



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

May 1, 2020

A Taste of Torah

Up, Not Down

by Rabbi Nesanel Kipper

At the start of the parsha, Hashem tells Moshe to speak to the Bnai Yisrael and tell them to be holy. What does it mean to be holy? The Ramban explains that it means to separate oneself from physical temptation and pleasure that is unnecessary for one's well-being.

The Ramban elaborates that although the Torah prohibits certain types of intimate relationships as well as non-kosher foods, there still remains room for one to indulge in meat, wine and the like, as well as to pursue other physical pleasures, while still technically acting within the Torah's guidelines. However, immersing oneself in the physical will prevent a person from focusing on the greater purpose of the mitzvos, which is to bring a person closer to Hashem. For this reason, the Torah tells us to stay away from unnecessary physical temptations.

At first glance, this seems like a mitzvah that is relevant for special, pious individuals who have attained a lofty level, not for the common, rank-and-file Jew. Yet Rashi cites the Medrash that this parsha was specifically said by Moshe to the entire assembly of Bnai Yisrael because many of the fundamentals of the Torah are dependent upon it. This would seem to imply that this mitzvah is indeed quite relevant to all Jews. This, of course, presents a complication, for how is the average person, living his life in a physical world, to fulfill this mitzvah in a meaningful way?

Furthermore, we know that every mitzvah one does adds holiness to the person. Putting on tefillin, eating matzah on Pesach, praying *shacharis* – these and all other mitzvos imbue the Jew performing them with sanctity.

Indeed, the blessing recited prior to performing a mitzvah contains a basic template, "Blessed are You, Hashem... Who made us holy through His mitzvos and commanded us..." In this context, holiness is referenced as something proactive, and not a mere abstention from unnecessary physical pleasure. How are we to reconcile the Ramban's definition of holiness as abstinence from physical pleasures with this description of holiness being the result of the positive performance of mitzvos?

The Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto; 1707-1746) in his classic work *Mesilas Yesharim* (Path of the Just) describes at length what it means to be on the level of *kedusha* (holiness). He says that holiness means that one is completely detached from the physical, and clings constantly, at all times, to Hashem. How is one to even begin attempting to achieve this lofty goal?

Any mitzvah that we perform brings us closer to Hashem. Therefore, the concept of performing mitzvos as being the definition of holiness can be more accurately described as one of the methods that we can utilize in order to achieve this state of holiness and connection to Hashem, as expressed in the aforementioned blessing recited upon a mitzvah.

Furthermore, the state of being removed from physical pleasures and temptations can be explained as a natural consequence of being constantly connected to Hashem. Someone who has achieved *kedusha* and is connected to Hashem finds no meaning in the pleasures of the physical world and has no drive to pursue physical pleasures; at this level,

continued on back

Stories for the Soul

Net Extension

In Eretz Yisrael, there are networks of schools that have been established to cater to children and teenagers coming from less-religious backgrounds. Many of these children are inspired to come closer to their Jewish heritage, often with opposition from their parents.

One such young man who became religious met fierce resistance from his parents. Nonetheless, with support from his *rebbeim* (teachers), he continued along the path toward Torah observance.

Several years after becoming religious, the young man became gravely ill and, sadly, he passed away not long after. The young man's rebbi at the school wanted to visit the parents during the *shiva* mourning period, but he was very nervous to do so out of concern of their reaction, as they had never made peace with their son's return to his roots. They approached Rabbi Chaim Kanievski, one of the leading Torah personalities of our time, to ask his advice. Rabbi Kanievski responded that on the contrary, the young man's return to observance had extended his life. The rebbi, somewhat encouraged, took his leave of the great sage.

The rebbi summoned his courage and went to visit the parents. Sure enough, he was given a tongue-lashing. "What did our son's becoming religious do for him?" demanded the parents. The rebbi, having nothing else to say, decided to simply share Rabbi Kanievski's words. The mother suddenly began sobbing and shouted, "You are correct! Becoming religious did indeed lengthen his life!"

The parents shared that several years earlier, during their son's journey to Torah observance, the young man's friends pulled up in a car one Shabbos

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Golden prosecutor | 4) Husband comes first |
| 2) Theatres and stadiums | 5) This time it's on the money |
| 3) Sensitive stomach | 6) Talking armpit |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part II

The Inquisition pursued the *conversos* in Portugal, and public burnings of those found guilty of the crime of secretly practicing Judaism were common.

In 1603, there was a large and very public *auto da fe* in Lisbon, and this prompted Menashe ben Israel's parents to leave Portugal.

A Taste of Torah

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separation from the physical world is an expression of that *kedusha*. In addition, one who fails to work on abstaining from these pleasures will never be able to reach a state of *kedusha*. Thus, mitzvah-performance and abstention from the physical work hand-in-hand to achieve and maintain a state of *kedusha*.

Every person has his own level of holiness that is within reach. Every mitzvah one does creates a stronger connection to Hashem, and creates a reality, at some level, that one's interest moves toward connection to Hashem and away from the physical. While many of us may have a hard time reaching the level of optimal

holiness, the Mesilas Yesharim stresses that once one has made the necessary effort to reach and maintain this level, Hashem provides, as a gift, the ability to remain at that lofty level.

Let us strive to attain *kedusha* through proper performance of mitzvos while attempting, each person in accordance with his own ability, to minimize indulgence in the blandishments of this physical world. If we take the necessary steps, we can hope for our personal fulfilment of the words of the Mesilas Yesharim, "the beginning [of *kedusha*] is dependent upon us, but the end is a gift from Hashem."

Stories for the Soul

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and invited him to go out with them. The young man declined, explaining that he had decided to observe Shabbos. His friends laughed and mocked him, but the teenager remained steadfast and refused to go. Laughing, the other boys drove off. Tragically, the car was in an accident, and some of the boys were killed. Had the young man gone with them, he would have certainly been injured and possibly

killed, as well.

The parents, astounded at the supernatural insight of the great sage, calmed down and were comforted at this realization.

In this week's parsha, the Torah teaches us that we are to live by the mitzvos. Many ideas are learned from these words, but a basic concept is that the mitzvos are a source of life, both in this world and the next.

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| 1) Golden prosecutor 16:4 s.v. <i>kesomes</i> | 4) Husband comes first 19:3 s.v. <i>ish</i> |
| 2) Theatres and stadiums 18:2 s.v. <i>mitchukoseihem</i> | 5) This time it's on the money 19:11 s.v. <i>lo signovm</i> |
| 3) Sensitive stomach 18:28 s.v. <i>vilu</i> | 6) Talking armpit 19:31 s.v. <i>al tftnu</i> |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers