

PARSHAS EMOR

תשפ"א

Sefer Vayikroh is dedicated to korbonos, chanukas hamishkon and the like. This is why it is called Toras Kohanim. But then the parshiyos go in different directions – as we explained at length last week.

The midrash says that when Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to construct a mikdosh, Moshe Rabbeinu said he didn't understand how it is possible. Hashem can't be limited to any space, not even the vast Heavens can contain Him! Hashem explained that He will concentrate His Shechinoh – but not in the mikdosh – in Klal Yisroel themselves.

In order for Klal Yisroel to connect to Hashem in a tangible way, there needs to be hashroas haShechinoh. The Beis Hamikdosh was a tangible expression to klal Yisroel that they can achieve that connection. Nevuoh, urim vetumim, etc., all facilitate this direct relationship with Hashem. But this is a demanding relationship. One needs to maintain a certain level of kedushoh and taharoh to be worthy of it. Klal Yisroel went up and down in their relationship with Hashem throughout their history. It is much easier to deal with an intermediary using avodo zoro than to serve Hashem directly and be responsible to Him alone.

Right after the Torah records the death of Aharon's sons, it discusses forbidden foods. That section concludes with the statement that the reason for all these laws is to enable Klal Yisroel to become kodosh. Hashem says "I am kodosh, and you can only connect to Me if you are kodosh as well." The whole purpose of yetzias mitzrayim was for us to leave the culture of Egypt which is the opposite of kedushoh and taharoh. We had to leave that environment to become Hashem's people. This only happens when we become kodosh.

Then the Torah discusses taharas mishpochoh, tzoraas and loshon horo, and then begins Parshas Acharei Mos. "B'zos yavoh Aharon el hakodesh." The midrash comments that if you want to go into the kodesh hakodoshim, you first need to go through all the previous parshiyos – learning and mastering the Torah of animals and human beings. You cannot just storm into the kodesh unprepared. Another midrash explains that zos means Torah. Without Torah, even if you perform the avodoh correctly and obey all the technical rules, you cannot enter the kodesh hakodoshim without breaking your head over a Rashi and a Tosfos, a Ramban and a Rashba. Without bending your mind to understand the thoughts of Hashem, you cannot enter the kodesh hakodoshim

And immediately after the parsha of the avodoh on Yom Kippur, we read the parsha of arayos.

Kashrus and arayos are like two bookends to kedushoh.

Between the body and soul, there is a constant struggle for dominance. Kedushoh means we connect with Hashem in all the various dimensions of our being – including the physical. Of course we live in a physical world and do physical activities with our bodies. But what dominates your mind? What pre-occupies you?

The posuk says Eretz Yisroel is a mokom kodosh and this is why it cannot tolerate the despicable non-Jewish acts of arayos.

Eretz Yisroel is valuable to us because it is kodosh. It is not just a national Jewish homeland. Theodore Herzl initially tried to convince the Jews of his time that there could be a Jewish homeland in Uganda – in the middle of the African continent. But he couldn't sell it. The Jews rejected his proposal and Herzl had to settle for Palestine. Imagine how different world history would have turned out if a million Jews from Europe went to Uganda instead of Israel?

In the mind of the secular Zionists, Eretz Yisroel is simply a piece of real estate on the eastern side of the Mediterranean for Jews to live in – nothing more and nothing less. They have no concept of kedushoh – they

have no sensitivity to kedushoh.

What is a mokom kodosh? It is a place where one can connect more easily to Hashem and live a more spiritual life. It is not – as I once heard someone say – just another New York where they speak Hebrew. The posuk in Tehillim says the only reason Eretz Yisroel was taken away from the nations and given to us is because it is the ideal place to live a life of kedushoh.

The posuk in Acharei Mos says, "Do not imitate the practices of Egypt where you previously lived, and the practices of Canaan where I am bringing you." The Ohr HaChaim asks that this description is superfluous. We certainly are aware that Klal Yisroel left Egypt and are headed to Eretz Canaan! Why not just mention the lands themselves?

He answers that one might have made a critical mistake about the demands of the Torah. We understand that the Torah wants us to live an elevated life of kedushoh. But when we are a part of a larger non-Jewish society, isn't it inevitable that we will be influenced by them and cannot be expected to keep up these high standards? To this argument, the Torah is telling us that one's decadent environment is no excuse. Despite having lived in such a morally corrupt society such as Egypt for generations, the Torah is still demanding we not imitate the Egyptian immoral practices. Despite the fact that we are being led to settle Canaan which is similarly corrupt, we are being warned not to imitate their immoral practices.

