

# *Parsha Achrei-Kiddoshim*

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## *1. The Value of a Proper Diagnosis*

The Commentators teach us that *tzaras* (a leprous lesion) is a disorder that does not result from a physical or physiological condition but rather from a spiritual deficiency. One who speaks *Lashon Hara* (Evil Speech) develops a discoloration of the skin to indicate his failing. The Torah states that the person who suspects that he has *tzaras* is **“brought to the Kohen.”** The question is – who “brings” the person in question to the Kohen? The answer is- he brings himself. If this is the case then why does the Torah say he is “brought” to the Kohen? The Torah should have said the person “goes” to the Kohen?

The Sforno explains that when a person’s condition is affected he is consequently inspired to take action. When the Torah says that he is “brought to the Kohen”, he is brought to the realization that he must go to the Kohen to deal with his problem. When one acknowledges that he has a problem that needs to be addressed it is the beginning of the cure.

The Sforno explains why the Torah prescribes that the Kohen must be the person who evaluates the leprous lesion. The Sforno explains that the reason why the Kohen is chosen is based on a verse in *Malachi*. The verse states, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the faith and one should seek Torah from his mouth because he is an angel of G-d.” The Kohen is designated as the teacher who has the ability to advise the person on how to address this problem through introspection.

As we read in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers) it is essential that one must **“Make for himself a teacher (Rebbe) and acquire for himself a friend.”** It is a necessity for every Jew to have a spiritual guide and a friend who does not share the conflict of interest that he has and thus is able to be truly objective (see Rabbenu Yona in commentary). We are all conflicted with self-interest that clouds our judgment. By choosing a teacher that one values, he is making himself receptive to that person’s teachings. This is why the Torah prescribes that the person who is in a questionable leprous state to go to the Kohen – who is that teacher par excellence.

We need to address the many difficulties or events that affect our lives. One cannot just simply dismiss these events as happenstance or something that is happening to everyone. We need to recognize the cause of the problem, which emanates from our spiritual shortcomings. In order to have a semblance of clarity one must choose a teacher and a friend so that he can consult with those who do not share his conflicts of interest.

## *2. Understanding Torah, to Revere it*

We are currently in the midst of the *Yemei HaSefira* (The days of Sefira) which is a semi-mourning period. The Gemara tells us in *Tractate Yevamos* that during this time, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva’s students passed away within a thirty-three day period. Rabbi Akiva’s students were the source of the spiritual illumination in the world. Within a thirty-three day period they all passed away from a plague. The Gemara explains that the reason why this tragedy occurred, despite their greatness in Torah, was because **“They did not treat one another with the proper respect.”** How does one understand this?

The Torah tells us “You must teach your son (Torah).” The Gemara explains that meaning of the word “son” does not mean child but rather “your student”. A question is asked – if in fact the word “child” means “student” why did the Torah not write “student”? The answer given is – the only

way that Torah can properly be transmitted between teacher and student is if the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student is like a father and his son. Based on this principle, how do we understand Rabbi Akiva's lack of awareness of the shortcomings of his students? If in fact they did not treat one another with the proper respect how is it possible that Rabbi Akiva was not aware of this?

The explanation given by the Gemara seems to be more difficult because of the spiritual stature of each of Rabbi Akiva's students. How is it possible for them not to treat one another with the proper respect? Evidently, it is clear that we cannot understand the passage of the Gemara on a literal level.

There is a Positive Commandment in the Torah to acknowledge a Torah Sage with the proper respect. The question to ask is – what is proper respect? If, for example, there were two Torah scholars- one who is the leading Sage of the generation and another is of lesser status, it would be disrespectful to honor and acknowledge the leading Sage at the same level as one acknowledges the lesser scholar. The Torah Sage, who is at a particularly high spiritual level, must be acknowledged in a manner consistent with that level. Each Torah Sage must be afforded the proper respect vis-à-vis his level.

Every one of Rabbi Akiva's Talmidim was at his own special level. The shortcoming, which ultimately led to the demise of 24,000 Talmidim, was that they lacked the sensitivity to discern the various levels among their peers to accord each one his proper level of respect. Therefore Rabbi Akiva only seeing the proper respect accorded to each of his students was unaware of the subtleties in which they failed.

