

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

שבר תחת שבר עין תחת עין שן תחת שן כאשר יתן מום באדם כן ניתן בו ... (כג-ד)

If someone hits his neighbor causing him to lose an eye, he is “owed” an eye. The *Torah* seems to suggest that the consequence for the attacker or negligent damager is that he must forfeit his own eye. *Chazal* explain, however, (*Bava Kama* 83*b*), that we are dealing with monetary value and not an actual eye, as it was difficult back in biblical times to ensure that the removal of an eye did not kill a person, and what would one do if the attacker was already blind, and so on. The **Maharal M’Prague ז”ל (Gur Aryeh)** explains that in reality a person should have to pay with his own actual eye, to teach him that no monetary equivalent could compensate for the loss of a living limb or organ. However, a person might come to mistakenly believe that once he pays, his debt is finished; he has completely compensated his neighbor for the damage that was done. In reality, though, such crimes can never be compensated for, and the damager must seek the forgiveness of the victim. In *Parshas Emor*, deep in the midst of the mission of the *Kohanim* who were meant to be our role models, we are reminded of how important it is to be sensitive to the “blemishes” we sometimes inflict on our fellow human beings: physical, emotional and even psychological scars, that cannot always be fixed or healed so easily.

Rabbi Binny Friedman recalled a visit he made years ago to the Old Synagogue of the *Maharal* (known as the *Altneu Shul*, in Prague). He immediately noticed its most distinctive feature: with the exception of some Hebrew letters very high up near the ceiling, the walls are completely blank, devoid of any art or decoration. Standing in stark contrast to all the other Jewish synagogues of Prague (not to mention synagogues all over Europe), this detail demanded an explanation.

There is an intensity to this *shul* with its history of hundreds of years in existence; eventually Rabbi Friedman learned why. On April 17, 1389, Easter Sunday, a Catholic Priest leading a procession past the Jewish community of Prague was hit with some sand thrown by a few Jewish children as they were in the midst of playing. Claiming they had denigrated Christianity and desecrated his lord, his incitement led the clergy to encourage savage mobs to pillage, ransack, and burn the Jewish quarter for two days in what became known as the Prague pogrom. 3,000 Jews were killed by their Christian brethren; all but the youngest children were murdered, with countless more injured and maimed, many of whom had their limbs cut off and eyes put out. Practically the entire Jewish community of Prague was wiped out in a matter of 48 hours..

As there were not enough able-bodied Jewish men left to give the dead a proper burial in a short period of time, to prevent a further desecration of the dead, the 3,000 Jewish bodies were stacked in the *shul* until little by little they were able to be given a proper Jewish burial. By the time they were all buried, however, the blood from their bodies had seeped into the walls of the building all the way up to the top of the windows. For over two centuries this was how the walls were left; the red stained stones a constant reminder of the price the Jewish community of Prague had paid for their faith.

When the *Maharal* came from Poland to Prague in the latter half of the 16th century and saw the blood on the walls, he told the Jewish community they could not pray there as the blood needed burial. Eventually they compromised by plastering the walls to “bury” the blood behind the plaster. But every 100 years or so, the blood seeps through and the walls need to be re-plastered. As part of a compromise, the walls remained blank without decoration out of respect for those who lost their lives. Eventually the **Noda B’yehuda** convinced them to decorate the top of the walls with verses but only the first letters of each word.

Think about who those 3,000 murdered Jews of 1389 might have been today. Millions more Jews would be alive. The loss is staggering. Same goes for the *kedoshim* of the Holocaust, pogroms and countless other tragedies. We live in a generation that is witnessing an attempt by some of the countries responsible for the most sinister destruction of a people in human history, attempt to “compensate” for those crimes. But at the same time it is important to remember why the *Torah* states the consequence as “*an eye for an eye*”; because we need to always be aware that such things can never truly be fixed.

ואחריו מחרתו שבועת ימים
יספור לו ... (הוקא! מד-כז)
Yechezkel HaNavi discusses, in this week’s *Haftorah*, the unique laws and customs associated with the *kohanim* and how they must remain pure and holy in order to do the *avodah* in the *Bais Hamikdash*. The *Navi* tells us that when a *kohen* becomes impure, even for a valid reason, he must undergo a purification process after which he must wait seven days while “they” - other *kohanim* - count the days of purity. But there really is no need to involve anyone else. Surely, he himself can count the days.

R’ Zalman Sorotzkin ז”ל (Oznayim L’Torah) explains that in truth the *kohen* himself does indeed do the counting, but it is the responsibility of the other *kohanim* to ensure that he does not enter the *Bais Hamikdash* during this period.

תורת הצבי על הפטרות
He explains that in its infinite wisdom, the *Torah* foresaw the vanity of the Christian priests and how one of their main functions is to “absolve” those on death’s door of their sins. Christianity believes that if sinners confess to their sins, they are promised to merit the reward of entering heaven. This is in stark contrast to our *kohanim* who must stay far away from the dead and the dying. Only *Hashem* can absolve one of his sins – not a *kohen*. Instead, the job of the *kohen* is to do the holy service in the *Bais Hamikdash* and teach *Klal Yisroel Torah*. Being a *kohen* has its privileges, but it does not give him carte blanche to do as he pleases. He is a member of the Jewish nation and must adhere to the 613 *mitzvos* just like any other member of *Klal Yisroel*.

