

Bais Midrash Zichron Eliezer

Message from the Rav – Parshas Emor 5772

#1

In the first verse of this week's Parsha, Hashem commands the Kohanim to avoid coming in contact with anything that would render them impure. In most cases, commands of this type or described with the word "vayidaber." In this instance, the word "emor" is used.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, ZT'L (Darash Moshe on P' Emor) offers a novel interpretation of this variation. He explains that the word "emor" is an expression of "pleasantness," as opposed to the word "vayidaber" which connotes "harshness."

What does "pleasantness" have to do with the Kohanim?

We all know that Kohanim have various rules and restrictions which govern their daily lives. While it is true that they are the leaders and role-models for Klal Yisroel, it is only natural that a Kohen might view the many Mitzvos and limitations placed upon him as more of a burden than a privilege. Once this happens, it becomes impossible for him to serve as true "teacher of Israel," for a person who does not appreciate something, cannot convince someone else to appreciate it either.

For example, Chazal teach us that observing the Kohanim perform the avoda was among the most inspirational sights that a Jew could see. If the Kohanim themselves did not truly appreciate what they were doing, it would have been impossible for them to inspire others.

For this reason, the Torah uses the expression of "emor." It is not enough that the Kohanim follow the basic commandments. They must also do so with a feeling of joy and "pleasantness," cognizant that they have been given a unique privilege.

Rav Moshe explains that since Kohanim are considered to be the "teachers of Israel," this lesson has particular application to those who enter the world of Chinuch, which generally presents various financial challenges. For example, a Rebbe cannot be successful in influencing students if he himself views his life in Chinuch as a constant burden and struggle. Children will instinctively sense this internal resistance. Indeed, according to Rav Moshe, individuals should refrain from entering Chinuch unless they truly view such a lifestyle as a privilege and honor!

I would like to suggest that this lesson applies to all of us (even if we are not in the world of Chinuch), for we are all "teachers" to the many people we interact with on a daily basis, be it our spouses, children, colleagues, friends, or even strangers in the street.

If our children see that we view Davening three times a day as a burden, why should they aspire to do so? If we view Torah and Mitzvos as a burden, it will be impossible for us to transmit the Mesorah to the next generation. However, if we recognize the beauty of living a Torah lifestyle, and appreciate the great responsibility that comes with it, we will then be able to inspire and influence all those who we encounter.

#2

As Lag B'Omer just passed, we know that Rabbi Eliezer stopped burning things after he met an elderly Jew carrying two myrtle branches to honor the Shabbos.

What was so significant about the myrtle branches?

It was the elderly man's appreciation and cherishment for Mitzvos. True, he most likely was involved with mundane things throughout the week, but he appreciated his role as an observant Jew. Upon witnessing the man's "chavivus," Rabbi Eliezer was immediately appeased.

#3

Toward the end of the third aliyah, we read of our obligation to observe all of Hashem's commandments (see 21:31). Interestingly, in the very next Pasuk (21:32), we are exhorted to avoid any desecration of Hashem's name. Why are these two Pesukim juxtaposed?

The Ksav Sofer explains that we must make sure that by doing Mitzvos, we don't inadvertently cause a desecration of God's name at the same time. For example, it often happens that in our zeal to perform Mitzvos and become "more frum," we somehow give off a certain impression that is less than pleasant. We tend to focus only on our connection God, at the expense of our interaction with people, and this is not correct.

The Pasuk therefore warns us that it is not enough to simply perform the commandments. We must also ensure that we maintain a pleasant temperament, and remain involved with the lives of others. For if we don't do this, people will mock the person performing the commandments, insinuating that as a result of keeping Mitzvos, people do not behave properly – a true Chilul Hashem.

As such, we must strive to follow all of the Mitzvos in the Torah, but we must make sure that we don't make a Chilul Hashem in the process!

#4

As we discussed a few weeks ago during Sholosh Seudos, Shamai would greet every single person with a pleasant countenance. We now understand that this was for two reasons. First, Shamai understood the pleasure and responsibility of a Torah lifestyle. He did not view the Mitzvos, or the general "Torah lifestyle" as a burden, but rather as a privilege. Second, he knew that in order to properly keep Torah and Mitzvos, he needed to behave in a proper fashion, thus demonstrating the pleasant ways of the Torah. In this way, he was able to observe Mitzvos and make a Kidush Hashem at the same time.

It is incumbent upon all of us to not only recognize the beauty of the Torah, and to perform its Mitzvos, but to behave in a way that demonstrates how "happy we are with our portion." We must make sure that we ourselves are truly happy living this lifestyle.

Finally, let us be extremely careful that no one should ever be able to claim that people who observe Mitzvos do not behave properly, and that the Torah does not influence its adherents to act in a proper fashion.

Instead, let us act in a way which forces all who see us to declare "what a wonderful Torah it must be."

Good Shabbos.

Rabbi Menachem Spira