It doesn't matter that you are surrounded by a degenerate culture. The Torah still demands you rise above it and maintain your high level of kedushoh.

The Ohr HaChaim says something more. Yes, these countries were steeped in arayos – no different than Tel Aviv and Los Angeles and we have to resist their influence. This is not an option. It is an absolute obligation. Kedoshim tihiyu is an absolute obligation.

But this doesn't mean the only solution is to detach completely from physical life. Despite the fact that one has to distance oneself from these corrupt societies, one still has to satisfy one's physical needs in the context of being kodosh. You need to eat food and you cannot fast all the time. You eat with kedushoh. Kedushoh means you engage in all your physical activities with a spiritual mindset.

There is an interesting halacha – a non-Jew cannot bring a korbon shlomim – only an oloh. A Jew can bring olos and shlomim. What is the difference between an oloh and a shlomim? A shlomim means the owner eats the meat of a korbon with kedushoh. Only a Jew has this capacity to uplift the physical world and bring spirituality into all the physical things that he does. A non-Jew cannot do this. The concept of kedushoh – serving Hashem through eating a steak – is beyond him. Only a person who lives a life disciplined by Torah and mitzvos can have the ability to sit in Yerushalayim with a korbon and eat it with kedushoh and taharoh – as a way of uplifting the physical world.

It is not only the Ramban's mitzvah of Kedoshim tihiyu. The Rambam also says one cannot have his life dominated by the pursuit of physical pleasure. For him this is included in lo sosuru acharei levavchem ve'acharei einechem. The theme of kedushoh runs through all areas of human life – food, speech, interpersonal relationships, business relationships. If we make ourselves kodosh, we can connect to Hashem in the fullest way.

At the end of Parshas Kedoshim, we repeat the theme that we are a unique people. We can connect to Hashem who is kodosh because we keep this system of mitzvos as a means to uplift our physical dimension.

Parshas Emor has many halachos about kohanim and korbonos and concludes with moadim. How do these items fit in with the theme of

kedushoh?

Rabbeinu Avrohom ben HoRambam in Sefer Hamaspik explains that in Jewish life, there is a basic minimum that is required from every Jew. Every Jew is mekabel ol malchus shomayim and mekabel ol mitzvos – all 613 of them – twice a day when he recites Shema. A roshoh is someone who violates any mitzvah which receives malkos. It doesn't matter which aveiroh it is. You have to keep all of them. None of them are optional. Why?

Rabbeinu Avrohom explains that we receive everything we have from Hashem. Everything about our existence comes from Hashem. We are always taking. The moment you take, you owe. If you take without giving back, you are a roshoh. So if you take from Hashem and don't give back what He asks from us – keeping 613 mitzvos – you are a roshoh. Keeping all 613 mitzvos is the minimum to not be a roshoh.

But beyond this minimum, you are supposed to use every mitzvah as a way of uplifting yourself in avodas Hashem. We can go through Shabbos in a very minimal way by making sure not to do any melachos and keep all the issurim derabbonon. But did we use Shabbos as a derech avodoh of getting closer to Hashem? Did we experience kedushoh and menuchas Shabbos?

We can also use the basic aspects of human living as a part of our avodas Hashem. We keep kashrus as a way of serving Hashem and showing that we don't let food dominate and control our lives. Just because the food is technically kosher doesn't mean you can simply indulge with no limits and be a menuval b'reshus haTorah. You can use eating as a derech avodoh as well.

But, there are certain people of whom Hashem demands a high level of kedushoh. There are kohanim who are one level higher than a Yisroel, and then there is the kohen godol who is on an even higher level and who has greater demands.

Hashem tells us to bring the best of our animals for a korbon shlomim – not blemished animals. So when you sit down to eat that korbon, you use that enjoyment as part of your avodas Hashem.

Just as certain people have higher demands on them which comes with higher kedushoh, certain days of the calendar have a higher level of kedushoh as well. The Ramban says you are supposed to use Shabbos and Yom Tov to upgrade your level of learning and to upgrade your quality of tefillah. Use these days to uplift your learning and davening generally during the rest of the week and the rest of the year.

At the end of the parsha, we have the menorah, the lechem haponim, and the story of the ben Ish Mitzri.

The menorah teaches us a special lesson. Chazal ask: why do we need to have a menorah in the mikdash? Does Hashem need our light from the menorah? Rather, as we learned from Sefer Mishlei, the menorah represents chochmoh.