A Torah Sage is more than a repository of knowledge. A Torah Sage is one who reflects his inner spirituality in his outward behavior. All of his Torah knowledge is synthesized and integrated into every aspect of his life.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin zt'l says in *Nefesh Ha'Chaim* that one must have a tremendous amount of reverence and respect when one is engaged in Torah study because he is studying the Word of Hashem. Similarly one should also conduct himself with reverence and respect during the reading of the Torah. The Ramah in his glosses says that although there is no obligation to stand during the reading of the Torah, it is admirable if one stands because the setting of the Torah reading is seen as a reenactment of Sinai (Just as at Sinai we stood in trepidation to hear the word of Hashem). If one, however, sits casually and does not conduct himself with the appropriate posture then this is considered disrespect. There are many levels, nuances, gradations of greatness to which we must be sensitive and act accordingly.

### ***3. Is it Really that Simple to Recognize a Problem?***

*Tzaras* (leprosy) is an affliction that is precipitated by speaking *Lashon Hara* (Evil Speech). This affliction is not caused by any physical or psychological states. *Tzaras* is an indicator that a person is failing in a specific spiritual area, which has to be corrected.

The Sforno quotes the Gemara in *Tractate Kiddushin* which states that if a person engages in commercial transactions with produce of the Sabbatical Year (which is forbidden) he faces many severe consequences which evolve over a period of time. The Gemara says that this person will have to sell his assets (field and house) because of financial hardship and eventually sell his daughter into slavery, and ultimately be forced to sell himself as a slave. The Gemara says when this person initially experiences some of these difficulties he would hopefully understand that there is a problem and would correct his ways. However if he is oblivious to his circumstance, G-d will cause him to fall into financial ruin.

The affliction of *Tzaras* comes upon a person in a similar manner– when one speaks *Lashon Hara*. Initially one's house is affected with discolorations of the stone, which is leprosy of the house. This state of being causes everything in the structure to become contaminated and ultimately the

house may have to be demolished. If the person is not sensitized through this event then his vessels and clothing are affected with leprosy. If he continues to remain oblivious to his need for spiritual correction, then the affliction of leprosy will affect his body. This state of being causes him to be treated as a pariah until he recovers from this affliction. The question is how is it possible that after an onslaught of such unusual events one does not immediately recognize that his problem is something of a personal and spiritual nature?

The answer is that even though the problem is easily recognized it is not that simple. One usually dismisses his issues as happenstance or part of a societal problem. For example, the person who engages in profiting from the produce of the Sabbatical Year will gloss over his problem and attribute his financial difficulties to “market conditions”. The person whose house develops *Tzaras* may ignore the problem because it does not sufficiently impact on his existence to act as a deterrent. As the afflictions of leprosy bring about greater limitations on a person’s function and social interaction he will begin realizing that all of his problems stem from his spiritual shortcomings. The Sforno explains that people live their lives as if they are in “a trance” which causes them to ignore everything around them. They no longer employ their intellectual capabilities to make the proper decisions.

He explains that animals and nature function completely on instinct and according to the physical laws that Hashem established for them to function. Since the animals’ behavior is not based on intellect but rather on instinct, there is nothing that can occur differently than what the instinct dictates. Animals are completely bound by natural laws set by Hashem.

Human beings, however, are endowed with intellect and free choice that enables them to change the course of events through their actions, which are not necessarily within the context of nature. For example, we can change our predicament by praying to Hashem. Our providence is not that of nature. However if a person chooses to ignore his situation and falls into a “trance-like” state where he does not employ his intellect to make the proper decisions he will be subject to the same providence as instinctive creatures. In other words, he will be subject to the circumstances of the physical world.

The Sforno explains that *Tzaras* is an affliction that is outside of the context of nature. It is intended to be a wake-up call to arouse the person from his “trance-like” state and make him realize that he must make corrections in his spirituality to bring about recovery. The process of realizing one’s mistakes takes him outside of the animal realm thus causing him not to be subject to natural providence.