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התניפה שבע שבתות תמימת תהינה ... (כג-טו)

The *meforshim* explain that the word “וספרתם” is derived from the root “ספיר” a sapphire. Our job during the *מי הספירה* is to polish and refine our *middos* and *avodah* until they shine like a diamond. Then we will be more suitable to be *mekabel* the *Torah* on *Shavuos*. I once heard that *Lag Baomer* and *Tu B’shvat* are two of the most easily celebrated *Yamim Tovim* because they are not accompanied by special *mitzvos*, obligations, or restrictions and don’t demand any sacrifice. While this may be true, the *seforim* write that *Lag Baomer* is a day of hope for many types of salvation. The *heilige Tanna Reb Shimon* evokes *Hashem’s rachmanus* through our *tefillos*, showering *Yidden* with *berachos*. No, it’s not a contradiction. While there may not be any specific *mitzvos* linked to this day, perhaps the opposite is true. Each and every one of us knows the areas in which we can improve. It’s a day of introspection, *avodas Hashem* through *simcha*, and increasing our *kesher* to *Hashem* through *tefillah*. Reb Shimon, and his son Reb Elazar, lived for years in the cave, with *mesiras nefesh* and practically no *gashmiyus*. It would therefore behoove us to try to follow in that area as well, thereby meriting Reb Shimon to intercede on our behalf.

There’s a powerful *vort* from the **Sar Shalom of Belz ז”ל**. He asks as follows: we know that *Hashem* “keeps” the entire *Torah*. Now, in order to be *מהדר במצוה*, we are supposed to pay more, up to a third of the price, to “upgrade” to a nicer *mitzvah* item. How is *Hashem mekayem* this *inyan* of *שליש עד מצה*? The *Belzer Rebbe* answers, when a *Yid* works on himself to combat the *צר הרע* and he is successful, say, two-thirds of the way, *Hashem* takes care of the final third. Then he added, there are 49 days of *Sefirah*. The thirty-third day, *Lag Baomer*, is exactly two-thirds of *ספירה*. Thus, if we make a concerted effort to better ourselves, and mostly succeed, *Hashem* will “cover” the deficit. We can then be *zoche* to *הוא מטרה את* and be worthy to be *mekabel* the *Torah* *בשמחה ובטוהרה* on the upcoming *Yom Tov* of *Shavuos* *הבא עלינו לטובה*.

משל למה הדבר דומה
אלה מועדי ה’ מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אתם במועדם ... (כג-ד)
משל: The *Maggid* of *Yerushalayim*, **R’ Sholom Schwadron ז”ל**, would use humor and charisma in his *drashos* to help bring out *mussar* points and to influence his listeners. Once, during his weekly Friday night *drasha* in the *Zichron Moshe shtieblach*, a person got up and announced, “This is *leitzanus*, (light-headedness). It is improper to speak this way.”

R’ Sholom took the rebuke to heart. He feared that perhaps this man was right, and he feared continuing to give his speeches in his normal manner. He decided to go to the **Chazon Ish ז”ל** for advice and guidance.

The *Chazon Ish* asked for a demonstrational speech so that he could better decide whether R’ Sholom should continue in his humorous fashion or not. Since R’ Sholom wanted the *Chazon Ish* to experience his *drashos*, he began to speak as

ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל אני ה’ מקדשכם ... (כג-לב)

INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY ON THE WEEKLY SEDRA TO LEARN AND TO ENJOY BY R’ MOSHE GELB

After enumerating various laws pertaining to the *kohanim* and *korbanos*, the *Torah* inserts a command to sanctify *Hashem’s* Name. What is this *mitzvah* doing here? What is the connection between this *mitzvah* and the laws of *kohanim* and *korbanos*?

Perhaps we may explain as follows. When we speak of *Kiddush Hashem*, of *mesiras nefesh* to do *Hashem’s* will, it brings to mind the cry of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, after seeing the devastation caused by the *eigel*: “מי לה’ אלהי!” “Whoever is for *Hashem* - to me!” *Shevet Levi* rallied around him and with great personal sacrifice, executed all those involved in the *eigel*. When *Hashem* saw them gathering to sanctify His Name, He declared that these are the ones most loyal to Me, and they are the ones whom I want to serve Me! And He thus awarded the *kohanim*, who came from *Shevet Levi*, the rights to do the *avodah* of the *korbanos*.

Perhaps this is why the *Torah* speaks about the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem* here. Having just concluded its discussion of the laws pertaining to *kohanim* and a whole host of *halachos* regarding the *korbanos*, the *Torah* wants to make note of the special quality through which the *kohanim* merited to all these special laws and which grant them the right to bring the *korbanos* – *mesiras nefesh*, the fierce devotion and loyalty to *Hashem*, through thick and thin.

The *Gaon*, **R’ Meir Soloveitchik ז”ל**, would relate how the *heilige Chafetz Chaim ז”ל* once asked a visitor who came to him, “Do you know why I am a *Kohen*, and I am allowed to do the *avodah* on the *mizbeach* and *duchen*, but you are not?”

The poor fellow did not know what to answer, so the *Chafetz Chaim* explained: “I will tell you the reason. After the *eigel*, when *Moshe Rabbeinu* called out *מִי לַה’ אֱלֹהִים*, my *zeide* ran to his side, while your *zeide* did not! You should know,” he continued, “when *Mashiach* will come, there will be another call of *מִי לַה’ אֱלֹהִים* and at that time, one must focus and act immediately! He must not remain standing on the side!” May we be *takeh zocheh* to heed the call *b’karov*, וב”א!