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## God Gives So You Can Help Others

This week's Torah portion discusses many of the holidays including Passover, the Omer, Shavout, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret. In the middle of relaying information about each respective holiday, the verse tells us, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall

you leave them; I am the Lord Your God." (23:22).

What is the connection of these seemingly disparate ideas: leaving the corners of the field for the poor and the holiest days of the year?

Lesson:

A famous Torah commentary, Rabbi Avdmi ben R'Yose answers this question with a remarkable response. He states that if someone leaves gifts for the poor, it was as if he built the Holy Temple and brought his offerings to God in it (*Rashi; Sifra*). How is this the case?

Farmers put in tremendous efforts in ensuring a thriving, good harvest. Thank God, today incredible machines are responsible for most farm labor, but in Biblical times, the owner of the field invested a tremendous amount of time and labor to ensure a thriving crop. He had to plant and reap and plow and sew and harvest and weed the field, including the corners, knowing full well that he would not be able to profit or partake in the corner's produce.

It would be easy for one to turn a blind eye on the parts of the field that you could not partake in, but one who invested time and effort, ensuring the corners of the field are just as fruitful as the rest, is doing so because God commanded him to do so. They recognize that God sees and is responsible for creating a flourishing crop. They recognize that God gave them the crop to begin with and just as easily could have put them in the position of being the poor person, needing to collect from the corners of someone else's field. They invest their own time, efforts, sweat for the

sake of helping someone less fortunate than themselves. This noble act makes it worthy of being sandwiched between the holidays.

Often times we think that *I* have the field but now I have to share. But this is backwards thinking. God gave you the land *so that* you could perform this particular mitzvah and share with others. We think that we are sharing what we worked hard for and rightfully earned. However, the opposite is true: God only gave us what we have so that we can then use it in the service of Him and helping others. How great is it that God lovingly gives us what we have in order to provide for our needs *and* partake in the mitzvah of helping others as well.

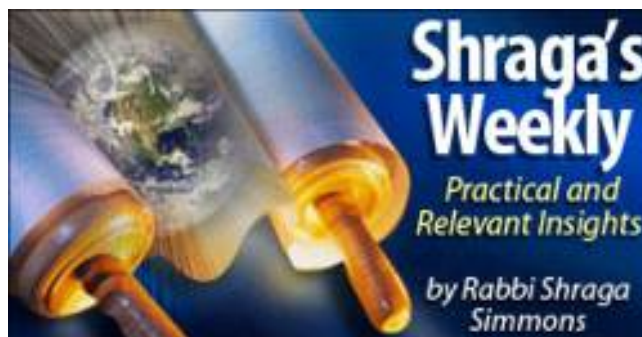
Someone who was becoming more aware of Jewish law found out about giving charity. “I just got a new job that pays double what I used to make. Giving 10% to charity, which is what Jewish law recommends, is a lot of my paycheck!” She confided to her religious sister. “I like having all my money! I enjoy nice things and I work hard to afford them. Now you’re saying I have to give my hard-earned money away?” she asked.

“It’s the other way around,” explained her sister. “God gave you your new job that pays double your other job *so that* you could now partake in this mitzvah *and still* enjoy your nice things! Because you are now giving charity, God blessed you with double the paycheck!”

God lovingly gives us everything we need to provide for ourselves and family *and* perform *mitzvot*, help others, connect to God and achieve our highest, holiest potential. If we look at it as an

opportunity from God then we are bringing our own sacrifice and offering to God, just as Rabbi Avdmi ben R’Yose says.

Exercise: Invest real time and effort in helping someone else. If making food for someone, make something special, instead of just thinking that something is better than nothing. If calling someone who needs, give them your undivided attention instead of trying to multitask. Have in mind that God gave you extra (time, resources, etc.) in order to partake in the mitzvah of helping others. In helping others, you are also giving a special offering to God.



## Israel and Kiddush Hashem

In this week's Parsha, God tells the Jewish people:

*"You shall not desecrate My Holy Name (Chillul Hashem), rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel (Kiddush Hashem). I am God Who makes you holy."*  
(Leviticus 22:32)

What is the nature of this Mitzvah?

The primary privilege and responsibility of every Jew is to create positive PR for God through our

loyal adherence to His Torah. Certain mitzvot clearly achieve this, like eating Matzah on Passover. When I spend a week cleaning out breadcrumbs from every nook and cranny of my home, the only possible motivation is that God said so! By eating Matzah, I increase the respect for God in the world, which is the essence of *Kiddush Hashem*.

