comment that *Klal Yisrael* would have then learned a lesson: Here is a rock that has no feeling, and yet it listens to the Word of the Almighty. How much more so do we, who get so much from the Almighty, need to listen to Him. Moshe Rabbeinu did not speak to the Rock, he hit the Rock, and therefore lost out on the opportunity to teach this lesson.

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky writes that this was not only a terrible moment for Moshe Rabbeinu, but it was a terrible moment for *Klal Yisrael*, for which we are still paying the price. His point is that there are certain moments in history that are propitious, and which can have an impact for years and years to come. He cites as an example Kings II [13:15-19] where Elisha tells the King of Israel, "Go shoot an arrow towards Aram." This is a symbol that you will be able to defeat your enemy, Aram. He shot the arrow. Then Elisha told him "bang the arrows on the ground." This was to symbolize that he will be able to subdue Aram. The King banged three arrows on the ground and then stopped. Elisha protests: "Why did you stop? Had you not stopped, Aram would have been yours forever."

The question is, "Okay, I did not bang the arrows on the ground enough times, but why can't I continue now?" The answer is, it was that moment where everything was aligned. Had he hit the arrows five or six times on the ground, Aram would have been totally subdued and history would have been different. That moment passed and when that moment passes, you just cannot "make it up." There are no "make ups" in Heaven for lost propitious moments!

Had Moshe Rabbeinu spoken to the Rock rather than hitting it, the impression would have been made on *Klal Yisrael* that we need to listen to the Word of the *Ribono shel Olam*, and history would have been different had we done so. When the prophet would come and tell us -- in later years -- "Don't do something" we would have listened, because that is what that moment could have accomplished.

What happened instead? Moshe did not speak to the Rock. He hit the Rock, and then the Rock responded. What happened in the history of *Klal Yisrael* is that we did not learn to respond to the WORD, and unfortunately the only way we learned to respond was by being hit. That is the story of Jewish history. Because at that propitious moment in time, Moshe Rabbeinu failed to make the impression that we must LISTEN to the WORD of G-d, the result was that we only respond when we get hit. This was the terrible effect of the sin of *mei merivah*. It did not merely cost Moshe Rabbeinu the ability to go into *Eretz Yisrael*. The bigger picture is that it cost us the lesson we could have learned, which would have made an indelible imprint on our national psyche. That moment passed and, unfortunately, now at times we only respond to hitting, rather than to the Word of the *Ribono shel Olam*.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chukas

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