There are two types of kedushoh that are demanded of us. One is kedushoh in our physical lives and our bodies to use them to connect to Hashem and uplift ourselves. The other is having kedushoh dominate my mental life, my thought processes. This is the menorah – chochmoh together with kedushoh. My mind is kodosh. My language is kodosh and my entire being is kodosh.

Jews can do everything in the world. But there are two ways of going about it – either as a Ben Torah or as a goy. Doing things as a Ben Torah means recognizing for myself and declaring to the world that I am different than those around me. I use everything in the material world I have been given as a means to serve Hashem. I am His representative in this world. There are certain days I have to retreat completely from worldly activity. I dress differently and I speak differently. The Taz says even though the practice of wearing a kippah started however it started, today it is a chiyuv deoraisoh. Why? Because it has become a symbol of the fact that a Jew is different than a non-Jew. A Jew can function in a non-Jewish society and do business with them, but he remains different.

Then we have the incident of the ben Ish Mitzri.

In the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, when Hashem counts the Jewish people, the Torah testifies that none of their children were illegitimate. They were under the absolute rule of the Egyptians for 83 years. Everyone was saying – these brutal masters controlled their bodies, surely they also controlled their wives? In response, Hashem declared they were all children of their fathers and there was no infidelity – with one exception.

The midrash describes exactly how this happened. There was a Jewish woman called Shlomis bas Divri. She was very outgoing and friendly – as her name indicates. But she was friendly to everyone indiscriminately – even to her husband's taskmaster. The taskmaster takes notice that this woman isn't as reserved and discreet towards Egyptian men as the other Jewish women usually are. So one day, after he takes her husband out to work, he returns to the house. The product of that, was this man. When the husband discovered the adultery, the taskmaster began to beat the Jew to death, but was saved by Moshe Rabbeinu who killed the Egyptian with the Shem of Hashem.

So all members of Klal Yisroel were conceived in kedushoh and taharoh with the exception of this one individual.

When the Jewish camps were set up, everyone belonged to the shevet of his father. This individual didn't have a Jewish father and couldn't join his mother's shevet's camp. He demanded that he be allowed to anyway, and when he was denied, he got angry and cursed.

If you take notice of how many people are murdered on a daily basis in the western world, you should be horrified. We see that people become angry and lose all control – they are suddenly capable of the worst behavior when they get angry. A Jew should be on a higher level. This ben Ish Mitzri was refused his demands, lost his temper, and cursed. They were told that he deserved skiloh.

There are many deep lessons here.

One is that Klal Yisroel were able to preserve the purity of their male-female relationships under the most difficult, impossible conditions as slaves in Egypt. There was not one instance of immorality except for this one woman. This is why Klal Yisroel merited to have the Shechinoh rest among them. "Mah tovu oholechoh Yaakov".

We are human beings and engage in normal human physical activity, but there is kedushoh. It means that everything that we do is disciplined and elevated. We do not allow ourselves to sink into animal behavior. Evolution is a very attractive idea. It gives full moral license to human beings to act as animals with no moral restraints. If people are essentially animals, there is nothing to force them to restrain themselves from expressing their animal instincts. This is what Hitler said is the problem with the Jews. The culture of the Aryan race is to live as animals where the strong dominate the weak. Jews represent a conscience and morality and it doesn't let us be free to live our lives as animals. Their existence shows us that we are not just animals, and we cannot tolerate this contradiction.

This is why Klal Yisroel merited to be taken out of Egypt. We show the world how to live a life of kedushoh. Even Bilaam recognized that this people is elevated by their tznius and their kedushoh. They are too close to Hashem and cannot be cursed.

These parshiyos are driving home a single idea. Hashem took us out of Egypt in order to connect to Him by elevating ourselves above the physical life of the Egyptians. We are a mamleches kohanim v'goy kodosh.

As we are counting down to kabbolas haTorah, it is important for us to think about how deeply we were transformed as a result of receiving the Torah and living a life of kedushoh and taharoh. The gemara advises us to go out and see how the non-Jews live in the market in order to appreciate what a life of Torah and mitzvos has done for us. The Rambam goes one step further and says we should go to the deepest African jungle to see what all human civilization would be like without the Torah making its impact on the world.

We changed the world dramatically because we spread the ideals of the Torah. The Torah demands that we become a higher level people. He took us out of Egypt to become kodosh, for Hashem is kodosh.