Another obvious example is the Mitzvah of *Bris Milah* — circumcision. Who would perform non-medical surgery on a helpless baby — and on such a sensitive part of the body? (Even the most radical college fraternity doesn't require such an extreme show of commitment!) So when a Jew performs *Bris Milah*, it is a *Kiddush Hashem*, awakening us and others to the presence of God in our lives.

### The Knife

The Holocaust produced many heroic deeds of Jews standing loyal to God, in the face of the most impossible conditions.

A beautiful story illustrates this idea (from "Stories of the Holocaust," by Yaffa Eliach):

One of the forced laborers in the camps relates that one day he heard frightening cries of anguish the likes of which he had never heard before. Later he learned that on that very day a selection had been made — of infants to be sent to the ovens. We continued working, tears rolling down our faces, and suddenly I hear the voice of a Jewish woman: "**Give me a knife.**"

I thought she wanted to take her own life. I said to her, "Why are you hurrying so quickly to the world of truth..." All of a sudden the German soldier called out, "Dog, what did you say to the woman?"

"She requested a pocketknife and I explained to her that it was prohibited to commit suicide."

The woman looked at the German with inflamed eyes, and stared spellbound at his coat pocket where she saw the shape of his pocketknife. "Give it to me," she requested. She bent down and picked up a package of old rags. Hidden among them, on a pillow as white as snow, lay a tender infant. The woman took the pocketknife, **pronounced the blessing** — and circumcised the child. "Master of the Universe," she cried, "You gave me a healthy child, I return him to You a worthy Jew."

### Watching Closely

Every aspect of our behavior can foster a *Kiddush Hashem*. I asked a woman who recently became observant what led her to make such a commitment. She said that when her 10-year-old niece became observant, the girl transformed from being a spoiled brat, into a model of kindness and compassion. The woman said, "If this is the effect that Torah has on a person, then I want it, too!"

On the converse, a Jew acting in a despicable manner is a desecration of God's Name. Which is why we are so bothered when a Jew cheats in

business. Besides violating the Torah prohibition of stealing, the additional tragedy is that people will say, "If this is the effect that Torah has, then I don't want any part of it." It distances people from connecting to God.

Even further, such behavior demoralizes society, because there is a feeling that if Jews — the "guardians of morality" — are corrupt, then what hope is there for the rest of us?

This is perhaps the reason why the State of Israel today is a constant source of worldwide media attention, and why the United Nations routinely condemns Israel for every slight misstep (real or imagined). If it happened in another country, it may be forgiven as a consequence of law and order. But deep down the world expects Jews to uphold their mission as the role models for humanity, the "Light Unto the Nations."

This is why the Talmud (Yoma 86a) says that *Chillul Hashem* is the most serious of all transgressions, and the one for which it is most difficult to atone.

### **Shouting Down**

In actuality, the State of Israel has been a great source of *Kiddush Hashem*. The blossoming of the desert, the ingathering of the exiles, the great centers of Torah study, and the solid economic base — what other country achieved so much in its first 50 years? And this on the heels of a devastating Holocaust and crippling blows from Arab enemies.

Unfortunately, Israeli society also has aspects of *Chillul Hashem* on both sides of the fence.

Orthodox Jews sometimes throw things and shout — and the effect can be devastating.

The Torah says: "You shall surely correct your neighbor, but don't bear a sin because of him" (Leviticus 19:17). This means it is forbidden to correct someone if the result will make matters worse. In other words, it is no mitzvah to protest Shabbat desecration in a way that will create tension and resentment. Actually the bigger mitzvah in that case would be to keep quiet, or find a more pleasant way of expression. Don't allow your Kiddush Hashem to become a *Chillul Hashem*.

### **Lofty Jewish Ideals?**

On the other side, visitors to Israel are often shocked to find Jews sitting in cafes eating bread on Passover, and even having pork roasts on Yom Kippur. And some of the worst Western vulgarities have become an accepted part of Israeli life. It's all over the media for the world to watch and say, "Such is the People of the Book?!"

Israel is a living workshop where lofty Jewish ideals can become reality. To chase after the lowest elements of Western society is to sink into the grime of history. Is this how we define "something Jewish existing in the world?" Is this the expression of "light unto the nations?" Is this the culmination of 2,000 years of struggle and suffering? Is this what Tzahal soldiers died for? Is this being "free in our land?"

