



אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאוצרו של
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

*A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky*

5780 - Parshas Kedoshim – Inclusive Holiness

Parshas Kedoshim begins with a simple, yet complex command. “Kedoshim Te’heyu – You shall be holy.” The Torah then continued to list many mitzvos and laws which Jews must follow – for their own good. Moshe Rabbeinu explains that through keeping these mitzvos and observing the laws, we as a nation, and each individual, can elevate themselves to the ultimate level of holiness.

Before the Torah begins the commands, Hashem tells Moshe, “Speak to the entire congregation of the Jews, and tell them – you shall be holy.” Rashi begins his commentary on this parsha by telling us, “These words teach us: This parsha is said at Hakhel (the once-in-seven-years- gathering of all Jews at the Beis Hamikdash) because it contains the majority of the essential elements of the Torah.”

Something is troubling. There are many different mitzvos explained in this parsha. But holiness is a life’s work – mostly in private. To achieve holiness, one must spend days and weeks conquering internal battles, studying and praying. Even when achieved, holiness is not a public attribute, but a modest one. Is it an essential element? Why then is the first instruction at the public gathering of the Jews to “Be holy”?

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski was a towering leader of European Jewry during the first half of the 20th century. The Chief of the Rabbinical Beis Din of Vilna, and an extraordinary Talmudic scholar, he oversaw the many communal affairs in Vilna, while simultaneously responding to hundreds of halachic inquiries from across Europe and across the world. He spent most of his life guiding fellow Jews rather than spend his time alone, studying Torah and growing in his avodas Hashem. Throughout his entire life, he published only one set of seforim – “Achiezer”, a collection of collection of his brilliant responsa to many halachic questions. A young scholar once visited him to ask him a few difficult questions, and after Rav Chaim Ozer answered them all, the young man asked him another question. “Many of our great leaders have written so many seforim, books explaining difficult halachos and masechtos. Why is it that you have only authored one set of seforim – the sefer “Achiezer”? Surely you are capable of writing many more scholarly works?” Rav Chaim Ozer took a moment and then answered him with his brilliance – teaching him a lesson he would pass on to many others. “When I was young,” he began, “I thought that my main work is to study Torah and write seforim. But as I grew older, I realized that the ‘seforim’ which I am writing are the may widows, orphans, downtrodden and needy Jews, along with my entire community, with whom I spend most of my time guiding and helping. “These are the most prized seforim which I have written.”

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l quoted the Chasam Sofer to explain. Indeed, holiness is a private attribute, and one must work on himself in the isolated internal of his heart. But it can’t stop there. One must ensure that their holiness includes the rest of the Jews as well, and he incorporates his care and concern for the entire nation, as he grows and grows closer to Hashem.

One of the great biblical personalities mentioned in the Book of Breishis, Chanoch spent his days and nights immersed in deep service of Hashem, until he was able to reach the level of a heavenly angel. As it is written, (Bereishis 5:24) “For Hashem took him.”

Conversely, Avraham Avinu spent most of his time with simple folk – teaching them about Hashem and leading them on the correct path. He did not reach the spiritual level of Chanoch. Yet, he was greater.

The Torah is teaching us that while we are all on our path to holiness, we must keep the entire nation in mind, and make sure that you include others in your path to holiness.

Good Shabbos!

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