Points to Ponder

Achrei Mos (Kedoshim in EY) 5779

**כִּ֚י בֶּֽעָנָ֔ן אֵֽרָאֶ֖ה עַל־הַכַּפֹּֽרֶת: For in the cloud I shall appear (16:2)** – **Rashi** explains that since Hashem is always there a person needs to be careful not to hang out in the Kodesh lest he become lax due to familiarity. But isn’t that exactly what WE seek every day? Don’t we declare Shivisee Hashem L’Negdee Tamid? Why are we not worried about being lax then? **Rav Shteinman ztl.** explains that there is a difference between being in the revealed Shechina which needs extra protection from the glory. It is similar to not looking at the hands of the Kohein while he is Duchanin but the same hands can be looked at, later in the day. The Moon, we are told, not to gaze at exceptionally but we are allowed to look. When we demonstrate respect for something we are embarrassed of our standing in its presence.

**הַשֹּׁכֵ֣ן אִתָּ֔ם בְּת֖וֹךְ טֻמְאֹתָֽם:He dwells with them even in their Tumah (16:16**) – **Rashi** notes that Hashem is with them even in their Tumah. The Zohar HaKadosh adds that when the Shechina is with us in our Tumah, it appears as a mother. Why a mother? **Rav Chaim Volozhiner ztl.** explains that although both parents love the child, when the child soils himself, it is the mother who comfortably washes the child and calms him as she changes him. The same lesson is apparent when the Shechina is with us in our soiled clothes. Ima Shechina tries to get us cleaned so that we can be purified.

**וְהִתְוַדָּ֣ה עָלָ֗יו אֶת־כָּל־עֲו‍ֹנֹת֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל  And he will recite Vidui on it (16:21)** – It is interesting that the Kohein’s vidui contains neither the remorse not the Kabbalah L’Atid – the resolve not to sin in the future. Why? **Rav Schachter Shlita** quoted in the name of his Rebbe **Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** that the Vidui of the Kohein Gadol cannot cover the Teshuva steps required of another for that needs the individual and cannot be filled in by another. There is a Kappara function to the vidui we recite when we do it on our own – it is a breaking of the will, an awareness of our inability to run and hide and an acceptance of who and where we are – which are the necessary building blocks of Teshuvah & Kapparah.

**אַחַ֖ת בַּשָּׁנָ֑ה To atone for Bnei Yisrael…once a year (16:34)** – All holidays are but once a year. Why the added words in regard to Yom Kippur? **Rav Elya Lopian ztl**. explained that while Yom Kippur is a once a year experience, a person is in a Yom Kippur status every time a Tzaddik dies. This is the Torah’s intent here—that we atone now so that we should not need atonement the rest of the year via the death of a tzaddik.

**כְּמַֽעֲשֵׂ֧ה אֶֽרֶץ־מִצְרַ֛יִם אֲשֶׁ֥ר יְשַׁבְתֶּם־בָּ֖הּ לֹ֣א תַֽעֲשׂ֑וּ Like the actions of Eretz Mitzrayim that you lived in (18:3) – Rashi** explains that Egypt and Canaan were the most aberrant of the nations of the world at the time. It is most interesting that very places that Hashem placed the Jewish nation were the most odd in practice. **Rav Shlomo Wolbe ztl.** explains that in the places where one sees the most crass of behaviors that are most oppositional to Judaism, we find the strongest adherence to Jewish principles. For every Jew – no matter his level of observance has a spark of Kedusha within him which is antithetical to the concept of Tumah. Placing the nation in the face of the contrast would help us understand our place in the world – as individuals and as a nation.

**וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַ֥י תִּשְׁמְר֖וּ לָלֶ֣כֶת בָּהֶ֑ם My Chukim you shall observe (18:4) – Rashi** notes that the Chukim here refer to things that are Gezeiros HaMelech – not eating pig, not wearing Shatnez and the power of the purification of the Mei Chatas. It is interesting that in Parshas Beshalach (15:26) the Parah Adumah replaces the example of Taharas Mei Chatas. Why did it change? **The Lubavitcher Rebbe ztl.** explained that in this instance we are counting things that seem to have a logical explanation but are Chukim. Parah Adumah is so foreign from logic insofar as it is both considered a Korban (Hence it is called Chatas) but is not brought on a Mizbeiach and is prepared outside of the camp. Thus, it cannot be counted together with the others. Hazaah is a bit closer as it is somewhere near similar to Tevilah but is fulfilled with a few drops instead of the whole body – a Chok. In Beshalach we highlight KOL Chukav – including the most strangest of the strange – the Parah Adumah.