There was a Yiddish idiom that was commonly expressed in the Talmud Torah of Kelm (world renowned Yeshiva established by Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziev zt’l – student of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter zt’l) which was used to describe the quality of one’s acknowledgement of reality. The idiom was - “The astonishment of a cow.” What is the meaning of this idiom? Rabbi Simcha Zissel explained that this is similar to the situation when a locomotive train passed through the meadows and fields where cows were grazing. The train would cause a great commotion through the blowing of its whistle and the chugging of the engine while smoke billowed from its smoke stack. The cows grazing in the field with their heads bowed to the ground munching on the grass would lift their heads in astonishment and look up at the train, which was the cause of the commotion. However, as the train passes into the distance they gradually lowered their heads back again to munch on the grass as if the disruption never took place. This is in essence the equivalent of most people’s behavior. When events take place we take notice and we are astonished. As time passes we live our lives as if nothing has happened.

After the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> people were moved and impacted by the event to such a degree that they became consumed with the event. After receiving such a disruptive and loud wake-up call how many people have actually woken up? How many people have made lasting changes outside of the realm of security? Most people quickly returned to their regular routine as if the cataclysmic event never took place. This is similar to the train in the distance with the billowing clouds.

The Sforno explains that Hashem changes nature in order for us to be able to comprehend and understand that we are failing so that we should make proper changes. During the Gulf War 39 SCUDD missiles fell on Israel and caused no injuries. Immediately people equated this to the 39 classifications of forbidden creative activity on Shabbos and that this was a clear sign from G-d. However it began as astonishment and ended as an interesting observation. If we remain oblivious to Hashem's hints and remain locked in our "trance-like" state we will be subject to all the trends of nature – whatever they may be. If however on the other hand we take notice and make the necessary changes then our providence will supercede the natural order.

#### ***4. Taking Advantage of Opportunity***

The Torah says, **"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died."** Immediately after the Torah mentions the death of Aaron's two sons, the Torah describes the Yom Kippur Service. Chazal ask -why does the Torah juxtapose the death of Aaron's two sons to the Service of Yom Kippur? They answer- to teach us that just as the day of Yom Kippur atones for our sins so too does the death of tzaddikim (righteous people).

Yom Kippur only atones for one's sins in conjunction with *teshuvah* (remorse and a commitment to not repeat the sins, etc.). The Gemara in *Tractate Zevachim* tells us that the term "Kippur" means to "wipe clean". Since the Torah is equating the passing of the tzaddik with Yom Kippur then just as Yom Kippur wipes clean one's sins so to the passing of the tzaddik wipes clean one's slate from sin. In addition just as Yom Kippur only atones in conjunction with *teshuvah* so to does the passing of the tzaddik atone in conjunction with *teshuvah*. When one experiences sufficient remorse for the past and makes a sincere and binding commitment to change for the future at the time of the death of the tzaddik he will be atoned from his sins as though he experienced Yom Kippur itself. How do we understand this?

The Rambam states in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (The Laws of Atonement) that there are many sins, which require the day of Yom Kippur itself in order to bring about full atonement- even though the person may have done the proper *teshuvah* prior to Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur completes the atonement process because on that day the Attribute of Mercy of Hashem is so overwhelming that one's spirituality is fully rehabilitated. However, during the rest of the year when the Attribute of Mercy is not at this most advanced level, *teshuvah* alone cannot fully rehabilitate the person. Therefore one must wait until Yom Kippur for full atonement.

The *Shalah HaKadosh* asks- if Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year then why if one violates the day is one only subject to *koreiss* (spiritual excision) and not liable for the death penalty as when one violates the Shabbos? One would think that violating Yom Kippur would at least have the same degree of severity as Shabbos. The *Shalah HaKadosh* explains that the Attribute of Mercy is so overwhelming on Yom Kippur that even though the person deserves to be punished with death, the Mercy of Hashem does not allow this.

Through the juxtaposition of the death of the sons of Aaron to Yom Kippur the Torah is teaching us that just as the Attribute of Mercy (*Rachamim*) at the most advanced level is in place on Yom Kippur and therefore atones for all of our sins (with the proper *teshuvah*) so too is the *Rachamim* of Hashem is at that advanced level the tzaddik passes away.