It was not too many years ago that Israeli society still held itself to a higher standard. In the 1960s when British rock legend Cliff Richard performed here, parents were outraged at the negative effect

on Jewish children. Shortly thereafter, the Beatles were refused entry into Israel — on the grounds of being a subversive influence. Today, this seems tame by comparison. And whether one agrees or disagrees with that decision is not the point. The issue is that Israel — the model of morality for world Jewry, and the model for all humanity — had taken a stand.

We have built our land so beautifully and have achieved so much. But do we want to succeed like the other nations, if "success" is defined by 80 cable channels and McDonalds? The image of kibbutzniks dancing around the campfire has faded into stadiums thumping with heavy metal music.

Achad HaAm called Israel "the historic center of a roving spiritual idea." The world is watching. And it's God's good Name on the line. It's up to us.



## Reaching Beyond Yourself

In the opening verse of our *parashah*, God instructs Moses, "Say to the Kohanim ..." [1] and, *in that very same verse*, God once again repeats the command, "Say to them ...."

Since there is no redundancy in the Torah, we must try to decipher the meaning of this repetition. The Torah is teaching us that once Moses taught the Kohanim the special commandments that only they were permitted to perform, God tells Moses to repeat the other mitzvos to them, because through the performance of mitzvos, the soul is elevated and attains a new, enhanced state. It therefore follows that when one grows spiritually through the performance of mitzvos, one is not simply performing the same mitzvah, but because of one's new, heightened spiritual state, one brings oneself and the very same mitzvah to a much higher level.

Mitzvos actually have the power to change us, so if we are consistent in our observance we can attain a much higher level today than we enjoyed yesterday. Herein lies the secret of the miraculous transformation that enabled us, a nation of slaves, to become a Priestly Kingdom in only 49 short days after our Exodus. Every day, we were commanded to count, and as we did so, we shed the dross of Egypt and filled the vacuum with the mitzvos of our God until we came to that awesome moment: the giving of the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot, when God sealed His covenant with us. From this seminal experience, we learned that when we perform commandments, we are not simply adding mitzvos to our portfolios, but *we are creating a change in the essence of our beings*. What an amazing opportunity for spiritual growth! What a tragedy not to avail ourselves of it.

### IMPARTING A LIFE LESSON TO THE YOUNG

Our Sages teach us that this double language of "say" has yet another meaning, and that is that the adults must instruct the young. What is puzzling, however, is that this command is given to the Kohanim specifically when the Torah is discussing *contact with the dead*.

Once again, there is a special lesson to be derived from this. When we are overcome by grief at a death, it becomes easy to abandon our responsibility to teach the young; it becomes easy to fall into a depression and forget that little eyes are watching us. Therefore, the Torah teaches us that even in the face of pain and suffering, our responsibility to serve as an example to our children can never be abandoned. Our commitment to passing on Torah knowledge must transcend all other considerations.

We have personally witnessed this in the homes of our revered parents and grandparents, who, despite the pain of their Holocaust experiences, devoted themselves to imparting the light of Torah to a new generation. Upon arriving on these shores, our grandfather, HaRav HaGaon Avraham HaLevi Jungreis, *zt"l*, built a yeshivah. Every morning, our grandmother, Rebbetzin Miriam Jungreis, *a"h*, stood at the entrance to the yeshivah, greeting every child with a home-baked cookie and asking him to make a *berachah* - to say a blessing over the treat.

My father, HaRav Meshulem HaLevi Jungreis, *zt"l*, was a pioneering Orthodox rabbi in Long Island. Our mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, *a"h*, established the Hineni organization to

inspire a new generation to Torah commitment. In the spirit of the teaching of our *parashah*, they did all this despite their personal pain and the suffering that they experienced in the concentration camps.

But life's tests are never quite over. When our father learned in the course of a routine checkup that he had what appeared to be a malignant tumor, his immediate reaction was to go to his grandchildren and teach them Torah. Only then did he call our mother to inform her of the painful news. This, indeed, has been the imperative of our Jewish people. No matter how difficult or painful our personal situation might be, our commitment to teach Torah remains unswerving.

Let us then never succumb to the forces of darkness, but rather, let us bear in mind that we have a mission to elevate ourselves and those who are near to us to God's Divine calling.