**וָחַ֣י בָּהֶ֑ם And you should live by them (18:5) – Rav Yehuda Amital ztl**. noted three ideas that we learn from the Possuk. a) Mitzvot are to be performed not with sadness or a sense of suffering, but rather with joy and vitality. b) At the end of the Midrash Tanchuma on the Torah we learn that an evil person is considered dead even during his lifetime, because "he sees the sun shining but does not recite the blessing '…Who creates the lights;' he sees the sun set but does not recite the blessing '…Who makes the evenings.'" The characteristic of a living being is that it reacts; it is not apathetic to what is happening around it. The same idea applies to our service of God: it should flow as a natural reaction to what is happening around us. We should feel as though we simply have to do it, that we cannot exist without it. c) Torah and mitzvot must be a person's main activity. A person may engage for most of the day in work that enables him to earn a living, and he may learn Torah for only one hour each day, but he must feel that that one hour is the important part of his day and of his life, and that all the rest is secondary. Rashi, commenting on the verse, "And you shall observe My statutes to walk in them" (Vayikra 18:4), teaches: "One should not say, 'I have studied the wisdom of Israel; now I shall go and study the wisdom of the nations.'" One may not compare the two spheres. One may indeed study secular disciplines and other cultures, but study of Torah remains in a class of its own and is always the most important. A person should feel that Torah is his life; everything else is subservient to that purpose. According to these interpretations, "he shall live by them" means that our observance of mitzvot must be full of life, must be a natural part of our life, and must be the focus of our life.

**Haftorah – Machar Chodesh**: Why have a special Haftorah for the day before Rosh Chodesh? We do not have it for any of the other Yamim Tovim! **Rav Soloveitchik** ztl once noted that there are striking similarities between the moon and the Jewish people. Like the moon who right after it hits its nadir, it begins a rapid ascent toward a new beginning, the Jewish people can take solace in their darkest moments that Machar Chodesh – signaling a new day – a Yom She’Kulo Aruch!

(for my Friends in EY…)

**You shall be holy (19:1)** – What is holiness by Hashem’s standards? **Rav Dov Yaffe ztl.** explains that when Hashem extends beyond the natural order of things into the miraculous and supernatural He is doing so because of the Jewish people who also extend beyond natural expectations. **Rav Shmuel Rozovsky ztl.** explained that this is the intention of the Gemara (Berachos 20) that notes that today Hashem does not perform miracles as he did in the days of old because today we are not as committed and Moser Nefesh as they were in the days of old. Still, Rav Yaffe adds, we are able to be Kedoshim by ruling over nature and not naturally giving in to Taavah from Teva.

**Judge people favorably…Love your neighbor as yourself (19:15, 18)** – Both commandments here – one to Beis Din and the other on every Jew – require us to change our outlook on fellow Jews. How are we to achieve this honestly? **Rav Mordechai Greenberg Shlita quoted Rav Kook ztl** (Ein Aya 9:287) who explained that 2 people can look at the same situation in 2 distinct ways. One can see it positively because he seeks out the opportunity to be Makir Tov – to see the good in situations. The other wants to see things negatively and so he finds a reason to challenge the Tov. Thus, one who wants to achieve B’Tzedek Tishpot or V’Ahavta, needs to work on himself first in order to see to it, that what we look at we see in a positive light.

**Do not plant Kilayim (19:19)** – Why is one not allowed to plant Kilayim? **Ramban** offers 2 explanations: First, when one plants or grafts Kilayim, one is denying the good world Hashem created by trying to change its order and rule. Additionally, every tree and blade of grass has a Malach who is in charge of it. When one makes a Kilayim, s/he is messing with the celestial order of things. **Rav Asher Weiss Shlita** added that the 2 reasons are really one and of the same. In the same way that the Torah was given to us and is not to be changed as it is complete, so too, is the world complete and we are not to mess with that either. We should accept it for what it is – a gift from Hashem.

**And you shall be holy to me because I am Hashem and I separated you from the other nations to be for me (20:26) – Rav Dovid Kviat ztl.** explains that Hashem is letting us know that already from Maamad Har Sinai we were separated and put forward from the rest of the nations. However, the **Mesech Chochma** adds that we need to preserve our uniqueness. If we are able to do so, we will be ok. Otherwise, the nations of the world will come along and separate us from them. Rabbi Frand Shlita added that if we do not sanctify and distinguish ourselves – the nations will sanctify themselves from us.