



THE RABBI BINYAMIN KAMENETZKY
TORAH LEGACY FOUNDATION
לזכרון של הרב בנימין קמנצקי זצ"ל

אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאת צדו 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 Emor - Frequency Call

Parshas Emor begins with an order for the Kohanim. Hashem tells Moshe “Say to the Kohanim the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a dead person among his people...”

Due to their holiness, the Kohanim have restriction uniquely to them, regarding tumah (spiritual contamination) as well as restrictions on who they can and can not marry.

Interestingly, Hashem, when telling Moshe what to say, uses a double expression, “**S**ay to the Kohanim the sons of Aaron, and **t**ell them.” The Medrash (Rabbah 26:5) explains this with a parable.

A doctor treated two patients - a Kohen and a non-Kohen. He advises the non-Kohen to be much more careful with his health than the Kohen, and explained that the Kohen does not enter a cemetery, thereby avoiding any exposure to dead bodies, which cause sickness. But the non-Kohen is not careful to avoid a cemetery, thereby requiring an extra warning. So too, the Medrash explains, the angels, who are less prone to sin, need only one warning but man, who is more prone to sin, needs a double warning.

What is the meaning of this Medrash?

Over half a century ago, there was an odd Jew who lived on the Lower East Side was. He called himself “The Professor,” and imagined himself to be both a medical genius and a high-ranking military official.

Despite his limited association with reality, there were some kind people who befriended him and invited him over often for a good meal. One of those people was one of the greatest Talmudic scholars in the latter half of the century, Rav Eliyahu Moshe Shisgal zt”l. (Rav Shisgal was the son-in-law of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l, and passed away at a relatively young age in 1973.)

On one occasion, The Professor was in Rav Shisgal’s home together with a few other guests, when he pulled out a transistor radio, and proudly showed it off. He turned the volume to the loudest, and switched from station to station. He was immensely enjoying himself - completely unaware that most of the guests were getting more agitated by the minute. Rav Shisgal understood that he had to get him to turn it off, but he did not want to dampen his spirits.

Brilliantly, he walked closer to the radio and acted as if he was concentrating intently on what was playing. “Are these military secrets I hear?” he asked.

“Yes! Of course!” The Professor answered.

“Well then,” Rav Shisgal continued, “I don’t know if anyone else here is able to hear them. You may be breaking military protocol, and I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“You are right!” The Professor quickly replied, and promptly shut his radio.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt”l explained. Commandments from Hashem are in essence are a positive reinforcement to His will. Hashem commanded the angels and humans alike to follow His Torah, do His mitzvos, and avoid sin.

Since the original instruction, Hashem never needed to give any additional warnings to the angels. One reinforcement is enough.

Before Hashem sends a soul down to Earth to be born into a new life, He commands it to do the same, as the gemara tells us (Niddah 30b) “When man enters into the world, Hashem tells him, ‘Be righteous and don’t be wicked.’” But unlike an angel, man travels through this world with many temptations to sin. He is tested every day, and has constant brushes with the evil inclination.

On those occasions, Hashem pushes and encourages him again, giving him yet another command and warning, to remind him to follow in His way, and not to falter to sin. One must turn down the volume of life around him, think again about what is right - and tune in to the correct frequency - and heed Hashem’s call.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky is the Director of Advancement at Yeshiva of South Shore - ישיבה תורת חיים - בית בנימן. He is currently compiling the vast storehouse of all the Torah thoughts from his grandfather. If you have any stories to share from his grandfather, you can email him at skamenetzky@yoss.org.