### AN ONGOING COMMITMENT

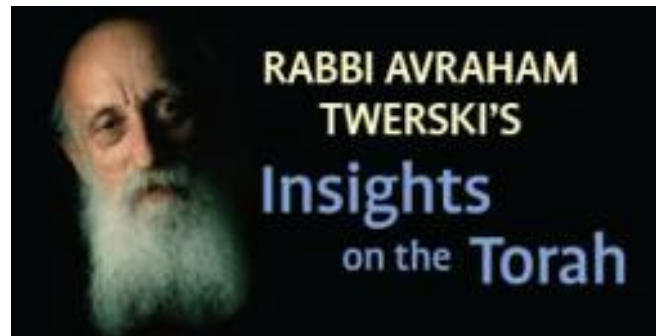
In this week's *parashah*, we study the special mitzvos pertaining to the Kohanim as well as to the Kohen Gadol. A High Priest is different from the ordinary priest in that even in the midst of the pain of losing one of his closest relatives, he must still carry on and perform the Temple service and minister to the Jewish people. The Torah states, "And he shall not leave the Sanctuary."<sup>[2]</sup> This commandment calls upon the Kohen Gadol to bear in mind that his responsibility to the community is so great that he must repress his personal suffering and continue his service to the people.

From this we learn the level of commitment required of our leaders. A leader of the Jewish people must find the strength to transcend his own pain for the greater welfare of the community. The teachings of the Torah are timeless; thus, this level of commitment applies to each and every one of us, for our entire nation is described as "*Mamleches Kohanim* - a Priestly Kingdom." Thus, in a sense, we are all *Kohanim* - we are all leaders, for there is always someone in our lives who looks to us for strength and must be fortified.

This lesson applies to every parent, grandparent, rebbi, and teacher. We must always bear in mind that one day, our children, our students, will remember that in time of crisis we remained steadfast in our faith; of course, the converse is also true. If we succumb to despair, that too will be etched in their memories. So let us ask ourselves, *What legacy are we imparting to future generations? Will we be remembered for the darkness that we allowed to envelop us or for the faith and hope that we inspired?*

It's all in our hands; the choice is ours to make.

1. Lev. 21:1.
2. Ibid. 21:12.



## Mirror of Faults

*"Just as he will have inflicted a wound on a person, so shall be inflicted upon him" (Vayikra, 24:20).*

This portion of the Torah deals with personal injury. The Talmud says that the Oral Law, transmitted through the generations, was that the above verse, as well as "an eye for an eye," are not meant to be taken literally. Rather, one must compensate the victim for the injury.

The *Kometz HaMinchah* translates this verse a bit differently. "As one caused a defect in another, so it shall be given to him."

The Baal Shem Tov taught an important psychological insight. Inasmuch as people are generally in denial, they may be unaware of their character defects. Therefore, God shows them their character defect in another person. "The world is a mirror," the Baal Shem Tov said. "The faults you see in others are your own."

One might say, "Why is this a general rule? I just happened to see someone in a rage. How does that prove that I do not have control over my anger?"

Let us reflect on, "I just happened to see." If you put several people on a busy street corner for

several minutes, then asked them to report what they saw, you would likely get a different response from each one. They were all witnesses to the same scene, in which many things were happening. Yet, each person saw something different than the others.

This is because the mind has a selective filter. If we were at all times aware of all the stimuli bombarding our senses, our minds would be overwhelmed and we could not possibly function. The filtering system, therefore, blocks out most stimuli and allows us to focus on just a few.

There is no escaping the fact that there must be some reason why, out of the myriad of stimuli, the filtering system selects those of which the person becomes aware. The Baal Shem Tov's point is that the selectivity is determined by what one wants or needs to become aware of. One factor governing this selectivity is one's own character makeup.

Our psychological defensive system operates to minimize our discomfort. It is easier to accept a character defect within oneself if it occurs in others as well. Therefore, the mind's filtering system is motivated to allow these particular stimuli to come to one's awareness, and blocks out those which serve no psychological purpose for the individual.

If we bear this in mind, we will be able to avoid *lashon hara*, derogatory speech. Saying something derogatory about someone else is an indication that we, too, have that character defect. Why would anyone wish to disclose his own character defects to the world?

This, the *Kometz HaMinchah* says, is the message of the above verse: "As one caused a defect in another, so it shall be given to him." The faults you attribute to others are probably your own.

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