



פרשת שמיני

We probably should not have been surprised – although I guess I was – to notice that right after the Yom Tov of Yetzias Mitzrayim, where we emerged from the forty-nine levels of טומאה, the Parshiyos deal with the various and still mysterious topics of טומאה. Assorted Mefarshim make us aware that the forty-nine days of ספירה, which relates to Klal Yisroel's abandoning a level of Tumaah on each day, bringing them to the level of קבלת התורה on Shavuos. In Parshas Shemini, the Torah teaches us about how a Kohein must react to טומאה and the איסור of a Kohein doing the Avodah while intoxicated, and concludes with the words (10:10) ולהבדיל ולטהור. וגו' בין הטמא ובין הטהור. The next topics are the foods that we are forbidden to eat, as well as other of forms physical contacts, and concludes again with the refrain – or some variation of – טמאים הם לכם (11:26). Then, after including vessels that have had exposure to טומאה and how to relieve that Tumaah with a מקוה, the Torah again concludes ולהבדיל ולטהור (11:47); which is somehow a רמז to our Avodah in the forty-nine days of Sefirah to help bridge that gap and become worthy recipients of the Torah.

It does not stop there. Tazriah and Mitzorah deal yet with another Tumaah, as pointed out by the Ibn Ezra (12:2), אחר שהשלים תורת הטהור והטמא בנאכלין הזכיר טמא אדם. Even in Acharei Mos, after a short return to the death of Nadav and Avihu, the Torah takes us into Yom Hakipurim to stand before Hashem, and, as described by the Mishna (Yuma 8:9), חטא לפני מי אתם מטהרין. Only once we are freed from the shackles of Tumaah can we proceed to קדושים תהיו, furthering our Avodah to become what we aspire to be, עבדא דקודשא בריך הוא.

As eye-opening as that was – at least to me – we shall return our focus to Parshas Shemini. And again, we take note of one of those Rashi's that sometimes get glossed over, and we may just miss some important lessons. I never really wondered much about the structure of

Shemini – beginning with the tragic Petirah of Nadav and Avihu and concluding with מאכלות אסורות. Rashi however, quotes a Toras Kohanim who obviously did wonder, and therefore explained the wording דברו אל בני ישראל (11:2) to mean that the commandment of the forbidden foods was to be said by ALL THREE, אהרן, אלעזר ואיתמר, because they were ALL EQUALLY SILENT when dealing with the tragedy of Nadav and Avihu. We certainly wonder what connection could there be, what is the מדה מדה of their mournful silence, which often requires more willpower than the anguished shout of despair, to the list of the prohibitive foods?

We need, at least, to wade into one of the great theological debates of Yahadus, at least up to our knees (see Derashos H'ran 11, Shach Y'D 81:35, Mesilas Yesharim 11 and Chavtzeles Hasharon Shemos 2:7). We know the severity of מאכלות אסורות, and the havoc it creates in our Neshamos, somehow is more than other sins (see Yuma 39A). The spelling of the word ונטמתם במ (11:43), you will become contaminated through them, without an "Aleph" reads like the word to become dulled, unfeeling; a spiritual hardening of the arteries, resulting in a Yiddisheh "Hartz" that no longer pumps out Yiddishe blood to the mind and the rest of the body. I very often quote, albeit with sadness, Rabbi Berel Wein Shlit"a who asked (about forty years ago – it's much worse today), how can it be that American college students can be pro-Palestinian? He answered, because after three Doros of eating in McDonalds you will be pro-Palestinian, at least. What a Vort – sad and depressing but HOW TRUE!! But exactly what causes such negative devastation is what the debate is about.

The Sefer Hachinuch (73, 144), and the Ramban in numerous places, maintain that there is something intrinsically faulty with the things that the Torah forbids. In Parshas Mishpatim, (22:30) the Ramban says that





Hashem does not want us to eat certain foods שלא יולידו "that create a barrier and coarseness in the נפש. In Parshas Shemini (11:13), he explains the reason for the disqualification of certain birds is דריסה, they are predators and they are to be avoided since שדמו מחומם "לאכוריות", their essence is cruelty. The Ramban goes on to explain the reason for full hooves is the same – indicating a predatory nature. This approach can be called – slightly over-simplified – you are what you eat. The Ramban continues his approach regarding the איסור of דם (17:11), because the soul is in the blood - הדם הוא הנפש and as man imbibes the blood of an animal, כי הנאכל ישוב בגוף, האוכל והיו לבשר אחד וכו' ותהיה עובי וגסות בנפש האדם ותשוב קרוב "לטבע הנפש הבהמית אשר בנאכל". These foods will coarsen and add to the crudeness of mans' Middos, and we have enough problems without these added supplements of un-refinement.

There is another approach, found in Maharal (Tiferes Yisroel Perek 7 and 8), who basically agrees that these foods can affect man and his Middos; HOWEVER, he adds, "כי האמת הוא וכו' אבל אין זה עיקר טעם המצוה". One of his proofs is that if חזיר is inherently bad and will have negative effects on man, how could the Gemara (Chulin 17:A) allow us, when we enter Eretz Yisroel, to eat it, as it says (Devarim 4:10) ובתים מלאים כל טוב, which means even קדלי דחזירי (see Rashi – bacon). The Maharal's approach – as much as I can understand it – is that the power behind every Mitzvah, proven especially by the Mitzvos which are beyond man's comprehension, is THE MITZVAH ITSELF that is fulfilling the צווי השם. The טומאה created and forged by the sin is because Hashem said NOT TO DO IT. When it is forbidden, the betrayal of that command itself produces the טומאה. Therefore, when Hashem allows it – like when we enter Eretz Yisroel – no negative effects are created. Kedusha is generated by obedience, and Tumaah is generated by disobedience.

We probably should try and understand – based on this approach – why מאכלות אסורות create a greater מטמם

גזירות המלך than any other violation of. Tosafos in Maseches Chulin (5B) will help us. The Gemara (ibid) teaches that Hashem will not allow a Tzadik to eat Treif. Tosafos points out that although Tzadikim have in fact violated other עבירות, they have been spared from eating related sins; there seems to be a special protection for that. The reason is because every external act is removed from the man himself, whereas eating is actually internal, infusing the violation of the גזירות המלך into yourself.

If you learn the last Rambam in Hilchos Mikvaos (11:12), you will better understand this position. He writes, דבר ברור, וגלוי שהטומאות והטהרות גזירת הכתוב הן Tumaah and Taharah are classified as חוקים - concepts beyond comprehension. Being Toivel to remove the Tumaah is also a חוק, because טומאה is not like dirt that can be washed away. A physical remedy to an intangible element, it is obviously not the water that cleanses, but rather, the fulfillment of the Mitzvah. It seems that the לשונו הזהב of the Rambam is leaning towards the position of the Maharal. You decide.

Back to our long forgotten Rashi – who we now suggest also follows the Maharal and Ramban - and now the מדה נגדה מדה flows. Aron and his sons displayed unusual restraint – שהשוו בדמימה - were all equally silent and accepted the גזירת שמים - EVEN WITH SIMCHA. Otherwise, they would have never gotten the command of יין ושכר דבר ה' without Simcha. Total obedience – so they were Zocheh to teach Klal Yisroel the laws of טומאה, which rests on that sort of accepting חוקים which are difficult to understand.

Man has always had trouble with obedience, since day one, when Adam succumbed to the Eitz Hadaas. May Hashem grant us the wisdom and the strength to do what Hashem wants us to do, כל הימים.

Among those who are לישועה.

אמני דאנקה
חיים טובים ואיתן