The Rambam states that during the year one needs to pray within the context of a *minyan* (quorum) in order for his prayers to be heard by Hashem. However during the Ten Days of Penitence (between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) Hashem will even listen to the supplications of an individual. The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah bases this on the verse, **"One should seek Him (Hashem) when He is to be found. Call to Him when He is Closest."** During the time of Yom Kippur and the Ten Days of penitence Hashem is the closest to us because his Attribute of Mercy is so overwhelmingly present. By juxtaposing the death of tzaddikim to Yom Kippur, the Torah is telling us that just as during the Days of Penitence Hashem is attentive to the prayers of an individual so too with the passing of the tzaddik Hashem listens to the prayer of the individual.

Unfortunately, we have had many great tzaddikim pass away recently. The passing of these unique and spiritual individuals pains us all; however, we must take advantage of the special level of *Rachamim* that exists at these moments. Just as we call out to Hashem on Yom Kippur when He is the closest to us so too when the Tzaddik passes away we should call out to Hashem to save the Jewish people.

## ***5. What Qualifications must one possess to have a Relationship with Hashem?***

The portion begins, "***Kadoshim t'hue (You shall be Holy) Ki Kadosh Ani ... (because I am Holy)***". The Torah is telling us that the Jew must be Holy because Hashem is Holy. The question is- what is the relevance between the sanctity of Hashem and the sanctity of the Jew? The Midrash explains that *Kiddusha (Holiness)* is, "***Kaddaish ess atzmacha b'mutar lach (You should remove yourself from those things that are permitted to you.)***" Meaning that we should only partake in what is necessary to maintain our existence and refrain from what is unnecessary. Chazal are telling us that the only path to *Kiddushah* is by utilizing the material as a means to an end that is limited to the context of necessity.

The Torah states in parshas *Shemini*, "***These are the creatures (Chaiya) that you may eat from among the animals that are upon the earth...***" The Torah uses the term "*Chaiya*" which usually means the undomesticated animal; however, in this context it includes within it even the domesticated animals (*Behaima*). If so, why does the Torah choose to introduce the Kosher and non-Kosher species with the word *Chaiya*?

Rashi in his commentary cites the Midrash, which says that the word "*Chaiya*" is alluding to "life". Since Hashem wants the Jew to be attached to Him, as he is the source of life, the Torah therefore expresses itself with the word *Chaiya* to indicate this concept. One can only have a relationship with Hashem if he partakes only of Kosher species; however, if one partakes of the non-Kosher species it creates a spiritual impurity which does not allow a relationship. The Torah is teaching us that one can only have a relationship if one maintains an existence of spiritual purity. Therefore Hashem removed us from those things that are spiritually contaminated. Now we are able to understand the opening verse in the portion of *Kadoshim*, "You must be Holy because I am Holy." We can only have a relationship with Hashem if there is a commonality. If Hashem is *Kadosh* we must be *Kadosh* – only then can we attach ourselves to Him.

What does it mean to be Holy by removing oneself from those things that are permitted? The Ramban explains that a person can behave in the most despicable manner within the context of everything that is permitted. A person is able to live as a hedonist being indulgent in everything that is permitted and nevertheless have no relevance to Holiness (*Kiddushah*). This is because this manner of lifestyle is the antithesis of spirituality and thus causes a separation between himself and Hashem. The word *Kadosh* literally means "Removed or set aside." Therefore in order for one to be *Kadosh* (Holy) one must remove himself from physicality as much as possible.

Moshe tells the Jewish people that when he was in Heaven receiving the Torah from Hashem "***Bread I did not eat, water I did not drink for forty days and forty nights.***" What is the importance of informing the Jews that he did not partake of bread or water for this period of time? The Yalkut explains that what Moshe was actually saying to the Jewish people was, "Just as I gave my fat and my blood for the sake of acquiring the Torah, so too if you want to acquire the Torah you must give your fat and your blood." Meaning that if one wishes to have relevance to Hashem and His Knowledge (The Torah) one needs to remove himself from physicality when it is not a necessity.

To have a relationship with Hashem we must follow His prescription, "***Kadoshim T'hue (You shall be Holy) Ki Kadosh Ani ... (because I am Holy)***".

## ***6. Our Connection to Hashem is through our Parents***

There is a Positive Commandment to, **“In the presence of a Zokain (elderly person) shall you rise and you shall honor the presence of a Zokain (Torah Scholar) and you shall revere your G-d- I am Hashem.”** Chazal tell us that while the word “Zokain” usually means “an elderly person” it also means “*Talmid Chacham*” (Torah Scholar). As the Chazal tell us, “Who is a Zokair (Elder), the one who has acquired Torah Knowledge.” The Rambam states in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* that one has the obligation to stand, raise oneself, and acknowledge a *Talmid Chacham* if he is within your four cubits. *If the Talmid Chacham* is one’s Rebbe (Teacher) then the level of acknowledgement is expanded. The verse continues **“...and you shall revere your G-d- I am Hashem.”** Rashi cites the Midrash that explains this to mean that if one knows that a Torah scholar is approaching and pretends to be preoccupied in order to avoid acknowledging his presence, Hashem knows what is inside his heart and he will be held accountable.

The Torah states, **“Your father and mother you shall revere and My Sabbaths shall you observe- I am Hashem, your G-d.”** The Torah tells us that one not only has the obligation to revere his father (which is more natural) but also his mother (which one normally does not). Rabbi Meir Simcha of Divinsk zt”l says that the basis for Torah from Sinai is *Mesora (Traditional Transmission of Torah)*. The basis for Torah from Sinai is the transmission from father to son. Why does one value what is told to him by his father more than what is told to him by a stranger – to the point that we allow it to dictate our lives? The answer is – that since there is a Mitzvah to revere and respect a parent the word of the parent is received differently than that of a stranger. Therefore “I am Hashem” which is stated in the verse is directly attributed to the Commandment of **“Your father and mother you shall revere.”** Reverence for one’s parents guarantees the transmission of Torah from generation to generation and the acknowledgment of **“I Am Hashem.”**

The Ten Commandments encompass Torah in its entirety. The transgression of any of them carries a serious liability. It is understandable why observance of the Shabbos is counted as one of the Ten Commandments because the importance of this mitzvah is an acknowledgment that Hashem is the Creator of the world. This is a fundamental belief in Torah Judaism. Why would a Commandment of observing the Shabbos be one of the Ten Commandments? The reason is that by observing Shabbos one acknowledges that Hashem is the Creator of the world. Why would the Commandment of honoring one’s parents be included in the Ten Commandments? It would seem that this Mitzvah is not as fundamental and profound as the others. We are able to answer this question based on Reb Meir Simcha’s explanation regarding the importance of revering a parent. If it were not for the reverence one has for a parent there would be no Torah. Consequently, there would be no G-d. The basis for our belief in Hashem is the *Mesora*, the transmission from Sinai from Generation to Generation and from father to son.

The Gemara tells us that Rabbi Akiva explains the “ess” (which is always an adjunct to whatever it is associated with). The Torah states, **“(ess) you shall revere your G-d.”** The word “ess” which precedes this Commandment is interpreted by Rabbi Akiva to mean that you should revere a *Talmid Chacham* as you should revere G-d. The Maharal of Prague explains why Hashem wants the Torah Sage to be revered as you revere Him. The Torah Sage is the teacher and the transmitter of Torah. He is the one that disseminates the word of Hashem. G-d wants us to value this person to this level because he wants us to value the Torah Sage’s teaching. Since the *Talmid Chacham* is the repository of the *Mesora* he must be revered to ensure the transmission of that Torah.

With this, we can understand the Gemara in *Tractate Pesachim* that states, “one is not permitted to be present in the bathhouse with his Rebbe when his Rebbe is taking a haircut.” If one sees his Rebbe engaging in these mundane needs one’s reverence for his Rebbe will be diminished. One will perceive his Rebbe almost on a peer level and not on the level of Teacher and Student. This is not to say that the student does not know his Rebbe cuts his hair. The Rambam states in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* that a Rebbe is not permitted to joke with his students because it might cause them to not revere the Rebbe as he should be revered. Thus, that which would have taken only a few moments to teach his students would take a longer period of time. This is due to the lack of appropriate level of reverence for the Rebbe. The more the students revere their Rebbe the more they are attentive to his words.

By stating, **“In the presence of a Zokain (elderly person) shall you rise and you shall honor the**

**presence of a Zokain (Torah Scholar) and you shall revere your G-d- I am Hashem”** the Torah is telling us that if one wants to revere Hashem one needs to revere and acknowledge the Zokain. The more one acknowledges and values the true Torah Sage the more he will revere Hashem. If however one feels that the Torah Sage is merely “another teacher” then this will cause him to not revere Hashem. It is not the love of Torah that makes one revere Hashem but rather it is the reverence for the Torah Sage.

## ***7. Keeping the Conduit to Hashem Open***

The Torah states, “**With this shall Aaron come into the Sanctuary (the Holy of Holies)...**” Once a year the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies (the location where Hashem dwells) on Yom Kippur to perform the Service of Yom Kippur. The *Yalkut* (Midrash) explains the words, “**With this...shall Aaron**” means that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with “bundles of Mitzvos in his hand.” In order for the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) to be in the presence of the *Shechina* (*The Divine Presence*) in the Sanctuary, he needed to have many merits to make him qualified and effective.

The *Yalkut* lists the many merits with which the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies: Torah Circumcision, Shabbos, the merit of Jerusalem, all the Tribes of the Jewish People, Yehudah (Kingship), etc. It is clear that the Kohen Gadol needed to have many merits to go before the Divine Presence. Given all of the requirements for carrying out such an awesome task, one would think that the Kohen Gadol needed to enter into the Holy of Holies to bring about atonement for the sins of the Jewish people.

It would be understandable that such a difficult service was required to atone for the transgression of Shabbos, dietary laws, etc. However, the Torah tells us that the High Priest did not enter into the Holy of Holies to atone for those sins. Rather, the Kohen Gadol entered into the Holy of Holies and stood before the Divine Presence to atone for the possibility that someone may have entered into the *Mikdosh* (Sanctuary) in a contaminated state or someone may have eaten *Kodshim* (*Sacrificial food*) while being in a contaminated state, which is forbidden.

Why is the atonement for these infractions (contaminating the Mikdosh etc.) seemingly more involved and weighty than the atonement for all the other sins? All the other sins of the Jewish people are atoned for through the goat that was thrown down the mountain, *Azazel*. The process of atonement, which involves *Azazel* sequentially, comes only after the Kohen Gadol has performed the Service in the Holy of Holies to atone for the possibility of contamination of the *Mikdosh* or the eating of *Kodshim* in a contaminated state. How do we understand this?

The Torah tells us that Hashem dwells in amongst the Jewish people even if they are in a contaminated state. If this is the case then why is it such a high priority for the Kohen Gadol to perform the Service in the Holy of Holies to atone for the possible contamination of the *Mikdosh*? Evidently, if this infraction must be atoned, it is clear that although Hashem dwells amongst the Jewish people our relationship with Him is diminished to some degree.

The Torah states, “Make for Me a Mikdosh so that I shall dwell in your midst.” Meaning the Mikdosh itself was the conduit through which Hashem related to the Jewish people. Then just like a pipeline needs to be free and clear of obstructions in order for it to be an effective conduit, so too does the Mikdosh. If the Mikdosh, which is the link between Hashem and the Jewish people, is contaminated then it is diminished in its effectiveness as a conduit. If we are able to clear the conduit and make it fully functioning then all of the other issues can be addressed. Therefore the priority for the Kohen Gadol was to atone for the contamination of the Mikdosh and the eating of the Sacrificial Food in a contaminated state.

Every day we pray for the rebuilding of Bais HaMikdosh (the Temple) and then we ask Hashem to give us a share in His Torah. Since the Mishna tells us that the studies of Torah is equivalent to all of the other Mitzvos combined, then why do we not first ask for a share in Hashem’s Torah and then to have the Bais HaMikdosh rebuilt? The answer is that one cannot have a proper share in

Torah without a full relationship with Hashem, which comes through the Bais HaMikdosh. In order for us to have the capacity and the clarity to truly understand Torah we first need to have the Bais HaMikdosh speedily rebuilt in our time.